

Exodus 6:28-7:25, Introduction to the Plagues

Overview

In the summary provided by Exo 1:1-4:18, Moses is in Pharaoh's palace as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Now he returns as God's messenger and Israel's deliverer (Table 1).

These chapters focus on eleven miracles, starting with the changing of the rod into a serpent, and ending with the death of the firstborn. The central nine fall into a regular structure (Table 2).¹ There are other reasons to set them apart from the first and last miracles. The first miracle, unlike those that follow, doesn't harm anybody. And the last one, the death of the firstborn, is part of a detailed description of the passover, a central feature of Israel's worship.

Thus we divide this section into four parts (see note).

- 6:28-7:6 repeat Moses' commission to Pharaoh, and describe God's purpose in the following miracles.
- 7:7-13 is the first sign.
- 7:14-10:29 give the nine plagues.
- 11:1-13:16 describe the death of the firstborn, the institution of the passover, and Pharaoh's release of the nation.

Theme	First Panel, 1:1-4:18	Second Panel, 4:19-40:38
Entering Egypt	1:1-7, The eleven tribes go to Egypt and multiply	4:19-31, Moses returns to Egypt with his family
Oppression	1:8-22, Pharaoh oppresses Israel	5:1-6:1, Pharaoh increases the oppression
Leaders raised up	2:1-4, Moses born	6:2-27, Moses and Aaron commissioned by God
Moses in Pharaoh's Palace	2:5-10, Moses in Pharaoh's palace as the son of Pharaoh's daughter	6:28-13:16, Moses in Pharaoh's palace as deliverer
Travel to Horeb	2:11-15, Moses flees from Egypt to Midian	13:17-17:7, Israel travels from Egypt to Sinai
Conflict	2:16-17, Moses overcomes the shepherds	17:8-16, Moses overcomes Amalek
Moses and Jethro	2:18-22, Moses' Midianite family	18:1-27, Moses' Midianite family
Encounter with God at Horeb	2:23-4:18, Moses called to "serve God upon this mountain," 3:12	19:1-40:38, At Horeb, Israel enters covenant with God

Table 1: The Organization of Exodus

First Cycle Aaron's Rod	Second Cycle No Rod	Third Cycle Moses' Rod or Hand	Warning
7:14-25 Nile to Blood	8:20-32 Flies (-Israel)	9:13-35 Hail (-Israel)	Moses stands before Pharaoh in the morning
8:1-15 Frogs	9:1-7 Cattle (-Israel)	10:1-20 Locusts (Israel??)	Moses comes before Pharaoh
8:16-19 Gnats	9:8-12 Boils (Egyptians)	10:21-29 Darkness (-Israel)	None

Table 2: The Nine Plagues

6:28-7:7, Repetition of the Commission to Pharaoh

This commission contains God's momentous declaration, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," which will require special attention, so we'll mark it as a separate section.

¹ Noted by Cassuto and many others

6:28-7:2, Moses' Reluctance

In 6:6-13, God commissioned Moses to speak, first to the children of Israel (6:6-9), then to Pharaoh (6:10-12) (Figure 1, chart). When God told him to speak to Israel, Moses did so, though with disappointing results: the Israelites “hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage” (6:9). But when God told him to speak to Pharaoh, Moses protested:

Exo 6:12 And Moses spake before the LORD, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?

Now the Lord repeats this second commission. He is reminding Moses to finish the job he has been given.

There is a striking parallel between the flow here and what we saw in Exodus 3-4 (Figure 2). There, God commanded Moses to Go (3:7-10), Moses objected (3:11-15), and God responded with a renewed command and an explanation his plan (3:16-22).

Figure 2: God's Longsuffering with Moses

Now, again, God has commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh (6:10-11), he has objected (6:12), and God responds with a renewed command and an explanation of his plan (6:28-7:13). How longsuffering the Lord is with his reluctant servant!

Moses' reluctance to carry the Lord's message, and the Lord's insistence, anticipates other reluctant prophets

Around 770 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel, God sends Jonah to warn Nineveh to repent. Jonah promptly sails off in the other direction, and the Lord has to prepare an ocean storm and a great fish to get him back on track.

Later, around 600 BC, Jeremiah complains of the message God has given him, of coming judgment on Judah. The people mock his message rather than taking him seriously:

Jer 20:7 O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. 8 For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and

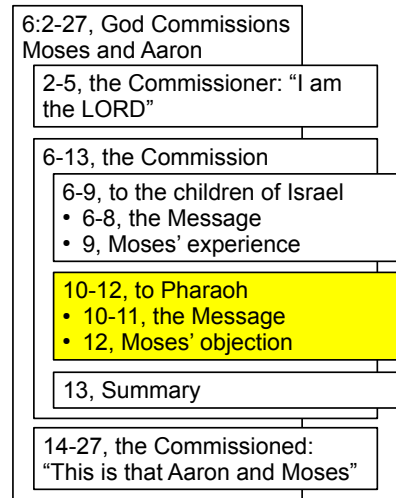
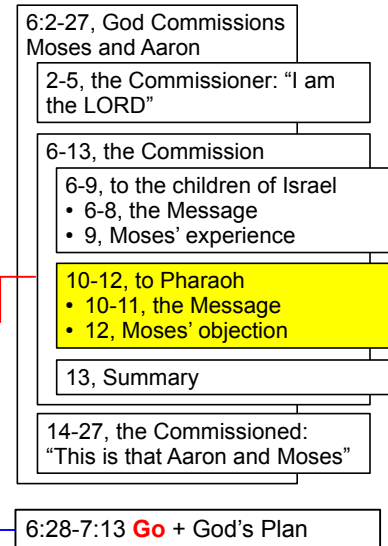


Figure 1: Structure of Moses' Commissioning

2:23-25 God's Purpose		3:7-10 God's Purpose Command " Go "
Mode	Question	Statement
Focus	God Said ...	The LORD Said ...
Moses	3:11-12 Moses: Who am I? God: I will be with you.	4:10-12 Moses: I cannot speak The LORD: Go, I will be with your mouth
The People	3:13-15 Moses: (They will ask) What is his name? God: The LORD God of your fathers	4:1-9 Moses: They will not believe The LORD: Three signs
3:16-22 Go + God's Plan & Purpose		



a derision, daily. 9a **Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name.**

Like Moses and Jonah, Jeremiah tries to back out of the assignment. But, like them, he finds the Lord's commission is inescapable:

9b But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

There is a lesson here for us. If we are the Lord's, and he has given us a task, he will see to it that we do it. It's a waste of time and effort to try to get out of the assignment, so we should quit belly-aching and get to work.

6:28 And it came to pass on the day when the LORD spake unto Moses in the land of Egypt, 29 That the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I am the LORD:—

The commissioning section introduced God's declaration, "I am the LORD" (Figure 3, chart). God made this statement three times in 6:6-8 when sending Moses to the children of Israel, but not at all in the commission to Pharaoh, who has already said,

Exo 5:2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

In spite of his lack of interest in the God of the Israelites, that God wants him to recognize that he must deal with Jehovah. So the declaration that was missing in 6:10-11 now opens the amplification of that commission in 6:29, and closes it in 7:5,

Exo 7:5 And **the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD**, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

A major theme of Exodus is revealing the meaning of the name of God. Israel will learn the meaning of that name through his gracious deliverance of them. The Egyptians will learn it by bitter plagues. Before God is done with him, Pharaoh will recognize the Lord. After the eighth plague, the locusts, we read,

Exo 10:16 Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, **I have sinned against the LORD your God**, and against you. 17 Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and **intreat the LORD your God**, that he may take away from me this death only.

And after the death of his firstborn son,

Exo 12:31 And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and **go, serve the LORD**, as ye have said. 32 Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and **bless me also**.

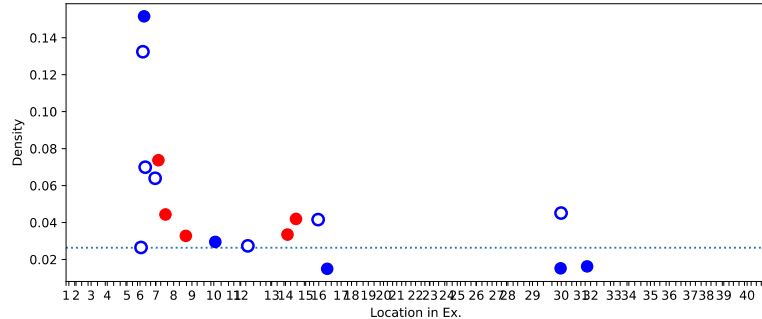


Figure 3: "I am the LORD" in Exodus. Solid: with verb "to know." Blue: Israel. Red: Egyptians.

speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say unto thee.—This is what the Lord previously told Moses to do in 6:10-11 (Figure 1).

30 And Moses said before the LORD, Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?—Moses repeats his protest from 6:12. He is still smarting from his first encounter with Pharaoh in 5:1-5, which led to such unpleasant reactions from his kinsfolk, and is not eager to repeat the experience.

The whole conversation recalls Moses' fourth protest at the burning bush (Figure 2, left side):

Exo 4:10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

That conversation ended with God appointing Aaron to be Moses' spokesman:

Exo 4:15 And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. 16 And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

Now the Lord repeats that appointment.

7:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. 2 Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land.—Table 3 shows the correspondences between these two descriptions of Aaron's role, but also highlights two differences.

	4:15-16	7:1-2
Roles	16b and thou shalt be to him [Aaron] instead of God.	1 I have made thee a god to Pharaoh : and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.
God gives Moses the words	15 And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.	2a Thou shalt speak all that I command thee:
Aaron delivers them to the audience	16a And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people : and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth,	2b and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh , that he send the children of Israel out of his land.

Table 3: Parallels between 4:15-16 and 7:1-2

The two are similar in that each has the same three parts:

1. A description of Moses and Aaron in which Moses has the role of God;
2. A promise that God will give Moses the words to be communicated;
3. A promise that Aaron is to deliver the words to the intended audience.

But there are several differences:

- The parts come in a different order.
- The audience in 4:15-16 is the people, while in 7:1-2 it is Pharaoh.
- Moses' role as God is toward Aaron in 4:15-16, but toward Pharaoh in 7:1-2.

The statement about Moses' role as God moves from the end of the instructions in 4:16 to the beginning in 7:1, thus emphasizing it. This emphasis is particularly important, since Pharaoh

considered himself to be a god, the incarnation of the sky-god Horus. Moses as the representative of the Lord is thus opposed to Pharaoh as the incarnation of Horus, god vs. god.

An important feature of 7:2-3 is not obvious in English (Table 4). Consider the verb to speak, as we vary the speaker: “I speak, you speak, he speaks, we speak, they speak.”

Except in the third person plural, the verb is exactly the same, and we have to specify the pronoun to know who is speaking. In Hebrew, the verb is marked for person and number, and in general a separate pronoun is not used. When it is used, it emphasizes the distinctive role of each participant: “As for you, you will do X; as for him, he will do Y.”

Person	English	Hebrew
I	speak	edabber
You (singular)	speak	tidabber
He, she, it	speaks	yidabber
We	speak	nidabber
You (plural, y'all)	speak	tidabberu
They	speak	yidabberu

In the three clauses in 7:2-3a, the pronoun is explicit.

- As for you, you shall speak all that I command you.
- As for Aaron thy brother, he shall speak unto Pharaoh.
- As for me, I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and wonders.

Table 4: Marking the subject in English and Hebrew

The distinction between Moses and Aaron reassures tongue-tied Moses: “Moses, you don't have to talk to Pharaoh. That's Aaron's job. Your only concern is to pass on to Aaron what I tell you.” The emphasis on the Lord's distinctive role is just as important. “Moses, you and Aaron don't have to make anything happen. That's my job. You just convey my message.”

This is a general pattern in God's work, and a contrast with the world. In ordinary society, results are everything, and people will often excuse irregular procedures as long as we achieve the desired outcome. But in God's economy, we are not responsible for results. Our task is simply to obey what he tells us to do, and he then undertakes make it happen. Recall Paul's words:

1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? 5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, **even as the Lord gave to every man?** 6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but **God gave the increase.** 7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but **God that giveth the increase.**

In our passage, God states what he will do partially in v. 3, then fully in 4 and again in 5 (Table 5, chart). With this big picture in mind, we will focus on the first detail, in 7:3a.

7:3, Hardening Pharaoh's Heart

3 And I will harden קשה hifil, qashah H7185 Pharaoh's heart,—The idea that God “hardens” Pharaoh's heart is prominent in the plagues, and some find it troubling. Let's consider:

Mental state	7:3 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart,	4 But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you,	5 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD,
Miracles	and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.	that I may and I will lay my hand upon Egypt, ... by great judgments.	when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt,
Deliverance		and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt	and bring out the children of Israel from among them.

