

# God Punishes Egypt



## SABBATH—JULY 19

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Exodus 7:8–15; Exodus 7:3, 13, 14, 22; Exodus 7:14–8:19; Exodus 8:20–9:12; Exodus 9:13–10:29.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go free, just as the LORD had said through [told to] Moses” (Exodus 9:35, ERV).



**Pharaoh doesn't want to let God's people go.**

**A FARMER** tried to get his donkey to move. But the donkey wouldn't budge. So, the farmer took a thick branch and smacked the donkey. Again, the farmer spoke to the donkey. Then the donkey started to move.

When someone asked the farmer why the farmer's plan worked, he answered, “First you need to get the animal's attention.”

This story helps us understand better Moses' experience with Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God gave Moses his orders. Then Moses went to Pharaoh with God's famous words, “shalach et ami,” which means “Let My people go!”

Pharaoh doesn't want to let God's people go. The Bible doesn't explain why Pharaoh refused. Yes, the Egyptians believed the Hebrews could join their enemies in a war, fight against them, and escape Egypt (read Exodus 1:10). At the same time, the Hebrews were the slaves of the Egyptians. As slaves, the Hebrews worked for free. Pharaoh didn't want to lose his slaves. So, God needed to get Pharaoh's attention first before He could get Pharaoh to change his mind about letting His people go free.

**THE LORD GOD AGAINST “THE GODS” OF EGYPT  
(Exodus 7:8–15)**

**What lessons can we learn from the first meeting between the God of the Hebrews and the gods of Egypt? Read Exodus 7:8–15 for the answer.**

The coming fights were going to be between the living God and the Egyptian “gods.” What made things worse was that Pharaoh believed he was one of those gods. The Lord didn’t just fight against the Egyptians, or even Egypt itself. The Lord fought against their gods. The Egyptians honored more than 1,500 male and female gods. The Bible tells us very clearly: “I will punish all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord” (Exodus 12:12, ICB). Later, when Israel hears the story again about how God saved them, Moses tells them, “The Egyptians were burying all their oldest sons. The LORD had struck them down. He had done it when he punished their gods” (Numbers 33:4, NIV).

We can see an example of how God punished their gods in the story of the stick that turned into a snake (Exodus 7:9–12). In Egypt, a cobra was a symbol of Wadjet, a female snake god. A cobra is a snake whose bite can kill a person. Wadjet controlled southern or Lower Egypt. The symbol of the cobra was in Pharaoh’s crown. The cobra was a sign of Pharaoh’s power and showed he was a god. That’s because the Egyptians believed that Wadjet would spit poison at Pharaoh’s enemies. The Egyptians also believed that the snake was holy. So, the snake would lead Pharaoh to the place where Egyptian kings went after they died.

Aaron’s stick became a snake and ate all the other snakes in front of Pharaoh. In this way, God showed His power over Egyptian magic. God beat the symbol of Pharaoh’s might. Not only that, Aaron and Moses held the snake in their hands (Exodus 7:12, 15). This first fight showed God’s power and control over Egypt. Moses had more power and control than did the “god” Pharaoh himself.

The ancient Egyptians also believed that another snake god, Nehebkau, was holy. So, the Egyptians worshiped him. Nehebkau’s name means “he who controls the spirits.” The Egyptians believed Nehebkau was very powerful because he swallowed seven cobras. So, when Aaron’s stick became a snake and swallowed all the other snakes, God showed the Egyptians that He, not their snake god, had all the power. After this powerful meeting, the Egyptians understood this message right away and very clearly.



**Aaron’s stick became a snake and ate all the other snakes in front of Pharaoh.**

**WHO MADE PHARAOH'S HEART STUBBORN?  
(Exodus 7:3, 13, 14, 22)**

**Read Exodus 7:3, 13, 14, 22. How do we understand these verses?**

Nine times in the book of Exodus, the Bible says that God makes Pharaoh's heart hard or stubborn (Exodus 4:21; Exodus 7:3; Exodus 9:12; Exodus 10:1, 20, 27; Exodus 11:10; Exodus 14:4, 8; also read Romans 9:17, 18). Another nine times we read in the Bible that Pharaoh made his own heart hard (Exodus 7:13, 14, 22; Exodus 8:15, 19, 32; Exodus 9:7, 34, 35).

