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Strike the Water of the Nile and It Will Be Turned into Blood

7: 14-25

Strike the water of the Nile and it will be turned into blood DIG: How important was the Nile River to Egypt? By this plague of blood, what do you think God was trying to tell the Egyptians? The Israelites? What kind of pressure did this plague put on Pharaoh? On his magicians? What was his response?

REFLECT: Given the eyes of faith, what mighty acts of ADONAI have you personally seen in your life? Who are the magicians that imitate God's work today and hinder your trust in the real thing? How do you cope with that?

The ten plagues start with **God** turning **the Nile River into blood**. But why did **He** choose to start with **the Nile**? Hardly any country in ancient or modern times has been so dependent on its waterways as ancient **Egypt**. This transportation led to widespread shipbuilding and a development of ports. Sea commerce also developed and provided many important products for **Egypt**. Perhaps most important for **the** average **Egyptian**, however, was the yearly contribution of **the Nile** to agricultural life. Its annual rise and flooding provided new deposits of fertile soil along with much needed water in the surrounding fields. If not for this flooding, **Egypt** would be as barren as the deserts on either side of it. Therefore, **the Nile** was worshiped because the very economic health of the land was dependent on its faithfulness. Poverty and calamity would come with its failure. **The Egyptians** fully recognized this fact, and in thanksgiving for the blessings of **the Nile**, hymns were written. The Hymn of **the Nile** best describes its importance.

*Hail to you, Oh Nile, that issues from the earth and comes to keep Egypt alive! . . . He that waters the meadows which Recreated, in order to keep every kid alive. He that makes to drink the desert and the place distant from water: that is his dew coming down from heaven.*¹⁰⁸

Then ADONAI said to Moses His servant: **Pharaoh's heart is heavy; he refuses to let the people go (7:14)**. Another Hebrew term is now used to present the nature of **Pharaoh's** hardened **heart**. It is *kabed*, which means *to be heavy*. The term can be used in

a literal quantitative sense. For example, Absalom's hair was **heavy (Second Samuel 14:26)**, and **Moses'** hands were tired, or **heavy (17:12)**. But *kabed* may also be used in a qualitative sense, that is, that something is weighty, or full of a particular quality or trait. Therefore, this verse is saying that **Pharaoh's heart** was *weighted down* with something. But what was it?¹⁰⁹

The concept of a **heavy heart**, and *the Weighing of the Heart*, was pictured in **the Egyptian** Book of the Dead. They believed that when someone died, that person went to Duat, or **the Egyptian** underworld. There, the hearts of the dead were to be weighed on the scales of truth. If the **heart** was **heavy** with misdeeds, they believed it was unworthy, and it was thrown to the goddess Ammit to be eaten. Because **the Egyptians** believed that the **heart** was the location of the soul, that person would be condemned to remain in Duat forever. However, if the **heart** were pure, and was lighter than a feather, that person would go on to Aaru, **the Egyptian** equivalent of heaven. So when the Bible says: **Pharaoh's heart is heavy**, it pictures **his heart** being filled with evil and injustice. **HaShem** was simply judging **Pharaoh** as someone who already had a **heavy**, or sinful **heart**.

In each of the three groupings, the first plagues (**the blood, the flies, and the hail**) came with a warning from **Moses** as **Pharaoh** went out in the morning to worship at **the Nile River**. **God** said: **Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water** to worship his gods. **Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake**. We need to remember that **Moses** went out to confront **Amenhotep II** who was one of the warrior kings and the most powerful man in the world at that time. **Then** say: **ADONAI, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let My people go, so that they may worship Me in the desert. But until now you have not listened. Moses** continued to challenge **Pharaoh** saying: **This is what ADONAI says: By this you will know that I am ADONAI. With the staff that is in My hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood (7:15-17)**. Why would **the LORD** have **Aaron** strike **the Nile** with **his staff** and turn it **into blood**? To **the Egyptians**, the god Hapi gave birth to **the Nile** and sustained it. He is pictured as a bearded man with female breasts and a pregnant stomach. **YHVH** confronted this false god and defeated it.

*There is a striking introversion here with the tenth plague. Here we see the waters **of the Nile changed into blood** - the symbol of death; while in the last plague there was actual blood-shedding, with the death of the firstborn. In addition, **the Israelites** would protect themselves on the Passover when they put **the blood** of a lamb on their doorframes.*

The Nile River was the lifeblood of **Egypt**, but it became death to **them**. What had been a blessing became a curse.¹¹⁰ **The fish in the Nile** died, **the river** stank and **the Egyptians** were **not able to drink its water (7:18)**. Some have attributed the plagues to some kind of natural phenomenon. Red silting of **the Nile** is indeed very common, but it never has brought about the widespread death of **fish** or created such a stench that it would seriously alter the life of **the Egyptians**. One wonders, if this was a purely natural event, why **Moses** would try to exploit it for **his** own purposes. Neither would a natural phenomenon explain the suddenness of the miracles, the starting of the plagues at the command of **Aaron** or **Moses**, the opposition and imitation from **the magicians of Egypt**, nor the exclusion of the Jewish area of Goshen from the effects of the plagues.

Many have attempted to explain the plagues of **Egypt** and the judgments of the Great Tribulation as totally natural phenomena. Their intent is to eliminate **God** from the equation, hence the need for repentance. However, it is important to understand that the miracles **God** performs are both **providential** and **creative**. Sometimes **the LORD** uses things that **He** has already created, like **blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, thunder, hail, fire** or **rain** in such a way (or combination, like a burning bush or hail mixed with **blood**) to make it a **providential** miracle (through the wisdom, care and guidance of **God**). In other miracles **He** creates something out of nothing, like matter (**Genesis 1:1**), wine (**John 2:1-11**), life (**Matthew 9:18-19, 23-25; Lk 7:11-15; Jn 11:1-44**), eyesight (**Matthew 9:27-31; John 9:1-32**), speech and hearing (**Mark 7:31-37**), or fish and bread (**John 6:5-13**). Those are **creative** miracles. But whether a **providential** miracle or a **creative** miracle, they are miracles of **God**!

