

THE FIRST PLAGUE ON EGYPT

The Plague of Blood

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. ¹⁶ Then say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. ¹⁷ This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. ¹⁸ The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.’”

¹⁹ The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood.’ Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.”

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. ²¹ The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

One of the most common arguments or excuses we hear from unbelievers is some version of the question, “If God exists, why doesn’t he show himself? When people have proof, they will believe.” Our text from Exodus chapter 7 and dozens, perhaps hundreds, of stories like it all throughout the Bible, show us that this just isn’t true. Even when people are exposed to God’s glory and God’s power and even when they come face to face with God in person, they will find ways to doubt him, to reject him, and to worship other gods instead.

When God sent Moses to Pharaoh, he called himself “The LORD, the God of the Hebrews.” This was to set himself apart from the Egyptian gods so that he wouldn’t be mistaken for one of them, since some of the Egyptian gods in their mythology were tricksters. It was also to show that the only true God is the God of the Hebrews, the one who sent his Son Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven, so that we never forget that there is no other way to eternal life except through Jesus.

They met by the Nile. This was a perfect choice, since (1) the Nile was worshiped by the Egyptians as a god, (2) the encounter could not later be denied since it happened in public, (3) and being in public it could be and was witnessed by many people, including most of Pharaoh’s court and family.

The Hebrews had been in Egypt for a long time-- four hundred and thirty years. The first eighty years were spent as privileged guests, until Joseph died at a hundred and ten. After that, we're not exactly what happened, although history suggests that an invader subjugated Egypt, and it was after this invader was driven away that the Hebrews were enslaved by the Egyptians out of mistrust, jealousy, and the Unchristian fear that many people have toward foreigners in their land.

Now Moses appeared to demand the release of God's people, armed only with a stick. Moses didn't need this staff or walking stick to perform any miracles, but later on it would serve as a reminder of Aaron's place of authority when he became Israel's first High Priest.

The sin of Pharaoh and the Egyptians was first and foremost, Idolatry. Their idolatry was the open and national worship of false gods. They were not atheists; they were not fools. They knew, as Moses and the Israelites knew, that **"Every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything"** (He 3:4), but they had the wrong idea about who God is. The ancestor of the Egyptians, a man name Mizraim, was the son or grandson of Ham, one of Noah's sons. We know that none of the descendants of Ham hung on to the faith of their grandfather Noah for very long, and when we compare the polytheism of the Egyptians with their many gods with the unadulterated faith of Abraham, Moses, and Israel, we see just how quickly a family can abandon their faith. It only takes one generation to lose everything. The faith of your descendants is in the hands of one person: You. What kind of example do you set? What stories about Jesus do you tell your children? What attitude about Church do you show? Are you legalistic about your faith and habits, or is it clear that you go because you love to go, love to listen, love to learn, love your Lord Jesus?

To teach Pharaoh about the true God, the Lord had Moses turn the water of the Nile into blood. The water became blood. The fish died. The river stank. The Egyptian couldn't drink it. There are theories sticking up out of the internet that the Nile and other rivers have deposits of red clay or red algae at certain times of the year, but that doesn't fit with the Bible's simple words, "The Nile turned to blood." It didn't seem like blood, or look like blood. It was blood. These are some of the same arguments that the Reformed churches use about the Lord's Supper. It can be a less emotional discussion if you ask, after reading the text out loud together, "What do you think Moses means when he says: **'All the water was changed to blood'**"? Every part of the Nile was affected. Only by digging in the sand could they find water fit to drink.

What change did this bring about in Pharaoh? Well, our text doesn't go that far, but you can read and find that he didn't take this to heart. In fact, his magicians did the same thing-- although they couldn't undo what God did through Moses, and it wasn't their priests and the

ones who preached their religion and sacrificed to their gods that performed the miracle, but just their magicians; their charlatans; their jugglers and clowns.

This plague was a sermon on the Law of God. The Law **gives glory to God**. The law **shows man his sin**. The Law **shows man his need for a Savior**. The law is different from the gospel. The law was written in man's heart and is still there in the conscience, but the Gospel is only revealed by God through preaching. Their contents is different: The **law** tells us what we must do; the **gospel** tells us what Christ did for us. Both Law and Gospel promise eternal salvation, but the **law** says this is possible only through perfect obedience; the **gospel** reveals that salvation is ours through the perfect obedience of Christ in our place.

They are also different in their threats. The threats of the **law** are obvious: death, damnation, torture. The gospel has no threats at all, but only joy, the resurrection, life, and peace. The **Law must** be preached to anyone who is secure in his sins, who doesn't want to make any changes in his life, and who thinks he has earned salvation for himself. This must be crushed by the Law before the Gospel can be held out to rescue him. Pharaoh had to be taught the law in this way: Publicly, nationally, for all of Egypt to be shown their sin and their need for a Savior.

Idolatry does not just mean Pharaoh's worship of statues and sphynxes. Modern idolatry takes many forms. Some people elevate the theories of contemporary science. Some people value money or power above all. The danger—and the current political climate, medical crisis and social media all support and feed this temptation—is to make my own opinion more important than anything else. Those dangerous words, "My own opinion," should cower and tremble and collapse next to God's Holy Word.

Who will you trust? The mistake-maker you see in the mirror every day, or the sinless Son of God, who was crucified to pay for the mistakes we make, who lived purely, sinlessly, perfectly, in our place.

How many streams and creeks and rivers in hell will spontaneously and horribly turn to blood to preach the Law and punish the Pharaohs, the magicians, and the jugglers of Egypt and the idolaters who tempt us away from our faith today?

Put your trust in Jesus, who has forgiven all of our sins, and even all of our idolatries. Turn to the cross, and remember that God alone had the power to put faith in your heart, and he chose to do exactly that! Praise his name and his mercy forever and ever! For the same God who changed your heart from doubt to faith is the very same God who turned the river Nile into blood. He did that to preach the Law. But he saved you—because he loves you. Amen.