So, who really made the king's heart hard: God or Pharaoh himself?

To answer this question, let's look at the story about God's ten punishments against Egypt. We read that in each of the first five punishments, Pharaoh caused his own heart to become hard. So, he started the problem. Then, starting with the 6th punishment, the Bible says that God made Pharaoh's heart hard (Exodus 9:12). What this information tells us is that God honored Pharaoh's decision and gave it more strength. That's exactly what God promised Moses He would do (Exodus 4:21).

In other words, God sent punishments to help Pharaoh stop sinning and to turn from the evil in his heart. God didn't put fresh evil in Pharaoh's heart. God allowed Pharaoh to do the evil that was in his heart already (read Romans 1:24–32).

So, God didn't remove Pharaoh's free choice. Pharaoh was free to decide to serve God or fight against Him. Pharaoh chose to fight against God.

The lessons from this story are plain. God gives us free choice. We can choose between right and wrong, good and evil, to obey or not to obey. Lucifer in heaven, Adam and Eve in Eden, Pharaoh in Egypt, and us today: God gives us all a choice. Wherever we live, we choose between life or death (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Here's a word picture to help us better understand this idea: imagine, in your mind, butter and clay in sunshine. The sun melts the butter but makes the clay hard. The heat of the sun is the same on both objects. But two different things happen. What happens depends on the material. With Pharaoh, his actions depended on his thoughts and feelings about God and His people.



**The sun melts the butter,  
but makes the clay hard.**

**THE FIRST THREE PUNISHMENTS (Exodus 7:14–8:19)**

God sends ten punishments to Egypt. For sure, these punishments made life terrible for the Egyptians. But the punishments were really against their gods. Each punishment hit at least one of these gods.

**What were the punishments? Read Exodus 7:14–8:19 for the answer.**

God told Moses that the talk with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, would be difficult (Exodus 7:14). But God wants to show Himself to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians. So, God decides to communicate with them in a way that they can understand. Also, the Hebrews will learn more about their God from His punishments against the Egyptians.

The first punishment is against Hapi. Hapi is the god of the Nile (Exodus 7:17–25). Life in Egypt depended on water from the Nile. Where there was water, there was life. Because water made life possible, the Egyptians invented Hapi and worshiped this god as the giver of life.

Of course, only the living God is the Giver of all life, including water and food (Genesis 1:1, 2, 20–22; Psalm 104:27, 28; Psalm 136:25; John 11:25; John 14:6). Changing water into blood is a symbol of changing life into death. Hapi couldn't give life or protect it. Only God can.

God gives Pharaoh another chance. This time, God fights against and punishes the female frog god, Heqet (Exodus 8:1–15). Then the Nile gives frogs, not life. The Egyptians fear and hate the frogs. The Egyptians want to get rid of them. The exact time when this punishment ends shows that God's power was the cause of the frogs.

The third punishment has the shortest explanation (Exodus 8:16–19). The type of insect meant here ("kin-nim" in the Hebrew language) is not clear. (Maybe they are gnats, mosquitoes, ticks, or lice.) The punishment was against the god Geb. Geb was the Egyptian god of the earth. Out of the dust, God brings insects. (The word "dust" helps us remember that God made the skies and the earth.) The insects cover the land. The Egyptian magicians can't do this miracle (that's because only God can make life). So, the magicians announce, " 'This is the finger of God' " (Exodus 8:19, NLV). That is, God's power was the cause of the insects. But Pharaoh refused to change his heart.



**God gives Pharaoh another chance. This time, God fights against and punishes the female frog god, Heqet.**

**FLIES, LIVESTOCK, AND BOILS (Exodus 8:20–9:12)**

**Read Exodus 8:20–9:12. This story shows us that God is very powerful. At the same time, what does this story teach us about our freedom to reject God?**

Uatchit was the Egyptian female god of flies. The god Khepri was in charge of the rising sun, life, and being born again on this earth after dying. The Lord defeated both of these “gods.” In the story in Exodus 8:20–9:12, God protected the Hebrews while the Egyptians suffered. From this time forward, none of God’s punishments bother the Hebrews anymore.

