

## The Plagues and the Egyptian Gods

by John Meakin (Sources: Steve Platt, *Equinox — The Ten Plagues of Egypt*; Barbara Watterson, *Gods of Ancient Egypt*.)

It was God's intention to execute judgment against the Egyptian gods (Ex 12:12) and, through the plagues and deliverance of the Israelites, teach the Egyptians that it was He who was the Lord (Ex 7:3–5). Egypt was arguably the most polytheistic nation of the ancient world, with more than 80 different gods being worshipped throughout the land. Even the Pharaohs themselves were considered gods, along with the sun, the bull, various fish, frogs, locusts and other insects — to name but a few.

Pharaoh's thinking and that of his entire nation was in gross error. The life of the nation was based on a vacuous and idolatrous allegiance to gods that were not gods. And each time Pharaoh hardened his heart, God sent a plague of devastation that struck right at the heart of Egypt's economy and its pantheon of gods. Each plague amply demonstrated the impotence of the Egyptian deities, exposing the emptiness of the people's idolatry and progressively destroying the nation — and along with it any remaining confidence in its gods.

Following are [sic — *is?*] a list of the plagues and the gods they would have affected.

**The plague of blood.** Turning the Nile into blood struck directly at all these gods: Khnum was the guardian of the Nile sources. Hapi was the spirit of the Nile, its dynamic essence was sometimes manifested in a crocodile, for whom hymns of adoration were composed. Osiris was the god of the underworld — the river Nile was considered his bloodstream. Sepek took the form of a crocodile. Neith was a warlike goddess who took special interest in the lates — the largest fish found in the Nile. Hathor was the god who protected the chromis — a smaller Nile fish.

**The plague of frogs:** “The frog (or toad) was deified in the goddess Heqt who assisted women in childbirth” (*NIV Study Bible* on Ex 8:2). The Egyptians deified frogs. They were sacred and could not be killed — a crime punishable by death. Yet the Egyptians were forced to tread on them and see them all die and rot.

**The plague of lice:** No direct god is likely involved with lice as far as we can ascertain. But the Egyptian priests were noted for their physical purity: they were circumcised; shaved their heads and bodies; washed frequently; dressed in beautiful linen robes. These priests controlled things politically, religiously and economically. Their performance would have been devastated because of this plague.

**The plague of flies:** The ichneuman fly deposits its eggs on other living things. It was regarded as a manifestation of the god Uatchit.

**The plague of cattle disease:** Hathor was the goddess of love, beauty and joy — and was represented by a cow. Memphis in Egypt was known for the worship of Ptah and its sacred animal — the sacred Apis bull. There was only one Apis bull at any one time, a firstborn animal (interestingly, this would have been a victim of the 10<sup>th</sup> plague). Mnevis, a sacred bull venerated at Heliopolis was associated with the god Ra. The god Khnum was represented as a ram.

**The plague of boils:** Sekhmet was a lion-headed goddess, supposed to have the power of both creating epidemics and ending them. The special priesthood devoted to her was called sunu. Serapis was the deity charged with the responsibility of healing. Imhotep was the god of medicine and guardian of the healing sciences.

**The plague of hail:** Nut was the sky goddess.

**The plague of locusts:** Isis and Seth had responsibilities relating to agricultural crops.

**The plague of darkness:** Ra was the sun god — one of Egypt’s greatest gods. His consistent provision of life-giving light and warmth every day without fail was venerated. Amun-Re, another sun god, was the chief deity of Thebes. In the New Kingdom period, this god was the Egyptian national god — part of an important triad of deities including his wife Mut and son Khons. Pharaoh was a “god” himself and considered the representative of Re.

Aten was a deified sun disc. Atum was the god of the setting sun depicted in human form. The snake and lion were sacred animals associated with him, and worshipped in lower Egypt at Heliopolis. Khepre, who appeared like a beetle, was a form of the sun god, Ra. Horus was the sun god symbolized by a winged sun disc, son of Isis and Osiris, but also son of Ra and his brother Seth. Harakhte, another form of the god Horus and identified with the sun, was venerated at Heliopolis and was represented by a hawk.

**Death of firstborn:** Min was the god of procreation and reproduction. Isis was the symbol of fertility or power to produce offspring. Hathor, goddess of love was one of seven deities who attended the birth of children. The Apis bull was a firstborn animal and greatly revered. Finally, if Pharaoh was considered a god, then the death of his firstborn was the death of the son of god!

Taken together, the 10 plagues provided a comprehensive rout of the Egyptian deities, striking directly at them, just as God had promised (Ex 12:12).