

Exodus – Lesson 7

The Plagues on Egypt – Part 1

Read Exodus 6:14-8:32

1. (a) What is the primary *clan* in the genealogy of 6:14-25? Why is this *significant* to the story?

The Levites are the primary clan listed in the genealogy. The genealogy begins in order, starting with Reuben and Simeon, then it continues giving a much more detailed view of the Levites. This is done because Moses and Aaron, the protagonists of the story, come from the clan of Levi, and it would be important to the Israelites reading this book later to understand why the Levites are so important to the priestly duties established by God through Aaron.

(b) Make a list of the *immediate* family tree of Aaron and Moses from 6:20-25. What is *interesting* about Aaron and Moses' mother? Why do you think that Moses does *not include* his children here?

Moses & Aaron's father was Amram and their mother was Jochebed (Jochebed was *both* Moses & Aaron's mother and their *great-aunt*, i.e. their grandfather's sister; v. 20). Aaron was married to Elisheba, and his sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar (v. 23). Eleazar (the only son of Aaron listed here as such) married an unnamed woman (one of the daughters of Putiel) and bore Aaron the grandson Phinehas (v. 25). Moses' children are not important to the overall story being told. The genealogy traces the family line of Moses down to its most important point (i.e. him) and traces the family line of Aaron down to its most important point (i.e. his son Eleazar and grandson Phinehas who would later become leaders/priests of Israel).

(c) Compare 6:25 to Numbers 25:1-15. What great *irony* do you see in the events of Exodus that are about to unfold and the events recorded in Numbers 25?

In Numbers 25, a great plague comes upon the people of Israel because the Israelites had invited some of the women (i.e. harlots) of Moab into their camp and had worshiped the gods of these Moabites. Additionally, an Israelite had welcomed a Midianite woman into his family, angering God who sends a plague which kills upwards of 24,000 people. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, stops the plague of God by killing both the man and his Midianite wife. God gives to Phinehas, as a result, a "*perpetual priesthood*" (v. 13) because he had made "*atonement*" for the people (i.e. he had paid the price necessary to root sin out of the camp). It is ironic (and necessary) for Moses to include Phinehas in the genealogy of Exodus 6, given the fact that a whole series of plagues are about to come upon the Egyptians as this story unfolds.

2. Given that Moses wrote this historical account, why would he have *repeated* his concern of 6:30?

The repetition of this concern shows that Moses (writing many years later) was willing to show his faults and his weaknesses in being used by God. Again, like so much else in this story, the emphasis is on the *work of God*, not the power of human persuasion or human ability. Moses continually recounts his weaknesses because they demonstrate a *contrast* with the power of God. Whereas Moses feels inept to do what God commands, God's power stands firmly able to do all that God desires. This is a *consistent* pattern in the word of God. Throughout Scripture, the great heroes of the faith are regularly shown to be weak and sinful vessels. This is done for two great purposes: 1) to contrast the weakness of even great men (like Moses) with the unlimited power of God and 2) to contrast the frailties and sinfulness of human beings to the perfection of Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the pages of Scripture.

3. (a) Compare Exodus 7:8-13 to Luke 16:19-31 and John 12:37-40. Explain *why* the use of miraculous signs to “prove” a revelation from God is often ineffective.

The miraculous signs that Moses was given by God were *ineffective* in convincing Pharaoh and his court that Moses and Aaron had come from God and that God’s power was behind these acts. A similar thing happens in John 12: although Jesus was able to perform a number of miraculous signs before the Jews of his day, they still did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of the Living God. In both cases, the issue was the *natural inability* of those seeing the miracles to believe that they were signs from God himself. The signs, although clearly supernatural in nature, were “explained away” by counterfeit signs or justified as “normal.” This is why John quotes from Isaiah in John 12: the hardness of the hearts of those who saw these signs were *both* natural (as human beings go) and *the judgment of God* upon those who have suppressed the knowledge of him as God (see Romans 1:18ff). This is why Abraham’s response to the rich man in hell (Luke 16:27-31) is so *apropos*; even miracles cannot convince the dead (Ephesians 2:1) to trust in God and follow him in faith. Only the *internal* miraculous work of regeneration can change a person so that he or she will respond in faith to the work of God and his person as their Creator.

- (b) Compare Exodus 7:8-13 to John 6:4-15; 25-33; 66-69. What is the lesson *for the church*?

