

Love...

is missing

in

The Egyptian plagues



*Signs performed by Yahweh
Described by His prophet Dt34:10
Presented by His servant
Prompted by my friend*

Thanks to God

I thank God for His patience in surprising me for nearly 40 years with many gifts that I never asked for, including the courses that I never intended to study at ANU and questions from many people that challenged me towards one topic – to show God's love expressed in several narratives in the Bible. I also thank God for answering my 32 most difficult questions I wanted to find the answers to about heaven and angels, all of them were answered by the time I ran out of steam in looking for more questions.

I could not hesitate any longer but share God's beauty with those who are thirsty to see it.

Important

- The data about ancient Egypt contained in this paper is not verified because it comes from the Internet, and the Internet is a collection of... you know.
- The paper aims to show God's love in dealing with Egyptians.
- I added some scenarios to show the context for biblical information. These scenarios may not be precise.
- Look beyond imperfections and a lack of eloquence to find what is most important.

Introduction

Has God sent the ten plagues to punish Egypt for keeping His people in slavery? Has God hardened Pharaoh's heart and then punished him for not letting His people go? Has God destroyed Egypt and its army as revenge for what they have done to His people? Is the God of the Old Testament a God of vengeance, punishment, and judgements, unlike the God of the New Testament? NO! We need to study the Bible carefully, listen to some Hebrew scholars when the Hebrew text is unclear, consider other passages of the Bible and ask God for guidance. Let me demonstrate.

Who did coin the expression "Egyptian plagues"?

God's people were in Egypt for many years before God spoke to Moses from the burning bush¹ and asked him to go to Egypt to take His people out of slavery and bring them to the land "flowing with milk and honey."² God knew that Pharaoh would not permit people to go;³ therefore, He told Moses about it but assured him that He would strike Egypt with His miracles and then Pharaoh would let the people go.⁴ How do people interpret these words of God? He said 'miracles' (מִלְאָכָה) which should be translated as special, marvellous, wonderful or the like, or 'wonders' (מוֹפְתִים) which should be translated as a marvel, miracle, sign, symbol, or wonder.

For several weeks before Moses came to Egypt, he carried in his heart the idea of signs⁵ and wonders⁶ to be shown to Pharaoh. When he arrived in Egypt, he spoke to Aaron about the signs that God commanded him to perform before Pharaoh.⁷ Aaron

1 Ex3:2

2 Ex3:8

3 Ex3:19

4 Ex3:20

5 Moses was to perform signs with the staff which he had in his hand. Ex4:17NASB

6 God told Moses to perform wonders before Pharaoh. Ex4:21NASB

7 Moses told Aaron about the signs that God commanded him to perform. Ex4:28NASB

spoke to people about *signs*.⁸ God announced that He would multiply *signs* and *wonders*.⁹ Several weeks or a few months passed when God showed signs and wonders to the Pharaoh, his servants, and the Egyptians. Each time Moses reports 'signs' or 'wonders' being performed. Signs and wonders of God could not be presented to Egyptians as good health, bountiful harvest, beautiful weather, prosperity, peace with surrounding nations and the like because Egyptians already enjoyed these blessings yet attributed them to their gods. Out of necessity, God had to show what happens when He stops his blessings in the time that is precisely foretold and in a manner that was not experienced before so that everybody would have to acknowledge His power. As a result, what God calls 'signs and wonders' really are signs and wonders, despite that most commentators see them as disasters and attribute false intentions to God, who intended to rescue Egyptians from their beliefs in false gods who lead to eternal death. Egyptian gods proved false because they could not do anything to rescue their subjects from disasters that fell on people when God withdrew His blessings.

God instructed Moses to use the term 'plagues' when speaking with Pharaoh: "I will send all my plagues on you and your servants."¹⁰ The Hebrew term used this time for the plague (אָפֶקֶט) was correctly translated as calamity or affliction, slaughter, or blow. It was the first time that God used this term about signs and wonders. God used a similar term when saying to Moses, "One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh..."¹¹ This time it was the term (מַדְבָּה), also correctly translated as calamity or plague. In both cases, the term 'plague' was used for sufferings that Egyptians would experience due to the lack of God's blessings, not as a disaster imposed by God on Egyptians for their crimes.

