

## Reformation Fellowship Notes • September 4, 2016

Teacher: David Crabtree

### Handout #11

## Exodus 11:1-10 & Overview of the Plagues

### I. Introduction

- A. I have gone through the text describing the first nine plagues.
  - 1. At the end of the ninth plague, Pharaoh called in Moses.
  - 2. That meeting continues in Chapter 11.
  - 3. This is followed by a long description of the Passover.
- B. I will finish that interaction at the end of the ninth plague before talking about the plagues as a whole.
- C. In following weeks, I will talk about the last plague (Passover) in detail.

### II. Exodus 11:1-10

- A. The organization of this chapter is difficult.
- B. My best guess:
  - 1. The first three verses describe a message that came to Moses from God.
  - 2. Verses 4-8 describe what Moses said to Pharaoh at the same meeting that was taking place in Chapter 10 when Pharaoh called Moses to get him to take away the darkness.
  - 3. Verse 9 is a summary of the situation on the eve of the Passover.
- C. What God told Moses:
  - 1. When did he talk to Moses?
    - a) Earlier, before he met with Pharaoh?
    - b) While he was meeting with Pharaoh?
    - c) I don't think we can know.
  - 2. Announcement of tenth and final plague:
    - a) The tenth plague will force Pharaoh to drive you out.
      - (1) The Israelites will not have to fight to free themselves.
    - b) Instruct the people of Israel to ask the Egyptians for silver and gold.
      - (1) The Egyptians will gladly give.
      - (2) God disposed the Egyptians kindly towards the Israelites.
      - (3) Moses was highly esteemed by Egyptians.
        - (a) They probably consider him the source of the plagues.
        - (b) They respect his power.
        - (c) They may even sympathize with the plight of the Israelites.
        - (d) This includes the advisers of Pharaoh and the people, but it does not include Pharaoh.

## D. Plague announced to Pharaoh:

1. At midnight—when things are at their worst
  - a) Egyptians avoided being out at night (evil spirits wandered about).
2. God himself is the agent of this plague (angel of death).
  - a) Only plague that takes place without the use of Moses' staff.
3. All the first born will die.
  - a) First born is the most important child.
  - b) It will affect every strata of society—
    - (1) From Pharaoh to the poorest.
  - c) It will affect cattle as well.
  - d) The greatest outcry ever (either before or after)
4. The Israelites will not be affected.
  - a) There will not be even a dog bark against them.
  - b) Because God makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.
  - c) This is an important theme throughout the plague narrative.
5. As a result, all your advisors will come to me and beg us to leave.
  - a) Pharaoh will have no choice; no one would enforce his commands.
6. The Israelites will leave.
7. Moses left Pharaoh in anger.
  - a) He is frustrated by the stubbornness of Pharaoh?

## E. Recap of where we are in the narrative:

1. Needed because there will be a long digression to describe the Passover ceremony.
2. Pharaoh did not listen because God wanted to multiply his wonders.
3. All the plagues were brought by the agency of Moses and Aaron.
  - a) They did not bring Pharaoh to repentance.
4. Pharaoh remains insanely defiant.

**III. How did God Perform the Plagues?**

## A. What is a miracle?

1. There is a sense in which everything that happens is an act of God.
  - a) Most of what happens is according to the laws of physics and chemistry.
  - b) We call this the “laws of nature.”
2. There are two ways God can overtly reach into our experience (two kinds of miracles):
  - a) Supernatural
    - (1) Violation of the laws of chemistry and physics
  - b) Hypernatural
    - (1) Event of such magnitude that it becomes unique—

- (a) But consistent with the laws of nature;
  - (2) In a context that makes it significant.
- 3. The qualities of a miracle (God acting overtly in human experience):
  - a) Attention getting
    - (1) It has to strike people as way out of the ordinary.
  - b) Right time
    - (1) It has to come at a time of significance.
  - c) Meaningful, purposeful
    - (1) It has to gain significance from the context.
    - (2) Miracles are intended to communicate.
- 4. Both supernatural miracles and hypernatural miracles have these qualities.
  - a) Some miracles appear to be according to the laws of nature.
    - (1) The crossing of the Jordan almost certainly has a naturalistic explanation (Joshua 3:14-17).
  - b) Some miracles appear to defy naturalistic explanation.
    - (1) Moses' staff eating the staffs of the magicians of Pharaoh.
- 5. To look for naturalist explanations of miracles is not necessarily to explain them away.
  - a) It can be an attempt to explain the means by which God did what he did.
  - b) Miracles (supernatural or hypernatural) cannot bring a fundamentally arrogant heart to repentance.

