"For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord" (Exodus 12:12)
“Against All The Gods Of Egypt”

Introduction

I. The descendants of the patriarch Abraham moved to Egypt during the time of Joseph (Gen. 46:8–27).
   A. Some seventy souls moved to Egypt—while in Egypt they became a nation within a nation (Gen. 46:27).
   B. “But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.” (Acts 7:17–19; cf. Exo. 1:5–14).
   C. The people cried out to the God of their forefathers (Exo. 2:23–25).

II. God raised up Moses to set His people free (Heb. 11:23–27).
   A. God spoke to Moses from the burning bush at Mt. Horeb (Exo. 3:1–4).
   B. “But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go … So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go” (Exo. 3:19–20).
   C. “And the Lord said to Moses, When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go” (Exo. 4:21).
   D. It was through a series of plagues that God chose to harden Pharaoh’s stubborn heart (cf. Exo. 7:3, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32).

III. Egypt was a polytheistic society—they worshipped over eighty gods.
   A. “For beneath and above everything in Egypt was religion. We find it there in every stage and form from totemism to theology; we see its influence in literature, in government, in art, in everything except morality. And it is not only varied, it is tropically abundant; only in Rome and India shall we find so plentiful a pantheon. We cannot understand the Egyptian—or man—until we study his gods.” (Durant, p. 197).
   B. “The Egyptians considered sacred the lion, the ox, the ram, the wolf, the dog, the cat, the ibis, the vulture, the falcon, the hippopotamus, the crocodile, the cobra, the dolphin, different varieties of fish, trees, and small animals including the frog, scarab, locust and other insects. In addition to these there were anthropomorphic gods; that is, men in the prime of life such as Amun, Atum, or Osiris.” (Davis, p. 95).
   C. “As to rituals, they show us the gods in their temples. The presence of priests, often in large numbers, might lead one to suppose that temples offered men a privileged place for communicating with their gods. But the reliefs which sought to portray the actual content of religious rites demonstrate that this is a mistaken assumption. Carved in stone, meant to last, they consistently represent the king acting alone on behalf of the gods or else making them offerings without assistance. Men—that is, priests—maintained only an ephemeral physical presence in the sacred buildings, leaving virtually no traces there. When they are represented, it is above all as bearers of liturgical objects, not as active participants in the rite. The texts explicitly state that they are simply delegated by the king, who, since he cannot be everywhere in person, maintains a constant presence throughout the land by way of the temple reliefs.” (Meeks and Meeks, p. 8).
D. “Even Pharaoh was a god, always the son of Amon-Ra, ruling not merely by divine right but by divine birth, as a deity transiently tolerating the earth as his home. On his head was the falcon, symbol of Horus and totem of the tribe; from his forehead rose the uraeus or serpent, symbol of wisdom and life, and communicating magic virtues to the crown. The king was chief-priest of the faith, and led the great processions and ceremonies that celebrated the festivals of the gods. It was through this assumption of divine lineage and powers that he was able to rule so long with so little force.” (Durant, p. 201).

IV. God was going to reveal Himself to Egypt by the plagues and judge the land and her gods (Exo. 7:4; 10:2; 12:12; 18:11).
   A. “But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them” (Exo. 7:4–5).
   B. The plagues were not just against Pharaoh and his people, but “against all the gods of Egypt” (Exo. 12:12).
   C. Every one of the plagues was a direct insult to the gods of Egypt.

V. In all likelihood the first nine plagues were similar to plagues that have stricken the land of Egypt from the dawn of time.
   A. It appears as though God Divinely intensified these plagues and brought them to pass at the time of His choosing.
   B. “The first three plagues were related to the Nile and its associated pools and streams, the next three were concerned with flies and the diseases they carry, and the final three described phenomena that produced increasing degrees of darkness.” (Youngblood, p. 51).
   C. However, these plagues were not merely natural disasters—they were miracles in every sense of the word.

