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BIBLE STUDY • THEOLOGY • FORMATION



MOSES SERIES

Part Nine of Thirty

The Ten Plagues - Part One

A deeper study guide for Exodus 7:14-9:12: God versus the gods of Egypt, the first six plagues, the magicians, Goshen, judicial hardening, and the theological pattern behind the plagues.

"On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD."

Exodus chapter twelve, verse twelve

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How to Use This Study Guide

This companion guide takes Part Nine deeper than the article itself. The article introduces the first six plagues; this study guide slows down over Egyptian theology, literary structure, Hebrew word studies, natural science questions, Christological echoes, critical thinking, journalling, and practical discipleship. Use it as a printable workbook, a small-group guide, or a deeper self-paced study alongside the Moses Series.

STUDY RHYTHM

Recommended rhythm

1. Read Exodus 7:14-9:12 straight through before studying individual plagues.
2. Mark the repeated patterns: warning, sign, plague, Pharaoh response, hardening.
3. Track which Egyptian domain is being challenged in each plague.
4. Notice the magicians: what they can copy, what they cannot remove, and when they finally confess limitation.
5. Finish with the self-quiz and word finder to reinforce key terms.

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1. Biblical Text and Learning Objectives

Read first

- Exodus 7:14-9:12
- Exodus 12:12
- Numbers 33:4
- Psalm 78:43-51
- Psalm 105:26-36
- Optional: John 2:1-11; Luke 11:20; Exodus 31:18; Revelation 16; 2 Timothy 3:8-9

By the end of this guide, you should be able to:

- ☐ Explain why the plagues are not merely natural disasters but judgments on the gods of Egypt.
- ☐ Describe the 3-3-3-1 literary structure and why it matters for reading Exodus.
- ☐ Summarise the role of the Egyptian magicians and what their failure reveals.
- ☐ Identify the Egyptian deities or domains targeted in the first six plagues.
- ☐ Explain how the Goshen distinction functions as a visible act of covenant separation.
- ☐ Discuss the relationship between natural mechanisms and miracle in the plague narratives.
- ☐ Describe the transition from Pharaoh's self-hardening to judicial hardening.
- ☐ Trace major New Testament echoes: Cana, the finger of God, Revelation, and the defeat of counterfeit spiritual authority.

THE BIG IDEA

Key thesis of Part Nine

The first six plagues are a precision theological demolition of Egypt's religious system. YHWH is not randomly attacking Egypt; He is exposing every domain Egypt assigned to its gods - the Nile, fertility, earth, insects, livestock, healing, and human bodies - as subject to His authority alone.

2. Part Nine at a Glance

Part Nine covers the first six plagues: blood, frogs, gnats, flies/swarms, livestock death, and boils. The movement is cumulative: the Nile is struck, the house is invaded, the earth becomes hostile, Goshen is set apart, sacred animals die, and the magicians are silenced.

Plague	Text	Targeted Domain	Key theological shift
Blood	Exodus 7:14-25	Nile / Hapi, Khnum, Osiris	Egypt's source of life becomes judgment.

Frogs	Exodus 8:1-15	Fertility / Heqet	Sacred fertility symbol becomes infestation.
Gnats	Exodus 8:16-19	Earth / Geb	Magicians confess: this is the finger of God.
Flies	Exodus 8:20-32	Sacred insects / Khepri	Goshen distinction first appears.
Livestock	Exodus 9:1-7	Cattle / Hathor, Apis, Mnevis	Pharaoh verifies evidence and still hardens.
Boils	Exodus 9:8-12	Healing / Sekhmet, Thoth, Isis	Magicians cannot stand; judicial hardening begins.

3. What the Plagues Actually Are

Exodus gives us its own interpretive key: “on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments.” The plagues are not only events; they are verdicts. They expose the failure of the gods Egypt trusted to sustain creation, fertility, agriculture, health, and life itself.

Two levels of reading

- The natural/historical level asks what happened: red water, frogs, insects, disease, livestock death, boils.
- The theological/polemical level asks what claim was being dismantled: who supposedly ruled this domain, and what did YHWH prove?
- The narrative requires both levels. A natural mechanism does not cancel a miracle if timing, scope, targeting, and theological meaning are under divine control.
- The plagues are public education: Egypt learns who YHWH is; Israel learns who their God is and what He owns.