Again, God’s punishments were His way of letting Pharaoh, king of Egypt, know that “‘I, the LORD, am in this land’ ” (Exodus 8:22, ERV).

Pharaoh tried to bargain with God. Pharaoh was willing to allow Israel to worship their God and give offerings to Him. But the Israelites must not leave Egypt (Exodus 8:25). Moses couldn’t agree to this plan because the Egyptians thought animals were holy. If the Israelites killed these animals and gave them to God as an offering, the Egyptians would hurt the Hebrews. Also, God’s plan for His people didn’t include their staying in Egypt.

In the meantime, God’s next punishment (Exodus 9:1–7) falls on the livestock. Hathor was the Egyptian female god of love and protection. Hathor had the head of a cow. A bull god Apis also was very popular in Egypt. So, in the 5th punishment, God defeated important Egyptian gods when the livestock of the Egyptians died.

In the 6th punishment (Exodus 9:8–12), God completely defeats the female god Isis. Isis was the god of medicine, magic, and wisdom. God also defeated other Egyptian gods: Sekhmet and Imhotep. Sekhmet was the female god of war and disease. Imhotep was the god of medicine and healing. Sekhmet and Imhotep can’t protect the people who worship them. Now the magicians are so sick that they can’t appear in Pharaoh’s palace. The magicians are helpless to stop the God who made the skies and the earth.

For the first time in the story about the ten punishments, a verse says that “the LORD made Pharaoh stubborn” (Exodus 9:12, NIV). As we already saw, these words show us that the Lord will respect our decisions. He will allow us to suffer when we choose to reject Him.



**So, in the 5th punishment, God defeated important Egyptian gods when the livestock of the Egyptians died.**

**FROZEN RAIN, MORE INSECTS, AND NO LIGHT  
(Exodus 9:13–10:29)**

**Are God's punishments against the Egyptian gods a success? Do they cause Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to change his mind? Read Exodus 9:13–10:29 for the answers.**

Nut was the Egyptian female god of the skies. The Egyptians often painted pictures of Nut that showed her in control of everything that happened under the sky and on the earth. Osiris was the god of crops and having babies. In the Bible, hail or frozen rain is often a punishment from God (Isaiah 28:2, 17; Ezekiel 13:11–13). During this punishment, the Egyptians who hide their property in a safe shelter will be protected (Exodus 9:20, 21). Everyone is now given a test: will they, or will they not, believe God's Word and obey the warning?

God says that His reason for letting Pharaoh live is so that the whole earth will know Him (Exodus 9:16). The king of Egypt now confesses that he sinned. But later, he changes his mind.

Seth was the Egyptian god of storms, war, disagreements, and disease. Seth and Isis were the gods of farming. Shu was a god of the air. Serapis was the female god of making babies, healing, and the afterlife. None of the Egyptian gods can stop God's punishments (Exodus 10:4–20) because statues have no power (Isaiah 44:9, 10, 12–17).

Pharaoh's servants ask him to let Israel go. But again Pharaoh refuses. Pharaoh tries to make a deal with Moses. But Moses rejects Pharaoh's offer because he won't let the Hebrew women and children join the men in the desert. Women and children are an important part of worship.

Finally, Ra was the top Egyptian god. As we saw already, Ra was the sun god. Thoth was a moon god. But Ra and Thoth can't give light. Pharaoh again tries to make a deal with Moses. But Moses refuses to accept this bargain. Then darkness falls on Egypt for three days. But there was light where the Israelites lived. The separation between the Israelites and the Hebrews is powerful.

Pharaoh refused to feel sorry about his sins. The Lord gave Pharaoh very powerful proof that He was God. Pharaoh's own servants asked him, " 'How long will this man [Moses] make trouble for us? Let the Israelite men go to worship the Lord their God. Don't you know that Egypt is ruined?' " (Exodus 10:7, ICB). But Pharaoh refused to obey God and let His people go.