Discussion

I. **First Plague: Water Changed To Blood (Exo. 7:14–25)**
   A. The Nile was the heartbeat of Egypt—all trade, commerce, and crops depended upon the Nile.
      1. “The word ‘blood’ can be understood either as literal blood or metaphorically as ‘blood red’ (that is, the color of blood). In either case the fish in the Nile would die.” (Youngblood, p. 53).
      2. Not only was the Nile “red,” but other waters as well, even the water that was drawn for use in houses in stone or wooden jars.
B. This plague was an affront to many of the greatest gods of Egypt.
1. The great Khnum was the guardian of the Nile—Khnum is represented as a human being with a ram’s head.
2. Hapi (or Hapy) was the “spirit of the Nile” and its “dynamic essence.”
   a) Hapi was the god of the annual Nile inundation.
   b) Epithets for Hapi describe him as being the “lord of the fishes and birds and marshes.”
   c) “The very position of Hapi made it certain that he would become successful as a deity. The entire country looked to the Nile as the source of all wealth and provender, so that the deity which presided over it rapidly rose in public estimation. Thus Hapi quickly became identified with the greater and more outstanding figures in early Egyptian mythology. He thus became a partner with the great original gods who had created the world, and finally came to be regarded as the maker and moulder of everything within the universe. We find him credited with the attributes of Nu, the primeval water-mass, and this in effect made him a father of Ra, who had emerged from that element. Hapi, indeed, stood in more immediate relationship to the Egyptians than almost any other god in their pantheon. Without the sun Egypt would have been plunged into darkness, but without the Nile every living creature within its borders would assuredly have perished.” (Spence, p. 170).
3. One of the greatest gods of Egypt was Osiris, the god of the underworld; the Egyptians believed the Nile was his bloodstream.
4. Where was Tauret (Taweret), the hippopotamus goddess of the river?
5. Where was Nu, the god of life in the Nile?
C. “The gods had the same bodily fluids as humans. Their blood, for example, was red, whether they were major gods in the pantheon, minor gods, or fomenters of cosmic trouble. However, the gods’ bodily fluids and secretions had special virtues. Generally speaking, anything that came from a divine body and touched the ground was productive.” (Meeks and Meeks, p. 69).
D. “It was appropriate that the first of the plagues should be directed against the Nile River itself, the very lifeline of Egypt and the center of many of its religious ideas. The Nile was considered sacred by the Egyptians. Many of their gods were associated either directly or indirectly with this river and its productivity. For example, the great Khnum was considered the guardian of the Nile sources. Hapi was believed to be the ‘spirit of the Nile’ and its ‘dynamic essence.’ One of the greatest gods revered in Egypt was the god Osiris who was the god of the underworld. The Egyptians believed that the river Nile was his bloodstream. In the light of this latter expression, it is appropriate indeed that the Lord should turn the Nile to blood! It is not only said that the fish in the river died but that the ‘river stank,’ and the Egyptians were not able to use the water of that river … imagine the horror and frustration of the people of Egypt as they looked upon that which was formerly beautiful only to find dead fish lining the shores and an ugly red characterizing what had before provided life and attraction. Crocodiles were forced to leave the Nile. One wonders what worshipers would have thought of Hapi the god of the Nile who was sometimes manifest in the crocodile.” (Davis, p. 102).
II. **Second Plague: Frogs (Exo. 8:1–15)**

A. The presence of the frogs would not have been unusual, for the receding Nile left ponds which would have been a natural breeding ground for them.

B. “In various parts of the East, instead of what we call ovens they dig a hole in the ground, in which they insert a kind of earthen pot, which having sufficiently heated, they stick their cakes to the inside, and when baked remove them and supply their places with others, and so on. To find such places full of frogs when they came to heat them, in order to make their bread, must be both disgusting and distressing in the extreme.” (Clarke, p. 101).

C. The frog was considered the theophany of the goddess **Heqt** (or Hekt, or Heket), the wife of the creator of the world and the goddess of birth.
   1. Heqt was always shown with the head and body of a frog.
   2. Amulets and scarabs worn by women to protect them during childbirth would often bear the image of Heqt for protection.
   3. Heqt was believed to assist women in childbirth—consider the irony in the statement that the frogs invaded pharaoh’s bedroom and even jumped on his bed (Exo. 8:3).
   4. Even the involuntary slaughter of a frog was often punished with death.
   5. The people of the land had to gather the decaying bodies of the frogs, and put them into heaps.

D. The fact the Pharaoh entreated Moses to interceded with Jehovah to take away the frogs was a sign he recognized the God of Israel as being the author of the plague.

E. It is very possible that the next plague originated from flies depositing their ova in the putrid masses of the dead frogs.

III. **Third Plague: Lice (Exo. 8:16–19)**

A. The word “lice” is translated as “sand flies” or “fleas” in some translations.

B. The Hebrew word **kinnim** comes from a root word meaning “to dig”; it is probable that the insect in question would dig under the skin.

C. This would have been an embarrassment to **Geb**, the great god of the earth.
   1. He was also president of the divine tribunal on the kingship.
   2. Egyptians gave offerings to Geb for the bounty of the soil.