The last time the word 'plague' (אָפֶקֶט) is used in the context of the Exodus narrative mentions God who instructed Israelites to take some blood of the Passover lamb and smear it on the two doorposts and the lintel,¹² which will be a sign for God to pass over the houses marked with blood and prevent any plague falling on those who are inside.¹³ This occurrence of 'plague' is not a disaster intended to punish Israelites for some crimes but a desire to *prevent* them from the disaster. The term 'plague' in this case shows that 'plagues' do not necessarily mean punishment, revenge, vengeance, or judgements. Therefore, the three occurrences of the term 'plague' used in the Exodus narrative in no way indicate that God's signs and wonders were intended to express God's retribution inflicted on Egyptians.

Titles given to the sections of the Bible as 'plagues' are supplied by the commentators of the Bible. Various websites describe the signs as disasters or curses sent by God to force Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave slavery in Egypt or punishment, retribution, or revenge for exploiting Israelites for Pharaoh's resistance to letting the people go. It seems that Satan accomplished his job of insulting God when commentators explain that He tried to pay back Pharaoh for keeping His people in slavery. And it seems that many people who profess to be God's children support Satan in insulting God for His signs and wonders.

⁸ Aaron spoke to people and performed the signs. Ex4:30NASB

⁹ Ex7:3

¹⁰ Ex9:14

¹¹ Ex11:1

¹² Ex12:7

¹³ Ex12:13

From this point on, I will not use the expression ‘Egyptian plagues’; I will use the name that God gave it – Signs and Wonders.

Pharaoh's hardened heart

Pharaoh's hardened heart poses a problem for theologians and laypersons alike. Several interpretations are on offer, but none are readily accepted. We know that God gives people free will, yet in the case of Pharaoh, God is reported as forcing Pharaoh to not allow Israel to leave slavery in Egypt. Several websites and videos insult God for sending plagues on Egypt as punishment, judgements, or vengeance because Pharaoh refused to set Israelites free. Others say that God punished Egyptians for exploiting Israelite slaves. The accusations are high, but the convincing power of interpretations offered is rather low. Does the Bible allow God to lead or force people to make wrong decisions and then torture them or the nation with disasters of unprecedented proportions for these decisions? To me, it sounds like the work of Satan, not God.

Some scholars argue that (קִיַּן) should be translated as ‘stiffen’ rather than ‘harden’, but it does not change the argument because in such cases, it is God who strengthens Pharaoh's decisions and later on punishes him for these decisions. Other scholars show that Pharaoh hardened his own heart for a long time before God made a move and hardened his heart. It makes the impression that Pharaoh's heart was determined not to let God's people go, but they omit the fact that before Moses left for Egypt, still at the burning bush, God had already told Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. In such a case, God had hardened Pharaoh's heart before Pharaoh knew that God would want His people to leave Egypt. Again, the argument failed.

We know that God gives people the freedom to choose between life and death, but He would like them to choose life and live.¹⁴ God does not desire the death of the wicked, and He would rather have them turn from their wicked ways and live.¹⁵ To harden Pharaoh's heart and then send the disasters to the whole nation is incompatible with God's character. Does the Bible explain what is wrong with the current interpretation of the expression ‘God hardened Pharaoh's heart’?

Language

The Bible uses some expressions that at least puzzle us before we understand them. For example, Jesus declares that those who want to be His disciples must hate their mother, father, siblings, and even their own lives.¹⁶ Why would God, who is love¹⁷ and teaches us to love one another,¹⁸ and our enemies,¹⁹ ask us to hate our own family as a condition of being His disciple? We need to figure out why Jesus said these words. Is it because we should literally begin to hate our family, or is something else at stake? My interpretation is that our love for Jesus must be so valuable that the love for any other person is hate by comparison. If we need to decide between Jesus and any other person, we should never reject Jesus, but always the person. We can see that some conflicts between plain text in different passages require some intellectual effort and

¹⁴ Dt30:19

¹⁵ Ez18:23; 2P3:9

¹⁶ Lk14:26

¹⁷ 1Jn4:8

¹⁸ Jn13:34

¹⁹ Mt5:44

decisions. We also must remember that some statements do not describe God's character but require us to look below the surface.