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

Egyptian religion as an operating system

Egyptian religion was not a private hobby added to public life. It organised kingship, agriculture, medicine, funerary practice, law, architecture, fertility, and social order. To strike Egypt’s gods was to strike the system that made Pharaoh’s empire intelligible.

1. Why is it insufficient to call the plagues “natural disasters”?

2. How does Exodus 12:12 change the way you read all ten plagues?

4. The 3-3-3-1 Literary Structure

The plague narrative is tightly structured. The pattern is not accidental; it controls pacing, escalation, and theological emphasis.

Group	Pattern	Meaning
1: Blood, Frogs, Gnats	Morning confrontation for	Egyptian ritual power

	first; no warning for third; magicians fail at third.	fractures.
2: Flies, Livestock, Boils	Morning confrontation for fourth; no warning for sixth; Goshen distinction appears.	Israel is visibly set apart; magicians are silenced.
3: Hail, Locusts, Darkness	Morning confrontation for seventh; no warning for ninth; Pharaoh's court begins cracking.	Pressure moves toward the final plague.
10: Firstborn	Stands alone with Passover instruction.	Judgment and mercy meet through blood.

3. How does the literary structure help you see that Exodus is carefully composed theology, not a random list of disasters?

4. Why might every third plague arriving without warning matter spiritually?

5. The Magicians of Egypt

The magicians are not comic villains. They are trained religious professionals - sacred scribes and ritual specialists - whose defeat becomes a miniature version of Egypt's defeat. Their story is about the exposure of counterfeit power.

What they can and cannot do

- They can replicate the staff-serpent, water-to-blood, and frogs.
- They cannot remove a plague; they can only add to the disaster.
- They cannot create gnats from dust and confess, "This is the finger of God."
- By the boils, they cannot even stand before Moses.
- After Plague Six, they disappear from the narrative.

DISCERNMENT

Counterfeit power has a ceiling

The magicians can imitate signs, but they cannot redeem. They can copy the form of judgment, but they cannot reverse it. This is the biblical pattern of counterfeit spiritual

authority: impressive for a time, exposed at the limit.

5. What is the difference between replicating a sign and possessing true divine authority?

6. Why is the magicians' confession more honest than Pharaoh's response?

6. Plague One: Blood and the Nile Gods

The Nile was Egypt's life-source and a sacred theological reality. By turning the Nile to blood, YHWH strikes the domain of Hapi, Khnum, and Osiris. The river that sustained life becomes a sign of death and judgment.

- Hapi: associated with the Nile inundation and agricultural fertility.
- Khnum: ram-headed guardian of the Nile's source and creator figure.
- Osiris: associated with death, resurrection, and in some Egyptian imagination, the life-giving Nile.
- Pharaoh is confronted at the water, likely in connection with a dawn ritual or royal act of homage.

SCIENCE AND MIRACLE

Natural mechanism and miracle

A toxic red algae or cyanobacteria bloom can explain red water, fish death, and foul smell at the natural level. But Exodus is not merely describing an ecological accident. The timing, scope, prophetic announcement, and theological interpretation identify the event as YHWH's directed judgment.

7. How does Plague One answer Pharaoh's "I do not know YHWH"?

8. Why does it matter that Jesus' first sign in John turns water into wine rather than water into blood?

7. Plague Two: Frogs and Heqet

Frogs were associated with Heqet, the frog-headed goddess of fertility, childbirth, and new life. YHWH turns a symbol of life and protection into a plague that invades every private space.

- The plague enters ovens, kneading bowls, bedrooms, and Pharaoh's bed.
- No part of Egypt - not even royal privacy - is outside YHWH's reach.
- Pharaoh asks for relief but chooses "tomorrow," one more night with the frogs.

- The hardened heart often prefers manageable misery to immediate surrender.

PASTORAL INSIGHT**The strange psychology of “tomorrow”**

Pharaoh’s “tomorrow” is one of the most revealing details in the plague narrative. He wants relief, but not immediate surrender. He wants the suffering reduced on his own timetable rather than bowing now. This is not courage. It is delayed obedience disguised as control.