Table 5: Parallels across 7:3-5

1. The different words used to describe a hard heart;
2. How these terms emerge in the narrative of the plagues;
3. Paul's interpretation of Pharaoh's hardening in Romans 9

Vocabulary

The expression “harden the heart” translates three different Hebrew roots, each with its own nuance (see note). Figure 4 (chart) shows their distribution. Both the verbs and their subjects vary. Sometimes Pharaoh's heart is hard (hollow in the figure), sometimes Pharaoh is the subject (light colored center, and sometimes the Lord does the hardening (border and center the same). Dotted lines mark the start of each plague, showing the concentration of this idea in this section.

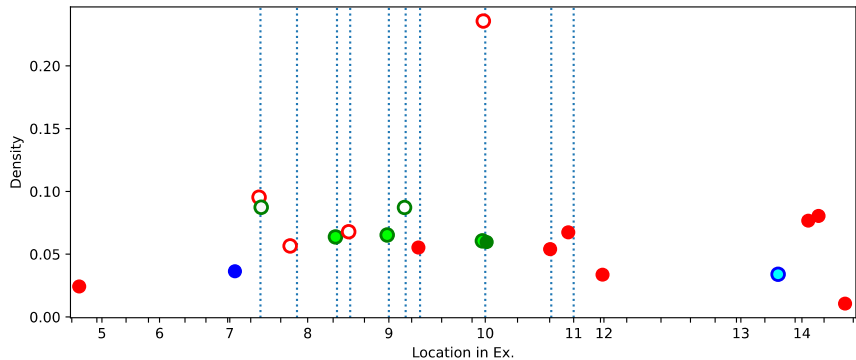


Figure 4: Hardening of the heart in Exodus. (13:15 lacks "heart.")

Blue: קָשָׁה. Red: קָשָׁה. Green: קָשָׁה. Solid: subject is the LORD.

Hollow: subject is Pharaoh's heart. Lighter color: subject is Pharaoh. Dotted lines mark the start of each plague.

The rarest, describing Pharaoh only here (and in 13:15 without “heart”), is קָשָׁה *hiphil*, *qashah* H7185 (blue), which literally means “hard” (chart). This is the only root of the three that should be translated “harden.” The subject is the Lord here, but Pharaoh in 13:15,

Exo 13:15 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go [**Pharaoh hardened** against sending us out], that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, ...

The adjective describes hard bondage in 1:14; 6:9; but also 4x describes Israel as “hard of neck” (“stiffnecked”) after the episode of the golden calf:

Ex. 32:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a **stiffnecked** people:

Ex. 33:3 ... I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a **stiffnecked** people: lest I consume thee in the way.

Ex. 33:5 For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a **stiffnecked** people: ...

Ex. 34:9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a **stiffnecked** people; ...

It is often used later in the Bible to describe rebellious Israel:

2Chr. 36:13 And he [Zedekiah] also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and **hardened his heart** from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.

Ezek. 3:7 But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and **hardhearted**.

Psa. 95:8 **Harden not your heart**, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: [Num 14]

Prov. 28:14 Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that **hardeneth his heart** shall fall into mischief.

The most common word for hardening the heart in Exodus is חזק *chazaq* H2388 (red), meaning “be strong” (chart). Eight times God strengthens Pharaoh’s heart, while four times Pharaoh’s heart is the subject. Only twice elsewhere in the OT is someone’s heart said to be *chazaq*. The first time is during the conquest of Canaan, in a verse that echoes God’s dealings with Pharaoh.

Josh. 11:20 For it was of the LORD to **harden their hearts**, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.²

The other is in Ezekiel, where “their fathers” recalls Israel’s wilderness rebellion:

Ezek. 2:3 And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. 4 For they are impudent children and **stiffhearted**.

The LXX translation of “make strong” (the common Hebrew expression for what God does) with “harden,” followed by the KJV, is unfortunate. The Hebrew word *qashah* that actually means “hard” refers to a negative attitude, stubbornness, and suggests that God is leading man into sin. But “strengthen” describes a sympathetic action, helping someone do what they already want to do, and we will see confirmation that this is what the Lord is doing with Pharaoh. 7:3 is the only time that makes God the subject of true hardening, and it is a prediction of what will happen as a result of the strengthening: Pharaoh does in fact harden himself (13:15).

The third verb is כבד *kabad* H3513, “be heavy.” Once God is the subject, three times Pharaoh does it, and twice his heart is said to be heavy. Hearts are described as *kabad* only one other time in the OT, citing Exodus, when the Philistines are trying to get rid of the ark of the covenant:

1Sam. 6:6 Wherefore then do ye **harden [make heavy] your hearts**, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?

So the two common words in Exodus are rarely used elsewhere in the Bible, and only in allusions to Egypt, while the rare word in Exodus is commonly used elsewhere.

Interestingly, in Egyptian literature, the situation is reversed.³ The Egyptians often spoke of someone having a “heavy” or “strong” heart, but these were positive traits, indicating restraint, self-control, stability, and courage.⁴ Pharaoh was considered a god, and one expects a god to have a strong heart. But in confrontation with Jehovah, this is exactly the wrong attitude to have.

2 Hardening followed by “as the Lord said to Moses” is common during the plagues. See Table 10 in the note.

3 Shupak, Nili. (2004). Ḥzq, Kbd, Qšh Lēb: The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart in Exodus 4:1–15:21. In *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford. Probleme der Ägyptologie*, Volume: 20.

4 The general notion of hardness of heart has been related to the Egyptian belief that the last judgment consisted of weighing the heart, and the custom of furnishing mummies with a scarab amulet inscribed with a spell to preserve the heart in judgment. This may lie behind the new covenant promise of Ezek 36:26 concerning a heart of stone. See references in Shupak. But Shupak denies that “heavy heart” in Egyptian means “guilty,” as some maintain.

The Bible warns us that in our natural, fallen state, our hearts are wicked, and subject to God's judgment:

Gen 6:5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? 10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, ...

The standard Hebrew root for stubbornness, *qashah* (properly “hard”), appears only twice in Exodus. Moses, raised from a child speaking Egyptian, focuses on the Egyptian expressions. In hardening Pharaoh, God is actually reinforcing an attitude that Pharaoh would have considered virtuous and worthy of praise. In a conflict, typically we seek to neutralize our enemy's strong point, but the Lord is engaging here in spiritual judo, amplifying what the adversary considers his strength in order to overcome him. Far from overriding Pharaoh's will, God is encouraging him in his natural tendency.

Sequence of Tenses and Subjects

The second issue that deserves our attention concerns the sequence of tenses and subjects that appear (Figure 4, chart). The series shows an overall process of intensification.

The two uses of the common Israelite term, *qashah*, bracket the plagues, as if to say, “I'm going to describe Pharaoh's attitude using his language and value system, but this really describes what we as Israelites commonly call a hard, or stubborn, heart.”

In the first two instances, 4:21 (as God sends Moses back to Egypt) and 7:3 (in the repeated commission to speak to Pharaoh), God is the subject, but the verb is future. God does not say, “I am hardening Pharaoh's heart,” but “I will harden it.” This is a prediction, not a statement that he is doing it.⁵ The first time he actually strengthens Pharaoh's heart in 9:12, after the sixth plague (the boils). Before that point, we are told five times that Pharaoh's heart is strong or heavy, and twice that Pharaoh himself makes it heavy. Then, in the seventh plague, all three agents are active: first Pharaoh makes his heart heavy (9:34), then his heart is strong (9:35), and finally God says, “I have made his heart heavy” (10:1).

Only at this point does God become the leading agent, making Pharaoh's heart strong in the plagues of locusts (10:20) and darkness (10:27). Exod 11:10 summarizes God's work in strengthening Pharaoh's heart throughout the plagues.

Exod 13:15 emphasizes Pharaoh's agency, using the conventional Hebrew term “harden,” in the confession that Israel is to recall at the passover each year. The last three instances, of God making Pharaoh's heart strong, concern Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel at the Red Sea.

When God first called Moses at the bush, there was no threat of hardening, but a prediction of Pharaoh's innate stubbornness, an instance of God's omniscience, not his sovereign decree:

Exo 3:19 And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.

This prediction begins to be fulfilled when Moses and Aaron first approach Pharaoh in 5:1:

Exo 5:2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

5 The only other future is in 14:4, predicting the Lord's strengthening of Pharaoh's heart at the start of the Red Sea episode, immediately following the statement of Pharaoh's hardening of himself in 13:15.

As we have noted, 4:21 and 7:3 are predictions. The first non-predictive references to hardening are statements about Pharaoh's heart, followed by Pharaoh's hardening his own heart. Only then does God step in and do what he had predicted he would do, taking an active role in hardening. When God hardens Pharaoh's heart, he is reinforcing what Pharaoh considers a sign of strength, not compelling him to do something he does not already want to do.

Pharaoh's Hardening in Romans 9

This trajectory prepares us for the third subject we should consider, Paul's explanation of this phenomenon in Romans 9. He longs for the salvation of his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (9:3), but he knows that some believe while others do not, and explores God's sovereign choice of whom to bless and whom to leave in their sin. After citing examples from Genesis (the distinction of Isaac and Ishmael, of Esau and Jacob), he moves to two passages in Exodus. We can align his argument in Romans 9 with these two passages, and also with the ultimate declaration of his name in Exod 34:6-7 (Figure 5, chart).

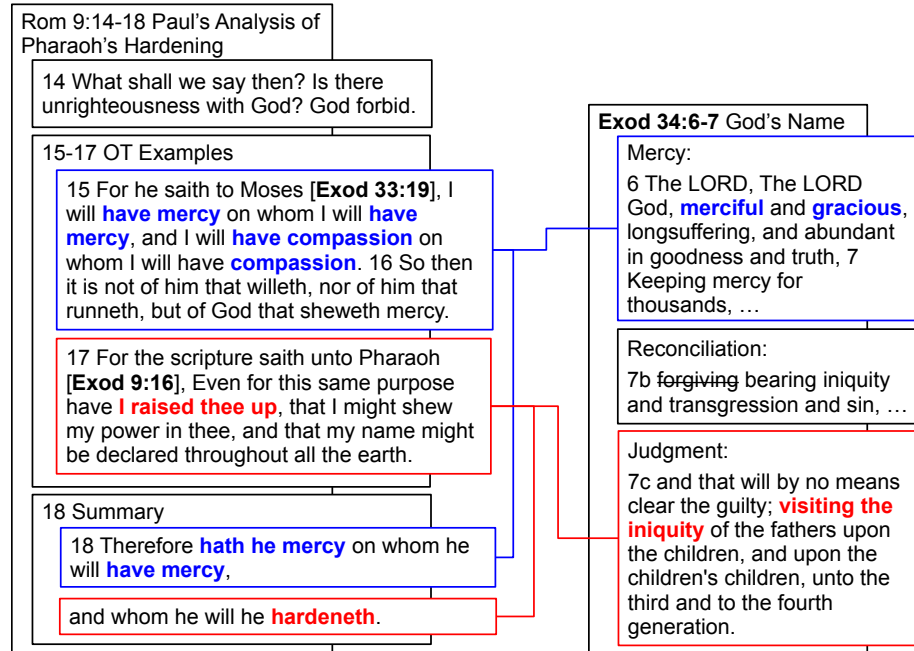


Figure 5: Organization of Rom 9:14-18 around Exodus

Rom 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

His goal is the two-part conclusion in v. 18,

Rom 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

First, to substantiate God's sovereign choice of those "on whom he will have mercy," he quotes Exod 33:19,

Exo 33:19 And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious (חנן *chanan* H2603) to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy (רחם *racham* H7355) on whom I will shew mercy.

The historical context is the sin of the golden calf, in Exodus 32. The entire nation is guilty of the most vile idolatry. In interceding with God for them, Moses is grappling with how he can persuade a holy God to tolerate a sinful people. God's answer is his grace (LXX "mercy") and his compassion. God's reply, in Exod 33:19, anticipates the final revelation of his name in 34:6, which begins with the same two roots, "gracious" and "merciful."

Exo 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful *rachum* and gracious *channun*, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,

All deserve destruction. God sovereignly chooses those whom he will pardon.

