

TASK OF MOSES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Moses and Aaron established their credibility before Pharaoh by performing *a number of miracles*. *Changing Aaron's rod into a serpent was the first in a series of miracles* that continued throughout the forty years that Moses ministered to Israel. These miracles proved to Israel that God's claim, "I am the LORD," was genuine (10:2). That name meant He was fully capable of fulfilling every promise of His covenant with Israel. The ten plagues were given to remove all doubt of His superiority over the gods of Egypt. They were given not only to convince Pharaoh but also to convince Israel.

As the series of plagues unfolds, it is interesting to note the progress of revelation in these miracles: (1) there is an increase in severity as well as intensity with the final three (hail, locusts, and darkness) depriving men of elements necessary to life; (2) the Egyptian magicians are able to duplicate the first two (blood and frogs), but bow out at the next with an acknowledgement of God's presence; whereas the first three affect the entire land, the remainder affect only Egypt with attention called to God's special protection of Israel in all but two; in each of the five occasions, when Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, he did so with growing urgency (compare 8:8; 8:25, 28; 9:27-28; 10:16, 17; 10:24). The nine plagues build with intensity and finally culminate in the tenth one, the slaying of the firstborn (12:29).

I. Plagues of Discomfort — 8:1-32

A. Second Plague: Frogs — 8:1-15

This is the second in a series of penal miracles perpetrated upon Egypt for the purpose of demonstrating the superior power of Jehovah. The first in this series (turning of the waters of the Nile into blood) was explained in the previous lesson. The culmination of these plagues (death of the firstborn) will be dealt with in the next lesson.

1. Nature of the Plague — 8:1-5

8:1-2 — The stated purpose of this plague was penal: "If you refuse, I will smite" (8:2). At the same time, it proves God's superiority since punishment is inflicted by a superior upon an inferior.

8:3-4 — The extent of this plague was unlimited - "The river shall bring forth frogs abundantly" (8:3). The same verb is used in Genesis 1:20; 8:17, and Exodus 1:7 and indicates a swarming or immeasurable reproduction. An abundance of frogs was not uncommon when the Nile was high but never in such overwhelming proportions. In the case of the waters turned into blood the people were able to obtain clean water with some effort, but in this case, there was no relief whatsoever.

8:5 — The implications of this plague were theological. Since frogs are ranked among the sacred animals of Egypt, the object of their superstition now became the instrument of their punishment at the hand of Jehovah! Amulets in the form of frogs have been discovered in Egypt indicating the superstitious reverence this humble creature enjoyed. Two of Egypt's prominent deities were symbolized by frogs: (1) Hapi, who supposedly controlled alluvial deposits and the waters crucial to soil productivity, and (2) Hegt, who was the emblem of fertility and life after death. Thus, the gods they venerated became a nuisance and polluted their homes, which was a real problem to a nation so ceremonially strict in their ideas of purity.

2. Reaction to the plague — 8:6-11

8:7 — "The magicians did so with their enchantments" - The magicians at best could add to the discomforts but were powerless to reverse the plague. Had they been able to stop the plague, Pharaoh would not have appealed to Moses and Aaron for that purpose.

8:8 — "Entreat the Lord" - Literally, "Intercede for me." This is the first time that Pharaoh is really moved to make any promises concerning the release of Israel. Although he made a promise here he did not keep it; consequently, it became easier for him to repeat this pattern of insincerity.

8:9 — "Glory over me" - literally, "Be pleased to command me." This was not simply a polite gesture, but an invitation for Pharaoh to establish the time sequence so that there would be no doubt in his mind that the plague ceased at the command of Jehovah and not by happenstance.

8:10 — "And he said, Tomorrow." - Pharaoh was probably anxious to see if the frogs would disappear by chance overnight so that he would not be pressed to acknowledge Jehovah or release Israel.

3. Removal of the plague — 8:12-15

8:14 — "And the land stank" - Heaps of putrefying frogs, representative of Egyptian deity, became a pungent reminder of the supremacy of the LORD and of Pharaoh's recent promise.

8:15 — "When Pharaoh saw that there was respite" - Literally, "breathing time." Pharaoh, like so many others before and since, forgot the earnestness of his pledge when the pressure was off.

