

The OVERLOOKED Plague

That Ninth Plague, occurring just before the Deaths of Egypt's Firstborn of both man and beast, contains Details Essential to the Exodus Narrative.

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A very common misconception permeates religious communities in their perceptions of events relating to the timing and conduct of the Exodus of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The greater segment holds that both the Passing-Over and the Exodus were accomplished **within the same eleven hours** of darkness in the middle of the first month of the Hebrew Calendar. In other words, that both events occurred within the same night.

Now, to accommodate this position, it's necessary to hold that the original Passover evening in Egypt had to have been observed (eaten at least) **after** the fourteenth day had actually ended (at sunset). This is very important, as there's no-one who advocates that the Exodus was underway in the night portion of the fourteenth day. Despite a clear Scripture that indicates the two events were separated by a full day, there are still many who align with the prevailing Jewish position, placing both within the same evening, that of the fifteenth, with the Passover meal being eaten prior to midnight and the Exodus beginning immediately thereafter.

Two other 'problem areas' that need to be dealt with relative to this are: **1)** the command by Moses for all to remain in their homes until morning and to burn any remains of their Paschal meal in the morning, (which would have them still there in the morning, which a Scripture states that they did do), and **2)** for Israel to have 'spoiled the Egyptians' prior to observing the Passover. The '*remain inside until morning*' instruction is resolved and dismissed in the minds of many by declaring that after midnight is the start of 'morning' as in on **our** method of time reckoning, (though not theirs') thus they were free to leave as soon as the Passing Over (at midnight) had occurred. But if this actually were the case, why would it have been necessary to even issue and preserve such an instruction? It would have meant nothing, as there was practically no restriction involved at all.

Despite a few 'knotty little problems', such as how long it would have taken Pharaoh to take-in reports of and fathom the scale of Egypt's 'firstborn deaths disaster' and to contact Moses and Aaron, informing them of his change of mind and issuing their release, (also notifying all of his army of his new decision so they would respond properly (urging them to leave as opposed to preventing them from leaving)).

Another consideration lightly considered is their having to round up all their animals and to pack all their belongings in the dark (keep in mind, they *began* the evening with clear understanding that they weren't going anywhere, (as did Egypt's army!)) (Those who lived in tents couldn't have pre-packed their tents, as some suppose, as they were still in them keeping the Passover that evening!) So, all of this would have to have been done in darkness! Then, how long would it have taken to get the word out to all of Israel's millions ¹ that Pharaoh had changed his mind and for them to burn the remains of their Passover meals? (This wasn't a mere formality, there was an important reason for doing this.) Then, how long would it have taken to mass-organize all of them for the orderly Exodus that chapter 13:18 indicates?

Genesis 15:14 Fulfilled

But it's the spoiling of the Egyptians that poses the greatest challenge to the 'same night' advocates' theory. In the wilderness, the massive outpouring of treasure from all the people, when it came time to build the tabernacle, attests to the scale of that spoiling. IF they left Egypt in the same night as they ate the Passover, then the spoiling would have to have been accomplished at least the day before. But, there's a significant problem with that!

¹ See my article "*The Passover of the Exodus*" for the text-evidence which reveals how large the population was.

When the Lights Went Out!

It's in its proper time-setting that the **ninth plague** presents its additional significance. Had it been any one of the other plagues, we wouldn't have the temporal significance that this one poses, as with it, all activity ceased for a specific period of time. (We should perhaps also give pause to consider the similar three hour interval of darkness that immediately preceded the death of God's Firstborn!) In the case of this plague, we are given its exact duration. That **duration** is also not without significance. We are also given evidence of its onset in Exodus 10:23, which indicates that all activity ceased, every Egyptian staying put, unable to see anything at all for three days. Had this begun during the night, who would have known of its beginning? Egyptians didn't wake up in the morning into darkness over their lands, it began during the day! So we're able to deduce from how Moses worded it that it began in the daylight hours, and thus would have ended at the corresponding time of day, three days later.

Here's the Exodus narrative regarding this plague: 10:21 *"And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, **even darkness which may be felt.** 22: And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: 23: They **saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.** 24: And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you. 25: And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. 26: Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither.*

27: *But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. [(Moses said) all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that **I will go out.**] 28: And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die. 29: And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more. [And he went out from Pharaoh*

in a great anger.]

