

Introduction to the 10 Plagues

The Lord wants to be known

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The Lord distinguishes himself

The Lord's purpose in the 10 plagues is to reveal himself. The formula " ... that you may know that I am the Lord ... ," or something similar to it appears in Exodus 6:2, 6, 7, 8, 28; 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14; and 10:2. Four players or groups of players have the opportunity to know the Lord in the drama of the plagues: Moses, the Israelites, the Egyptians and Pharaoh.

The Lord makes himself known by revealing his awesome power, and thereby gives the players the opportunity to recognize him. Ultimately, the Lord reveals himself by distinguishing between himself and everyone else. The difference between the Lord and everyone else is enhanced in the following ways, as seen in the plagues, which appear in three series of three, with the 10th and final plague standing alone:

- Plagues 1-3: The Lord distinguishes between his servants, Moses and Aaron, and the servants of the Egyptian gods, the magicians. Although the Egyptian magicians duplicate the first two plagues (7:11, 22), they cannot reverse the effects (8:8), and they cannot duplicate the third plague (8:18), finally recognizing "the finger of God" (8:19).

- Plagues 4-6: The Lord distinguishes between his people, the Israelites, and the Egyptians. While the first three plagues affected all of Egypt, the next three don't impact the land of Goshen, where the Israelites live (8:22-23).

- Plagues 7-9: The Lord distinguishes between himself and everyone else. In these plagues, he demonstrates that "there is no one like me in all the earth" (9:14); therefore, the severity of the plagues is without precedent (9:18, 9:24, 10:6, 10:14).

- The 10th plague: The three ways that the Lord distinguished himself reappear in the 10th plague, the plague of the first-born. Moses (11:3), the Israelites (11:7) and the Lord (11:6) are all differentiated again. Moreover, the Lord executes the 10th plague himself and not through Moses or Aaron (12:12). The 10th plague is outside the series and, unlike the other nine, has nothing to do with natural events, completely defying any explanation that denies the power of the Lord.

This differentiation is enhanced by the literary structure of the narrative, as seen in the chart on the following page.

In the plagues, the Lord goes to war against the Egyptian gods (12:12, Numbers 33:4). Many if not all of the plagues represent defeats for specific Egyptian gods that supposedly ruled over some natural force. For example, the first plague impacted the Nile, and the Egyptians had a "Nile" god named Hopi. The New Testament correspondence is the war the Lord fought and won against Satan through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of his Son, Jesus Christ (Mark 3:27, Ephesians 1:19-23, Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14-15). The prize in both wars is the people of God, whom the Lord delivers in the first case from the bondage of Pharaoh and the Egyptians and in the second case from the bondage of Satan and his demons.

The Lord's distinguishing himself culminates for the Israelites on Mount Sinai, where they are given the 10 commandments, the first and primary of which is, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

The prologue to the 10 Plagues (7:8-13) introduces elements that will reappear in the plagues themselves, thus

forming an apt introduction. The Egyptian magicians duplicate the sign of the serpent (7:11), but Aaron's serpent swallows that of the Egyptians, demonstrating the Lord's superior power (7:12). Pharaoh, as he will do throughout the plagues, hardens his heart (7:13).

The Lord went to war against Satan, demonstrating his power. He has distinguished between his servants and Satan's servants, between his people and Satan's people, and between himself and everyone else. By showing himself to be set apart from anyone or anything else, he has revealed himself, that we may know that he is the Lord and that we may have no other gods before him.

Literary structure of the plagues narrative

Plague **Ex. source** Warning **Instruction formula**

1. blood 7:14-24 yes "In the morning," "station yourself"
2. frogs 7:25-8:11 yes "Go to Pharaoh"
3. gnats 8:12-15 no none

4. flies 8:16-28 yes "In the morning," "station yourself"
5. livestock 9:1-7 yes "Go to Pharaoh"
6. boils 9:8-12 no none

7. hail 9:13-35 yes "In the morning," "station yourself"
8. locusts 10:1-20 yes "Go to Pharaoh"
9. darkness 10:21-23 no none

10. first-born 11:4-7 yes none
- 12:29-30