B. Third Plague: Lice — 8:16-19

The first nine plagues can be organized into three cycles. In the first plague of each cycle Moses is commanded to rise early and meet Pharaoh at the river (7:15; 8:20; 9:13). In the second plague of each cycle Moses is commanded to confront Pharaoh, presumably at his palace (8:1; 9:1; 10:1). But the last plague of each cycle is served without warning (8:16; 9:8-9; 10:12). Having abused the respite God granted him, Pharaoh has every reason to expect further calamity. Although God sees fit to judge Pharaoh without warning, He does not do so without measure lest he be reduced to nothing before his time.

8:16 — "Smite the dust of the land that it may become lice" - Like anything else in the Nile valley, the very soil of Egypt was considered sacred and was worshipped as Seb, the father of gods. This deified dust now became the raw material for producing a most obnoxious pestilence. The word translated "lice" in the Authorized Version is almost universally accepted to mean "mosquito gnat." These insects were a frequent menace in Egypt especially during the flooding of the Nile.

8:18 — "The magicians... could not" - The inability of the sorcerers to remove this pest was a direct and eloquent confession of impotence on the part of these deities which the Egyptians depended on to preserve them from such visitations. "Fly-gods" were common in most hot countries of antiquity: Zeus Apomuius was worshipped at Olympia in Greece; Myiagros was the protector against flies at the festival of Athena; Acchor was venerated at Cyrene; Beelzebub, "the lord of the flies," was the recognized guardian of Philistia against insect plagues.

8:19 — "This is the finger of God" - It is rather doubtful whether the magicians intended this admission to be an acknowledgement of the superior power of the LORD. The word they used for God - "Elohim", could have been intended to represent some supernatural power in a broad and unidentified sense. This would be the best excuse they could offer in defense of their professional reputation.

"Pharaoh's heart was hardened" - His reaction is an amazing antithesis to the admission of the magicians. They recognized a divine hand in the miracle but Pharaoh remained obstinate (cf. Prov. 27:22).

C. Fourth Plague: Flies — 8:20-32

Moses was instructed by God to confront Pharaoh at the river with the same demand "let my people go that they may serve me."

8:21 — "Swarms of flies" - Notice that "flies" appears in italics since there is no noun in the original text to specify the nature of this "swarm" or "multitude." It is quite possible that no definite species is intended, but that all manner of flying insects invaded Egypt. The Septuagint translators, who lived in Egypt, supplied the word for "dog-fly" which was an abhorrent blood-sucking insect not uncommon in Egypt. If this were the only insect involved, the plague would once again be an embarrassment to the god of the flies. If all manner of flying insects are implied, then the affront would be more poignant since the scarab beetle would have been among the pests. The scarab or dung beetle was considered the most sacred symbol of Egyptian religion. It was sculptured on every religious monument, painted

on every tomb, engraved on jewelry, worn about the neck as an amulet, and honored in countless images of every size and all possible materials.

8:22 — "I will sever in that day the land of Goshen" - The Egyptian magicians were not willing to credit the God of Israel with the previous plagues but now the LORD forced that distinction by exempting His people from all subsequent plagues. Furthermore, this geographical distinction underscores the miraculous aspect of the plague.

8:23 — "I will put a division between my people and your people" - Until this point, the Israelites had suffered the plagues along with the Egyptians. This may have been the penal consequence for their partiality to Egyptian gods. Now God makes a distinction between His people and the Egyptians as a token of His favor and of His redemptive intentions.

PHARAOH'S FIRST COMPROMISE PROPOSAL — 8:25-27

8:25 — "Sacrifice to your God in the land" - Pharaoh, who had callously engineered the oppression of the Israelites, is now suffering an increasingly severe affliction with each subsequent plague. He was unable to endure the torment, yet was unwilling to release his bondsmen. Therefore, he proposed a compromise giving primary consideration to his own advantage: "I will allow your sacrifice, but stay in the land."

8:26-27 — "It is not meet to do so" - God's unconditional demand left no room for bargaining! Moses rejected the compromise for two reasons. (1) It would be an abomination in the eyes of the Egyptians. Moses recognized that Egypt worshipped the bull, the cow, the ram and other animals and for Israel to sacrifice any of these would be regarded by the Egyptians as an outright contempt for them and their gods. (2) Furthermore, it would be a violation of the LORD's command to go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice.

PHARAOH'S SECOND COMPROMISE PROPOSAL — 8:28, 32

The arguments of Moses could not be disputed by Pharaoh so he consented to let Israel go with the general stipulation: "Only you shall not go very far away" (8:28). Moses did not give any objection to this offer, possibly considering it loose enough to permit them to go to the place of God's choosing. He did admonish Pharaoh not to deal deceitfully with God's people as he had in the past (8:15).