D. This plague would have been especially dreadful to the priests of Egypt, for they were required to shave their hair off every day, and wear a single tunic, that no lice would be permitted on their bodies.
   1. The daily ritual of the priest was not possible because of physical impurity.
   2. “Though priests often performed important secular tasks, as illustrated by the architectural feats of **Imhotep**, their sacred duties set them apart from the rest of the population, and they bore marks of exclusivity. Throughout the land, circumcised priests shaved off all body hair, including eyebrows and lashes, and they conducted their rites cloaked in white garments and animal skins.” (Flaherty, p. 72).
3. “The priests shave their bodies all over every other day to guard against the presence of lice, or anything else equally unpleasant, while they are about their religious duties; the priests, too, wear linen only, and shoes made from the papyrus plant—these materials, for dress and shoes, being the only ones allowed them. They bathe in cold water twice a day and twice every night—and observe innumerable other ceremonies besides.” (Herodotus, p. 99).

IV. Fourth Plague: Swarms (Exo. 8:20–32)
A. Moses does not use the word “flies” in this passage—he used the word “swarms”—the phrase “of flies” was added by the translators.
B. Deification of the scarab beetle is still seen in Egypt today. 1. Amon-Ra, the creator and king of the gods, had the head of a beetle.
2. “Ra, the Sole Creator was visible to the people of Egypt as the disc of the sun, but they knew him in many other forms. He could appear as a crowned man, a falcon or a man with a falcon’s head and, as the scarab beetle pushes a round ball of dung in front of it, the Egyptians pictured Ra as a scarab pushing the sun across the sky.” (Harris, p. 24).
3. The scarab was actually a dung beetle—an insect which feeds on the dung in the fields.
4. The plague of swarms of scarabs, with mandibles that could saw through wood, was destructive and worse than termites!
C. Some scholars believe this was the blood-sucking gadfly which was responsible for a lot of blindness in the land.
1. Keil and Delitzsch believe this was the dog-fly, an insect described in detail by Philo.
2. Dog-flies are more annoying than gnats, and fasten themselves to the human body.
D. This is the first plague in which God made a distinction between His people and the Egyptians—the swarms stayed away from the land of Goshen, where His people lived (Exo. 8:22–23).
E. God put “redemption” between His people and the Egyptians (Exo. 8:23).

V. Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased (Exo. 9:1–7)
A. This plague was against domestic animals in the land of Egypt.
1. Horses and cattle were not only highly valued in the land of Egypt, but they were also sacred.
2. “All Egyptians use bulls and bull-calves for sacrifice, if they have passed the test for ‘cleanness’; but they are forbidden to sacrifice heifers, on the ground that they are sacred to Isis.” (Herodotus, p. 101).
3. “The flies would have also become carriers of the highly infectious and usually fatal Bacillus anthracis that had already killed the fish and frogs, and livestock (brought back into the fields as the flood-waters subsided) would have succumbed to the anthrax bacteria (fifth plague).” (Youngblood, p. 53).
B. The Egyptians worshiped many animals, and many animal-headed deities.
1. The god Apis was represented as a bull, and had been worshipped in Egypt since around 3,000 B.C.
   a) The funerary cult devoted to him left many important remains.
   b) The Apis bull was the living image of the god Ptah.
   c) He was also associated with Re, from whom he borrowed the disk he wore between his horns.
   d) When the Apis bull died, priests would travel through every pasture in Egypt looking for his replacement—the calf would have a black coat, with distinctive patches on his neck, back and body.
   e) The Apis bull supposedly had the power of prophecy.
   f) When the Apis bull died the land of Egypt mourned for him as they would for the loss of the monarch himself.
   g) After death his body would be embalmed, and after the funeral rites were performed the body would be placed in a granite sarcophagus.
2. Hathor was the cow-headed goddess of the desert.
   a) “The cow was the living symbol of Isis-Hathor, represented sometimes as a cow, at others as a woman with a cow’s head, at others as a horned woman.” (How and Wells, p. 185).
   b) “The original form under which Hathor was worshipped was that of a cow. Later she is represented as a woman with the head of a cow, and finally with a human head, the face broad, kindly, placid, and decidedly bovine, sometimes retaining the ears or horns of the animal she represents. She is also shown with a head-dress resembling a pair of horns with the moon-disk between them.” (Spence, p. 163).
   c) She was the symbolic mother of Pharaoh, and the king of Egypt was referred to as “the son of Hathor.”
3. Khnum was the ram-god.
4. This plague would have also affected Bast, the cat goddess of love.
C. The herds of cattle belonging to the Israelites were not affected (Exo. 9:4).
VI. Sixth Plague: Boils (Exo. 9:8–12)
   A. This was probably skin anthrax, a black abscess that develops into a pustule.
      1. At this time there were painful boils which affected the knees, legs, and soles of the feet (cf. Deut. 28:35).
      2. This explains why Pharaoh’s “magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians” (Exo. 9:11).
   B. An affront to Serapis (or Sarapis), the deity in charge of healing.
   C. An affront to Imhotep, the god of medicine—this alone must have led to great despair in the land.
      1. “The first real person in known history is not a conqueror or a king but an artist and a scientist—Imhotep, physician, architect and chief adviser of King Zoser (ca. 3150 B.C.). He did so much for Egyptian medicine that later generations worshiped him as a god of knowledge, author of their sciences and their arts; and at the same time he appears to have founded the school of architecture which provided the next dynasty with the first great builders in history.” (Durant, p. 147).
      2. It is very likely that he was the architect who planned Egypt’s first large-scale stone monument: the Step Pyramid at Saqqara.
   D. Also an affront to Thoth, the ibis-headed god of intelligence and medical learning.