Rom 9:16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

The second point of the thesis in 9:18 is “whom he will, he hardeneth.” The expression “he hardeneth” comes from Exodus 4-14, following the LXX. To substantiate God’s sovereign choice in this detail, he cites the Lord’s words to Pharaoh before the seventh plague, the hail:

Rom 9:17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh [Exod 9:16], Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

The Hebrew verb for “raised thee up” literally means, “caused thee to stand,” and can have the sense of establishing or confirming someone. This verb reflects the positive sense we have seen in the expression “strengthen [the heart],” though this particular verb is not used with the heart.⁶ As we have often seen, Exodus describes the progressive revelation of God’s name through his actions to deliver Israel, and God tells Pharaoh that he has been enabled to persevere through the plagues, so that God’s judgment may be fully demonstrated, according to the second part of the full form of his name as revealed in Exodus 34,

Exo 34:7b and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

God’s confirmation of Pharaoh in his haughty stubbornness completes Paul’s demonstration of his thesis,

Rom 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Paul argues in Romans 1-3 that all are guilty and without excuse before God, deserving his wrath. Pharaoh begins the story already inclined against the Lord. His hardening simply confirms him in the behavior in which he glories. The amazing thing is not that God hardens Pharaoh, but that he has mercy on some who merit his judgment just as much as Pharaoh did.

7:3-7, Completing the Second Commission

Let’s return now to the parallels observed in Table 5, tracing the mental state of the adversary, God’s miracles, and deliverance. The first cycle, in 7:3, covers just the first two steps. We have considered Pharaoh’s mental state. Now we read of God’s miracles:

and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.—This clause summarizes the coming events. “Signs” (אות *owt* H226) and “wonders” (מוֹפֶת *mowfet* H4159) differ (chart).⁷

“Signs” is the more common word, used of what Moses showed the elders to persuade them that the Lord had indeed spoken to him:

6 LXX διατηρέω G1301, to keep or preserve, also positive in meaning. Paul translates independently from the Hebrew with ἐξυγείρω G1825, to awaken, again emphasizing the reinforcement of Pharaoh’s intrinsic values.

7 See note. Trench §xc1 has an excellent discussion of the distinctive meanings of the respective LXX translations.

Ex. 4:28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the **signs** which he had commanded him. 29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: 30 And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people.

But it is only used twice in describing the plagues, and both times it conveys the knowledge that God is the LORD. The first is in the fourth plague, of flies, in excluding the Israelites:

Ex. 8:22 And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; **to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD** in the midst of the earth. 23 And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to morrow shall **this sign** be.

The second is in the eighth plague, of locusts:

Ex. 10:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew **these my signs before him**: 2 And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and **my signs** which I have done among them; **that ye may know how that I am the LORD**.

In each case, a “sign” carries a message. It signifies something—that God has visited his people; that he is the covenant-keeping God.

A wonder is intended to seize one's attention. While the signs are mostly directed toward Israel, wonders are said repeatedly to be done before Pharaoh or before the Egyptians:

Exo 4:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those **wonders before Pharaoh**, which I have put in thine hand: ...

Exo 11:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my **wonders** may be multiplied **in the land of Egypt**. 10 And Moses and Aaron did all these **wonders before Pharaoh**: and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Moses is first person in the Bible to work signs and wonders, and works more than anyone else.⁸ These words appear 21x each in Exodus and Deuteronomy, more densely than in the rest of the OT, and most later references to “signs and wonders” in the OT, other than Daniel, refer to the Exodus. They also characterize the works of Christ, as Peter reminded the Jews at Pentecost:

Act 2:22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and **wonders and signs**, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

This is one of many parallels we can trace between Moses and our Lord, the “prophet like unto” Moses (Deut 18:15). We already remarked how the structure of Exodus shows Moses as the forerunner, leading the people to Sinai, as our Lord is our forerunner, leading us to heaven (Heb 6:20). The attempt of Pharaoh to destroy Moses in Exodus 1 is a clear picture of Herod's attack on the newborn Messiah in Matthew 2. See note for many more parallels.

So 7:3 describes a psychological effect (hardening Pharaoh's heart), and miracles that God will work. 7:4 repeats the first two steps, and introduces the third, the deliverance (Table 5).

⁸ Elijah and Elisha (1 Ki 17-2 Ki 13) are notable miracle workers in the OT, but these words do not appear in the record of their ministries. Google AI assigns over 40 miracles to Moses, 16 to Elisha, and 8 to Elijah.

Whenever we have a repetitive structure, as in Table 5, we should compare the corresponding items, which often interpret or amplify one another as we go through the series.

4 But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you,—God predicted that he would harden Pharaoh’s heart. Now we are told that Pharaoh shall not hearken. This is not just God’s predicted activity, but the natural inclination of Pharaoh’s heart. God predicted it when he called Moses (chart):

Exo 3:19 And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And we have seen it already in the first meeting of chapter 5:

Exo 5:2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

that I may and I will lay my hand upon Egypt, ... by great judgments.—The second step is the demonstration of miracles. Our translation suggests that this is the purpose of Pharaoh’s stubbornness, but the Hebrew simply reports that the two things will happen, just as in 7:3. He will not hearken, and God will judge Egypt.

7:3 describe the miracles as signs and wonders, reflecting their impact on the observers. Now God reveals their purpose from his perspective. They are judgments that he inflicts, laying his powerful hand upon them:⁹

Ex. 9:3 Behold, the **hand** of the LORD is **upon thy cattle** which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain.

Judg. 2:15 Whithersoever they went out, the **hand of the LORD was against them** for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel,—7:4 adds a new element that was not mentioned in 7:3, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. He calls them by three titles. Two are familiar to us: “children of Israel” (118x in Exodus, starting in 1:1), and “my people” (20x, starting in 3:7). Now, for the first time, he calls them “mine armies,” a title he will repeat in 12:17, 41, 51.

out of the land of Egypt—From the beginning of the book, the Pharaohs recognized the military risk that the Israelites might pose:

Exo 1:9 And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, ...

But Israel never attacks Egypt directly. God has not promised them the land of Egypt. Their destination is the land promised to the Patriarchs. This title “armies” is dominant in Numbers as the camp marches toward Canaan. They are going to the land that God has promised them, but they must fight for it. Joshua and Judges emphasize the military nature of their mission, conducting holy war against the idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan.

The NT also describes God’s people as an army. Paul describes his associates as fellowsoldiers:

2Ti 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a **good soldier** of Jesus Christ.

⁹ In both these examples, as in 7:4, the object on which he lays his hand is marked with כֹּחַ.

Php 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and **fellowsoldier**,

Phm 1:2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our **fellowsoldier**, and to the church in thy house:

Our warfare is different from Israel's (something too often forgotten, as in the crusades, or in today's "Christian nationalism"). It is spiritual, not physical:

2 Cor10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war after the flesh**: 4 (For **the weapons of our warfare are not carnal**, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Paul describes these mighty weapons to the Ephesians:

Eph 6:11 Put on the **whole armour of God**, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For **we wrestle not against flesh and blood**, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13 Wherefore take unto you the **whole armour of God**, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

These lessons about spiritual warfare contain two warnings for us.

1. The Christian life is not easy. It is a life of struggle against a powerful adversary.
2. Our weapons are spiritual, not physical, and we should beware of political entanglements.

After 7:3 and 7:4, the third cycle goes beyond Pharaoh's stubbornness to the ultimate objective:

5 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD,—Talk of hardening (7:3) and rejecting (7:4) is negative, but the Lord's ultimate objective is positive. He wants the Egyptians as well as Israel to recognize him as the Lord.

when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt,—Now the signs and wonders of 7:3, explained as judgments in 7:4, become the object of God's exertion. He not only lays his hand on them, but stretches it out, reaching them wherever they are.

and bring out the children of Israel from among them.—And again, his actions will result in delivering Israel from their bondage.

6 And Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded them, so did they.—Finally! They are neither rushing in without direct instruction (as in 5:1), nor refusing (as in 6:12), just doing as they were told.

We are now at the point where the lives of Moses and Aaron begin to deliver fruit for the Lord. Moses wants us to realize that it took them a while to reach this point.

7 And Moses was fourscore years old, and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spake unto Pharaoh.—Each of them has spent eight decades in preparation. When most people are retired or dead, they are just starting. Listen to Moses in Psalm 90 (chart):

Psa 90:10 The days of our years are **threescore years and ten**; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Most people in Moses' day didn't live any longer than we do now. But Moses and Aaron show that we should never decline an opportunity to serve the Lord on the grounds that we are too old. Their example may have inspired Caleb in his request for Hebron, after Israel entered Canaan:

Jos 14:10 ... and now, lo, **I am this day fourscore and five years old**. 11 As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. 12 Now therefore give me this mountain, ...

7:8-13, The Initial Sign

8 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 9 When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle [mowfet, “wonder” in 7:3] for you:—He asks for a wonder, not a sign. He wants to be impressed, but not to be informed.

then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent.—At first, we think of Moses' encounter with the Lord at the burning bush:

Exo 4:2 And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. 3 And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; ...

But the two passages use different words for “serpent.” The word in 4:3 (נחש *nachash* H5175) is the common word for a snake, translated in the LXX as ὄφις (*ofis*, G3789). The word here is תנין (*tannin*, H8577), translated in the LXX as δράκων (*drakōn*, G1404), a much larger creature.

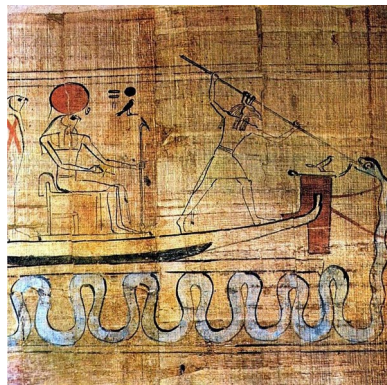
The Hebrew word *tannin* refers to a monster, sometimes named “Rahab,” that God destroys when he divides the sea and the dry land in creation and again at the Red Sea:

Psa 74:13 Thou didst **divide the sea** by thy strength: **thou brakest the heads of the dragons (תנין) in the waters**.

Isa 51:9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut **Rahab**, and wounded the dragon (תנין)? 10 Art thou not it which hath **dried the sea**, the waters of the great deep; ...

Job 26:12 He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud (**Rahab**).

These two kinds of serpent reflect two different deities in Egyptian religion (Figure 6, chart). The cobra was the symbol of the goddess Wadjet, “patroness of the Nile delta and protectress of all of Lower Egypt.”¹⁰ Pharaoh wore an image of the cobra on his crown as a sign of his royal authority. The serpent was good. But another



Exod 7:9 תנין <i>tannin</i> H8577 LXX “dragon”	Exod 4:2 נחש <i>nachash</i> H5175 LXX “serpent”
Python (?)	Cobra
God Apophis, promotes chaos	Goddess Wadjet, protects Egypt
Evil: chaos	Good: royal authority

10 Wikipedia, Uraeus

Figure 6: Two Serpents in Egyptian Religion

snake-like deity, Apophis (sometimes called Apep), is the essence of evil. Egyptian religion centers around the combat between order (*maat*) and chaos (*isfet*), and Apophis is the god of chaos, imprisoned in the underworld. Every night, as the sun god Ra (or Re) travels through the underworld to return to the eastern horizon, Apophis tries to destroy him and thus break the orderly cycle of nature.

Pharaoh's main job is to defeat chaos and maintain order. Now Aaron brings the god of chaos out of the underworld, right into Pharaoh's throne room. The nine plagues are the essence of chaos: God disrupts the natural rhythms on which the life of Egypt depends. Thus the first miracle, the giant snake, "is not a plague itself but a preview of the plagues."¹¹

The sign that Moses and Aaron gave the elders of Israel shows the Lord's control over Pharaoh's royal authority, challenging his *position*. The sign that they give Pharaoh shows that God can render Pharaoh impotent, destroying his *power*:

The Egyptians may have thought that there were good serpents and evil ones. The Revelation teaches us that both are emblems of Satan:

Rev 12:9 And the great **dragon** was cast out, that old **serpent**, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (cf. 20:2)

Not only chaos (the dragon), but also human royal authority (the cobra), are the work of Satan. In the Revelation, the *tannin* of the OT is the model for the beast from the sea, the antichrist (Rev 13). Just as the Lord Jesus is the incarnation of Jehovah, the antichrist is the incarnation of Satan.

10 And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded:—As in 7:6, Moses is finally with the program, marked by the phrase "as the LORD commanded," which is common throughout the book (see note).

and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent.—Now Aaron brings the god of chaos into the throne room.

11 Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.—Pharaoh's wise men and magicians previously appeared when Pharaoh had the dreams predicting the famine, in Genesis 41, and their failure led to Joseph's elevation. Now a new generation of these bureaucrats confront another Hebrew upstart. A thousand years later, Daniel will bear witness to the Lord in the midst of their Babylonian and Persian descendants.