Then **ADONAI** said to **Moses**, “**Tell your brother Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt - over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs’ - and they will turn into blood**”. For purposes of irrigation, canals were cut in various directions, and artificial pools were made to receive the waters of **the Nile** at its annual overflow.¹¹¹ The plagues were organized into three groups of three, with a climax at the end. In this first grouping, **Aaron** handled **the staff**. **Blood** was **everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars** where **water** was normally kept for daily use (**7:19**). Vessels of **wood** and **stone** are common expressions in the Bible for idolatry. These **wooden buckets** and **stone jars** that were used as offering bowls before the gods of **Egypt** also contained nothing but **blood**. **The rabbis teach that Aaron, and not Moses, was told to start the plague because the Nile had protected Moses when he was placed in its waters by his mother as child.**



Moses and Aaron did just as ADONAI had commanded. Then Aaron raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the flowing water was changed into blood (7:20). The entire plague account was a mere foreshadowing of the plagues that will strike the followers of Satan during the end times. It is also a model of judgment that will come upon all unbelievers. The first plague **in Egypt** is prominently repeated in the Great Tribulation. **Revelation: 8:3-4** describes the second trumpet judgment in that light (see the commentary on **Revelation, to see link click [Cx - The Second Trumpet: A Third of the Sea Turned Into Blood](#)**). The similarities between **Revelation** and the **Exodus** account are obvious. The only difference is the extent and intensity of the plagues in **Revelation**, which are so much greater. Thus, this episode in the TaNaKh is a mere foreshadowing of what will come upon unbelievers in the final days.¹¹²

The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt (7:21). The Egyptians, especially the priests, were very particular about washing **themselves** and there was nothing that **they** held in greater disgust than **blood**. **They** must have been beside **themselves** when **they** realized that **the river** they worshiped as a god had **changed to blood**, the very thing that disgusted **them**.¹¹³

But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by the power of Satan **in stagnant pools of water by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as ADONAI had said (7:22).** If it were merely a natural phenomenon, **Pharaoh** could have said, "But this happens all the time, **Moses!** Can't you do better than that?" But the fact that **the Egyptian magicians** had to appeal to **their secret arts** suggests that there was more than red sediment pouring into **the Nile**.¹¹⁴ *There is opposition from the magicians of Egypt in the first three plagues, but no opposition in the last six.* It is ironic that everyone was having trouble finding **drinking water**, and when they did find it, **the Egyptian** magicians seemingly turned it into **blood**. As if **they** needed

more **blood**. Probably turning **blood** into fresh **water** would have been more helpful, but **they** couldn't do that. **But** because **the Egyptian magicians** were able to counterfeit the miracle of turning **water into blood**, **Pharaoh** didn't believe **Moses and Aaron**. **Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even the miracle to heart (7:23)**. However, the confrontation with **Amenhotep II** was only beginning.

And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river. To supply their needs for clean **drinking water**, **the Egyptians** were forced to dig **along the Nile** because polluted waters would become safe for **drinking** only after being filtered through the sandy soil near **the river** bank.¹¹⁵ **Seven days passed after ADONAI struck the Nile (7:24-25). The plague of blood, unlike the remainder of the plagues, continued for seven days.** So **the Nile** was filled with **blood** for **seven days**. **Seven** is the number of completion in the Bible (see my commentary on **Genesis Ae - The Number Seven**), and that was the exact number of days **God** chose for **the blood** to be a sign of **His** complete victory over Hapi, the god of **the Nile**.

There was about eighty gods in **the Egyptian** pantheon. Some gods and goddesses had more than one function or area of responsibility. As a result, their religion was very complex and overlapping. The fertility of the land of **Egypt** depended upon the overflow of **the Nile** River to bring it both fertilizer and **water**. Therefore, this **river** was sacred to the god Osiris, whose all-seeing eye is found in many **Egyptian** paintings. Pagan rites were held every spring when **the river** brought life out of death. When **the water** was **turned into blood**, it brought death instead of life.¹¹⁶ This also assaulted Hapi (also called Apis), the spirit bull god of **the Nile**; Isis, goddess of the Nile; Khnum, the ram god, guardian of **the Nile**; Sepek, the god who was supposed to protect the crocodiles of **the Nile** who were dying and others.

Surely the pollution of **the Nile** would have taken on religious implications for the average **Egyptian**. Those who worshiped Neith, the eloquent warlike goddess who took a special interest in the *lates*, the largest **fish** to be found in **the Nile**, would have had second thoughts about the power of that goddess. Another god, Hathor, was supposed to have protected the *chromis*, a slightly smaller fish. Those **Egyptians** who depended heavily on fishing and on **the Nile** would have been greatly frustrated by a plague of this nature.

The first plague brought upon **Egypt** eloquently revealed the power of **God** and the impotence of **Egyptian** gods. For **the Egyptian** who wanted water for his cattle and for himself, it would have meant an exercise in deep frustration and despair. For the very religious **Egyptian** who faithfully sought the guidance and protection of the various gods



associated with **the Nile**, it must have raised serious questions about them. To **the Israelites** who witnessed this event, it was a reminder of the awesome power of **YHVH** who had chosen and blessed **them**. To us who are alive today and witness the idolatry of this present generation, this miracle is a reminder of the tremendous power of **God** who will not only bring blessing upon those who are faithful to **Him**, but will, with equal power, bring judgment and humiliation upon those who lift up their hand in rebellion against **ADONAI**.¹⁷