**Then darkness falls  
on Egypt for three days.  
But there was light  
where the Israelites lived.**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Plagues of Egypt,” pages 265–272, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“God allowed His people to see that the Egyptians were very mean and nasty. Then His people wouldn’t want to worship their gods. The Lord showed how much He hated the worship of false gods. The Lord punished Pharaoh for hurting His people and for refusing to be kind and fair to them. . . . God didn’t work a special miracle to make the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, hard. God gave Pharaoh powerful proof of His strength. But the king was stubborn. He refused to obey God’s truth. Every time Pharaoh rejected God’s truth, he grew more stubborn. Then Pharaoh wanted to fight against God more. Pharaoh rejected the first miracle. That choice caused terrible things to happen to Pharaoh in the end.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 268, adapted.



**“Every time Pharaoh rejected God’s truth, he grew more stubborn.”**

“The Egyptians prayed to the sun and the moon. When God caused the sky over Egypt to become dark, the people and their gods alike suffered. God came to help the people that the Egyptians made their slaves. The punishment was scary. But the punishment also shows God’s forgiveness and love. God didn’t want to destroy the people of Egypt. God gave the Egyptians time to confess their sins before He sent them the final and most terrible punishment.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 272, adapted.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more about why Pharaoh made his heart so hard against God. Pharaoh saw proof that letting God’s people go was the correct choice. But he refused to let them go. How can someone be so foolish? What does Pharaoh’s story teach us about lying to ourselves? What other people in the Bible made the same bad decisions? Think, for example, of Judas.
- ② When Pharaoh sees the disaster that his evil choices brought on Egypt, he confesses, “ ‘This time I have sinned. The LORD is right, and I and my people are wrong’ ” (Exodus 9:27, ERV). At the time, this announcement seems very powerful. But how do we know that Pharaoh didn’t really mean what he said?

## JESUS SEES OUR TEARS

No Christians lived in Kokila's town. So, the townspeople got angry when Kokila's father and four other families decided to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Kokila was 9. Her father's decision changed her life forever.

Kokila's mother died when Kokila was a baby. Kokila lived with her father, four older sisters, and an older brother in southern Asia.

Father was a farmer. He was very poor. The town leaders didn't let Father work in the field after he started to keep the Sabbath. The town leaders also refused to let father and the other Sabbath-keepers buy food from the stores.

Also, the town leaders made a rule. Anyone who spoke to the Sabbath-keepers must pay a lot of money as punishment. No one wanted to pay the money. So, Kokila's neighbors refused to talk to her and her family. Kokila had many friends. She lost them all.

The neighbors tried to force Kokila's family to give up their faith. The neighbors entered Kokila's home. They took the furniture, clothes, and dishes outside. They dumped everything on the street. Then the neighbors beat her father and brother. But Kokila's father refused to give up his faith.

One neighbor was kind during that terrible time. The neighbor wasn't a Christian. But he wasn't a member of the same big worldwide religion as all of the townspeople either. This neighbor helped Kokila's family to buy rice. He talked to Kokila. He was happy to pay the money for breaking the town rules.

For seven years, Kokila lived in danger. Three of the families who accepted the Sabbath left the church. Only two of the five families stayed loyal to God. One of those families was Kokila's family.

Kokila didn't complain. But she cried a lot. Father saw her tears. So, he decided to send Kokila to a Seventh-day Adventist school away from home. Kokila went to live there as a student. The school was the same as a heaven on earth for the girl.

Today, Kokila is 39. She works as a secretary at the school. The name of the school is E. D. Thomas Memorial Higher Secondary School, in Thanjavur, India.

Kokila remembers her happy time there as a student. She said, "The teachers talked to me! The children talked to me! It was so nice to have friends again."

*Thank you for your 13th Sabbath offerings. Your offerings support Seventh-day Adventist schools worldwide. E. D. Thomas Memorial Higher Secondary School got part of a 13th Sabbath Offering in 2020.*

INSIDE  
*Story*  
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**The neighbors dumped everything on the street.**



**Kokila**