Anything of value will have counterfeits. Our ability as creatures to know the God of heaven, interact with him, and enjoy his favor is our greatest treasure, and wise men and magicians throughout the Bible, like spiritualists and preachers of another gospel today, seek to lure people away from the truth. We do not have the luxury of bearing witness in a vacuum, but must expect opposition from Satan's ministers.

12 For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents:—The magicians in Joseph's day came up empty-handed. This time, they match Aaron's miracle, and also produce enormous serpents (*tanninim*). Their success, though, is ironic, as it will be in the first two plagues. The dragon, bloody Nile, and frogs all harm Pharaoh and his realm. To demonstrate their power, Pharaoh's magicians must bring judgment against their own land.

¹¹ Enns, P. (2000). *Exodus*. Zondervan, p. 194. Fretheim is the best overall discussion of this miracle.

but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.—We usually read this as “Aaron's serpent swallowed up their serpents.” But the text returns our attention to the rods that became serpents. The rod is a symbol of the authority and power of the one who carries it. The point of this miracle is not who has stronger serpents, but whether Aaron and the God he represents is superior to the gods represented by the magicians.

The power of Aaron and Moses over both the snake and the dragon, both Wadjet and Apophis, ought to be a profound encouragement to us. The Egyptians saw Apophis, the dragon, as evil. The Bible sees both beasts as embodiments of Satan, and evil. We commonly view history as a combat between the Lord and Satan. While Satan does oppose the Lord, these miracles show that in fact the Lord is completely in control of him, a theme echoed in other passages as well.

The world views Satan as a peer to God, plotting with his agents in separate war room like Hitler in Berlin against Churchill in London during WW2. The OT perspective is very different (chart).

In Job 1-2, Satan is part of the angelic council that must present itself before the Lord, showing its subjection to his authority:

Job 1:6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. [cf. 2:1]

As his name of “slanderer, accuser” suggests, he accuses Job, and suggests Job will reject the Lord if tempted. But he is only able to touch Job and his family with the Lord's permission, and subject to his limitations:

Job 1:12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:6 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

The outcome of the story vindicates Job and defeats Satan's intentions.

In 1 Kings 22, Ahab of Israel asks Jehoshaphat of Judah to fight with him against Ramothgilead, a Levitical city of refuge in the territory of Gad, east of the Jordan, which had fallen under the control of Syria. Ahab's court prophets all encourage him to go, but Micaiah the son of Imlah, a prophet of the Lord, predicts Ahab's death, and reports his vision of the heavenly council.

1Ki 22:19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. 20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. 21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. 22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a **lying spirit** in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. 23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a **lying spirit** in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

As in Job 1 and 2, the council includes an evil representative, a “lying spirit,” who yet is completely subject to the Lord, and who deceives Ahab's prophets to lead him to his doom.

Both of these accounts bring us face to face with the problem of evil. How can God be righteous, yet still permit and even direct the forces of evil? These matters surely belong to the secret things that belong to the Lord our God (Deut 29:29). But one thing is clearly revealed that should lead us to bow in adoring worship: our God is absolutely sovereign, even over Satan.

Aaron's rod swallows the rods of the Egyptian magicians. And in the sequel, as the plagues unfold, God sovereignly uses the evil forces of chaos to accomplish his purposes of bringing judgment on Egypt and delivering Israel from their bondage.

13 And he hardened Pharaoh's heart Pharaoh's heart was hard,—The subject of the verb is Pharaoh's heart, not Pharaoh.¹² The verb here is *chazaq* "be strong," the most common.

that and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.—As in 7:4, the clause is coordinate, not subordinate. The summary combines the references to hardening (7:3) and failure to hearken (7:4), showing that God's plan is on track.¹³

7:14-10:29, The First Nine Plagues

Before we go into the details of the plagues, we should step back and consider them as a group. What lesson do they convey? And how are they organized?

Significance of the Plagues

Three explanations have been given for the specific plagues and the order in which they occur:

1. They are natural events that occur seasonally.
2. They are judgments focused on individual gods worshipped by the Egyptians.
3. They are a reversal of God's creative work in Genesis 1, bringing chaos on Egypt.

Each of these adds insight to what is going on. Let's consider these one at a time, and the lessons they have to teach us.

Natural Events?

The plagues follow a natural sequence of events in Egypt, starting with the flooding of the Nile in late summer (chart).¹⁴

September: The Nile floods, bearing red soil and carrying toxic microorganisms.

Frogs abound after the inundation of the Nile.

Damp autumn months: Lice, flies, murrain and boils.

January: Hail and rain are uncommon in Egypt, but this is when they would occur.

February: Appearance of locusts in early spring, over the green crops.

March: Darkness from great sandstorms.

April: Death of the firstborn, dated by the Passover celebration.

Except for the last, the plagues follow the expected order of nature. This order is usually invoked to deny the Lord's supernatural work in the plagues. But more than nature is involved (J. Free):¹⁵

12 When Pharaoh is the subject (4:21;9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:20; 14:4, 8, 17), the verb is in the *piel binyan*. Here, it is in the *qal*, as in 7:22; 8:19; 9:35, describing the state of the heart.

13 The likely reference of 7:13 to 7:3 shows that even though different words are translated "harden," they are semantically linked.

14 F. Petrie, *Egypt and Israel* (New York: E. S. Gorham, 1911), pp. 35-36, as summarized by John Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), p. 85. This approach has been developed most thoroughly in G. Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt." ZAW 69 (1957) 84-103, ZAW 70 (1950) 48-59. Petrie thought the red Nile was before the flooding started, in June, but Hort (1957) 93-94 associates it with the peak of the inundation in August-September.

1. Intensification. While frogs, insects, murrain and darkness were known in Egypt, these were intensified far beyond any ordinary occurrence.
2. Prediction. The fact that Moses predicted the moment of the arrival and departure sets them apart from purely natural occurrences (cf. 8:10, 23; 9:5, 18, 29; 10:4).
3. Discrimination. Certain of the plagues did not occur in the land of Goshen where Israel was living (8:22, no flies; 9:4, no murrain; 9:26, no hail; 10:23, darkness; possibly Nile and frogs).
4. Orderliness. There is a gradual severity in the nature of the plagues, climaxing concluding with the death of the first-born.
5. Moral Purpose. These were not freaks of nature but were designed to teach moral precepts and lessons.

The underlying natural order reminds us of the divine intelligence behind our created world. But God did not simply wind the world up and let it run unsupervised. He energizes and runs it:

Heb 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things by the word of his power**, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and **by him all things consist**.

The world maintains its order at God's pleasure, and he can modulate it to reveal himself.

Judgment on the Gods of Egypt?

A second explanation is that each plague attacks a specific Egyptian deity. Hannah summarizes this view: "By the plagues God was judging the gods of Egypt (of which there were many) and showing Himself superior to them."¹⁶

Several verses are often cited to support this idea (chart). Just before the death of the firstborn, God declares,

Exo 12:12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite 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.

But this threat is still future, and is uttered after the end of the first nine plagues.

Two verses can be understood more generally.

When Moses meets Jethro on his way back to Sinai, Jethro declares,

Exo 18:11 Now I know that the LORD is **greater than all gods**: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them.

Numbers 33 summarizes Israel's exodus itinerary, after the death of the firstborn:

Num 33:4 For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them: **upon their gods** also the LORD executed judgments.

15 Joseph Free, *Archaeology and Bible History* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1950), p. 95, as summarized by Davis, p. 85.

16 Hannah, J. D. (1985). Exodus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 119). Table 14 in the notes, from his commentary, shows a survey of alignments that have been suggested.

Some plagues are clearly attacks on specific gods. But the Egyptians did not worship lice, flies, or locusts. A more nuanced version of this view focuses not just on the Egyptian deities, but on their religion. The Lord's conflict with Egyptian religion takes four forms (Table 6).

In some cases (1, 5, 6, 9), he is directly *attacking* the gods, the physical entities that they represent, or their priests.

In at least one case (2), he is *mocking* their worshippers. There was a frog goddess, Heket, but the second plague favors rather than attacks frogs. However, this plague may be mocking the Egyptians. Heket was a popular goddess, who helped women in childbirth, and the second plague may imply, "So you like to worship frogs? Here, have plenty."

A third judgment is *perverting* the mission of the priests, represented by the magicians (1, 2). The central function of Egyptian religion is suppressing chaos and establishing order. Twice (in addition to the introductory miracle of the dragon), the magicians are able to duplicate the miracle (the bloody Nile and the frogs), but in all three cases, instead of using their priesthood to oppose chaos and maintain order, they are increasing the chaos.

Plague	Religious Element	Judgment
1. Nile to blood	Hapi, god of the Nile and the annual flood	Direct attack
	Magicians	Pervert
2. Frogs	Heket, goddess of childbirth	Mock worshippers
	Magicians	Pervert
3. Lice	Magicians	Impotent
4. Flies from dust	Geb	Impotent
5. Cattle	Hathor (cow) or Apis (bull)	Direct attack
6. Boils	Magicians	Direct attack
7. Hail	Seth, god of storm and chaos	Impotent
8. Locusts	Numerous agricultural deities	Impotent
9. Darkness	Re or Horus, sun gods	Direct attack

Table 6: The Plagues and Egyptian Religion

The fourth judgment shows the religion's *impotence*. Geb, the god of the soil, is forced to yield swarms of flies "from the dust of the earth." Seth, a major deity, was the god of storms, but he is unable to protect the Egyptians from the destruction of the hail. There were numerous agricultural deities, but they could not protect the crops from the locusts. The court magicians also fit in here. They cannot reverse the chaos of the plagues. They are unable even to duplicate the plague of lice, and must confess that Moses and Aaron have divine power. Finally, in the case of the boils, the magicians are specifically mentioned as being afflicted. Ceremonial purification was essential for Egyptian priests,¹⁷ and it is likely that the boils disqualified them from their duties (among which was appearing before the divine Pharaoh).

The links of the plagues to Egyptian religion remind us of the Bible's repeated depiction of the Lord in combat with false gods. Paul teaches that these are not just statues, but living demons:

1Co 10:20 But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

And throughout Scripture, our God is engaged in combat with them.

We saw that the monster whom Aaron produced in Pharaoh's throne room, the *tannin*, is presented elsewhere in Scripture as Rahab, whom the Lord defeated in creating the world.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah represents the Lord against the prophets of Baal in a direct duel:

¹⁷ Zevit, *BR* 6:3 (1990) 22; Herodotus II.37

1Ki 18:24 And **call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD**: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. ...

In Daniel 10, the divine messenger sent to answer Daniel's prayer is engaged in a series of combats with the spiritual principalities and powers behind world kingdoms:

Dan 10:13 But **the prince of the kingdom of Persia** withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. ... 20 ... and now will I return to fight with the **prince of Persia**: and when I am gone forth, lo, the **prince of Grecia** shall come.

And the Revelation depicts Michael in combat with the devil and his angels:

Rev 12:7 And there was war in heaven: **Michael and his angels fought against the dragon**; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

We, like Moses and Aaron, are engaged in spiritual combat. Upsetting circumstances in our lives are not cause for discouragement, but show that the Lord has placed us in a strategic position important enough for Satan to direct his attacks against us, and should encourage us to increase our reliance on the Lord for his strength and direction.

Undoing of Creation?

More recently, scholars have noted echoes of Genesis 1 in the descriptions of some of the plagues (chart).¹⁸ Perhaps the strongest is the comparison of Gen 1:3, "let there be light," with Exod 10:29, "that there may be darkness" (literally, "and let there be darkness").¹⁹

But there are three problems.

1. Some proposed links are **non-specific**. For example, swarming is used in other accounts besides creation, and not always in a bad sense. It appears frequently in the flood narrative: Gen 7:21 [creepeth]; 8:17 [breed abundantly]; 9:7 [bring forth abundantly]. Should we conclude that the plagues are referring to the flood narrative? Again: some would link the ten statements in Genesis 1, "and God said ...," with the ten plagues (including the death of the firstborn),²⁰ but God also gave ten commandments on Mount Sinai, which is hardly a work of uncreation.
2. Some are **imprecise**. The lice are made from the dust of the earth (ערֶץ *erets* H776), while man is made from the dust of the ground (אֲדָמָה *adamah* H127).
3. Some (the boils) **don't match at all**, or are a stretch.