VII. Seventh Plague: Hail (Exo. 9:13–35)
   A. The region around Cairo normally receives two inches of rain per year.
   B. The flax and barley crops were destroyed (Exo. 9:31), which means this must have taken place in January.
   C. The plague originated from the sky, the realm of Nut, the sky goddess.
      1. “Her most general appearance, however, is that of a woman resting on hands and feet, her body forming an arch, thus representing the sky. Her limbs typified the four pillars on which the sky was supposed to rest. She was supposed originally to be reclining on Geb, the earth, when Shu raised her from this position.” (Spence, p. 173).
      2. Nut was the mother of five gods: Osiris, Hathor, Set, Isis, and Nephthys.
   D. Where was Shu, the wind god?
   E. Where was Horus, the hawk-headed sky god of upper Egypt.
   F. Isis and Seth protected the crops—burned fields testified of their impotence.
   G. Although this plague caused widespread devastation, a few trees remained for the locusts of the next plague to devour.
VIII. Eighth Plague: Locusts (Exo. 10:1–20)

A. In ancient times locusts could destroy an entire village’s food supply in a matter of minutes.
   1. Locusts were described as an army by Joel (Joel 1:6).
   2. “No one who has ever seen the locust at work accuses the Bible account of hyperbole. In 1926 and 1927, small swarms of the African migratory locusts were spotted in an area 50 by 120 miles on the plains of the river Niger near Timbuktu. The next year swarms invaded Senegal and Sierra Leone. By 1930 the whole of west Africa was flailing away at the pests with everything moveable. But the locusts didn’t seem to notice; swarms reached Khartum, more than 2,000 miles to the east of Timbuktu, then turned south, spreading across Ethiopia, Kenya, the Belgian Congo, and in 1932, striking into the lush farm land of Angola and Rhodesia. Before the plague finally sputtered out fourteen years after it began, it affected five-million miles of Africa, an area nearly double the size of the United States.” (Davis, pp. 128, 129)

B. Again, the gods of Egypt were silent.
   1. Where was Nepri (or Neper), the god of grain?
   2. Where was Ermutet, the goddess of childbirth and crops?
   3. Isis is again silent.
   4. Thermuthis, the goddess of fertility and the harvest was silent.
   5. Seth, the god of crops, was also silent.

C. Destroyed trees and crops left famine and unrest in the land.

IX. Ninth Plague: Darkness (Exo. 10:21–29)

A. “But when Moses said that what he [Pharaoh] desired was unjust, since they were obliged to offer sacrifices to God of those cattle, and the time being prolonged on this account, a thick darkness, without the least light, spread itself over the Egyptians, whereby their sight being obstructed, and the breathing hindered by the thickness of the air, they were under terror lest they be swallowed up by the thick cloud. This darkness, after three days and as many nights was dissipated.” (Josephus, Book II, XIV, 5).

