

The Ten Plagues

Passages: Ex 7–12

Memory Verse

“You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.” (1 Corinthians 7:23)

| Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word] | Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature] | Good Works [Behavior] |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God punishes those who have hard hearts that resist His will.2. God wants to free His people from bondage. | God is a God of redemption and salvation. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Learn to soften our hearts to God’s will.2. Free ourselves from sin, so that we can receive the wages of holiness, which is eternal life. |

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Egyptian Pharaoh
- B. The Ten Plagues
- C. The Passover

Life Application

1. Checking the Condition of Our Hearts
2. Freedom from Sin

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Just as the Israelites obeyed God’s commands for the Passover, we also need to soften our hearts to God’s will, so that we can free ourselves from sin and, as a result, receive the reward of eternal life.

Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

The Israelites' journey from bondage in Egypt to their inheritance of the promised land is a historical picture of our journey to salvation (1 Cor 10:1–4; Heb 11:8–16, 24–29, 39–40). Their slavery in Egypt represents our bondage to sin, while their exodus from Egypt represents our own freedom from sin and death. Their journey is a model for our own freedom and salvation in Christ.

A. The Egyptian Pharaoh

The pharaoh was equivalent to divinity in the Egyptians' eyes. His sacred position was directly connected to their worship of their many gods. The ancient Egyptians are known for their extremely polytheistic practices. They worshipped hundreds of different gods, each with different but limited purposes, as opposed to the one Creator and sustainer of all things. In other words, the pharaoh and the beliefs of his people were in direct opposition of the one true God and His children. Their religion was at complete odds with the Lord. Because of this, God declared, "against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord" (Ex 12:12).

God used the ten plagues not only to free His people, but also to establish His divinity and show the Egyptians who the true Creator is. By the end of the plagues, the Egyptians truly feared His mighty power. They realized how powerless their gods were, and how the Lord is the one true God. Numbers 33:4 says, "For the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments."

B. The Ten Plagues

Let's study the ten plagues in more detail and see Pharaoh's reaction to each of them. How many of the plagues do you remember? (*Allow students to answer.*) In order, they are: water turned to blood, frogs, lice, flies, livestock diseased, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn. You may notice that with each passing affliction, the Lord showed His mighty hand with greater and greater power. After the first two plagues, the magicians could no longer duplicate the miracles and admitted to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." On top of this, Goshen's protection not only distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians, but also showed God's power. Let's look at each plague in closer detail.

1. Water Turned to Blood (Ex 7:14–25)

The first plague affected a vital source of life for the Egyptians: the Nile River. The Egyptians also worshipped a great number of river deities. This plague was not only a direct attack on the Egyptians' way of life, but also on their beliefs. Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate the miracle, but they were unable to reverse the change that God had wrought.

2. Frogs (Ex 8:1–15)

Like the Nile, frogs were religiously significant to the Egyptians. Considered sacred creatures, they symbolized life and fertility. The Lord once again attacked the Egyptian's faith. Again, the magicians could only duplicate the problem. But they didn't need more frogs, they needed less! So, Pharaoh pleaded with Moses to take away the frogs. In response, Moses permitted the Pharaoh to dictate when the frogs should return to the river. This made it clear that it was not coincidence, but God's power. The moment Pharaoh saw that his people were free of the plague, however, "he hardened his heart" and refused to let the Israelites go (v. 15).

3. Lice (Ex 8:16–19)

The plagues moved from the water to the land with the third plague. This was the first plague that God enacted unannounced to Pharaoh, with no chance to repent or relent. This is also the first miracle the Egyptian magicians failed to duplicate, causing them to tell Pharaoh plainly, “This is the finger of God” (v. 19). Despite their words, Pharaoh once again hardened his heart.

4. Flies (Ex 8:20–32)

While the Egyptians may have tried to blame nature for the previous plagues, God’s power would be undeniable with this plague upon the sight of swarms of flies affecting the entire land except for Goshen, where God’s people dwelled (vv. 22–23). In response to this plague, Pharaoh attempted to compromise for the first time (v. 25). To him, allowing the Israelites to follow their religious practices was a show of leniency. But Moses correctly replied that this was not enough, so Pharaoh once again tried to compromise, urging them to “not go very far away” (v. 28). This was both an unacceptable compromise and a lie. The moment the plague was removed, Pharaoh again hardened his heart.