But this insight is valuable more generally, without links to individual plagues. Recall the introductory miracle, turning Aaron's rod into a dragon. There we saw that other biblical references to the dragon describe Rahab, something that the Lord smote in the process of creation, e.g.,

18 Ziony Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues," *Bible Review* 6:3 (June 1990), 16-23 and 42 (an excellent survey of all three views discussed here); "The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 66 (1976) 193-211 (more academic, and focused on aligning three different views with the documentary hypothesis). Table 13 in the notes gives more sources, and collects parallels that have been suggested.

19 Both verses use the jussive of הִיָּה.

20 <https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/egypts-plagues-undoing-creation-part/>, citing Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28-29

Isa 51:9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut **Rahab**, and wounded the **dragon** (תנין)? 10 Art thou not it which hath **dried the sea**, the waters of the great deep; ...

It likely recalls to the Egyptians their god Apophis or Apep, the god of chaos who opposes the order of creation. Genesis describes the world as originating in a state of chaos, before the six days of creation took place:²¹

Gen 1:2 And the earth was **without form, and void**; and **darkness** was upon the face of the deep.

In six days, God gave it form (overcoming without form) and light (overcoming darkness), and filled it (overcoming void). He brought order out of chaos. In the prophets, he sometimes describes judgment as reversing this process. Perhaps the most direct reference is by Jeremiah:

Jer 4:23 I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was **without form, and void**; and the heavens, and they had **no light**. 24 I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. 25 I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. 26 I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger.

Egypt's national life depended on the orderly annual cycle marked by the flooding of the Nile. Their religion focused on maintaining that order, and suppressing the forces of chaos. In the plagues, the Lord shows that he controls the chaos monster. He can turn the orderly annual cycle into one disaster after another. The alignment of the plagues with the yearly cycle emphasizes the replacement of the expected annual order by chaos. The gods of Egypt, including Pharaoh, were responsible to maintain this order, so the plagues judge them collectively, without needing to assign a specific god to each plague. And in allowing chaos to triumph over order, the plagues are indeed a reversal of the order of creation, a pattern of judgment seen also in Jeremiah.

As we noted in 7:8-13, the outcome of the battle between God and the forces of darkness is not in question. They are absolutely subject to him. He can turn them loose to achieve his purposes, or restrain them to protect his people. And he has already prepared their final judgment:

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, **prepared** for the devil and his angels:

The verb “prepared” is in the perfect tense, indicating an event in the past with enduring consequences. Their judgment is certain, and when the Lord is finished using them for his purposes, they will enter into it.

Overall Structure

After the dragon, the next nine miracles fit a regular structure (Table 7, chart),²² based on what role Moses and Aaron play in bringing each plague (columns) and where Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh to warn him (rows).

The order of the rows in each cycle captures a message for Pharaoh. First, the Lord allows him to encounter Moses and Aaron, giving him a chance to do his duty toward them. Next, they

21 The Egyptian cosmogony also begins with watery chaos. G. Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2002), 58.

22 Noted by Cassuto and many others. See notes for more detail.

proactively seek him out, warning him that he needs to take action. Finally, the third plague in each cycle happens without warning, showing that if he refuses to act, the Lord will act without him.

God has graciously revealed himself to us in his word, warning of our sin and telling us of the remedy that is available in the Lord Jesus. But our neglect does not disable his authority. Ultimately, he will do what he has said.

Agency			Warning and Setting
First Cycle Aaron's Rod	Second Cycle No Rod	Third Cycle Moses' Rod or Hand	
7:14-25 Nile to Blood	8:20-32 Flies	9:13-35 Hail	Stand before Pharaoh at Nile in the morning
8:1-15 Frogs	9:1-7 Cattle	10:1-20 Locusts	Go to Pharaoh (in palace?)
8:16-19 Lice	9:8-12 Boils	10:21-29 Darkness	No warning

Table 7: Structure of the Nine Plagues

Figure 7 shows the relative length of each plague. The final plague in each cycle, which is unannounced, is shorter than the others, ending the cycle like an exclamation point. The final cycle is the longest, building up to the final judgment, the death of the firstborn.

This structure reflects the Lord's purposefulness and control over the entire process. The Egyptians see their world in chaos. But God is carrying out a carefully ordered plan.

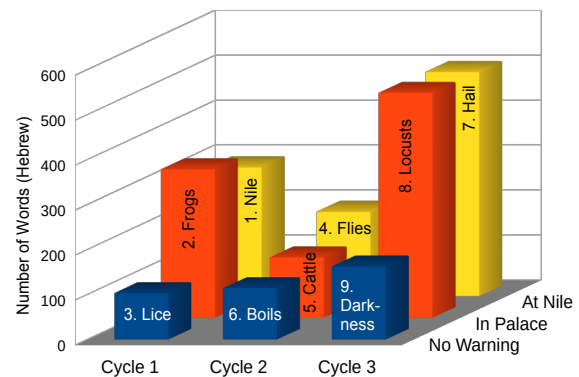


Figure 7: Length of Plague Descriptions

Repeated text often falls into distinctive types, or literary forms, marked by repeated features. For example, a biblical letter starts with the sender, the recipient, and a word of greeting, and ends with a final greeting. The nine plagues share certain features (chart), including.²³

- *Divine Analysis* of the situation by God to his representatives (2x)
- *Demand* to Pharaoh: "Let my people go, that they may serve me" (6x)
- A declaration of God's purpose to make himself *known* (4x)
- *Warning* of the plague that is about to come (6x)
- *Exemption* of the children of Israel (4x + 3?)
- *Command* to Moses and Aaron (7x)
- *Imposition* of the plague itself (9x)
- Involvement of Pharaoh's court *magicians* (4x)
- *Negotiation* between Pharaoh and Moses/Aaron (5x) (4x acknowledging the Lord)
- *Relief* as the plague is removed (5x)
- *Hardening* of Pharaoh (9x)

Only the imposition and the hardening appear in every plague.

Later scriptures remember these judgments as evidence of God's authority and power. The Psalms contains two shorter summaries of the plagues, looking back to the Exodus, rebuking Israel's rebellion (78) and praising God for his mercy (105), and Revelation 16 echoes some of them as patterns for God's final judgments on the earth, the bowls of his wrath (Table 8).

23 See Table 17 in the notes for a table of which features appear in which plagues.

7:14-25, First Plague: Nile to Blood

This plague, like the first plague in cycles 2 and 3, is included in Psalms 78 and 105.

14, Divine Analysis

14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuseth to let the people go.—The Lord observes what was stated in v. 13, but using the verb “be heavy” *kabed* instead of “be strong.” In both 7:13 and here, the subject is not the Lord, nor even Pharaoh himself, but his heart. And the past participle is misleading. It suggests the result of a process, while in both places the text is simply explaining the state of his heart, the natural condition of a fallen son of Adam.

Once more, at the start of the eighth plague, the Lord's analysis will focus on Pharaoh's hardness, but at that point, the Lord has become the agent:

10:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for **I have hardened his heart**, and the heart of his servants,

Order in Exodus	Ps 78	Ps 105	Rev 16
Nile to Blood	1	2	2, 3
Frogs	3	3	6
Lice		4	
Flies	2	4	
Cattle	6		
Boils			1
Hail	5	5	7
Locusts	4	6	
Darkness		1	4, 5
Firstborn	7 (last)	7 (last)	

Table 8: References or Allusions to the Plagues Elsewhere in the Bible

15-16, Demand

15 Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink against he come;—In the first plague in each cycle, they go to meet Pharaoh as he goes to the Nile. They are to “stand,” and wait for him to come to them.

Whatever reason he had for going to the Nile, it is unlikely that it included meeting them. But they are to make themselves available, and deliver their message. This is the least obtrusive way for them to present God's demands, the one that gives Pharaoh the greatest freedom.

and the rod which was turned to a serpent *nachash* shalt thou take in thine hand.—We should pay special attention to the various references to “rod” in Exodus, and in particular, in this plague (chart; see note).

A rod (מטה *matteh* H4294) is an intensely personal instrument, by which the owner can be identified. Recall Tamar's use of Judah's rod to identify him as the father of her children:

Gen. 38:18 And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy **staff** that is in thine hand.

Gen. 38:25 When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and **staff**.

The reference to the *nachash* shows us that this is Moses' rod, first introduced in 4:2-4:

Exo 4:2 And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A **rod**. 3 And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and

Moses fled from before it. 4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a **rod** in his hand:

When Moses left Midian to return to Egypt, the Lord specifically mentioned his rod:

Ex. 4:17 And thou shalt take this **rod** in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.

But in the narrative of his return, it receives a special designation:

Ex. 4:20 And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the **rod of God** in his hand.

Moses may carry it, but God has laid claim to it. We will see this title once more in Exodus, when the people fight with Amalek on their way to Mount Sinai:

Ex. 17:9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the **rod of God** in mine hand.

The Lord refers to this rod in 7:17,

Exod 7:17 Thus saith the **LORD**, ... behold, I will smite with **the rod that is in mine hand**.

Moses' rod has become the rod of God, subject to his control.

We will also read of Aaron's rod, in 7:19. We encountered this rod first in the introductory miracle of the dragon,

Ex. 7:9 When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto **Aaron**, Take **thy rod**, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a ~~serpent~~ dragon. 10 And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and **Aaron** cast down **his rod** before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a ~~serpent~~ dragon.

Aaron's rod, changed to a dragon, represented the ability to bring chaos, and challenged Pharaoh's *divine power* to maintain order. Moses' rod, changed to a serpent, challenged Pharaoh's *royal authority*. Both are active in this introductory plague. Then we see only Aaron's rod in plagues 2 (frogs) and 3 (lice), and only Moses' rod in 7 (hail) and 8 (locusts).

16 And thou shalt say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear.—This is the same request as in 5:1ff (chart).

Exo 5:1 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.

17a, Knowledge

17 Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD:—The last time Moses gave him this request, Pharaoh said,

Exo 5:2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? **I know not the LORD**, neither will I let Israel go.

Now the Lord is directly responding to Pharaoh's confessed ignorance. "Since you say you do not know me, I will give you a lesson." This motive is emphasized in the first plague of each cycle. God's motive is not cruelty or vindictiveness against Pharaoh. It is confronting his naturally hard heart with irrefutable evidence.

17b-18, Warning

Moses is to predict to Pharaoh the disaster that is about to fall.

behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.—The Lord is speaking. The references in 4:17, 20 shows that, physically, Moses' rod is in view.

Ex. 4:17 And thou shalt take this **rod** in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.

Ex. 4:20 And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the **rod of God** in his hand.

God has claimed it as his rod, and now takes credit for actions done with it.

There is a sober and blessed lesson in God's reference to "the rod that is in mine hand." The rod was Moses' rod before he met the Lord in the burning bush. The Lord shows him its potential in turning it into a serpent. But recall Moses' repeated objections to the Lord's command,

Exo 3:10 **Come Go** now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Exo 3:16 **Go**, and gather the elders of Israel together, ...

Exo 4:12 Now therefore **go**, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

It is not until he yields and sets out for Egypt that his rod becomes the rod of God. Our gifts and abilities, however impressive, will not achieve their potential until we yield our full personal obedience to the Lord. Only then can the Lord call our rod, "the rod that is in mine hand."

Note the action to be done with Moses' rod in God's hand: it will smite the river (7:20).

18 And the fish that is in the river shall die,—This would be a major catastrophe. The Greek historian Herodotus said,²⁴ "They eat fish either raw and sun-dried, or preserved with brine." The fish were one of the foods that the Israelites most missed during their wanderings:

Num 11:5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

and the river shall stink;—This would be a natural result of the dead fish.

and the Egyptians shall lothe to drink of the water of the river.—The dead fish and undrinkable water are highlighted in the recollections in the Psalms:

Psa 105:29 He turned their waters into blood, and **slew their fish**.

Psa 78:44 And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they **could not drink**.

These three details (dead fish, stink, undrinkable water) will be repeated in 7:20-21.

This plague is one of five that are echoed in the bowl judgments of Revelation 16 (Table 8). There, the angel who carries out the judgment gives a motive for this form of judgment:

Rev 16:3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. 4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou

24 Cited by Millington, *Signs and Wonders from the Land of Egypt*, ch. 4, who also gives illustrations.

hast judged thus. 6 For **they have shed the blood of saints and prophets**, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

A similar motive may lie behind this plague. Pharaoh attempted to murder the Hebrew baby boys in Exodus 1, and now God avenges their death.

19, Command to Moses and Aaron

19 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand—While Moses' rod is to smite the river, Aaron's rod extends the plague beyond the Nile itself, to other sources of water not mentioned in 7:17-18.²⁵

upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt,—Note “their,” that is, the Egyptians' streams, rivers, ponds, and pools. The application of Aaron's rod suggests that the plague is selective. In particular, it may have exempted the Israelites, and left water for the magicians.