#### IV. Naturalistic narrative

##### A. Origin

1. Commenters on the biblical text have long assumed that some of the plagues were causally connected.
2. First to develop it at all was Flinders Petrie in 1911.
3. First scientific effort by Greta Hort, professor of English literature, Aarhus University in Denmark in 1957-58.
4. Refined by Marr and Malloy in 1997.
  - a) Dr. John S. Marr—principle epidemiologist for the New York City Department of Health
  - b) Dr. Curtis Malloy—research associate with Medical and Health Research Association of New York City
5. Most recent effort by Colin Humphries in *The Miracles of Exodus* in 2003.

##### B. How each plague can be accounted for

1. First plague—blood
  - a) This is mentioned in Ipuwer Papyrus.
    - (1) Written before Exodus (1600 BC)
  - b) Nile floods June-September.
    - (1) Highest water is in September.
    - (2) Flood carries red soil.

- c) Red tides
    - (1) Only certain ones kill fish.
    - (2) Only in salt water
      - (a) They can develop in estuaries.
    - (3) Required conditions:
      - (a) Long hours of daylight
      - (b) Warm temperatures
      - (c) Water rich in nutrients
  - d) Blood red water caused by flooding Nile and “harmful algae bloom” in September
    - (1) Fish would have died several days to a few weeks after bloom started.
2. Second plague—frogs
- a) Frogs are at their maximum in November.
  - b) Frogs were driven out of the water due to algae and dying fish.
  - c) Frogs go in search of water and insects.
  - d) Frogs died from hunger and thirst.
3. Third plague—gnats
- a) Hebrew word is not specific.
  - b) Midges or mosquitoes are most likely.
    - (1) A later plague requires midges.
    - (2) Midges lay eggs on decaying animals.
    - (3) *Culicoides canithorax* is most likely.
4. Fourth plague—flies
- a) Stable fly is most likely.
  - b) *Stomoxys calcitrans*
    - (1) Swarms
    - (2) Breeds quickly
    - (3) Painful bites
    - (4) Bites mainly feet and legs
  - c) Midges and flies were eaten mainly by frogs.
    - (1) Since the frogs died, insects could multiply more easily.
5. Fifth plague—pestilence
- a) Wide range of animals
  - b) No humans killed
  - c) No one virus meets these requirements.
  - d) But two viruses would do this, and they are transmitted by the same insect.
    - (1) Both are carried by *Culicoides* midges
  - e) Two viruses:
    - (1) African horse sickness (kills horses)
    - (2) Bluetongue (kills cattle, sheep, goats, and camels)
6. Sixth plague—boils
- a) Glanders (*Pseudomonas mallei*)
    - (1) Boils on men and animals
    - (2) Highly contagious

- (a) Air
  - (b) Direct contact
  - (c) Insect bites (stable fly bites would work)
7. Seventh plague—hail
    - a) Not caused by previous plague
      - (1) But sets up the eighth and tenth plagues
    - b) Hail rare, but not unheard of in Egypt
      - (1) Large hail stones possible
    - c) Destroyed flax and barley
      - (1) Harvested at about the same time in Egypt
    - d) This would have happened February-March.
  8. Eighth plague—locusts
    - a) Some big locust attacks in historic times.
    - b) Locusts are attracted to damp soil.
      - (1) Must be damp down to 4 inches to lay eggs and propagate.
      - (2) Hail was followed by rain.
    - c) Fly with the wind
    - d) East wind brought locusts.
  9. Ninth plague—darkness
    - a) Sandstorm (Khamsin)
    - b) Usually in spring
      - (1) First of the year is usually worst.
      - (2) Particularly heavy flood usually causes particularly heavy sand storm.
  10. Tenth plague—death of firstborn
    - a) Hardest to explain
      - (1) Egyptians harvested grain wet.
        - (a) It had locust feces on it.
      - (2) A mycotoxin grew on grain.
        - (a) macrocyclic tricothecenes
    - b) After a period of little food—
      - (1) First born males feed first;
      - (2) First born male livestock fed next;
        - (a) Only top layer of grain would contain mycotoxin.
- C. Significance of this account
1. This puts all ten plagues in a 7- to 8-month period.
    - a) Starting in September and ending in March
    - b) Humphries, pp. 144-5
  2. Gives account the stamp of authenticity.
    - a) Very important event
    - b) But was not remembered by Jews
    - c) Most scholars doubt that exodus happened.
      - (1) Claim the account was written in Israel centuries later
        - (a) The accuracy of the details makes this impossible.

