

Homework August 3rd, 2013

The homework is divided into multiple parts
One part is less difficult. One part is more difficult.

Less Difficult

We will answer the questions we didn't get to last meeting in the "less difficult" section.
For this week, here are the additional questions.

1. What are the names of all of Aaron's sons?
2. How old was Moses when he first spoke to Pharaoh?
3. Aaron turned his rod into a serpent before Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's magicians did likewise, but what happened to their serpents?
4. What was Pharaoh's reaction when his magicians imitated the plague of turning the water into blood?
5. How did the Egyptians go about getting clean water?

More Difficult

In last meetings homework, we wanted to explore the "hardening" issue as mentioned in 4:21.
For this week, I would like to expand that discussion.

Below, I have a text which contains some Discussion Points (3) and (3) questions.

Please read the below section as preparation for the discussion and questions.

The Exodus story is one of the longest continuous narratives in the Old Testament. A large part of this lengthy story comprises a series of encounters where Yahweh sends 10 increasingly destructive plagues upon Egypt. These plagues are accompanied by demands from Yahweh to Pharaoh to "send/release my people that they may serve me".

However, although later plagues are big and indeed unique, the series commences with signs given by Yahweh to Moses and Aaron which the magicians of Egypt can copy. As a result, Pharaoh is not particularly interested in listening to them which raises questions as to the reasons for such a commencement. At one point Yahweh comments that he could destroy the Egyptians with a plague presumably with the result that Israel could have them left unhindered. However, He has not done this for His own reasons. (9:15-16)

Question: What might those reasons be?

Meanwhile, there is no suggestion that Israel, present only in the narrative from 6:9-11:10 as the object of Yahweh and Pharaoh's interaction, are doing anything other than working in the brick kilns, making bricks without straw. If Israel is to be freed, freeing them as quickly and painlessly as possible does not appear to be Yahweh's aim.

Question: What might be His reasoning to not free them quickly and painlessly?

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The plagues increase in their power, bringing destruction to the fertile land; suffering; the death of animals; illness; and finally death.

Discussion: Discuss God's choice of death and destruction as His means of getting glory over Pharaoh (14:4).

Question: How does this fit with the whole of Scriptures' picture of God?

Moving forward, when we reach 11:10 at the end of the first nine plagues, we find Israel, Pharaoh, and Egypt still seemingly in the same position as at the start.

There is a section about the plagues, I'll call it the plagues narrative, which for a large part of it is not concerned with the phenomena of the plagues, but rather with the interaction or encounters between Yahweh and Pharaoh of which the plagues form a part. Yahweh demands that Pharaoh send the people of Israel away, rather than just taking them Himself. Such a demand introduces most of the encounters and the plagues are related to Pharaoh's lack of response to this demand. To be clear, for each of the plagues before the firstborn, Pharaoh's response is to refuse to send Israel away.

At the end of each plague Pharaoh's response is explained by a narratorial comment on the hardness of his heart. Towards the end of the plagues this hardening is explicitly ascribed to Yahweh. Thus He appears to be preventing Pharaoh from obeying His commands, exacerbating the length of the interaction and the effect of the plagues, both in terms of their number and power. Moreover, Yahweh tells Moses in advance of these encounters that he is going to harden Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3), raising the question of why Yahweh would make such demands to Pharaoh at all.

Thus, the question of why Yahweh would lengthen the plagues is aggravated by the question of why he would make a demand and then work against that demand by hardening Pharaoh.

Discussion: Concerning 'free will' (which we may need to define), is Pharaoh portrayed as a 'puppet' or a 'robot', reducing him to just a "No Man" (opposite of a 'Yes Man') for Yahweh to manipulate?

If one were to use the English (KJV) and search for 'harden' and 'hardened', one would get 19 hits in Exodus. These 19 occurrences are translated from 3 different Hebrew words.

Discussion: What does each Hebrew word bring to the table as we attempt to understand the plan of Yahweh in "First: Commanding"; "Second: Preventing"; and "Third: Bringing about as much destruction as was probably possible to Egypt (in its entirety).