II. Plagues of Disease — 9:1-12

A. Fifth Plague: Murrain — 9:1-7

1. Announcement of the plague — 9:1-3

9:1-2 — Pharaoh's guilt is accumulating as he persists in his stubborn rebellion. This is seen in the words: "If you refuse to let them go and will still hold them" (9:2). It seems incredible that Pharaoh could continue to be so obstinate considering the emphatic declarations of the LORD's will.

9:3 — This plague deals a hearty blow to the honor of Egyptian religion in one of its most sensitive points - the worship of Isis and Orisis which venerated the cow and the ox, and of Ammon who was symbolized by the ram. The greatest deities of Egypt were the sacred cow, the Apis bull, and the calf, Mnevis. The plague here is literally a "pestilence of death." The English word "murrain" comes from a French or Greek root meaning "to die" or "to waste away." The Egyptians were compelled to witness the agonizing death of their sacred animals and realize that since their gods were powerless they were a godless people.

2. Restriction of the plague — 9:4

Once again the LORD made a very careful distinction between Israel and Egypt in the extent of this plague. This partial treatment of Israel was verified by Pharaoh's direct inquiry (8:7).

3. Commencement of the plague — 9:5-6

9:5 — "The LORD appointed a set time" - History verifies the fact that deadly pestilences are not unknown in Egypt and are sometimes quite fatal. However, the event still defies the naturalistic explanations of critics since it was strictly limited to the Egyptian districts, and since it came and ended suddenly in conjunction with the words of Moses.

4. Resolution of the plague — 9:7

Pharaoh sent messengers to Goshen to verify the report that Israel was exempted from the plague. Although the words of the LORD were proven true, he continued to harden his heart.

B. Sixth Plague: Boils — 9:8-12

9:8 — Moses was instructed by God to take handfuls of ashes from the furnace and symbolically cast them up to the wind. The furnace was probably a smelting furnace for metal or even a brick kiln used by the Israelites. Egyptian priests would cast in the air the ashes of human sacrifices offered to Typhon, the god of evil, believing that evil would be averted wherever the ashes were blown. The ashes cast by Moses in the presence of Pharaoh were destined to bring a curse rather than a blessing.

9:9-10 — The boils appear to have been serious inflammations which broke out into open running sores causing severe discomfort and irritation. The Egyptians were so concerned about ceremonial purity that they were ever cognizant of this type of infectious disease. This is reflected in their worship of Sakhmet, a lion-headed goddess who was credited with power both to create and terminate epidemics. A special priesthood, called Sunu, was devoted to her service.

9:11 — The hardness of Pharaoh's heart is demonstrated by the fact that he continues to summon the obviously impotent magicians. This time they were not even able to appear before Pharaoh due to the severity of their own affliction.

9:12 — "And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh" - This is the first time that it is directly stated that the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart. Up until this point he had hardened it himself. An infinitely holy God is just in dealing with evil men as He sees fit. Every act of kindness and patience on the part of God is pure mercy!

III. Plagues of Destruction — 9:13-10:20

A. Seventh Plague: Hail — 9:13-35

9:14 — "I will at this time send all my plagues upon your heart" - The sense of this statement seems to be that since the lesser plagues had not effected Pharaoh's humiliation, the subsequent ones would be measured with much greater terror. Each one would have the cumulative effect of all previous ones!

9:16 — The LORD declares the purpose for which He allowed Pharaoh to come to power: as an occasion for the demonstration of "My power and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." Though Egyptian historical accounts bear no reference to these events they were well-known throughout the world (Ex 15:14; Josh 2:10; I Sam 4:8).

9:19-21 — This plague is unique in that it provided opportunity for individual Egyptians to heed the warning and be spared the affliction. This was a sign of divine mercy which could be extended even to Egyptians if they would fear the LORD. It also demonstrates the fact that God does not take pleasure in the afflictions and death of the wicked, but rather, He delights in showing mercy! (Ezek. 33:4; Mic. 7:18; II Pet 3:9).

9:22-24 — In a spectacular display of meteorological terror God produced a storm of hail, thunder and fire never before witnessed in the history of Egypt. Hail was not uncommon during this season, but never in such proportions. Probably the most terrifying aspect was the fire "mingled" or literally "collected together," or in other words, balls of fire sweeping a destructive path across the land.

9:25 — The devastation was extensive although the "all" has more of a poetic significance than a numerical one. The same term is used in 9:6 "all the cattle of Egypt died," yet there were some left to be affected by this hail (9:19).