Another example of conflicting concepts comes again from Jesus's own words when He, the Prince of Peace,²⁰ tells His hearers that he did not come to bring peace but a sword.²¹ When we analyse how people responded to Jesus's activities, we see two diametrically different groups: some people experience peace, and others are agitated and begin to fight with Jesus and His followers. Jesus intends the first group's response, the other is unintended, but nevertheless, it exists. We can observe intended and unintended responses to the same action in other cases as well. We need to decide to which group we belong – will we fight in response to Jesus's unintended purpose of His action, or accept it and receive peace?

The case of Moses's report about God hardening Pharaoh's heart is similar to Jesus's bringing sword, not peace. It was not God's intention to harden Pharaoh's heart, but it happened nevertheless, and God knew about it. It was, of course, unintentional, but it may sound like intentional. The difference is that the unintentional hardening of Pharaoh's heart is in agreement with God's character of love, and the intentional is not.

All signs and wonders demonstrated to Egyptians were designed to disclose that all gods worshipped by Egyptians are false, and the only God worthy of worship is the God of the Hebrews. Sadly, the majority of Egyptians, with Pharaoh as the leader, were growing angrier and angrier when they witnessed that their gods were shown to be false. In their case, God's action hardened their hearts, but God did not intend it. He intended all Egyptians to follow Him, but only some of them realised that they needed to worship the Hebrew God and left Egypt with its false gods.²²

Conclusion

Jesus said that He "did not come to bring peace" to the earth, "but a sword."²³ God said that He would "harden Pharaoh's heart that" He might "multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt"²⁴ and "be honored through Pharaoh and all his army through his chariots and his horsemen."²⁵ Should we read the plain text of the Bible and preach that Jesus came to bring bloodshed and that God brought plagues to Egypt to honour Himself by destroying Pharaoh's army and suffering of all Egyptians? The choice is yours.

Signs and wonders of Egypt

Introduction

Moses wrote a very brief report on the Exodus and related topics. Many details are missing and go unnoticed until someone inquires about them. Some of them are easy to figure out; others are not so easy, and still, others may have several options. This paper attempts to show God's love for humanity regardless of the occasional harsh language of the Bible. I have added some events to the Biblical report to visualise the

²⁰ Is9:6

²¹ Mt10:34

²² Ex12:38

²³ Mt10:34

²⁴ Ex7:3

²⁵ Ex14:17

situation in Egypt while God was showing the signs and wonders, but these events are my imagination. However, the main plot in this paper is to show that God's love is greater than this paper attempts to demonstrate.

Classic Egyptology

Early Egyptologists incorrectly linked Rameses II with the Exodus. Despite many problems with the chronology of Egyptian dynasties, most Egyptologists hold it accurate and resist changing it. According to this timeline, all events associated with the biblical Exodus and Israelites in Egypt are only "pious fiction." Satan will do everything to discredit a new corrected interpretation of Egyptian history because he does not want the biblical record to emerge accurately. I will follow extensive evidence collected by filmmaker Timothy Mahoney and several Egyptologists working with him, presented in "Patterns of Evidence – Exodus" (several videos on the topic are offered free on YouTube). A lot of evidence for Exodus is available when one looks for it instead of discrediting all evidence under the excuse that it belongs to a different period. If you want to learn why "Shishak king of Egypt"²⁶ is not "Shoshenk" as claimed by most Egyptologists and scholars of ancient history or to understand why Egyptologists refuse to revise Egyptian Chronology although they know that it is wrong, you may wish to watch:

1. Patterns of Evidence [EXODUS](#) with filmmaker Tim Mahoney and David Rohl - Part 1 - The Journey,
2. Ancient Egypt's [New Chronology](#) by Egyptologist Dr. Rohl, or many other videos.