B. A plague of darkness was an insult to Egypt’s religion and entire culture.

C. The sun god Amon-Ra was considered one of the greatest blessings in all of the land of Egypt.
   1. Amon and Ra were originally two separate deities.
   2. Ra (or Re) was a Sun god whose cult was at Heliopolis (On).
   3. Represented in art with a man’s body and a falcon’s head surmounted by a solar disk, Ra was believed to sail across the sky in a boat each day and under the world at night.
4. “The moon was a god, perhaps the oldest of all that were worshiped in Egypt; but in the official theology the greatest of the gods was the sun. Sometimes it was worshiped as the supreme deity Ra or Re, the bright father who fertilized Mother Earth with rays of penetrating heat and light; sometimes it was a divine calf, born anew at every dawn, sailing the sky slowly in a celestial boat, and descending into the west, at evening, like an old man tottering to his grave. Or the sun was the god Horus, taking the graceful form of a falcon, flying majestically across the heavens day after day as if in supervision of his realm, and becoming one of the recurrent symbols of Egyptian religion and royalty. Always Ra, or the sun, was the Creator: at his first rising, seeing the earth desert and bare, he had flooded it with his energizing rays, and all living things—vegetable, animal and human—had sprung pell-mell from his eyes, and been scattered over the world.” (Durant, p. 198).

D. In Egyptian mythology Horus was the god of light who personified the life-giving power of the Sun.
   1. He was usually represented as a falcon-headed man wearing a sun disk as a crown.
   2. The reigning kings of Egypt were believed to be incarnations of Horus.

E. Where was Ptah, the chief god of Memphis, the one who created the moon, the sun and the earth?

F. Where are Atum, the sun-god and creator who was also worshiped at Heliopolis, the major center of sun worship?

G. Where was Tem, the god of the sunset?

H. Where was Shu, the god of sunlight and air?

I. Where were the deities of the moon?

X. Tenth Plague: Death Of The Firstborn (Exo. 11:1–12:30)

A. The firstborn was not only an heir of a double portion of his father’s inheritance, but represented special qualities of life (cf. Gen. 49:3).
   1. The law of primogeniture decreed that the major portion of a family estate would be inherited by the firstborn son when the father died (Deut. 21:17).
   2. Death of the firstborn son would cripple a family legally and emotionally.
   3. This tenth plague was potentially more devastating that all of the other plagues put together.
   4. This plague was also very selective—it destroyed only the Egyptians firstborn males, whether human or animal.
   5. The Israelites and the entire male population of the nation were to be exempt from this plague.
   6. This plague was too selective to merely be a childhood epidemic.

B. The story of the plagues is summarized in Psalms 78:44–51, and again in Psalms 105:28–36 (but not in chronological order).
   1. In Psalms 135:8 and 136:10 the death of the firstborn it is the only plague mentioned at all, probably because this plague made a greater impression of future generations.
   2. The tenth plague therefore can stand for all of the plagues because it was the most memorable (cf. Heb. 11:28).
C. This plague was directed against “all of the gods of Egypt” (Exo. 12:12).
   1. Would show the total inability of the gods of Egypt to protect them.
   2. Where was Meskhenet, the goddess who presided at the birth of children?
   3. Where was Hathor, one of the seven deities who attended the birth of children?
   4. Where was Min, the god of procreation?
   5. Where was Isis, the goddess of fertility?
   6. Where was Selket, the guardian of life?
   7. Where was Renenutet, the cobra-goddess and guardian of Pharaoh?
      a) She was the living embodiment of motherhood.
      b) Her name suggests the idea of “nursing” or “raising” a child.

D. “Following the death of Thutmose III, his son, Amenhotep II, took the throne and ruled for at least twenty-six years. This king, according to the early date of the exodus, would have been the Pharaoh of the exodus and the one who lost his firstborn son in the final judgment of God (Exod. 12). Some have seen a relationship between the death of Amenhotep’s firstborn son and the well-known ‘Dream Stela’ of Thutmose IV, his son and successor to the throne. In this document the god Har-em-akht promised the throne to Thutmose IV on the condition that he restore the exposure of the great sphinx which apparently had been largely covered by drifting sand. It is their view that this Dream Stela represents an attempt at legitimizing his right to the throne, since he was apparently not the firstborn son.” (Davis, p. 43).

Conclusion

II. The story of the plagues is summarized in Psalms 78:44–51 and 105:28–36.
III. After the plagues, Pharaoh released the children of Israel (Exo. 12:31–37).
   A. After three months they came to Sinai (Exo. 19–24).
   B. When Israel believed the report of the evil spies and refused to enter Canaan, God caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty years (Num. 14).
   C. After the death of Moses (Deut. 34), Joshua led the people into Canaan.
# Egyptian Deities

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<td>Ensures fertility</td>
<td>Bull</td>
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<td>Atum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thoth (Tehuti)</td>
<td>God of medical learning</td>
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