9:27 — "I have sinned this time" - Pharaoh must have been quite strongly impressed by this demonstration of God's power since his reaction is the most humble thus far. Yet the shallowness of his repentance is seen in its qualification "this time." His emotions were stimulated by sheer terror and not by a conviction of his sinful character. This insincerity was further underscored by his ultimate hardness (9:34).

9:30-31 — This account shows both how much was lost and how much remained to be destroyed in future plagues. To any country, especially before the days of commercial trade, crop loss was an economic disaster. How shocking to a nation, so devout to its gods, to find that the waters, the earth, their crops, and their cattle, all under the guardianship of a host of deities, were systematically destroyed by a force against which these gods were powerless!

B. Eighth Plague: Locusts — 10:1-20

10:1-2 — To Moses this entire process probably seemed an endless cycle of testing and hardening. At this point God encourages Moses by revealing again His purposes in all of these events: (1) to magnify His name in Egypt and (2) to establish a perpetual testimony for all generations of Israelites that, "I am the LORD."

10:3-6 — "Locusts" - To this day, locusts are the most dreaded pests in any area adjacent to the desert. So feared were they in Egypt that the people prayed faithfully to a locust god. Consider the following facts about locusts:

1. They are able to consume their own weight daily.
2. A one square mile swarm may contain from 100 to 200 million locusts.
3. Swarms can be as large as 400 square miles and more.
4. They are capable of maintaining a cruising speed of 10-12 mph for up to 20 hours. So serious and devastating are the effects of locust plagues that Amos (7:1-3) and Joel (1:1-7) use such plagues to portray the eschatological figure of doom.

10:7 — It is no wonder that the servants of Pharaoh dared to chide their god-king which they so highly revered. Such a plague would leave the already crippled economy of Egypt in a state of total ruin!

PHARAOH'S THIRD COMPROMISE PROPOSAL — 10:8-11

10:8-9 — Pharaoh very pointedly asked Moses, who would be going and who, if any, would be remaining in the land. The answer was that all persons and livestock would be leaving.

10:10 — "Let the LORD be so with you as I will let you go and your little ones" - What sounds very much like a benediction is really a very sarcastic and emphatic no! In other words, "May your God be with you to the same degree that I am inclined to favor such a scheme."

"Evil is before you" — This statement is not a premonition of danger since Pharaoh had witnessed God's continued protection of Israel from the plagues. Rather, it is an accusation of evil intentions: "You are proposing to leave Egypt for good."

10:11 — Following an emphatic repetition of his refusal, Pharaoh proposes that Moses take the men only, leaving their families behind as a pledge of their return.

"They were driven out" — Literally, they were bodily thrust out by Pharaoh's court servants. This was the greatest indignity and was prompted only by violent rage.

10:12-15 — The LORD commanded Moses to stretch out his hand over the land of Egypt so that the locusts would come and eat every bit of vegetation that had grown up since the hail plague. When the locusts came, "the land was darkened... they did eat... there remained not any green thing... through all the land of Egypt" (10:15).

10:16-20 — Pharaoh was so terrified by this supernatural demonstration of God's wrath that he hastily summoned, not the magicians, but Moses and Aaron whom he had just thrust out from his presence. He

called them that he might confess his sin and beg mercy. In desperation he pleaded for the removal of this "death" plague by the locusts. Once again, his confession was only the shallow repentance of one seeking to avert the consequences of sin (10:20).

IV. Plague of Darkness — 10:21-27

With this plague the entire series is coming to a climactic finish. The sun god, Re, was the supreme god of Egypt, now it had to veil its face before the LORD. The terror connected with this plague is seen in the fact that it will once again be used in the tribulation judgments (Rev 16:10).

10:23 — "Neither rose any from his place" - The implication is not that they had no artificial lights in their homes, but that their movements and business pursuits were very limited.

PHARAOH'S FOURTH COMPROMISE PROPOSAL — 10:24-29

10:24 — "Let your flocks and herds be stayed" - Pharaoh insisted on some guarantee of their return.

10:25-26 — Moses' uncompromising insistence on 100% compliance to God's demand is classically stated in his words, "There shall not an hoof be left behind."

10:28 — "See my face no more" - Filled with disappointment at not being able to get his own way, Pharaoh once again insulted Moses by threatening to take his life. This act on the part of Pharaoh eliminated the possibility of future negotiations. Pharaoh cut himself off from God's mercy!

10:29 — "I will see your face no more" - Moses evidently realized that this was the end of all formal negotiations with Pharaoh and that deliverance was now imminent.