

Parashah 14

Va'era

וַאֲרָא

“I appeared”

Exodus 6:2 – 9:35

Torah Together



The next two *Torah* portions describe the battle that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob wages with the gods of Egypt through Moses and Aaron. God inflicts ten plagues on Egypt, each one more devastating than the one before it. When it's all over, Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt will be defeated and God's purposes will be accomplished.

Much insight can be gained by considering these events from God's perspective – what was He accomplishing by confronting Pharaoh and Egypt's gods in this way? And what can we learn about God from this story?

1. God promises deliverance - 6:2-12

a) In verses 2 - 8, God speaks very explicitly to Moses. How does He begin and end his statement? What is the essence of His speech to Moses? Is this a reprimand?

Scripture Link:
Genesis 17:1 records the first instance of the use of the term *El Shaddai* (or God Almighty) as a name or description of God. What was the subject of this passage and what events were transpiring?

b) God also points out to Moses that his ancestors did not know Him by the name YHWH but by El Shaddai. Why do you think this is significant?

The Name of God
From the last *Torah* portion, we know that God revealed His personal name to Moses whereas Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew Him only as El Shaddai, or “God Almighty.” Why do you think the actual name of God was used in the book of Genesis? (Hint: Who wrote Genesis?)

c) Did the Israelites believe Moses? Why? What was Moses' response when God instructed him to go to Pharaoh again? Why do you think Moses responded this way?

Why these genealogies?

It often seems that much of the Torah is taken up with long lists of names, detailing the relationships of individuals. This was a common practice among ancient cultures to provide an oral history of clans and tribes. Even today, they provide **context**, helping us understand the times and people involved in the historical events being described.

Scripture Link:

Genealogies often appear at seemingly random points in the *Torah*. However, they are all linked together in some way. As an example, you can find **Amminadab** (Aaron's father-in-law) mentioned several places, like **Numbers 1:7**.

God's Agenda

God's actions are usually efficient, accomplishing several goals at the same time. According to **Exodus 7:4-5**, what two major goals does God intend to achieve with His upcoming actions? Can you think of other actions by God that have accomplished several goals at the same time?

Scripture Link:

For the names of Pharaoh's magicians, see **2 Timothy 3:8**. Details such as this testify to the divine source of our Scriptures.

2. Family record of Moses and Aaron - 6:13-27

a) Why do you think God thought it important that this genealogy be inserted here? Why do you think it starts with Reuben? Why doesn't it include Jacob's other sons?

b) What are the names of the three clans that make up the tribe of Levi? What do you find interesting about the mother and father of Moses and Aaron?

c) Can you determine what tribe Aaron's wife is from?

3. Aaron and Moses meet Pharaoh again - 6:28 - 7:13

a) At this second meeting with Pharaoh, how does God handle Moses' 'faltering lips'?

b) In 7:1-5, God gives at least two reasons for His coming actions. What are they?

c) How old were Moses and Aaron at this time?

d) Who threw down the staff in front of Pharaoh? Describe what happened. How do you think this happened? What does this imply about the struggle with Pharaoh?

4. The plague of blood - 7:14-24

a) When Moses spoke God's words in verses 16-18 to Pharaoh, did he make God's position clear? Of what was He trying to convince Pharaoh?

b) Who struck the waters of the Nile and what happened? Were Pharaoh's magicians able to duplicate this miracle? What was Pharaoh's response?

5. The plague of frogs - 7:25 - 8:15

a) How much time passed between the first plague and this second plague?

b) Describe this plague that God inflicted on Egypt. Did He give Pharaoh advance warning? Were Pharaoh's magicians able to duplicate this miracle?

c) The Egyptians worshiped frogs as the god Hekt. How do you think this effected the people during this miracle?

d) How did Pharaoh respond to this plague? Why do you think he went back on his word?

Egypt's gods: Hapi

The Egyptians considered the Nile river "the giver of life to all men." They worshiped the god Hapi as the god of the Nile. By turning the water of the Nile into blood, God was showing His superiority over the pagan god Hapi.