Israel is explicitly spared in the plagues of flies (8:22-23), cattle (9:4, 6-7), hail (9:26), and darkness (10:23), but they may also have been spared here and in the plagues of frogs (8:3-4) and locusts (10:6).

both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.—This phrase is enigmatic. “Vessels” is not in the original. It is likely that the expression is parallel to “all the land of Egypt,” and refers to the borderlands, rocky desert and scrub growth.²⁶ Not only along the well-watered banks of the Nile, but even in the borderlands, no water could escape Aaron's rod.

20-21, Imposition

20 And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded;—Compare 7:6. They have learned to obey the Lord. The Lord has threatened to smite the water with Moses' rod (7:17), and commanded Aaron to lift up his rod to direct the plague (7:19), and now both happen.

and he lifted up the rod,—The nearest subject is “the LORD,” which matches 7:17. He is acting through Moses.

and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants;—Moses smites the water on behalf of the Lord, leading to the three results predicted in 7:18, and remembered in Psalms 78 and 105:

and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. 21 And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river;—The result of the smiting is restricted initially to the Nile.

and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.—Now, in keeping with 7:19, Aaron's rod selectively spreads the plague throughout the land. Some selectivity must have been involved, since the plague lasted seven days (7:25), and people can't live that long in a desert climate without water to drink.

²⁵ This distinction between the roles of the two rods is from Cassuto.

²⁶ See discussion in C. Houtman, “On the Meaning of uba'esim ub'abanim in Exodus vii 19,” VT 36 (1986): 347–52; M. H. Pope, “Mid Rock and Scrub, A Ugaritic Parallel to Exodus 7:19,” in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 146–50

The expression “there was blood” is the first of five instances of this expression (followed in the plagues of lice, boils, hail, and darkness, thus including all three plagues that conclude the cycles) (chart). It is the same expression found in Genesis 1,

Gen 1:3 And God said, Let there be light: and **there was light**.

In coming plagues, we will read:

8:17 ... and ~~it became~~ **there was lice** in man and in beast ...

9:10 ... and ~~it became~~ **there was a boil** breaking forth ...

The full statement from Gen 1:3, including the initializing statement, “Let there be X,” appears in 9:22 (hail) and 10:21 (darkness).

Exo 9:22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, ~~that there may~~ and **let there be hail** in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt. 23 And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: ... 24 So **And there was hail**, ...

Exo 10:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, ~~that there may~~ and **let there be darkness** over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. 22 And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and **there was a thick darkness** in all the land of Egypt three days:

In the plagues, God reveals himself to the Egyptians as the true creator of world. They believed in a deity, Ptah, who created the elements of the world by speaking their names. What they heard only in their ancient mythologies, from their priests, Moses and Aaron now demonstrate before their eyes. It is the God of Israel, not Ptah, who is the creator to whom all people owe obedience.

Recall the emphasis on God’s name in 3:13-15 and 6:3.

Exo 3:13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? ... 15 And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **The LORD God of your fathers**, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

Exo 6:2 And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the **LORD**: 3 And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name **JEHOVAH** was I not known to them.

Both passages emphasize the name YHWH (“LORD”), the God who keeps covenant. But 6:3 explains that you can’t know God as the LORD until you first recognize him as God Almighty. Throughout Exodus, God is teaching Israel, who already know him as the Almighty, that he is the covenant-keeping God. The Egyptians have to back up a step, and the creation language in the plagues suggests that one of their purposes is to reveal him as God Almighty, the true creator.

In discussing the significance of the plagues, we noted that some people see them as a reversal of creation. But the repeated use of the formula “let there be ... and there was ...” suggests that the point is not so much reversing creation, as revealing the true creator.

The reddening of the Nile, accompanied with fish die-offs, does happen in nature. But such events cannot explain two features of this miracle: it happens *when* Moses smites with his rod,

and it happens *where* Aaron points with his. The Lord predicts it, and then it occurs, on cue. The text emphasizes the detailed correspondence between the prediction (7:17-18) and the fulfillment (7:20-21) (chart):

- all the water is turned to blood
- the fish in the Nile die
- the river stinks
- the Egyptians cannot drink the water

Modern science has shown that prediction in realistic systems is impossible, beyond a limited time horizon.²⁷ People have known this intuitively for centuries. Knowledge of the future is the prerogative of God. Thus Moses, giving criteria for recognizing a true prophet, makes predictive accuracy the key:

Deu 18:21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? 22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Centuries later, Isaiah repeatedly²⁸ cites the Lord's ability to predict the future as an indication that he alone is God:

Isa 46:9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 **Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done**, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Isa 41:21 Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. 22 Let them bring them forth, and **shew us what shall happen**: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or **declare us things for to come**. 23 **Shew the things that are to come hereafter**, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. ...26 **Who hath declared from the beginning**, that we may know? and **beforetime**, that we may say, He is righteous? yea, there is none that sheweth, yea, there is none that declareth, yea, there is none that heareth your words.

22a, Magicians

22 And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments:—As with the dragon, so with the bloody Nile, the magicians are quick to show that they can do whatever Moses and Aaron can do. Ironically, in each case, they are increasing the chaos that the Lord is bringing on the land, the exact opposite of what Egyptian magic is supposed to do!

Two questions have been asked about their success: where do they get the ability to do these miracles, and in this case, where did they get clean water?

27 Realistic systems are subject to iterated nonlinearities, which can lead to formally chaotic dynamics in which initial conditions that start arbitrarily close to each other diverge exponentially, imposing a prediction horizon: H. V. D. Parunak, T. C. Belding, and S. A. Brueckner. "Prediction Horizons in Agent Models." In D. Weyns, S. Brueckner, and Y. Demazeau, editors, *Engineering Environment-Mediated Multiagent Systems* (Satellite Conference at ECCS 2007), vol. LNCS 5049, pages 88-102, Springer, Dresden, Germany, 2008. <https://www.abcresearch.org/abc/papers/EEMMAS07PH.pdf>.

28 In addition to Isaiah 41 and 46, compare Isa 44:6-8; 45:21; 48:3-8.

Their ability may be trickery, but is more likely due to genuine demonic engagement. Satan is real, and he can give supernatural power to his agents. Paul warned the Thessalonians (chart):

2Th 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: 9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan **with all power and signs and lying wonders**,

We saw this in Revelation, where the false prophet is able to perform real miracles in support of the beast out of the sea (the dragon!):

Rev 13:13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he **maketh fire come down from heaven** on the earth in the sight of men, 14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 15 And **he had power to give life unto the image of the beast**, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

The source of the unpolluted water has been extensively discussed, but if our understanding of the complementary roles of the rods of Moses and Aaron is correct, there could have been some clean sources available, perhaps in Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

22b-23, Hardening

and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.—As in 7:13, both the hardness and the failure to listen confirm the Lord's prediction in his joint charge to Moses and Aaron in 7:3-4 (chart).²⁹

Exo 7:3 And I will **harden Pharaoh's heart**, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 But Pharaoh **shall not hearken** unto you, ...

The theme of Pharaoh's hard heart develops as we move through the plagues (Figure 4). Recall the three agents of hardness: Pharaoh's natural fallen heart, his own will, and the Lord. The theme appears twice in divine analysis sections (7:14 and 10:1), and the status of the hardening concludes each plague.

Like the hardening of the arteries, hardening of the heart is a progressive disease. The progression moves through Table 9 in diagonal fashion, from the upper left corner to the lower right, wavering between the heart and Pharaoh until finally the Lord takes over.

1. Nile 7:22b <i>Heart</i>	4. Flies 8:32 <i>Pharaoh</i>	7. Hail 9:34 <i>Pharaoh</i> & Servants 9:35 <i>Heart</i>
2. Frogs 8:15 <i>Pharaoh</i>	5. Cattle 9:7 <i>Heart</i>	8. Locusts 10:20 <i>Lord</i>
3. Lice 8:19 <i>Heart</i>	6. Boils 9:12 <i>Lord</i>	9. Darkness 10:27 <i>Lord</i>

Table 9: Who does the hardening? *Red Italics: the heart. Plain green: Pharaoh. Bold: the Lord. Red: subject is the heart. Green: subject is Pharaoh. Blue: subject is the Lord.*

Initially, Pharaoh's heart, like that of every child of Adam, is naturally hard. The Lord noted this in his analysis in 7:14, based on the report at the end of the initial sign in 7:13. This is Pharaoh's condition in the first plague, and is mentioned again in the third, fifth, and seventh.

²⁹ We hear this same reminder of the Lord's prediction in 8:15 (plague 2, the frogs), 19 (3, the lice); 9:12 (6, the boils), and 35 (7, the hail). There is no such note on plagues 4 (flies) and 5 (cattle). In 8 (locusts) and 9 (darkness), the Lord himself hardens Pharaoh, so clearly he is in control.

In the second stage, the patient deliberately encourages this condition. This begins in the second plague, where (as we will see) Pharaoh begins suppressing spiritual insight that he himself acknowledges, and continues in the fourth and seventh plagues.

After a reminder of the original condition of the heart in the fifth plague, we come to the third stage, when the Lord confirms the person's decision, in the sixth plague. The seventh plague reminds us of the two initial stages: Pharaoh's heart is naturally hard, and he and his advisors are deliberately suppressing what they have learned about the Lord. From this point on, in the eighth and ninth plagues, as well as at the Red Sea, the Lord is the agent of hardening.

The central item of Israel's creed emphasizes the importance of the heart:

Deu 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine **heart**, and with all thy soul, and with all thy ~~might~~ abundance.

Later echoes of this creed often mention just the heart (1 Sam 12:20, 24; 1 Chr 28:9), as the guiding organ of all other decisions.

Pharaoh's history is a sober anticipation of the principle Solomon will later crystallize in his proverb, echoing the exhortation of Deut 6:5:

Pro 4:23 Keep thy **heart** with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

And our Savior emphasizes the centrality of the heart in guiding our conduct

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his **heart** bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his **heart** bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his **mouth** speaketh.

Mrk 7:21 For from within, out of the **heart** of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Because the disease of heart hardness is universal, it is important that God's people take advantage of the medication that God has provided:

Psa 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine **heart**, that I might not sin against thee.

The full realization of the new covenant includes the blessed promise of a new heart, which is infused with the word of God:

Ezk 36:26 A **new heart** also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

Jer 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put **my law** in their inward parts, and **write it in their hearts**; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

But as long as we are in the flesh, engaged in the conflict of Romans 7, we need to be diligent to heed Solomon's exhortation, and protect our heart by saturating it with the Word of God.

23 And Pharaoh turned and went into his house, neither did he set his heart to this also.— Why didn't he care? No doubt because he had servants who could seek out unpolluted water for him. Some have suggested he would just drink wine instead of water.

24-25, Relief

Most of the relief sections begin with Moses and Aaron “going out” (יָצָא *yatsa* H3318) from Pharaoh (frogs, 8:12-13; flies, 8:29-30; hail, 9:33; locusts, 10:18), because the relief in those cases is the result of negotiation with Pharaoh, in which he calls them into his presence. Here he does not summon them, and so they do not “go out,” but the paragraph does describe respite from the bloody waters.

24 And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river.—We do not know whether they were successful.

25 And seven days were fulfilled, after that the LORD had smitten the river.—This sign and the ninth are the only ones with a specified duration.

Notes

Technical Observations on Segmentation of 6:28-13:16

It may be helpful to explain the division of this section in more detail.

At the highest level, this section is what Longacre calls an execution paragraph,³⁰ consisting of a command (the amplification of the second commission, 6:28-7:6), and Moses' execution of that command (which extends through 13:16). This structure peels off the second commission, whose inner unity is reinforced by the inclusion, "I am the LORD."

The execution section consists of the eleven miracles. The strong alternation of the central nine (Table 2, 7:14-10:20) does not extend to the first and last. This encourages us to set the initial sign apart as an introductory encounter, and to consider the final plague separately. The latter division is reinforced by the integration of the description of the plague with the instructions for and institution of the Passover.

The Lord Spake דבר vs. Said אמר

דבר is always either without content, or followed by לאמר. This will become particularly interesting when we get to ch. 30ff.

The relative אשר (דבר אמר) יהוה uses אמר only once, at 6:26, where it gives the content.

Otherwise (12x) it is דבר, with no content, simply referencing the event of God's

speech. Bottom line: דבר is the event of speaking. אמר focuses on the content of the speech.