Moses

Moses, a Hebrew child, an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter,²⁷ who was schooled to become a future Pharaoh, did not forget his people and family. One day, when he went to see how the Hebrew slaves were treated in the fields, he saw how one taskmaster was beating a Hebrew slave, one of his brethren.²⁸ He commanded the taskmaster to stop bashing the man, but the taskmaster wanted to show his power and pushed Moses back. Moses was well trained in the art of defending himself and, without too much thinking, hit the taskmaster so that he died. There was nobody around except the Hebrew slave to witness the scene. Therefore Moses thought the defended slave would keep quiet about the death of the taskmaster. They both buried the taskmaster, and the matter should be kept a secret.



The next day, Moses realised that someone knew about the murder and decided to flee Egypt before Pharaoh learned about it. By looking at his clothing, soldiers recognised Moses's position in the kingdom, and nobody dared to ask him why he walked so far from the palace. Sometime later, when the matter became known, Moses was far beyond the reach of Pharaoh and his soldiers. To camouflage his tracks, he did not go all the way to Palestine, where his ancestors lived, but turned south towards the land of Midian.

²⁶ 1K11:40

²⁷ Ex2:10

²⁸ Ex2:11

Moses joined several caravans that travelled in the direction he wished to go because it was too dangerous to travel alone. After many days, he came close to a well where he planned to top up his resources and witnessed an intriguing scene. Several shepherds drove seven shepherdesses away from the well and did not allow them to draw water for their flocks. He realised that the shepherdesses often had this problem and decided to do something about it.



He spoke to the shepherds trying to convince them that they should allow shepherdesses to draw water for their flocks because everybody has the right to use the well. But the shepherds did not listen and began to argue with Moses and try to demonstrate their power. Moses was trained in fighting, and when the shepherds became too brave, he quickly disabled them and asked them to let him draw water for the shepherdesses. The shepherds realised that Moses was a great fighter and decided to retreat. Moses could safely fetch enough water for all flocks of the shepherdesses; some water was left in the trough for the shepherds' flocks. Thanks to this kind act, shepherds became friends and, next time, helped the shepherdesses to the well.

The shepherdesses were thankful to Moses for helping them and, together, departed from the well. As they admired his skills, they learned that he was an Egyptian soldier who decided to learn about the world. At the same time, Moses learned that all seven shepherdesses were daughters of a Midianite priest Jethro, also known as Reuel. When the shepherdesses had to turn from the main track to their camp, Moses said goodbye to them and kept walking, hoping to find someplace to stay.

Jethro was surprised when he saw his daughters returning with their flocks so early. The daughters explained that an Egyptian soldier was at the well and ordered the shepherds to stand back while he drew water from the well for their flocks. Jethro asked whether the shepherds were keen to listen to his orders. The shepherdesses said that the shepherds tried to fight, but they could not win because the Egyptian was a well-trained soldier. Jethro asked: «Where is this soldier now?» The daughters answered: «He went to find a place to stay.» The father asked: «Why did you not invite him to stay in our place?» Zipporah immediately ran to find Moses and bring him to the family house.



Moses did not go far because he was hungry and tired and did not know how far he would need to travel to find a place to stay. As he was walking slowly and thinking about a safe place to rest for the night, he heard a familiar voice – it was Zipporah. «Moses, could you stay with us? My father would like to talk with you.» Moses did not hesitate to visit the house of friendly shepherdesses. «My name is Moses; what is yours?» he asked? «Zipporah» she answered. After a short conversation, they came to the camp of Jethro and were invited to the table. Zipporah looked after Moses and provided the best dishes before he asked. Priest Jethro discovered noble character traits in Moses and noticed Zipporah taking a keen interest in him. Therefore he asked Moses to stay with them longer than one night.