## V. What Did God Accomplish with the Plagues?

### A. Plagues as polemic against gods of Egypt

1. The plagues directly challenge the Pharaoh's ability to deliver.
  - a) Pharaoh was son of god—
    - (1) Mediator between gods and Egyptians.
    - (2) His job was to hold back the chaos.
      - (a) Chaos was most threatening when it affected most basic needs:
        - (i) Food
        - (ii) Weather
        - (iii) Long-term survival
    - (3) Many gods had power over different aspects of Egyptian life.
2. Some of the plagues targeted the realms of popular Egyptian gods.
  - a) First plague
    - (1) Khnum was guardian of the Nile.
    - (2) Hapi was the "spirit of the Nile."
  - b) Second plague
    - (1) Heqt was manifested in the frog
      - (a) goddess of birth
  - c) Third plague
    - (1) Geb was god of earth.
      - (a) Gave of the bounty of the earth
  - d) Ninth plague
    - (1) Amon-Re was the sun god.
      - (a) He was the main Egyptian god.
  - e) It is possible that all the plagues can be accounted for in this way.
    - (1) But maybe not (gnats? flies? etc.)
    - (2) Whether they can or not—this is not the focus.
      - (a) The focus is on Pharaoh.
      - (b) The gods are shown to be impotent, but the emphasis is on Pharaoh.
3. The plagues demonstrated clearly that Pharaoh was completely incapable of assuring order for his people.
  - a) Way out of his league,
  - b) And he was most powerful king in the world.

“The texts reviewed here, spanning from the Middle through New Kingdoms, illustrate that the king was closely associated with the sun and moon, the inundation and the fertility of the land. Furthermore, the connection between Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt is firmly established. What the plagues of Exodus show is the inability of the obstinate king to maintain Maat. Rather, it is Yahweh and his agents, Moses and Aaron, who overcome in the cosmic struggle, demonstrating who really controls the forces of nature.” (Hoffemeier, *Israel in Egypt*, p.153)

### B. Plagues as display of who YHWH is

1. Organization of the presentation of the plagues

- a) Three sets of three:
    - (1) First of set—formal confrontation
    - (2) Second of set—go
    - (3) Third of set—unannounced
  - b) Each set is progressively more threatening.
  - c) Pressure builds, then a break
  - d) What does this say about YHWH?
    - (1) He is not quick to destroy his enemies.
    - (2) Lots of warning
    - (3) Very patient
    - (4) Powerful
    - (5) Can reach into Egypt
    - (6) Spares his own people
- C. Plagues as preparation for Exodus
- 1. Encouragement to Israelites
    - a) They are not certain that God is able to do this.
    - b) They needed encouragement.
  - 2. Predispose Egyptians to help Israelites
    - a) Egyptians come to respect Moses and his God.
    - b) They want the Israelites to leave.
    - c) They give them wealth when they leave.
  - 3. Preparation for the conquest
    - a) Word of what God did in Egypt precedes them into Canaan and helps them in the conquest (Joshua 2:9; 9:24).

## Plagues of Egypt Chart

From *The Miracles of Exodus* by Colin J. Humphries, pages 144-5.

Plague	Cause	Time of Year
1. Nile turned to blood and fish died	Red soil particles plus red harmful algal blooms.	September
2. Frogs/Toads	Polluted Nile forces frogs ashore. Mass death due to starvation and dehydration.	September-October
3. Gnats	The biting midge <i>Culicoides carnithorix</i> . Free to breed rapidly due to population collapse of frogs.	October-November
4. Flies	The stable fly <i>Stomoxys calcitrans</i> . Free to breed rapidly due to population collapse of frogs.	November
5. Death of Livestock	Bluetongue virus and African horse sickness virus, both spread by the biting midge, <i>Culicoides</i> .	November-December
6. Boils	Skin infection spread by the stable fly, <i>Stomoxys</i> .	December-January
7. Hail	Exceptionally severe hailstorm.	February-March
8. Locusts	The desert locust, attracted by damp sand from hailstorm to settle and lay eggs.	February-March
9. Darkness for three days	First <i>khamstin</i> of the year produces particularly dark and dense dust storm.	March
10. Death of the firstborn males	<i>Mycotoxins</i> on grain, possibly <i>macrocylic tricothecenes</i> . Due to damp grain from hail contaminated by locusts' feces and stored in a grain store then sealed by sand from the <i>khamstin</i> dust storm.	late March-early April