- 9.** Where do you see the “tomorrow” instinct in human nature?

- 10.** Why might God let Pharaoh name the time of the frogs’ removal?

8. Plague Three: Gnats and the Finger of God

When Aaron strikes the dust and it becomes gnats or lice, Geb’s domain - the earth itself - is turned against Egypt. The ground they stand on becomes hostile.

- Kinim is difficult to translate precisely: gnats, lice, mosquitoes, or biting insects are all possible.
- This is the first plague with no prior warning.
- The magicians cannot replicate it.
- Their confession, etzba Elohim hi - “This is the finger of God” - is professional acknowledgement, not full conversion.
- Jesus uses the same phrase in Luke 11:20 in connection with His exorcisms.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**Finger of God: Exodus, Law, and Kingdom**

The same phrase connects three major biblical moments: the gnats from Egyptian dust, the commandments written with the finger of God, and Jesus casting out demons by the finger of God. Creation, covenant, and kingdom are all under the same divine agency.

- 11.** Why is the magicians’ confession significant even though it is not conversion?

12. How does Luke 11:20 deepen the meaning of Exodus 8:19?

9. Plagues Four to Six: Goshen, Livestock, Boils

Plague Four: Flies/Swarms and the Goshen Distinction

With Plague Four, the visible distinction between Egypt and Goshen appears. The Hebrew word for division, *peduth*, is connected to redemption language. The boundary is not only geographical; it is covenantal.

- Khepri and sacred insect imagery are inverted into infestation.
- Goshen is set apart so Egypt may know YHWH is in the midst of the earth.
- Pharaoh begins to negotiate: sacrifice here in the land.
- Moses refuses because worship cannot remain under Egypt's control.

Plague Five: Livestock Death and Verified Evidence

Egypt's sacred and agricultural animals are struck: Hathor, Apis, Mnevis, and related sacred bull and cow cults are exposed as powerless. Pharaoh sends investigators to verify whether Israel's livestock survived.

HEART DIAGNOSIS

Evidence does not automatically soften the heart

Pharaoh checks. The report confirms: not one Israelite animal has died. He has evidence from his own sources and still refuses. The hardened heart is not always an information problem. Sometimes it is a will that will not yield to the information it already has.

Plague Six: Boils and the Fall of the Magicians

The plague of boils strikes the human body and humiliates Egypt's healing system. Sekhmet, Thoth, and Isis cannot protect the medical-religious specialists. The magicians cannot stand before Moses. Their public collapse marks the end of Egyptian ritual authority in the plague narrative.

13. What does the Goshen distinction teach about judgment and covenant identity?

14. Why is Pharaoh's investigation in Plague Five such an important detail?

15. What does Plague Six reveal about the limits of religious expertise without the true God?

10. Escalation, Worship Disruption, and Judicial Hardening

After six plagues, the pattern is clear: the plagues move from environment to body, from reversible to irreversible, from public inconvenience to physical affliction. They also disrupt worship. Each Egyptian priest, farmer, patient, and household watches the system they trusted fail in the exact domain it claimed to govern.

Judicial hardening begins

Exodus 9:12 records a shift: “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” Pharaoh has repeatedly chosen his direction through the first plagues. Now God confirms the direction Pharaoh has chosen. This is what many theologians call judicial hardening: not God making a soft heart hard, but God confirming a chosen hardness as judgment.

WHAT MOST READERS MISS

Worship disruption

The plagues do not only interrupt Egyptian comfort. They interrupt Egyptian worship. Hapi cannot protect the Nile. Heqet cannot control frogs. Geb’s dust becomes hostile. Hathor and Apis cannot save the livestock. Sekhmet’s priests cannot heal themselves. Egypt’s devotional system collapses in public.

16. How do the plagues disrupt worship, not just daily life?

17. Why is judicial hardening a more careful reading than saying God arbitrarily hardens Pharaoh from the start?

11. Christological and Revelation Connections

The New Testament does not treat the plagues as isolated ancient events. It reuses their vocabulary and patterns to explain Jesus, the kingdom, the cross, and final judgment.