5. Livestock Diseased (Ex 9:1–7)

The fifth plague was the first to directly affect the Egyptians’ livelihood. Moses informed Pharaoh that this plague would happen at the appointed time the next day and only affect the Egyptians’ animals. With this, the Egyptians were unable to produce goods for trade, meat for food, or offer sacrifices to their gods. It was a crippling blow to their economy, livelihood, and religious lifestyle.

6. Boils (Ex 9:8–12)

The first plague to directly affect the Egyptians themselves, this was the second time a plague was enacted by God without warning. The Lord ordered Moses to “scatter [ashes] towards the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh” to ensure Pharaoh’s understanding that the plague was not random chance, but an act of God.

7. Hail (Ex 9:13–35)

This plague was the first where not only did God give the Egyptians a chance to save themselves (vv. 20–21), but Pharaoh was also driven to a surprising admission. He called Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked” (v. 27). However, his contrition lasted only as long as the plague. The moment the hail was stopped, he once again refused to let them go.

8. Locusts (Ex 10:1–20)

By the eighth plague, the Lord demanded of Pharaoh, “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?” (v. 3). For the first time, Pharaoh’s servants also spoke up and urged him to let the Israelites go with the words, “Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?” (v. 7). Pharaoh’s stubborn pride blinded him to the suffering of his own people. In response, Pharaoh asked Moses and Aaron, “Who are the ones that are going?” His question showed that he wasn’t planning on freeing the Israelites. From the very beginning, Moses had demanded the release of the entire population, yet Pharaoh here only relented in letting the men go free, tying the Israelites to slavery just as surely as if he had not let any go free at all. In response, God released a plague of locusts on the land.

9. Darkness (Ex 10:21–29)

This was the third time a plague was enacted unannounced by the Lord, following a pattern of two announced and one unannounced for the first nine plagues. Darkness may seem like a less serious problem than the previous plagues, but the sun represented one of the Egyptians’ most important, most worshipped gods. Three days of darkness would have been an ultimate challenge to the Egyptian religion, one that would likely have terrified them all (v. 23). God showed how powerless their false gods were, and how helpless their Pharaoh truly was, as a supposed representative of their gods.

Despite this, Pharaoh refused to release them, and this time, he threatened Moses with death the next time he approached. Moses’ answer was simple. “You have spoken well. I will never see your face again.” The clash between the two representatives had reached its climax.

10. Death of the Firstborn (Ex 11:1–12:36)

With this last plague, God told Moses that the end was in sight. After holding on so tightly to the Israelites, Pharaoh would “drive” the Israelites out of Egypt altogether (11:1)! Before leaving Pharaoh’s presence for the last time, Moses gave his final, and most ominous, warning. Pharaoh did not heed him, so the Israelites began preparing for their very first Passover.

As a result of this plague, Pharaoh was so desperate to be rid of them that he sent the Israelites away that very same night, while the rest of the Egyptians “urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste” (12:33). On top of this, as God predicted to Moses, the Israelites did not leave empty-handed (3:21). Miraculously, despite all the destruction that they experienced, “the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested” (12:35–36; cf. 11:2–3). Newly freed slaves do not normally leave with their masters’ treasures, and yet this is exactly what happened for the Israelites!

C. The Passover

Before the final plague, Moses prepared God’s people for their departure from Egypt. Their preparations became the institution of Passover, which the Jews continue to observe even today, albeit with slightly different traditions. Let’s read Exodus 12:5–13.

When Moses first returned to Egypt, both he and the Israelites questioned God when Pharaoh treated them even more harshly (Ex 5:17–23). But the ten plagues solidified their faith. By the end, none questioned His instructions; they all did exactly as the Lord commanded. They obediently requested articles of silver and gold from their neighbors, despite the high possibility of refusal or retribution, and followed His instructions in preparing for their first Passover meal (Ex 12:28, 35).

Redemption Through Christ, the Passover Lamb¹

For hundreds of years, the Passover served as a reminder of how God delivered the Israelites from Egypt. However, it also is an amazing foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, hundreds of years before His birth! Do you remember the different elements of the Passover and what they represent or foreshadow?

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| Lamb without blemish | Because God is holy, the sacrifice had to be without blemish (Lev 22:21–22). Peter wrote that we were redeemed not “with corruptible things, like |
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¹ See *E2 Year 1 Book 3 Lesson 8: The Passover* for additional details.

