

Exodus 7:8-11:10, Signs and Wonders in Egypt

The 10 “Plagues” of Egypt

In the Exodus narrative these are called signs and wonders (7:3; 8:23; 10:1-2; 11:9-10). There are also eleven signs if you include the staff becoming a snake. The entire episode has an intricate structure that is connected to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. The point of the narrative is God’s redemptive purposes for Israel, to make himself known to all the nations, and to punish to bring judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods (6:2-8; 7:5; 10:2; 7:17; 8:10; 9:14, 29; 12:12).

Sign	Pharaoh’s Hardening	Warning	Egyptian diety
Water into Blood (7:14-25)	P. heart remained hardened (7:22)	Yes, confront Pharaoh	Nile as source of life
Frogs (8:1-15)	P. hardened his heart (8:15)	Yes, go to Pharaoh	Ptha & Heka, frog gods
Gnats (8:16-19)	P. heart was hardened (8:19)	No	Magicians retreat
Flies (8:20-32)	P. hardened his heart (8:32)	Yes, confront Pharaoh	
Livestock (9:1-7)	heart of P. was hardened (9:7)	Yes, go to Pharaoh	Apis, a sacred bull
Boils (9:8-12)	Lord hardened his the heart of P. (9:12)	No	Magicians stricken
Hail (9:13-25)	P. hardened his heart (9:35)	Yes, confront Pharaoh	
Locusts (10:1-20)	Lord hardened P. heart (10:20)	Yes, go to Pharaoh	
Darkness (10:21-29)	Lord hardened P. heart (10:27)	No	Amun Ra, the sun god
Firstborn sons	Lord hardened P. heart (11:10)	Yes	Pharaoh as divine

The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart

The episode of Pharaoh’s hardening is used by Paul in Romans 9:17 to argue for God’s sovereignty and justice in his redemptive purposes. We should be careful extrapolating from this to a doctrine that God determines who will be saved and who will be condemned (double predestination). The Exodus narrative shows Pharaoh’s heart is hard and he hardens it himself. Eventually he hits a point of no return and the Lord hardens it further in order to demonstrate beyond any doubt who is Lord over all.

God gave many opportunities to Pharaoh even though he knew he was not the kind of person to respond humbly. Pharaoh acknowledges his sin and the Lord's greatness, but refuses anyway and opposes him to the end (9:27; 9:30). Pharaoh is one example that some can give themselves so over to sin and evil, they know they are doing evil and they don't care.

Questions

1. What does the 10 plagues of Egypt tell us about God and his power over creation? How does that challenge current ways we think of natural causes?
2. Some of the signs are direct challenges to Egyptian gods. The prophets also connect these with injustice. How can we gain insight into our cultures idols by its moral and social struggles? What are our idols and how do they plague us (pun intended)?
3. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is always a challenge for people to understand due to our modern convictions about individual freedom. Should we discern the difference between someone who may be a sinner and someone who is completely given over to sin and evil? How and why?
4. The means of God hardening Pharaoh's heart is through the signs and wonders. How does this shed light on the tension between God's sovereignty and Pharaoh's will?
5. The overall narrative of the "plagues" is really about God's power to save Israel. How has God achieved an even more powerful salvation through Christ?
6. How does this give you hope that God will eventually bring about his kingdom of righteousness and peace?