(Most are aware that the Book of Exodus is not strictly chronological. It's apparently compiled of two major sources, with possibly a third minor source. The 'compilation' of these writings is what accounts for its being broken with regard to its chronological flow. For example, chapter 12 was spoken well in advance of the tenth of the month, yet chapter 11 describes what is to be done, being spoken right at the onset of the fourteenth day. Chapter 11 is the LORD speaking to Moses, but verse 8 alone is Moses speaking to Pharaoh and belongs back with, and describes the same incident as, verse 28 of chapter 10, which is here harmonized into the narrative at the bottom of the previous column, offset by brackets.)

But, **when** did the ninth plague occur, and we need to ask this question with the related question in mind of when did Israel spoil the Egyptians? One thing for sure, Israel did not spoil the Egyptians during this interval of intense darkness, a darkness that could be felt, a darkness in which no one moved about, an unusual kind of darkness in which lamps did not throw light, except within Israel's dwellings! Had the spoiling happened within the three days of darkness, they couldn't have located their treasures, likely kept safely in hidden places, let alone know what it was they were giving them! It isn't that Israelites could see but the Egyptians couldn't, the Israelites could see only within the confines of their dwellings!

Another thing we should note is the rapid fire occurrences of each of the plagues. There weren't days in between each of them. They were pretty much back to back, one day to the next, especially the final three: the locusts, the darkness and the passing-over or the deaths of the firstborn.

A couple of other incidents that bracket the scene are Pharaoh's question, seeing the Israelites out in the pastures selecting their Paschal lambs on the tenth of the month. The other is that Pharaoh didn't summon Moses within the three days of darkness.

Regarding the first incident, we see Pharaoh making a very curious statement, one that seems to reflect what the Israelites were doing on the morning of the tenth day. In 10:16-17 he makes this statement: *"Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, **I have sinned against the LORD***

your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only.” This is unlike his responses to other plagues. Here, during the eighth plague, Pharaoh admitted to his *personal* sin, asks forgiveness of it and acknowledges that the penalty for that sin is his personal death! Much in keeping with the theme of what Israel was doing when selecting their Paschal lambs. Did Pharaoh ask what they were doing with so many men out in the fields selecting out certain lambs, (this was very unusual) and did he get a true answer? Did he get word that this activity related to coming human deaths? Israel knew what they were doing, and the importance of it. Did they advise their neighbors, and could the situation have been reported to Pharaoh? Did he entertain a premonition from this that the next thing to come was his personal death for defying God? I pose this to suggest that we have an allusion to the activities of the children of Israel the morning of the tenth day hidden within Pharaoh’s anxious plea. In other words, it suggests that the eighth plague was underway on the ninth to tenth days of the first month. But even if not, we are still locked-into the timeline imposed by their having to select their lambs on the tenth day.

When Lambs were Selected

Now, we also should ask ourselves why it was that God instructed Israel to select out their lambs specifically on the tenth? What would it matter if they were to do so a day or two later? Another instruction with regard to their ‘keeping them’ for three days is also relevant. God told them to slay them on the fourteenth day, and to roast them **whole**, uncut, with their entrails within. (12:9) Any hunter or survivalist is aware that to cook an animal in this manner would result in the intestines bursting, contaminating the meat. But if the animal were to fast for three days, being given only water, it would allow time for the animal to be cleaned out and that wouldn’t happen. Their selected animals were taken in and isolated from the flocks, likely kept within the open courtyards of their dwellings, where, in that climate, cooking was typically done, and provided time for this fast to happen. Also, something we should consider: Is the three-plus day interval between selection and slaying in any way related to the three days of darkness?

If it’s not, then we have a problem: Simply because Israel could not have selected their lambs or kids of the goats out in the fields **during** the plague of darkness over the land. It doesn’t say that Israel’s fields had light, only that their dwellings did, and considering that Israel-in-servitude lived among other servant ethnicities, that same darkness must have affected their locales! The light ‘*in their dwellings*’ was limited to the interiors. Israel too sat quiet during this interval, with all work in the land suspended, allowing them time to rest up for the exodus to soon come.