In the morning, Zipporah asked Moses if he could go with them to the mountains, help them look after the flock, and defend them from the unkind shepherds. He

accepted the invitation; after all, he did not have any plans and looked for a place to stay. So, they went together to the mountains and spent a beautiful day there. Zipporah was always close to Moses and told him about the mountain of God. She was a little surprised that Moses wanted to hear more about this God. She expected that an Egyptian should vindicate dozens of gods of the Nile and disrespect all other gods that do not even have a name. Therefore, she asked Moses about the gods of the Nile. Moses told her his story – that he was born into a Hebrew family, was adopted by Pharaoh's only daughter who did not have children, and grew up in Pharaoh's palace but never became an Egyptian. Zipporah and her sisters listened to this exciting story until they decided to go home because the sun was getting close to the horizon. The shepherds already filled the trough and waited for the shepherdesses' flocks to drink first. Moses thanked them for their kindness and promised to see them the next day.

Moses and the seven shepherdesses decided to return home after the day in the mountains when the shepherds were still partying at the well. Zipporah accompanied Moses and tried to tell her father everything that she heard from him while her sisters attended to the needs of their flocks and prepared the meal. Jethro would be blind if he did not recognise how fond Zipporah was of Moses. After all, he was a priest, knew people, and worshipped God, maybe the same God as the Hebrew people did. No wonder that after a delicious meal and more stories in the company of beautiful people, he asked Moses if he would like to stay with them and have Zipporah for his wife. Of course, he did, and after many years in Pharaoh's palace and many days in the desert, Moses became a married man, looking after a flock of sheep and goats in the mountains.

Year after year passed, Zipporah gave birth to two boys, and Moses did not desire to go back to Egypt. He was also afraid that the ruthless Pharaoh, who pretended to be the god Ra on Earth²⁹ yet could not have more children than one son, may be adapted, may still seek Moses's death. Since he enjoyed life as a shepherd in a peaceful clan who worshipped the God of heaven, he was happy to live in the Median for good. Jethro was also happy with the arrangement, and maybe he saw in Moses a new priest after him(?)

While in the mountains with Zipporah and Jethro's flocks, Moses was more and more intrigued by the mountain on the west side of the wilderness. Each time he tried to lead the flock closer to the mountain despite Zipporah always warning him about the God who lives there. People believed that this God was omnipotent, and therefore they were afraid to come even close to the foot of the mountain. The mountain rumbled from time to time, was covered with smoke, and sometimes people could see flames at night. Moses knew that if this were the same God that his mother Yochebed taught him about, He would be merciful and compassionate. Why would such a God be frightful to people?

One day when Zipporah stayed home, Moses said that he would remain in the fields for a few days because there was not much grass left for their flock to graze on, and he needed to find a place further away where food was more plentiful. He had a chance to come to Mount Horeb, the mount of God that Zipporah told him about many times. The flock found a better place to graze, and Moses could admire the big size of God's

²⁹ Ra is regarded as creator of the sun, the world, life, gods, and people.

home, much bigger than all pyramids in Egypt. Obviously, the place where God lives must be more significant than the pretended god of the Earth can build.

Moses gathered enough courage to approach the mountain closer than ever. His flock enjoyed unique pastures with no dangerous animals around. Moses could safely leave the flock and venture very close to the mountain. As he was admiring the colossal size of Horeb and its peak glistening in the sun, he noticed a bush on fire. Zipporah told him about this phenomenon, and a few times they were watching such burning bushes. But this bush was not dry. It was as lush as it could get. But the flames appeared to lick only the resin dripping from it, while green leaves were left untouched by the flames. Moses came closer to the bush to find out why this bush was different. As he gazed at the bush and subconsciously moved closer and closer to it, he realised that it was not an ordinary bush on fire. He knew that the bush, no matter how big and dry, would be consumed in a few moments, but this bush was green lush, and there was nothing dry in it to burn!

Moses was frightened. He was trying to find out the science behind the phenomenon, and therefore he was deeply in thought until he realised that this fire had something to do with the God who lived on top of the mountain. And he remembered what Zipporah told him about this omnipotent God that is frightening to people. He remembered what his forefathers taught about the invisible God who created the universe and giant monsters inhabiting oceans. This encounter with God that had just begun was making a lasting impression on Moses. When he started to describe it for future generations a few years later, he intended to create a similar impression on his readers. Therefore, he placed the most impacting elements at the very beginning of his report and only then explained in detail what had happened.