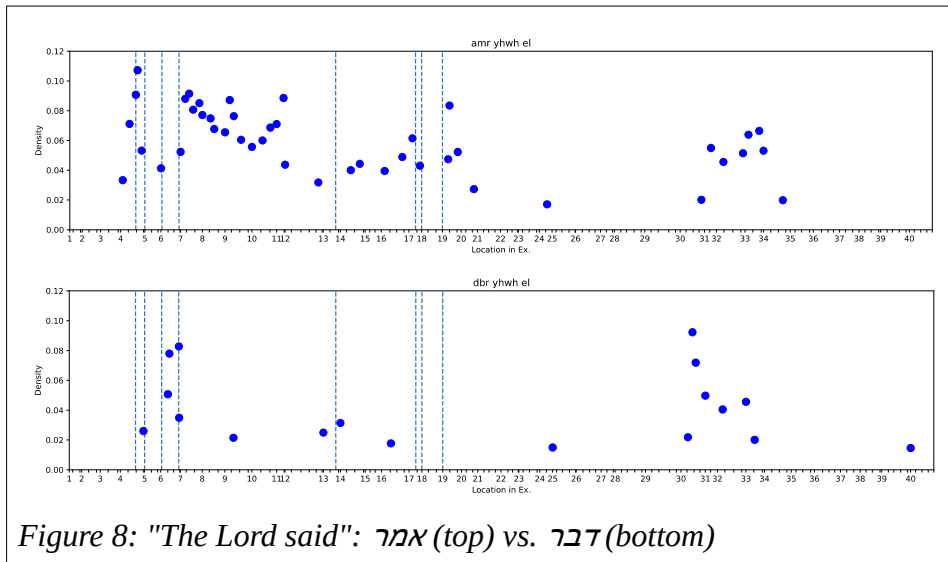


Figure 8: "The Lord said": אמר (top) vs. דבר (bottom)

The Road to Hardening

3:18-20 describes the engagement with Pharaoh as having four steps:

1. request for three-day leave to sacrifice
2. Pharaoh's rejection, known but not caused by the Lord
3. Display of mighty signs
4. Release from Egypt.

30 Robert E. Longacre, "An Apparatus for the Identification of Paragraph Types." *Notes on Translation* 15 (July, 1980), pp.5-22.

4:21 is the first reference to God's active hardening **חזק** his heart, a prediction of a future action, which according to the list in 3:18-20 will come after the signs (#3 in the list above).

Three different verbs are used to describe Pharaoh's hardening: be strong (**חזק** *chazaq* H2388), be hard (**קשה** *qashah* H7185), and be heavy (**כבד** *kabad* H3513). Table 10 lists the verses in Exodus, 19 vv out of a total of 21 in the OT. (Three more verses, Deut 2:30; 15:7; 2 Chr 36:13, use the verb **אמץ** *amats* H553.) The confusion is due to the LXX, which uses **σκληρύνω** (G4645) for all three roots (though once distinguishing **חזק** with **κατισχύνω**, G2729, in 7:13, and mostly using **βαρέω**, G916, for **כבד**, except in 10:1).

Sarna notes that ten times God hardens Pharaoh's heart (solid dots in Figure 4) (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17), while ten times Pharaoh is responsible (hollow dots; Sarna includes **קשה** in 13:15, which does not use the word "heart") (7:13, 14, 22; 8:11, 15, 28; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15).

Ref	Heb Root	LXX	Agent	Tense	Sign	As the Lord said
4:21	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Future		
7:3	קשה	σκληρύνω	God	Future		
7:13	קזח	κατισχύνω	heart	Past	serpent	x
7:14	כבד	βαρέω	heart	Past	serpent	
7:22	קזח	σκληρύνω	heart	Past	1 blood	x
8:11	כבד	βαρέω	Pharaoh	Past	2 frogs	x
8:15	קזח	σκληρύνω	heart	Past	3 gnats	x
8:28	כבד	βαρέω	Pharaoh	Past	4 flies	
9:7	כבד	βαρέω	heart	Past	5 cattle	
9:12	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Past	6 boils	x
9:34	כבד	βαρέω	Pharaoh	Past	7 hail	
9:35	קזח	σκληρύνω	heart	Past	7 hail	x
10:1	כבד	σκληρύνω	God	Past		
10:20	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Past	8 locusts	
10:27	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Past	9 darkness	
11:10	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Past	all	
13:15	קשה	σκληρύνω	Pharaoh	Past		
14:4	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Future	Red Sea	
14:8	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Past		
14:17	קזח	σκληρύνω	God	Present		

קשה H7185 *hiphil* occurs 1x (+ Sarna)

Table 10: The Hardening of Pharaoh. Refs are in MT; in ch. 8, English is 4 vv higher.

God

Ex. 7:3 And I will harden **Pharaoh's** heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh

Lack of ת favors taking Pharaoh as the subject rather than object of the verb

Ex. 13:15 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would **hardly C** let us go [hardened so as not to let us go], that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast:

קח H2388 occurs 12 = 8+4**God x8**

Ex. 4:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will **harden D** his heart, ~~that~~ and he shall not let the people go.

Ex. 9:12 And the LORD **hardened D** the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.

Ex. 10:20 But the LORD **hardened D** Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go.

Ex. 10:27 But the LORD **hardened D** Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.

Ex. 11:10 And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD **hardened D** Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Ex. 14:4 And I will **harden D** Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.

Ex. 14:8 And the LORD **hardened D** the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.

Ex. 14:17 And I, behold, I will **hardened D** the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

Pharaoh's Heart x4

All Qal, statements

Ex. 7:13 And he **hardened G** Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said. (or: Pharaoh's heart was hard)

Ex. 7:22 And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was **hardened G**, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.

Ex. 8:19 Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was **hardened G**, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

Ex. 9:35 And the heart of Pharaoh was **hardened G**, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses. s

כבד H3513 occurs 6 = 1 + 3+ 5**God x1**

Ex. 10:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have **hardened C** his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him:

Pharaoh x3

Causal

Ex. 8:15 (MT 11) But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he **hardened C** his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

Ex. 8:32 (MT 28) And Pharaoh **hardened C** his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go.

Ex. 9:34 And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and **hardened C** his heart, he and his servants. s

Pharaoh's Heart 2x

Qal or Adj—statement

Ex. 7:14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is **hardened Adj**, he refuseth to let the people go.

Ex. 9:7 And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was **hardened G**, and he did not let the people go.

Signs and Wonders

Table 11 shows a very clear preference of τέρας for מופת and of σημεῖον for אות. Trench: signs convey a message, while wonders grab the attention. Thus it makes sense that the signs focus on the Israelites, while the wonders focus on the Egyptians.

	אות	מופת	פלא	מעשה	Total
τέρας	0	30	1	1	47
θαυμα*	0	0	9	0	171
σημεῖον	75	1	0	0	116
δύναμις	0	0	0	0	563
Total	79	36	13	235	

Parallels between Moses and the Lord Jesus

Table 11: Vocabulary for Signs and Wonders

Moses in Exod 1-4a is the forerunner of Israel's experience in 4b-40, as Christ is our forerunner into the heavenly sanctuary, Heb 6:20.

Moses does signs and wonders (7:3), as does our Lord (Acts 2:22).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezmN2hZ836U&t=9s>

The Key Parallels Covered:

- Both were raised from among their brethren (Israelites)
- Both served as shepherds — Moses literally in the wilderness, Jesus as the Good Shepherd of people's hearts
- Both were sent to bring salvation after long periods of apparent divine silence (400 years of bondage in Egypt for Moses; 400 years between the Old and New Testaments for Jesus)
- Both fasted for 40 days and nights (Moses on Mount Sinai, Jesus in the wilderness before temptation)

- Both spent time in Egypt as children and were called out of Egypt
- Both were born during times when evil kings ordered the death of Jewish baby boys (Pharaoh and Herod)
- Both were miracle workers who performed clusters of miracles to testify to their God-given authority
- Both instituted covenants of blood and brought salvation to many
- Both received God's audible stamp of approval from heaven (Moses at Sinai, Jesus at His baptism and transfiguration)
- Both gave up riches for a life of humble service and poverty (Moses leaving Pharaoh's palace, Jesus leaving heavenly glory)
- Both were criticized by their own families
- Both were willing to sacrifice their lives for those they led
- Both miraculously provided bread for the people (manna in the wilderness; Jesus as the Bread of Life and feeding the multitudes)
- Both had faces that shone with glory after encountering God
- Moses chose 12 spies; Jesus chose 12 disciples

The most powerful parallel? Both were deliverers — Moses delivered Israel from the slavery of Egypt through the Passover Lamb, while Jesus is the true Passover Lamb who delivers us from the slavery of sin. This is the heart of the prophecy: God promised to raise up “one like Moses” (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), and the evidence shows Jesus perfectly fulfills it in every way.

Google AI finds these parallels:

Here are the specific chapter and verse references for the key parallels and differences between Moses and Jesus:

Early Life & Deliverance

- **Escaping a royal decree:** Pharaoh's decree (**Exodus 1:15-22, Exodus 2:1-10**) matches Herod's decree (**Matthew 2:16-18**).
- **Time in Egypt:** Moses was raised in Egypt (**Exodus 2:10**); Jesus was taken to Egypt to escape Herod (**Matthew 2:13-15**).
- **Deliverers:** Moses delivered from Egyptian bondage (**Exodus 3:7-10**); Jesus delivers from the bondage of sin (**John 8:34-36, Galatians 5:1**). [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Ministry & Miracles

- **40 Days of fasting:** Moses fasted on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 34:28**); Jesus fasted in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1-2**). [6, 7, 8]
- **Miraculous bread:** Moses and the manna (**Exodus 16:4, Exodus 16:14-15**); Jesus multiplies bread (**John 6:5-13**) and declares Himself the true Bread of Life (**John 6:32-35**). [9]

- **Mountain teachings:** Moses receives the Law on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19:3, Exodus 20:1-17**); Jesus teaches the New Covenant principles on the mount (**Matthew 5:1-2**). [10, 11, 12, 13]
- **Radiant glory:** Moses' face shines (**Exodus 34:29-35**); Jesus is transfigured with radiant glory (**Matthew 17:1-3**). [14]

Role as Mediator

- **Intercessors:** Moses offers his life for the people (**Exodus 32:31-32**); Jesus actually lays down His life as a ransom (**Mark 10:45, Romans 5:8**).
- **Covenant mediators:** Moses mediates the Old Covenant (**Exodus 24:7-8**); Jesus mediates the New Covenant (**Hebrews 9:15, Luke 22:20**). [15, 16, 17, 18, 19]

Key Differences

- **Servant vs. Son:** Moses was a faithful servant, but Jesus is the Son over the house (**Hebrews 3:1-6**).
- **The Law vs. Grace:** The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (**John 1:17**).
- **The Promised Land:** Moses died in the wilderness due to disobedience (**Numbers 20:12, Deuteronomy 34:4-5**); Jesus provides eternal rest in the heavenly country (**Hebrews 4:8-10, Hebrews 11:16**). [20, 21, 22, 23, 24]

- [1] <https://www.thoughtco.com>
- [2] <https://thelehrhaus.com>
- [3] <https://www.lourdes-giftshop.com>
- [4] <https://www.wisdomonline.org>
- [5] <https://www.teachingwithpower.com>
- [6] <https://www.vatican.va>
- [7] <https://avirtuouswoman.org>
- [8] <https://jasonbybee.com>
- [9] <https://www.agapebiblestudy.com>
- [10] <https://www.logos.com>
- [11] <https://www.bbc.co.uk>
- [12] <https://friarmusings.com>
- [13] <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org>
- [14] <https://twojourneys.org>
- [15] <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org>
- [16] <https://fpcjackson.org>
- [17] <https://www.knaphillbaptist.org.uk>
- [18] <https://www.desiringgod.org>
- [19] <https://learn.ligonier.org>
- [20] <https://goservglobal.org>
- [21] <https://twojourneys.org>
- [22] <https://twojourneys.org>
- [23] <https://www.bible.com>
- [24] <https://www.biblegateway.com>

Two Kinds of Serpents

Hebrew uses two different words for “serpent” in describing the transformed rod—נחש in 4:3 and 7:5, but תנין in the miracle before Pharaoh (Table 12). LXX translates this latter word exclusively with δράκων, a term that it uses also for Leviathan, dragons, jackals, and lions—larger, terrifying, almost mythical beasts. Cassuto understands it of a crocodile.

The animal that appeared to Eve in the garden is נחש, but the beast from the sea in Revelation is derived from תנין. Rev 12:9 and 20:2 identify the two.

	נחש	תנין	שרף	ליתן	תן	כפיר	Total
ὄφις	30	0	2	0	0	0	40
δράκων	2	12	0	5	3	2	36
Total	31	16	7	6	15	31	

Table 12: The two kinds of serpents

“As the Lord commanded”

This phrase recurs throughout Exodus.