In John 6, the large crowds that follow Jesus do so because they eat and are filled. They come to Jesus looking for a hand-out, as though following Jesus is all about getting their stomachs filled. As Jesus addresses them, he points out that following him is *not* about getting some material blessing from him, but about radical obedience to him in faith and believing that he is the *only* way to God. In essence, Jesus demands of them that they come to him for more than food. As a result, most abandon him because they refuse to pay the price. They have seen the miracle (as Pharaoh) did, but they are not interested in the *spiritual* nature of Christ’s demands, but only in the *temporal* advantage of having been fed. The lesson for the church is simple: the church is *not* to be about meeting *temporal* needs as the basis for fellowship, but to make the radical call to trust in Christ as the *primary* basis for any relationship with him or with his church. This is particularly true for those in the so-called “church growth” movement, which believes that the church must “provide” something to potential members in order to get them to come, things like entertainment, material blessings, a sense of happiness or well-being, physical health or healing, etc. Even if such things are produced in a miraculous way, they can *never* bring people to a *real* conviction of sin and a *true* commitment to Christ. The church must take the *counter-intuitive* approach of calling people to repentance of sin and trust by faith in Christ as the *only* way to God, and not to cater to the “cultural” methods of marketing or appeal.

4. (a) What is the first *plague* that God brings upon Egypt? According to v. 14, *why* does God bring this plague? What other *consequences* would result from this plague (see v. 24)?

The first plague is the changing of the water of the Nile into blood. God did this because Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and because he had refused to accept the “signs” given by Moses and Aaron. The consequence of this was that the *entire* water supply of Egypt was contaminated, and the Egyptians would have to dig for ground water that might not be connected with the Nile. It is also likely that the following plagues (i.e. frogs, gnats, and flies) would be a *direct* consequence of a river of blood: the populations of such creatures might expand dramatically as a result.

(b) Why do you think that God brought this as the *first* plague (see Genesis 3:21 and 9:4-6)?

Genesis 9:4-6 says that life “*is in the blood*” and that the shedding of human blood would be both prohibited (as murder) and essential to the redemptive plan of God. When Adam watched God kill animals and shed their blood, he came to “see” the connection of his sin with death by the spilling of blood. When God told Noah that no one was to eat blood (or murder), he was raising the value of blood as a redemptive token, the gift of atonement that would be used to propitiate his wrath from sinners. The river of blood would be a very real sign from God of his *emphasis* on blood as a significant part of his plan to redeem humans, especially as he worked to redeem the Hebrews from Egypt. Later, the shedding of the blood of the firstborn in Egypt would carry the same symbolism, as would the shedding of blood on the altar under the sacrificial system. Ultimately, the shedding of the blood of Christ would provide the *perfect* atonement in the new covenant, able to redeem completely all of those called out by God (Hebrews 9:15).

(c) According to 7:22-23, why does Pharaoh’s heart *remain* hardened? Compare this to 8:7 and 8:19. Why did God allow the magicians to *duplicate* this feat three times and then stop them?

Pharaoh’s heart remains hardened because the “plagues” that come upon Egypt can be duplicated by the court magicians, so Pharaoh sees to no reason to believe that what Moses & Aaron have done is anything spectacular or from God. God, apparently, allowed the magicians to duplicate this feat *so that Pharaoh would remain stubbornly opposed to letting the people go*. In the simplest sense, God allows the magicians to duplicate his work (or, better, works the same miracles through them) in order to *force* Pharaoh to remain hardened against Moses and Aaron. This would keep the focus (in the long run) on the power of God as the situation was completed. However, once the fourth plague arrives, the magicians are cut off, and Pharaoh is left with no excuse; at this point, any stubbornness that he has is *deeply* engrained and he continues his resistance. This will, of course, be used by God to finish the job.

5. (a) What are the *second through fourth* plagues that came upon Egypt? Is there any *relationship* between these plagues and the first?

The second plague is a swarm of frogs, the third is a swarm of gnats, and the fourth is a swarm of flies. It is possible that these plagues were a *direct* consequence of the Nile turning to blood: the populations of such creatures might expand dramatically as a result. Such a conclusion *is not necessarily* an admission that these things happened “on their own” and that God did not sovereignly cause them to happen. In these cases, God may have used the “means” of a river of blood to bring about these events. Whatever the case, they can all be attributed to God.

(b) What *compromise* does Pharaoh offer to Moses during the fourth plague (see 8:25)?

Pharaoh offers to let the Hebrews sacrifice to God *within the land*, and not outside its boundaries. Obviously, Pharaoh thinks that he can appease this “god” of the Hebrews by such a measure, but Moses doesn’t fall for it. He points out that such sacrifices would be an “*abomination*” to the Egyptians and they will become angry and rise up against the Hebrews for doing so. Pharaoh then offers to let the Hebrews go, but only out a short distance so they can quickly return. Moses accepts this offer, but we must remember 5:1-3.

(c) How does the fourth plague *end* (see 8:29-32)? What is significant about Pharaoh’s *response*?

The fourth plague ends with Moses praying to the Lord for relief on behalf of Pharaoh, given that Pharaoh “seems” to grant their request to go out and sacrifice without restraint. But, again, Pharaoh reneges on the deal because his heart is hardened again. Verse 32 does not say if it was God that hardened his heart, or if it was his own natural hardness that led to the decision to renege, but it becomes the basis for all of the plagues that are to follow: Moses had an agreement from Pharaoh, but his refusal will now bring swift consequences upon Egypt.