

Psalm 105:26-36 (Opening)

26 *He sent Moses, his servant,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.*

27 *They performed his signs among them
and miracles in the land of Ham.*

28 *He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they did not rebel against his words.*

29 *He turned their waters into blood
and caused their fish to die.*

30 *Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.*

31 *He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.*

32 *He gave them hail for rain,
and fiery lightning bolts through their land.*

33 *He struck down their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.*

34 *He spoke, and the locusts came,
young locusts without number,*

35 *which devoured all the vegetation in their land
and ate up the fruit of their ground.*

36 *He struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the firstfruits of all their strength.*

We're going to take a little break from our studies in the book of Romans and spend the next few weeks looking at the significance of the Passover.

Passover was the first holiday established for the Jews. It's the point of origin for all the other holidays on the Jewish calendar. But it's also the pivotal holiday for Christians, because Jesus was crucified on Passover.

Today, we'll look at the history behind the first Passover; why it happened, and how it happened. Next week we'll look at how the orthodox Jews of today celebrate Passover. Then we'll look at the significance for us of the Passover, both today, and in the future.

The first Passover was not so much celebrated as it was feared. Passover was the culmination of God's full-out attack on Egypt, to secure the release of the children of Israel from their captivity in Egypt, and to convince the children of Israel that He was in fact the God of the Universe, in complete and total control of everything.

It all started with 70 Hebrews moving to Goshen in Egypt during the famine in the end of the book of Genesis, because of Joseph saving them. After Joseph died, things kind of went downhill for them. The Egyptians saw that they were growing in number very quickly, and they didn't want to lose their hold on the country, so they enslaved the Israelites, and used them to make the bricks and mortar to build cities for Pharaoh. The Egyptians got so worried about the Israelite "overpopulation" that the Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all the male Israelites. What better way to preserve your empire than to commit massive genocide against those who you think is an inferior race? The midwives that were Hebrew lied to Pharaoh that they couldn't get to the delivery in time to get the male babies away from

them, so instead, Pharaoh told all the Egyptians to throw any male Hebrew babies into the Nile.

I'm sure we've all heard the story about how Moses was saved by his mother putting him in a basket, and then Pharaoh's daughter pulling him out of the Nile. So Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household, raised as one of his sons.

So, over the next 80 years, we have the story of Moses killing one of the Egyptian task-master, who was over the Israelite workers, Moses running away to Midian, which is in what is now Saudi Arabia, marrying Jethro's daughter, the burning bush, and God's direction for Moses to go back to Egypt to free the Israelites.

Now, we have Moses in Egypt, trying to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave and sacrifice to God three days journey away from Egypt, so they wouldn't be in Egypt to perform the sacrifices. Pharaoh wasn't too keen on the idea, not wanting to lose his free labor force, even for a short time, but he probably knew that if they left Egypt, they wouldn't come back.

So, now we get to the point where God performs 10 wonders, or plagues, against Egypt. The plagues start in Exodus chapter 7, and go through chapter 12. There are a couple different thoughts about why the specific plagues that God brought against the Egyptians. One school of thought is that the plagues were a specific attack against Egyptian gods. Another major school of thought is that they were a way of removing creation from the Egyptians, basically disowning them. As we talk about the plagues, I'll point out the information from both of these, because I think they're both useful.

But first an over-arching question, why ten plagues? Why not seven, or four, or even 25? Well, there's a lot of discussion about that, too. One idea is that 10 is considered a complete number for the Jews; maybe because we have 10 fingers and 10 toes. There were 10 commandments, so the law was complete.

Another possibility is that, if we follow the discussion that the plagues were taking creation away from the Egyptians, since there were ten things that God spoke during creation in Genesis 1, God used 10 plagues to reverse that creation against the Egyptians.

Either of these is a good description, but as far as I'm concerned, the answer to the question "Why 10 plagues?" is because that's the way God decided to do it. And who am I to question God's motives or rationale?