- Here and 7:20, in executing the first two miracles
- 12:28, 50, of Children of Israel in keeping the Passover
- 16:34, laying up the manna before the Lord
- 34:4, Moses returns to to the Mount with two new tables
- 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 20, 31, of the prepaation of the priestly garments
- 39:43, of the preparation of the tabernacle
- 40:19, 21,23, 25,27, 29, 32, of the erection of the tabernacle

It is most common in Exodus; Numbers and Leviticus are next in density.

Enns' Comparison of the Plagues

	magicians reproduce plague	magicians or court beg	Pharaoh begs/capitulates	Pharaoh hardens heart	Pharaoh's heart is/becomes hard	God hardens Pharaoh's heart	distinction between Israel and Egypt	early morning confrontation	confrontation in palace	Aaron's staff	Moses' staff
[Snake]	X			X						X	
Nile	X				X			X		X	
Frogs	X		X	X						X	
Gnats		X			X					X	
Flies			X				X	X			
Livestock				X	X		X		X		
Boils						X	X				
Hail		X	X		X		X	X			
Locusts			X			X			X		X

	magicians reproduce plague	magicians or court beg	Pharaoh begs/capitulates	Pharaoh hardens heart	Pharaoh's heart is/becomes hard	God hardens Pharaoh's heart	distinction between Israel and Egypt	early morning confrontation	confrontation in palace	Aaron's staff	Moses' staff
Darkness			X			X	X				X
Firstborn			X			X	X				X

Table 13: Enns' comparison of the plagues (NIV Application Commentary, Exodus, 194)

The Plagues and the Gods of Egypt

John Hannah's table³¹ (Table 14) is a good summary of this popular explanation, but an added column shows the particular plagues where Aling³² raises questions.

The Plagues and the Gods and Goddesses of Egypt			
Plagues	Refs	Possible Egyptian Deities	Aling Caveat
1. Nile to blood	7:14–25	Hapi (also called Apis), the bull god, god of the Nile; Isis, goddess of the Nile; Khnum, ram god guardian of the Nile; and others	
2. Frogs	8:1–15	Heqet, goddess of birth, with a frog head	
3. Gnats	8:16–19	Set, god of the desert	X
4. Flies	8:20–32	Re, a sun god; or the god Uatchit, possibly represented by the fly	X
5. Livestock	9:1–7	Hathor, goddess with the cow head; Apis, the bull god, symbol of fertility	Not camels
6. Boils	9:8–12	Sekhmet, goddess with power over disease; Sunu, the pestilence god, Isis, goddess of healing	X
7. Hail	9:13–35	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility; Set, god of storms	
8. Locusts	10:1–20	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops and fertility	X
9. Darkness	10:21–29	Re, the sun god; Horus, a sun god; Nut, a sky goddess; Hathor, a sky goddess	
10. Death of the firstborn	11:1–12:30	Min, god of reproduction; Heqet, goddess who attended women at childbirth; Isis, goddess who protected children; Pharaoh's firstborn son, a god	

Table 14: The Plagues and the Gods of Egypt

Some other good references on this analysis include:

<https://www.torahmusings.com/2017/01/ten-plagues-egyptian-mythology/>
<https://bcworldview.org/when-god-humiliated-the-gods-of-egypt/>
<https://shellsstory.wordpress.com/2012/06/03/1821/>

31 Hannah, J. D. (1985). *Exodus*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 120f). Victor Books.

32 Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and Bible History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 106. J.K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 309, rejects this view entirely.

The Plagues and Creation

Several web sites see a parallel between the plagues and the creation account in Gen 1-2, as though God is undoing creation:

<https://www.gardentogardencity.com/p/unraveling-creation-the-hidden-meaning>
<https://www.thetorah.com/article/invoking-creation-in-the-story-of-the-ten-plagues>
<https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/why-are-there-10-plagues/> (BP)
<https://popchrist.com/2016/04/08/creation-the-10-plagues-of-exodus/>
<https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/egypts-plagues-undoing-creation-part/> (and sequels)

Schaser (israelbiblecenter.com) notes that there are ten plagues, corresponding to the ten words of creation in Gen 1, “and God said” But he does not show a close alignment between the two sets.

Advocated most vigorously by Ziony Zevit.³³

It is often observed that Gen says 10x “God said,” and there are 10 plagues.

The parallel with the gods of Egypt seems much better aligned with the polemic purpose of the plagues.

Plagues	Gen	Exod	Common Feature	Notes
1. Nile to blood	1:10	7:19	Gatherings מקוה of water	Zevit; word used elsewhere Lev. 11:36; Is. 22:11; perhaps Jer 17:13 “hope/reservoir of Israel” BP:
2. Frogs	1:20	7:28	Swarming שרץ	Zevit. Supposed to swarm in water; now swarms in land. But Gen 7:21;8:17; 9:7, etc. describe insects and people swarming Pretorius: frogs leave water for land (but they are amphibious!) BP: frogs violate God’s separation of water and dry land (but they always do)
3. Gnats	2:7	8:16-17	Dust of earth/land	Pretorius: gnats leave earth for skin BP: man created from dust of the earth, now afflicted from it (עפר is consistent, but Gen uses אדמה while Exodus uses ארץ)
4. Flies	1:28		Fill the land	Zevit: out of control, contrary to Gen 1:18 Pretorius: flies leave sky for people BP: fill the land (but Exod doesn’t use this expression)
5. Death of livestock				Zevit: what was created for man is now taken away
6. Boils				Zevit punts; both he and Pretorius point out implication for uncleanness.
7. Hail	1:1-12			Zevit, Pretorius: undoing the third day, green plants
8. Locusts				

33 <https://www.thetorah.com/article/invoking-creation-in-the-story-of-the-ten-plagues>; “The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague Narrative in Exodus,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 66:4 (Apr 1976), 193-211. See also C. Pretorius, <https://www.gardentogardencity.com/p/unraveling-creation-the-hidden-meaning>

9. Darkness	1:4			Zevit, Pretorius: undoing creation of light
10. Death of the firstborn	1:26			Zevit, Pretorius: undoing creation of man

Table 15: Echoes of Genesis in the Plagues

Plague	Genesis	Exodus
1. Nile to Blood	Gen 1:10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.	Exo 7:19 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water , that they may become blood; ...
2. Frogs	Gen 1:20 And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature [swarmer] that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.	Exo 8:3 And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly [swarm with frogs] , which shall go up and come into thine house, ...
3. Lice	Gen 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.	Exo 8:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.
9. Darkness	Gen 1:3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.	Exo 10:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, ...

Table 16: Some Parallels between Creation and the Plagues

Table 16 shows some of the more persuasive parallels.

Bible Project Podcast

<https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/why-are-there-10-plagues/>. Here are my notes on this podcast?

Miracle with the monster: Gen 3:15, then confronts Pharaoh. 7X by this you shall know that I am YHWH.

Seven days after Nile turned to blood, cf. 7 days of creation

Frogs—loan word—from Aramaic or Arabic. Land or sea creature? Mixed up. Erases boundary between land and sea. Swarm *sharatz* like Gen 1. Swarms on land as well as sea.

Dust of the land Exod 8:12 עֲפָר הָאֲרֶזֶן turns to gnats, just as humans made from dust of the land עֲפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה (but earth vs. land). Dust is image for mortality.

Flies fill the land מִלֵּא אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה, just as people were to fill the land. Gen 1:28 וּמִלֵּא אֶת־הָאֲרֶזֶן

Plague on animals—distinguish Israel from Egypt. Sets a time, *moed*, 9:5, like the times that God established with heavenly bodies.

Boils: Hebrew word for snake backwards, *shechin* instead of *nachash*

Hail: longer, as are others in third triad—look at size. Clouds promise rain, but drop icerocks. Destroys everything that comes from the ground, God's blessings

Locusts: eat everything from the ground. Genesis day 3. Wind blows them in, God's *ruach* bringing disorder instead of order

9th: "let there be darkness," instead of "let there be light" וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ , cf. Gen 1:3 יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי-אוֹר

Instances of Gen 1 Creation Language in the Plagues

Both expressions occur with the hail and darkness. The expressions suggest that the relation of the plagues to creation is not un-creation, but rather separate acts of creation.

Let there be X

Ex. 9:22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, ~~that there may~~ and **let there be hail** in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.

Ex. 10:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, ~~that there may~~ and **let there be darkness over the land of Egypt**, even darkness which may be felt.

And there was X

(1, Blood) Ex. 7:21 And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and **there was blood** throughout all the land of Egypt.

(3, Lice) Ex. 8:17 And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice [**there was lice**] in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

(6, Boil) Ex. 9:10 And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil [**there was a boil**] breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast.

(7, Hail) Ex. 9:24 So **there was hail**, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.

(9, Darkness) Ex. 10:22 And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and **there was a thick darkness** in all the land of Egypt three days:

Features of the Nine Plagues

Table 17 gives more details on Table 7. Table 18 shows which features appear in each plague.

Agency			Warning and Setting
First Cycle Aaron's Rod	Second Cycle No Rod	Third Cycle Moses' Rod or Hand	
7:14-25 Nile to Blood (Israel??) 7:17 know	8:20-32 Flies (-Israel) 8:22 know	9:13-35 Hail (-Israel) 9:29 know	Moses stands before Pharaoh at Nile in the morning
8:1-15 Frogs (Israel??) 8:10 know	9:1-7 Cattle (-Israel)	10:1-20 Locusts (Israel??)	Moses comes before Pharaoh
8:16-19 Lice	9:8-12 Boils (Egyptians)	10:21-29 Darkness (-Israel)	None

Table 17: Detailed 3x3 Table of Plagues

Element	Nile	Frogs	Lice	Flies	Cattle	Boils	Hail	Locusts	Darkness	Count
Divine Analysis	1							1		2
Demand + “Serve me”	2	1		1	1		1	2		6
Knowledge (demand)	3						2			2
Warning	4	2		2	2		3	3		6
Exemption (Warning)		?		3	3		4			
Knowledge (Warning)				4						
Command to Moses and Aaron	5	3	1			1	5	5	1	7
Imposition	6	4	2	5	4	2	6	6	2	9
Exemption (Execution)	?	?			5		7	?	3	
Magicians	7	5	3			3				4
Negotiation		6		6			8	4, 7	4	5
Knowledge (Negotiation)		7					9			
Relief	9	8		7			10	8		5
Hardening	8	9	4	8	6	4	11	9	5	9
Knowledge (summary)	x	x		x			x			4
Exemption (summary)	?	?		x	x		x	?	x	4

Table 18: Detailed List of Features in Each Plague Description

Rods in Exodus

A person’s rod or staff (מטה *matteh* H4294) was distinctive, a mark of his identity, as shown by Tamar’s use of Jacob’s rod to identify him:

Gen. 38:18 And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy **staff** that is in thine hand.

Gen. 38:25 When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and **staff**.

Whose rods are described in Exodus? Most references are to the rod of Moses:

Moses

Ex. 4:2 And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A **rod**.

Ex. 4:4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a **rod** in his hand:

Ex. 4:17 And thou shalt take this **rod** in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.

Ex. 7:15 Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river’s brink against he come; and **the rod which was turned to a serpent** *nachash* shalt thou take in thine hand. *must be Moses’ rod*

Ex. 9:23 And **Moses** stretched forth **his rod** toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt.

Ex. 10:13 And **Moses** stretched forth **his rod** over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.

Ex. 14:16 But lift thou up **thy rod**, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.

Ex. 17:5 And the LORD said unto **Moses**, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and **thy rod**, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.

Aaron

Ex. 7:9 When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto **Aaron**, Take **thy rod**, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent.

Ex. 7:10 And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and **Aaron** cast down **his rod** before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent [dragon].

Ex. 7:19 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto **Aaron**, Take **thy rod**, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.

Ex. 8:5 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto **Aaron**, Stretch forth thine hand with **thy rod** over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt.

Ex. 8:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto **Aaron**, Stretch out **thy rod**, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

Ex. 8:17 And they did so; for **Aaron** stretched out his hand with **his rod**, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

God

Ex. 4:20 And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the **rod of God** in his hand.

Ex. 7:17 Thus saith **the LORD**, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with **the rod that is in mine hand** upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.

Ex. 17:9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the **rod of God** in mine hand.

Magicians

Ex. 7:12 For they cast down every man **his rod**, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

Ambiguous

Ex. 7:20 And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and **he** lifted up **the rod**, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.