

Lessons for Israel from the Plagues

The plagues of Israel were intended by God as a teaching time for Israel, and in turn for us. Israel needed to understand some important truths as they were to move forward first out of Egypt and then into the Promised Land. They had been in captivity for over 400 years. During that time, they had maintained a semblance of commitment to God, but overall, they had lost a real understanding of who God was and what He could and would do for them.

The overriding purpose of the plagues was to bring glory to God, which is always a factor in everything God does. In addition to bringing glory to Himself, God wanted, according to Exodus 7:5, to let the Egyptians know “**that I am the Lord.**” Many did believe and some even went with the Israelites when they left. A second purpose was expressed in Exodus 10:1-2. Read those verses.

First, consider that God used 10 different plagues before the Egyptians let His people go. God did not have to use all those plagues to accomplish His will. Had He wanted to, He could have put all Egyptians to sleep for a week and His people could have quietly left the country. He chose to set them free in 10 steps.

Each of the plagues was directed toward a specific deity of the Egyptians, so accomplishing His will with 10 different plagues was a factor in showing the Egyptians that He was greater than any of their gods. But there were lessons for the Israelites also. The big lesson was His power. Throughout the history of the nation the prophets and Psalmists regularly returned to the account of God’s actions in Egypt as a reminder of just how powerful He was. Read Exodus 7:17 and Exodus 9:14. We can talk about the power of God because we have His full revelation including the power demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus. For 400 plus years the Israelites had not seen God’s power so that was a lesson they needed to learn.

A brief survey of the plagues shows God’s power over various aspects of nature and culminates with His demonstration of power over life and death. Read Deuteronomy 4:35 and Exodus 14:31. We need to be reviewing for our children and grandchildren all God has done for us, so they too will believe. J. B. Phillips’ book, “*Your God is too Small*” would certainly have been applicable to the Israelites in Egypt even as it is applicable to us today.

The various plagues were designed to show different aspects of God and how He works. The fact that God did not get His people free on the first plague is also a lesson. God could have gotten them out at any point but chose not to. One of the most difficult lessons for any of us to learn is that God has His own time-table, along with His own reasons for doing it the way He sees best. In our instant gratification culture, we find it hard to wait. He could have set them free faster but there were lessons both the Egyptians and the Israelites had to learn that could only be learned by God saying, “Not yet.”

As God performed the various plagues, their intensity or seriousness increased. The scope and degree of punishment increased. That lesson was primarily for Pharaoh but had to have been seen by the Israelites. God's will will be done. If we choose to ignore God's warnings or deliberately disobey His commands He will bring into our lives things to draw us back to Himself. Ignore them and He will step up His pressure to bring us back. As our Heavenly Father, He loves us too much to allow us to continue on a wrong path that will lead to loss of fellowship and blessing. God does not give up on His children.

Notice that as the various plagues are described, Scripture adds, but *Goshen was spared*. Goshen was where the Israelites lived. God was able to distinguish between His people and those who rejected Him. He protected and cared for His own, (flies 8:22, death of livestock 9:4, hail 9:26, darkness 10:23, and death in chapter 12). God does not always exempt us from the consequences of living in a sinful world, but He knows who His children are and will keep every promise He has made to them. He has promised never to leave us and when we go through troubled waters He has assured us not only of His presence but His strength and His peace.

Read Exodus 9:7. The total livelihood of Egypt was destroyed but God was still able to provide for His people. The fact that Pharaoh had to investigate the way God provided for the Israelites is a reminder that today the world watches believers and when we truly live out our faith they must explore it. I have heard many non-Christians ask believers in times of trial, "How can you be so calm?" That is what Pharaoh wanted to know when he sent men to investigate God's care for His people.

Read Exodus 10:21-23. There is no way to explain this via natural causes. Only a powerful God, who can control creation, is able to do that. We live in a sin darkened world, but God has given us both His Word and His Spirit to lighten our way through the darkness of sin.

That God was in total control is seen from the many times when He said in advance what was going to happen and the several times when He declared exactly when the plague would end. Exodus 3:19-20 is a general description of what would happen when Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and everything was as God said it would be. Specifically, throughout the plagues, God declared that the flies would come (8:23), that the cattle would die (9:5), that hail would come (9:18), the locust would come (10:4) and of course the death of the firstborn (11:4).

Does everything go right once God began to act on behalf of His people? Unfortunately, it did not. We are the children of God and He cares for us, but we still live in a sinful world. In Israel's case we read that when Pharaoh was challenged to think positively about God's people, instead of agreeing he made it more difficult for them. Exodus 5 describes Pharaoh's response. Read Exodus 5:18. We assume that as Christians we have certain rights and when we try to claim them too often society, controlled by Satan, not only rejects our claims but makes it even more difficult for us. Think about how society has reacted to Christian businesses that have claimed they will conduct their businesses on Christian principles. A society that insists on its rights,

refuses to give Christians theirs. It can be costly to take a stand for our faith, but in the end, we will win even as the Israelites did.

A final major lesson of the plagues pictured in the plagues was the death of the firstborn. We are tempted to read back into it the meaning as seen in the New Testament with the death of Jesus on the Cross for us. There can be no doubt that was what God was ultimately picturing for us, but the Cross was not visible to the Israelites. What was clear, however, is that in the application of blood there was life and when it was not applied, death followed. No one could miss that.

God went on to build upon that truth as the Israelites were instructed to build a tabernacle and there to offer animal sacrifices for their sins. Elaborate rituals were put in place to visibly demonstrate that in the shedding of blood there was forgiveness of sin. There were regular sin offerings that were to be made and there was the annual Day of Atonement when blood was placed on the scape goat that was sent out into the wilderness as a symbol of taking away the sins of the nation.

The final plague was the beginning of the lesson that the wages of sin is death. Praise God we know Jesus took our death penalty upon Himself and shed His blood on our behalf, so we don't need to repeat blood sacrifices. What we must see, as the Israelites learned, is that if you don't apply the blood you die. The New Testament can declare that anyone who has the Son, that is has asked Jesus to apply His shed blood to them, has life. But, as it was in Egypt in the days of the Pharaoh, those who do not apply that blood via a personal commitment to Jesus will die, their sins not covered by the blood of Jesus.

God could have set His people free in a much easier way than 10 plagues, but He chose the plagues because there were lessons that were essential for the Israelites. If those lessons were important for God's people then, then they are equally important for us today. We have a truly powerful God who in His time and in His way will care for His people. We have a God who loves us so much He took our death penalty upon Himself, shedding His blood so we might have life and have it more abundantly.