If we are to place the plague of darkness, it very conveniently fits within the timeframe of the selection of the lambs and the Passover. The darkness likely began in the early afternoon of the tenth and extended to the early afternoon of the thirteenth. This helps explain the necessity of selecting their lambs when they were told to select them. Moses wasn’t summoned to see Pharaoh for their ‘final’ face-to-face during the darkness period, it was immediately **after** it. With light restored mid day, Israel could then begin to prepare for the Passover.

What we need to come to grips with is the simple fact that IF we assign the three days of darkness to any other interval, we must push it back to before the tenth, as it would have to be over with to allow Israel to go out into the pasturelands and select out the appropriate animals. The three days of darkness had to be either fully before the tenth day lamb selection period or after it. The picture we get from the Exodus narrative is that the tenth plague was close behind the ninth, not with half a week or more lapse in between.

But where this consideration is particularly useful is in revealing that Israel could **not** have spoiled the Egyptians on the scale that they did prior to the Passover. Further evidence is in the Egyptian reaction in chapter 12:33 (“...*We be all dead men*”) suggests that the spoiling took place **after** so many (perhaps a fifth of Egypt’s population) had died being ‘firstborn’. Granted, they were instructed that they were to spoil the Egyptians long prior, just as they were instructed about the Passover before it happened, (for that matter, there was an four-centuries old Abrahamic prophecy about their doing this) they were instructed about the spoiling well in advance also. The “now” in 11:2 refers to when Moses gave the instruction, not necessarily when they carried

out the spoiling. Verse 3 suggests what Moses predicted in verse 8, that Pharaoh's court servants would find themselves capitulating (even bowing) before Moses, as Pharaoh himself did, apparently. (Keep in mind the many chronology shifts of the book of Exodus.)

Chapter 12's Account

Exodus 12:31 *“And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. 32: Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also. 33: And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. 34: And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading-troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. 35: And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: 36: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.*

Even though this passage is chronologically mixed also (mentioning their exodus before the spoiling) it at least indicates that the spoiling took place after the Passover and after the tenth plague's devastation.

Did They Meet One Final Time?

Another 'problem area' with same night advocates is the **time** it would have consumed for Pharaoh to have sent servants to summon Moses and Aaron to him. Moses lived among the people, in Avaris, on the opposite bank of the Pelusiac Branch of the Nile. First, Pharaoh would have to receive reports of the magnitude of the disaster, he then would have to send servants by boat across the river to locate Moses, then Moses and Aaron would have to have returned with them by boat and be ushered into the palace. Then, they would have returned to the opposite side again and begun the notification process. All of this would have taken time. Perhaps an hour or two, time which same night advocates can't afford to see lost. So the explanation is posed that, on the strength of both men's hasty and angry utterances toward each other, (Ex. 10:28 & 11:8) that

Pharaoh only sent messengers. (Thus saving considerable time.) Allowing a 'next night' Exodus relieves this concern somewhat. I say somewhat because it's still an astounding feat that such a huge population could assemble and leave in an orderly manner, with thousands of animals, even in some 30 hours between an 'early fourteenth' Passover and dawn on the fifteenth. (My paper on the Exodus describes the population projections of the children of Israel and the logistical dynamics of the Exodus.) What is most remarkable, on the magnitude of **miraculous**, is that three million people and livestock, could assemble and leave their home city in such a short period as 30 hours, let alone in just the proposed five or six!

Another comment that should give pause to 'same night' advocates is that the Egyptians watched Israel leave *as they were burying their dead*. (Num. 33:3-4) To suggest that Egypt would be involved in burying their dead during the same night as their decease, before sunrise, or very shortly thereafter, is also preposterous. The same passage states that the Exodus was on the morrow after the Passover, not in the morrow of the Passover! (the fourteenth)

A Noted Anniversary

The ninth plague offers insight into the primary question here, as to when the Passover was observed originally and when the Exodus was underway. The 'selfsame day' mentioned in Exodus 12:42, which some regard as saying the two events occurred within the same night, refers instead to the *'night to be much observed'* that we read about in Genesis 15:4-18. The Exodus began on the exact anniversary of the Abrahamic Covenant, made 430 years before, after sunset, beginning the fifteenth day of the first month. The Exodus was on the selfsame day as that.

But, the ninth plague, when properly placed chronologically, shows that Israel did not spoil the Egyptians prior to the Passover, and thus, there was a day between it and the Exodus. (Num. 33:3-4) 

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