

## Exodus 9-11

In this lesson we will examine these three chapters as a unit because the specifics of the plagues are not as important as the ever growing contest between YHWH/Moses and Pharaoh and the ever-increasing cost the Egyptians pay for Pharaoh's hardened heart.

**1) Egyptian animals suffer.** We begin with God commanding Moses to tell Pharaoh that if the Hebrews are not released to go and worship, then God will unleash a plague on the animals of Egyptians, while sparing the animals of the Hebrews. Even when God brings this promised plague about, Pharaoh is not moved.

**2) Egyptian animals and people suffer.** Next Moses is commanded to take dust and throw it in the air with the result that both animals and humans will be covered in boils. In this plague we witness the increasing severity of the plagues such that both humans and animals are affected. The writer makes certain to point out that even the Egyptian magicians are affected, meaning their magic is insufficient to ward off this plague.

**3) Egyptian crops, animals, and people suffer/die.** The next step in this plague progression is a reminder from God that this contest is no longer simply an issue of freedom vs slavery, but of Pharaoh and the Egyptians acknowledging that YHWH is the one true God. Thus, there is a warning from God to Pharaoh that God's patience is wearing thin and because Pharaoh is still exalting himself there will be a plague of hail. What is interesting about this plague is that many of the Egyptians failed to heed the warning and so lost their crops, animals, and lives (again note the increasing severity of the plagues as well as the differentiation between Hebrews and Egyptians). Following this plague, Pharaoh makes his first, halting attempt to confess his faults and asks Moses to get God to back off. When Moses asks and God stops the hail, Pharaoh hardens his heart again and refuses to let the people go.

**4) All Egypt will be at risk of famine...so all may suffer/die.** Chapter 10 begins with the plague of the locusts which threatens all life in Egypt or, as the officials see it, the nation is "ruined" because all plants will be destroyed and there will be nothing to eat. Again, this plague brings about a meaningless act of repentance by Pharaoh, which leads to no softening of Pharaoh's heart and an offer of freedom for the Hebrew adults.

**5) All Egypt is crippled without light.** This plague reflects YHWH's power in that YHWH can stop the sun-god Ra from shining on Egypt, while continuing to shine on the Hebrew people. This plague elicits an offer that will allow the people to leave, but not the animals. Growing in confidence, Moses does not agree and demands total and complete freedom. At this point Pharaoh threatens Moses with death if Moses ever shows his face again to Pharaoh. Moses agrees that the face to face meetings are not helpful.

**6) The first born shall die.** God is done with this contest and so will bring about a plague so cruel that Pharaoh will make the Hebrews leave. Before the plague is announced, God informs Moses that the Hebrews will ask for and receive parting gifts from the Egyptians...who see Moses as greater than Pharaoh. Moses then informs Pharaoh of the punishment for Pharaoh's unwillingness to acknowledge the greatness of YHWH. The punishment is the death of the first born of Egypt (people and animals). It is only after this pronouncement that Moses leaves Pharaoh's presence for the last time.

**Reflection:** What these plagues reveal is the difference between YHWH and Egypt's gods (including Pharaoh). YHWH cares about YHWH's people. The gods don't care about human beings. YHWH makes and keeps promises. The gods neither make nor keep promises. YHWH creates new realities. The gods only recycle what exists. YHWH hears, remembers, and responds. The gods don't hear, remember, or respond. YHWH is a God of morality and justice. The gods are amoral or are self-centered.

### Questions:

1. What do you think about this comparison between God and "the gods"?
2. Where have you seen people acting more like "the gods" than someone committed to God?
3. How do you align your life with God rather than "the gods"??