The first plague that God brings against the Egyptians was turning the Nile River, and all the water in Egypt, into blood. This is in Exodus chapter 7, starting in verse 14. In verse 19 of Exodus 7, when God is telling Moses what to do so God will turn the water into blood, he says "Stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood", the word translated as pools is the Hebrew word mikveh, the same word used in Genesis 1 to describe the gatherings of water God made to create the dry ground. This could be God's way of negating the second spoken creation in Genesis 1:10.

Also, this could be God's attack on the supremacy of the Egyptian god Hapi, the god of the Nile. Hapi was responsible for bringing the annual floods to the Nile, causing the fertility of the river valley, and creating the plentiful crops and well-fed livestock.

The second plague was the plague of frogs. God caused frogs to come up out of the river and get into everything, and then die in huge heaps. I can't imagine the smell in Egypt at this point, first all the dead fish from the Nile washing up on the shore, and then the dead frogs all over the place. But it's going to get worse!

In the anti-Genesis school of thought, this plague takes away the creation God did in Genesis 1:20, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures". Not only did the fish die from the water turning into blood, but the frogs did, too, once they were on dry land and getting into everything.

The Egyptian goddess Heket was the goddess of fertility, water, and renewal, alongside of Hapi, she was responsible for the fertile crops and well fed livestock. Heket was usually depicted as either a frog or a woman with a frog's head.

In the third plague, God tells Moses to have Aaron strike the dust of the earth to have it become gnats or lice, depending on your translation. In the anti-Genesis school of thought, the lice correspond to the creeping things from Genesis 1:24 "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds."

In the aspect of an attack on an Egyptian god, this would be against Geb, the god of the Earth. He was often considered the personification of the soil, whether it be the fertile land around the Nile or the sand and dust of the desert. This plague converts the goodness of the god of the soil and uses it to create a pest against all the Egyptians and their beasts.

The fourth plague was the swarms of flies. Moses warned Pharaoh that there would be swarms of flies, but that in Goshen, where the Israelites lived, there would be no flies.

From the anti-Genesis aspect, this would correspond to the flying creatures in Genesis 1:22, and a complete reversal of God's blessing in 1:28 for man to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." In this plague, the flies had dominion over the Egyptians!

As an attack against a specific Egyptian god, this could be an attack on Khepri, the god of the morning sun. While on the surface that doesn't really make sense, Khepri was a personified scarab beetle. He was also the god of flies and beetles.

The fifth plague against Egypt was the first attack directed specifically at one type of living thing. The fifth plague was the death of livestock; horses, donkeys, camels, herds and flocks. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but the livestock of the Israelites were untouched. Remember, livestock was a significant indicator of wealth during this time, so the more you had, the better off you were.

In Genesis 2:18-20, we see that God created every creature for man. In this plague, God is taking away from the Egyptians what He had given to all men as a blessing.

Hathor was the Egyptian goddess of motherhood, fertility, love, and joy. The earliest representations of Hathor are of a cow wearing a necklace and royal Egyptian head piece. This plague was probably an attack directly aimed at Hathor, who would have been responsible for all the livestock in Egypt.

The sixth plague was specifically against the people and the remaining beasts of Egypt, not a side-swipe at them. It was the plague of boils. This and all the rest of the plagues only affected the Egyptians, not the Israelites in Goshen.

There's nothing specific in this plague that takes away anything written in Genesis 1; however, it is a swipe at the Egyptian purity laws, which, like the Hebrew purity laws, required men to be without any blemish to be allowed into the temple.

As for the Egyptian deity being affected by this plague, it would be Isis, the goddess of medicine.