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| | silver or gold, [...] but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:18–19). It is impossible for us to become truly holy. So, to make up for our inadequacies, our sacrifice, the Lord Jesus, had to be holy and without blemish. |
| Unleavened bread | Paul wrote, “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:8). Removing leaven from our lives is an ongoing process that requires us to live new lives in truth. |
| Bitter herbs | The bitter herbs reminded the Israelites of the bitterness of the slavery that they had to endure while in Egypt. We should always remember that the world we live in today is not our true home – we are merely pilgrims and sojourners, seeking to enter our heavenly home (Heb 11:13). |
| The lamb is slain | Just as the Israelites sacrificed a lamb “without blemish” to spare their lives during the tenth plague, Jesus gave Himself up as our Passover Lamb, sacrificed to redeem us from sin and death (1 Cor 5:7). |
| Blood is shed | During the tenth plague, the Lord promised to “pass over” any house with the blood of the sacrificed lamb (Ex 12:7, 13). In the same way, Jesus purchased our lives with His blood (Acts 20:28; Eph 1:7) and delivered us from death (Rom 6:11). |

The Israelites were preserved from the tenth plague and freed from slavery because they humbly followed God’s commands. In the same way, we also need to follow God’s instructions and obey His commands in the Bible in order to receive salvation.

Check for Understanding

- Aside from Pharaoh and his people, what was God declaring judgment upon through the ten plagues, and why?** He was declaring judgment upon their gods; Pharaoh and the beliefs of his people were in direct opposition of the one true God and His children.
- Name four of the plagues and share one new teaching that you learned for each.** See *Spiritual Teachings, Section B*.
- Name the different elements of Passover and what they represent or foreshadow.** See *Spiritual Teachings, Section C*.

Life Application

1. Checking the Condition of Our Hearts

The ten plagues were the result of a battle between a righteous God and the stubborn heart of Pharaoh. The more stubborn Pharaoh became, the progressively worse the plagues became, and the more his people suffered. It is easy for us to look back and wonder why Pharaoh was so stubborn, but how many times have we refused to apologize or back down in an argument? How many times have we refused to listen to God’s words, or decided to make our own choices rather than follow His will?

a. What kind of heart do I have?

“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.” (Ezek 11:19 NIV)

What does it really mean to “harden our hearts” like Pharaoh did, or to have a “heart of stone”? On the other hand, what do you think it means to have a “heart of flesh”? Let’s take a moment to think of some characteristics that we might see in each type of heart. *(Teachers: Allow students to brainstorm, either as a class, in groups, or individually, and add to the following chart. Examples added below.)*

| A heart of stone is a heart that is: | A heart of flesh is a heart that is |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proudful - Deaf to God’s will - <i>Resistant to God’s word (Zech 7:12–14)</i> - <i>Callous or uncaring towards other people</i> - <i>Carnal (Rom 7:25)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Humble - Willing to change for God - <i>Responsive to God’s word</i> - <i>Receptive to God’s blessings</i> - <i>Seeking to draw close to God</i> |

Overall, to harden our hearts means to regard ourselves so highly that we stubbornly rebel against God, while to have a heart of flesh means to be willing to mold ourselves to His will rather than our own. Based on our chart, do you think you have hardened your heart towards God? Or have you learned to have a “heart of flesh,” one that sees God’s blessings and is willing to follow His will? If you think that you are in danger of having a heart of stone, then realizing it is an important first step! After that comes the determination to soften our hearts towards God.

b. Softening our hearts towards God

To soften our hearts towards God requires that we change the way we think about ourselves. Take a moment and reflect on the skills that you have. Are you particularly good with music? Academics? Reading? Write them down. For each, write down a short prayer thanking God for what He has given you. For example, if you are particularly good at sports, your prayer might be: “Thank You, God, for giving me quick reflexes and a healthy body.” If you are good at reading, then maybe you can thank God for giving you the time, money, and opportunity to read so many books!

Remember that all of the things that we are good at are a result of God’s blessings, whether it be through giving us our physical or mental abilities, giving us the time to practice our favorite skills, or giving us families who encourage our hobbies. When we remember that these are blessings given by God, it becomes easier for us to humbly soften our hearts towards His will.

c. The Lord will judge His people

“For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb 10:30–31)

We should not only focus on the Israelites’ miraculous freedom from slavery, but also remember the fearful and stunning punishment that the Lord gave to the Egyptians. Pharaoh had so many chances to surrender and listen to God’s voice, but he instead hardened his heart each time. As a result, while Goshen had an invisible shield of protection around it, the Egyptians suffered deeply.