Egypt's gods: Hekt

The Egyptian goddess Hekt, a fertility goddess, was represented as a woman with a frog's head. By producing an infestation of frogs, God showed that the goddess Hekt was not in control of fertility, even that of frogs. It must have been discouraging to see the symbol of their fertility goddess turned into reeking piles of dead frogs.

Egypt's gods: Geb

Geb was an Egyptian god of the earth and therefore reigned over the dust of the earth. Again, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses, YHWH, was able to make a laughingstock of an Egyptian god.

Egypt's gods: Khepri

Khepri was the Egyptian god of creation and rebirth. He was represented as a man with the head of a fly. Again, YHWH makes a nuisance out of an Egyptian god.

Egypt's gods: Hathor

Hathor, the Egyptian goddess of love and protection, was often depicted as a woman with a cow's head. This plague was a particular insult to Pharaoh as he believed that he had a special relationship with Hathor as the protector of Egypt.

6. The plague of gnats - 8:16-19

a) Who brought about this third plague on Egypt and how did he do it? The Egyptians worshiped Geb, god of the earth. Given the nature of gnats, how do you think the Egyptians felt about this plague?

b) Were Pharaoh's magicians able to duplicate this miracle? What was their conclusion? What was Pharaoh's response?

7. The plague of flies - 8:20-32

a) In what way was this fourth plague different from the previous plagues? What was God's point of this difference? (It would appear that Pharaoh's magicians had given up trying to duplicate God's miracles by this time.)

b) What was Pharaoh's initial response to this plague? What was Moses' objection to offering their sacrifice "here in the land"? Why do you think Pharaoh again went back on his word?

8. The plague on livestock - 9:1-7

a) Describe this fifth plague on the Egyptians. Which livestock was spared from this plague? What effect do you think this miracle had on the people of Egypt?

b) What was Pharaoh's response to this miracle?

9. The plague of boils - 9:8-12

a) Who performed this sixth miracle and how did he do it? From Pharaoh's perspective how was this miracle different than the others?

b) What was Pharaoh's response to this miracle?

10. The plague of hail - 9:13-35

a) Through Moses, God tells Pharaoh exactly what He intends to do and why. According to verse 16, why is God dealing with Egypt in this way?

b) Hail must have been a fairly rare occurrence in Egypt, as it still is today, and this was a record-breaking hail storm. Who sustained what kind of damage from this hailstorm and who was protected?

c) How was Pharaoh's response to this plague different than to the others? Do you think Pharaoh's confession was heartfelt? Did Moses think so?

d) After the hail stopped, what did Pharaoh and his officials do? What do you think their attitude toward God was at this time?

Egypt's gods: Im-Hotep or Isis

Im-Hotep was considered a god of healing and Isis was the goddess of medicine and peace. Certainly this plague showed both to be impotent in comparison to the God of the Israelites.

Egypt's gods: Nut

Nut, the Egyptian goddess of the sky, was also the mother of the sun god, Ra. She was supposed to protect the land from destruction which came down from the heavens and so was particularly responsible for not preventing this plague.

"I have raised you up . . . that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

Exodus 9:16

The Superiority of our God

In **Exodus 9:16**, God clearly sets Himself above both Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt. Through Moses, God tells Pharaoh that his very existence was a function of God's will and that God intends to use him so that "my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." It appears that Pharaoh had no concept of who he was dealing with. The very fact that we are studying this story, some 3500 years after it occurred, bears witness to the fact that God was successful – Pharaoh was indeed used so that God's name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Digging deeper

1. God had many things to demonstrate and teach through his dealings with Egypt. List some of the things God was trying to accomplish through His miracles. (Hint: One might be to demonstrate to Egypt that He was more powerful than their gods.)

2. There are many places in this parashah (as well as the previous one) where God talks of "hardening Pharaoh's heart." Sometimes it appears that God does this and other times that Pharaoh himself does it. Research "hard-heartedness" and see if you can determine what role God played and what role Pharaoh played in this. Does this contradict man's free will?

For further study, see

Haftarah : Ezekiel 28:25 – 29:21

Brit Hadashah : Romans 9:14-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1