- John 2 reverses Plague One: water becomes wine, not blood; abundance and joy replace judgment and death.
- Luke 11:20 echoes Plague Three: Jesus casts out demons by the finger of God.
- 2 Timothy 3 names Jannes and Jambres as a pattern of false teachers whose folly is eventually exposed.
- Revelation 16 recapitulates Exodus plagues at an eschatological scale: blood, sores, darkness, frogs, and final judgment.
- The Passover Lamb stands at the centre: the plagues create the context in which blood becomes the sign of protection.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The New Exodus pattern

What God did to Egypt becomes the template for how Scripture describes God's judgment on every empire that sets itself against His people. Jesus is not a side-note to Exodus. He is the fulfilment of its deepest pattern: judgment passes over those covered by the Lamb.

18. Which New Testament echo most changes the way you read the plagues, and why?

19. How does Revelation's reuse of plague imagery help us understand empire and judgment?

12. Critical Thinking and Seminar Lab

Seminar prompt A: Natural mechanism and divine agency

20. Build a careful argument for why possible natural mechanisms do not remove the miraculous nature of the plague narrative. Address timing, scope, control, and theological meaning.

Seminar prompt B: Counterfeit spiritual power

21. The magicians can imitate but not redeem. How might this pattern help Christians discern spiritual authority today?

Seminar prompt C: Evidence and hardness

22. Pharaoh verifies the Goshen livestock report and hardens anyway. What does this suggest about the relationship between evidence, will, and repentance?

Mini research task

23. Choose one Egyptian deity from this part and write a short paragraph explaining why that god's domain was specifically targeted by the corresponding plague.

13. Journalling Workbook

What I trust for life

Egypt trusted the Nile, fertility, cattle, health systems, and sacred order. What good thing have you been tempted to treat as ultimate?

One more night with the frogs

Where are you delaying surrender because the misery is familiar or manageable?

The finger of God

When have you encountered something that exceeded your system of explanation? How did you respond?

Goshen distinction

Where have you seen God preserve or mark His people in a way that did not remove them from difficulty but showed they belonged to Him?

Verified but unmoved

Have you ever had enough evidence and still resisted obedience? What was really being protected?

Dismantled trust

If God dismantled one misplaced confidence in your life, what truer confidence might He be inviting you into?

14. Self-Quiz

Try answering without looking back. Then check the answer key later in the guide.

1. What verse explicitly says God judged the gods of Egypt?

- A. Exodus 3:14
- B. Exodus 12:12
- C. Exodus 20:8
- D. Numbers 14:4

2. Which plague first defeats the magicians?

- A. Blood
- B. Frogs
- C. Gnats
- D. Livestock

3. Which Egyptian goddess is associated with frogs and childbirth?

- A. Heqet
- B. Hathor
- C. Sekhmet
- D. Isis

4. Which plague first introduces the Goshen distinction?

- A. Blood
- B. Frogs
- C. Flies/Swarms
- D. Boils

5. Which plague leaves the magicians unable to stand before Moses?

- A. Gnats
- B. Flies
- C. Livestock
- D. Boils

6. What does “finger of God” connect to in the New Testament?

- A. Jesus casting out demons
- B. Paul’s shipwreck
- C. Peter walking on water

D. Pentecost wind

7. What phrase best describes judicial hardening?

- A. Random divine cruelty
- B. God confirming a hardness Pharaoh has chosen
- C. Pharaoh never making choices
- D. A natural weather pattern

8. Explain the difference between a plague as a natural event and a plague as theological judgment.

9. Why is Pharaoh's "tomorrow" in the frog plague spiritually revealing?

10. Name two ways the magicians' defeat prefigures the exposure of false spiritual authority.

11. Explain how the Passover is already being prepared by the first six plagues.

15. Word Finder Activity

Find the key words from Part Nine. Words may run forward, backward, up, down, or diagonally.