When we ignore the truth for too long, our hearts become too hard to break through. If this happens, Paul warns that God may give us up, or simply give us over to our sins (Rom 1:24, 26,

28). To avoid being “given up,” we must learn to soften our hearts to God’s will, or else face His judgment as the Egyptians did. As the Bible says, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

2. Freedom from Sin

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39 NIV).

As the plagues became more severe, Pharaoh attempted to compromise with Moses multiple times. Let’s read Exodus 8:28 and 10:8–11. One of Satan’s tactics is keeping an avenue open towards sin in our lives. But the Bible teaches us to cut off our hand if it causes us to sin (Mt 5:30) – in other words, we need to remove sin entirely from our lives. If we simply venture a short distance away from it, then it is that much easier for us to return. We also should strive to bring our whole families with us into salvation (Ex 10:10). Anyone who remains in Egypt is not only a path for us to return to a life of sin, but also someone who may not receive salvation. To leave Egypt entirely requires that we do not compromise. Only then can we free ourselves entirely from the bondage of sin.

So what does it mean to be freed from the bondage of sin? To be in “bondage” means to be bound in servitude. This means that we must serve and obey someone or something that controls us. Most servants still receive some sort of payment or wage. But as slaves to sin, the only payment we will receive is death. It is truly a bitter bondage, made even worse because there had been no way for us to escape. No matter how we struggled, we were doomed to experience eternal death. But Jesus Christ freed us from this by experiencing death on our behalf! Because of His sacrifice as our Passover Lamb, we are now free from the bondage of sin!

It is important to remember that being free from sin does not mean we can do anything that we like. Paul wrote that being free from sin, we are now instead “slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:18). This may sound unappealing, but while the payment we receive as slaves to sin is death (Rom 6:21), as slaves to righteousness, “the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life” (Rom 6:22 NIV)!

It is always easy to tell ourselves, “I can stop at any time!”, or, “It’s OK; I worked hard, so I deserve a break.” But in truth, there are many things in our lives that we have become “slaves” to, such as social media, video games, or even reading books all night! Think about your own life and share with the class what you think you are a “slave” to. Be honest! Then, as a class, try coming up with different (practical!) solutions that will help each other set such activities aside (examples may be: installing an app to help regulate your phone or computer usage; putting a bigger clock on your table; setting an alarm to help remind you when to stop; putting your phone or book in a different room while doing homework; etc.).

Memory Verse

“You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.” (1 Corinthians 7:23)

Meaning

While the Israelites’ physical freedom was paid for with the lives lost during the ten plagues, our spiritual freedom was bought by the agony, suffering, and death experienced by the Son of God. Because of this, Paul wrote that we were “bought at a price,” so instead of becoming “slaves of men,”

we must glorify God with our lives. Jesus Christ purchased us with His blood (Acts 20:28), so we must not allow ourselves to become enslaved to other people, or to the sinful trends of the world around us.

Conclusion

The ten plagues helped the Egyptians and Israelites alike to see and understand God's power. As a result, the Israelites' obedience in the establishment of the Passover led to their freedom from Egypt. In the same way, we need to soften our hearts to God's will so that we can free ourselves from sin and, as a result, receive the reward of eternal life.

Lesson 11 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. In what way were we “bought at a price”?
Our spiritual freedom was bought by the agony, suffering, and death experienced by the Son of God. Jesus Christ purchased us with His blood (Acts 20:28).
2. “For we know Him who said, ‘ _____ is Mine, I will _____,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will _____ His people.’ It is a _____ thing to fall into the _____ of the _____ God.” (Hebrews 10:30–31)
Vengeance, repay, judge, fearful, hands, living
3. Why was the Egyptians’ religion in direct opposition to God?
They worshipped hundreds of different gods, each with different but limited purposes, as opposed to the one Creator and sustainer of all things.
4. What was different about the Israelites’ attitude to God before and after the ten plagues?
Before, they questioned God when Pharaoh treated them more harshly. After, they were completely obedient to His instructions regarding their preparations to leave Egypt.
5. What danger do we face when we ignore the truth and harden our hearts for too long?
Our hearts become too hard to break through. If this happens, Paul warns that God may give us up, or simply give us over to our sins (Rom 1:24, 26, 28).
6. How do we soften our hearts towards God?
By changing the way we think about ourselves; remember that all of the things that we are good at are a result of God’s blessings. When we remember this, it is easier to humble ourselves before Him.
7. What sin(s) are you still a “slave” to? How can you free yourself from them?
Personal answers.