It's interesting to note, here, that some people have explained away the power of God in these first six plagues by saying it was a chain reaction of events that was caused by torrential rains in Ethiopia, causing the red clay from that area to inundate the Nile, killing the fish, causing the frogs to get sick with anthrax and leave the water because of the dead fish in the swamps. Once the frogs died, the lice and flies multiplied from their corpses and those of the fish, and having been infected with anthrax, then infected the livestock and the people, causing the boils. It's a very nice and neat package to put all these plagues into, but it doesn't quite reach the scale of what is described in Exodus, and also, like I just said a little bit ago, takes away from the power of God in these events.

The seventh plague was the first of two attacks on the vegetation in Egypt; hail. The hail was so fierce that it flattened trees and crops alike, as well as any living animals that were in the field. The flax and the barley crops were near harvest, and they were totally devastated, as it

says in Exodus 9:31. Anything outside in Egypt was stuck down, except in Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

As an attack against the Egyptian deities, this would be against Nut, the goddess of the sky, and the mother of Hathor, and Isis mentioned earlier. The sky produced the rain, thunder and lightning, and in this instance God showed that Nut was not in charge of what falls from the sky!

The eighth plague was locusts. Now, both hail storms and locusts are not uncommon in Egypt, but nothing to this extent had been witnessed before or since. What the hail left standing, the locusts ate. By the time the eighth plague was over, according to Exodus 10:15, "Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt." Total devastation.

In the anti-Genesis school of thought, the hail and locusts are tied together against Genesis 1:12, where it says "The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind."

Since the Egyptian priests and magicians couldn't do anything to stop this attack of the locusts, it could be seen as an attack on Set, the Egyptian god of storms and disorder.

The ninth plague is one that's a little hard to explain; God caused darkness over Egypt for three days. And not just normal darkness, but like it says in the end of Exodus 10:21 "A darkness to be felt". Not just the absence of light, but light being replaced with something you can feel. One explanation could be a horrible sandstorm that overtook all of Egypt, but the Egyptians would have known what that was. And again,

Israel was spared this plague; “all the people of Israel had light where they lived.”

Obviously, in the anti-Genesis way of looking at the plagues, this is against Genesis 1:3, where God created light. With this plague, He took light away from the Egyptians.

As an attack on Egyptian Gods, this is one of the biggest, against Ra, the god of the sun, one of their most important gods. Ra was powerless to stop the God of the Israelites from turning off his shining rays. Ra was not bigger than God.

Well, we’ve talked about nine out of ten of the plagues. The last one was the biggie; the one that took away the life of all of the first-born of all of Egypt, including the son of Pharaoh himself. And, it’s the reason the Jews celebrate Passover. Let’s turn to Exodus 12 and look at the details of this plague.

Exodus 12:1-20

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

⁷ "Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰ And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. ¹⁷ And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. ¹⁸ In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹ For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. ²⁰ You shall eat

nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

God attacked the deity of Pharaoh, the god-king of Egypt, and took away the breath of life given to man at his creation in Genesis 1:26. The first born was considered a blessing, and God took that blessing away from the Egyptians.

Some of the key things to take away from this, all these plagues; first, God was bigger and more powerful than any of the so-called gods of the Egyptians. It says in Numbers 33:4 it says “On their gods also the Lord executed judgments.”

Second, God didn’t do these plagues to convince the Egyptians of anything. He did them to show his power over the gods of the Egyptians so the Israelites would understand that the supposed gods that had enslaved them for the four generations they lived in Egypt were useless carvings, simply inanimate objects that had been made by man.

Third, God has power over every created thing, even if they don’t recognize the fact that God has power over them. Pharaoh tells Moses in Exodus 5:2 “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.” During the time that Moses was interacting with Pharaoh, he learned who the LORD is, and he did, eventually, let Israel go.

There’s so much more to talk about with Passover, but it will wait until next week. We’ve really only scratched the surface of the significance of this holiday, for the Jews and for us, too.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 (Closing)

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

Questions

1. What significance do you see for you in the 10 plagues that God used in Egypt?
2. What significance do you see for you in the Passover as it was described in Exodus 12?