He began with the words: “the angel of the LORD appeared to him...” After so many years of silence, the Most High god decided to communicate with His nation. He was too majestic to communicate directly, and He was invisible. Therefore He chose to appear in some visible way so that Moses and his readers could understand and appreciate the event’s grandeur. So, Moses reported that God sent His angel, who placed a fantastic, lush bush engulfed with flames in the distance. The angel came to prepare the way for Yahweh, and this is why Moses called him “the angel of the LORD.” Moses already knew God’s personal name when writing about this event because he heard it from His mouth at the mountain. He put it in writing because it was easy to do, but it was not easy for people to figure out how to pronounce it. Also, Moses did not tell anyone how to pronounce it because this name was too holy to be used without the utmost respect. When people read Moses’s report, they did not pronounce God’s name יהוה (YHVH), they just said “the name” instead, and everybody knew what it meant. Sometime later, only the High Priest knew how to pronounce God’s name, and he was to pronounce it only once a year during the Day of Atonement when performing his duties in the Most Holy apartment of the sanctuary.

After shaking off the first imagination of meeting God in the bush, Moses intended to examine the bush more carefully. It was not dry but full of life, covered with lush leaves, and it was on fire! What a sight! Moses slowly came closer and closer to the bush and admired the phenomenon more and more.³⁰ When he was very close, he

³⁰ Ex3:2

heard the voice coming directly from the bush: “Moses, Moses!”³¹ This voice was a big surprise for Moses, and he froze. In addition to the wonder that he had already observed, he heard someone but was unsure whose voice he heard. Soon he realised that he needed to respond; therefore, with a shaking voice, he said quietly: «Here I am.» Then he heard clear instructions on what to do: “Do not come any closer and remove your sandals from your feet because the place you are standing on is holy ground.”

Moses immediately fell on one knee to remove one sandal, then the other, and while doing this, he noticed that the ground was different, covered with different grass than the rest of the mountain. Then he raised his head because the voice continued: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses realised that the unknown god living on top of the mountain was the same God he heard of from his mother Yochebed, and many Hebrew slaves in Egypt. Immediately he covered his face with his hands because he was afraid to look at God. In fact, he did not see God, but he knew that God was there, although invisible. After a while, Moses was sure that he spoke with the highest authority in heaven and earth. And when he wrote about this incident later, he used God’s proper name, which nobody knew how to pronounce except for him and a high priest.

God continued: “I know how much my people suffer from their taskmasters, and this is why I came down to see you. I need to deliver them from their slavery in Egypt and give them a spacious land overflowing with milk and honey, the land of Canaan now occupied by seven nations.³² I send you to Pharaoh so that you can bring my people, Israel, out of Egypt.” Moses was speechless and, after a while, responded to God: “Who am I that I should go and demand from Pharaoh to let the people go? He uses Hebrew slaves to build his cities and will not be happy to let the multitude of workers just leave Egypt.”³³ But God pleaded with Moses: “I have seen how Egyptians oppress my people. I have heard the cry of my people, so please go to Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt, out of slavery.”

Moses felt compassion for his brethren who suffered in Egypt for many years while he had to flee because his idea to defend just one of them backfired. Then God tried to encourage Moses and said: “I will certainly be with you all the way, and we will meet again at this mountain before we go to the land I promised.” Moses felt much better after God gave him this promise, but many questions were raised in his head. Then he asked God: «my brethren have been in Egypt for many years; they hear about many false gods of the Nile and the gods from other lands who have many names. If I tell them “the God of your fathers,” they will demand a better description. What can I tell them?» God answered: tell them that my name means “I am that I am” or just say “I am” because this is what my name means. You can begin your speech like this: “The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.” Moses felt better now because at least he knew how to begin his speech. This was the first time God told him His name, and Moses recorded everything that God said, but he never pronounced God’s name to anybody; he was saying “**I AM**” instead. After God instructed Moses what to say and do when

³¹ Ex3:4

³² The Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite.

³³ Ex3:10