Words: PLAGUES, BLOOD, FROGS, GNATS, FLIES, LIVESTOCK, BOILS, HAPI, HEQET, GEB, GOSHEN, MAGICIANS, JANNES, JAMBRES, PHARAOH, KHEPRI, HATHOR, SEKHMET, FINGER, JUDGMENT

Z	X	X	N	L	D	U	V	L	J	D	T	W	R	L	E	Q	Z	W	F
Q	A	O	H	K	G	Y	N	R	O	H	T	A	H	B	L	O	O	D	S

W	Y	G	G	M	I	P	A	H	O	M	R	Q	T	B	G	H	O	W	G
L	J	U	D	G	M	E	N	T	J	A	N	N	E	S	K	Q	J	Q	O
R	G	I	S	Q	X	N	E	H	S	O	G	H	H	W	G	H	H	U	R
G	P	U	T	S	J	Y	B	V	D	N	Y	E	A	I	X	S	W	T	F
U	K	M	A	T	N	S	J	C	B	H	F	C	V	Z	B	D	T	J	F
F	M	Z	N	V	Y	A	K	O	E	R	L	O	F	D	L	E	H	A	B
Q	M	F	G	N	A	C	I	Q	V	M	I	S	W	N	Y	G	O	Z	U
T	T	V	W	K	G	L	D	C	X	I	E	X	T	I	X	A	A	U	S
C	R	K	G	U	S	I	C	Y	I	R	S	W	E	A	S	I	R	R	R
R	Y	E	V	E	Z	E	P	O	B	G	X	V	M	G	K	L	A	V	Z
H	G	Y	G	K	B	L	G	M	I	T	A	H	H	Z	G	A	H	M	F
L	I	Q	D	N	A	I	A	S	K	X	W	M	K	A	H	Y	P	O	P
T	T	F	D	G	I	J	V	L	H	Z	H	D	E	G	S	Q	T	J	A
J	N	Q	U	R	X	F	R	Q	E	B	W	N	S	C	H	X	K	E	E
A	L	E	O	H	T	A	B	X	P	T	G	X	R	I	Q	E	H	C	Y
U	S	R	D	I	J	H	A	W	R	C	K	S	K	G	K	C	L	H	U
P	T	E	Q	E	H	Z	H	G	I	E	M	F	A	J	I	V	L	O	S
P	V	S	K	C	O	T	S	E	V	I	L	Y	I	I	U	K	Y	L	C

16. Answer Keys and Further Reading

Self-Quiz Answer Key

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. C
5. D
6. A
7. B

Suggested short-answer themes: the plagues operate at natural and theological levels; Pharaoh's "tomorrow" exposes delayed surrender; counterfeit power can imitate but not redeem; the first six plagues teach blood, distinction, judgment, and the failure of Egypt's gods before Passover is instituted.

Word Finder Answer Key

PLAGUES: (8,12) -> (2,18)

BLOOD: (15,2) -> (19,2)

FROGS: (20,6) -> (20,2)

GNATS: (4,9) -> (4,5)

FLIES: (12,7) -> (12,11)

LIVESTOCK: (12,20) -> (4,20)

BOILS: (10,7) -> (6,11)

HAPI: (9,3) -> (6,3)

HEQET: (6,19) -> (2,19)

GEB: (4,11) -> (6,13)

GOSHEN: (12,5) -> (7,5)

MAGICIANS: (13,14) -> (5,6)

JANNES: (10,4) -> (15,4)

JAMBRES: (7,15) -> (13,9)

PHARAOH: (18,14) -> (18,8)

KHEPRI: (10,14) -> (10,19)

HATHOR: (14,2) -> (9,2)

SEKHMET: (14,16) -> (14,10)

FINGER: (7,16) -> (2,11)

JUDGMENT: (2,4) -> (9,4)

Suggested bibliography for going deeper

- John D. Currid, Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament.
- Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus.
- Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus (JPS Torah Commentary).
- Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary.
- T. Desmond Alexander, Exodus (Apollos Old Testament Commentary).
- James K. Hoffmeier, Israel in Egypt and Ancient Israel in Sinai.
- K. A. Kitchen, On the Reliability of the Old Testament.
- Richard Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, for Exodus plague echoes in Revelation.

FINAL THOUGHT

Closing encouragement

Part Nine asks a searching devotional question: what if some of the things God dismantles are not evil in themselves, but have become too small to carry the weight of our trust? The Nile was real. The cattle were real. Egypt's systems were sophisticated. But none of them were God. The plagues expose false foundations so that the living God can be known.