

## THE TEN PLAGUES

*Exodus 7-10*

Cover the necessary facts connecting this lesson with the last one as briefly as possible at the beginning of the lesson period. The teacher must use his own judgment in choice of details. Be sure to point out that if the children of Israel had gone back to the Holy Land after the famine was over as they should have done, they would never have become slaves in Egypt and would have been spared much hardship and suffering.

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### Doctrinal Points

*What happens when we lose sight of our spiritual purpose.  
How worldliness can gradually destroy our higher nature.  
Why we so often stubbornly persist in evil.*

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### Notes for Parents

The Egyptians never forgot that the Hebrews were “outsiders” and after a while became afraid of their growing numbers, and the Pharaohs began to try to curb them. They made them slaves, and at last one Pharaoh ordered that all the male children of the Hebrews should be killed as soon as they were born. Everyone remembers the familiar story of how the infant Moses was saved.

Moses was preserved by the Lord and finally commissioned by Him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and back to their true home in the Holy Land. Pharaoh naturally wanted to keep his slaves, and the story of the ten plagues, which is our lesson for today, is the story of how his stubborn resistance to the Lord’s will was gradually broken.

What does this teach us about our own lives? All who love the Bible have recognized the Holy Land as a symbol of heaven. Heaven is our true home. We live on earth for a few years and find

the earth beautiful and full of pleasures, but if our life here is too easy, we are likely to forget that after all we are only strangers in the earth and “sojourners, as all our fathers were.” If we let the world make slaves of our higher faculties, our character deteriorates, just as the land of Egypt was progressively devastated by the plagues brought on by Pharaoh’s stubborn determination not to let the children of Israel go home and worship God. All the good things which the Lord gives us in this world—and they are many—are meant for use, to help us develop the love to the Lord and the neighbor which make heaven in our souls both here and hereafter.

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### Primary

Review briefly the birth and call of Moses, but be sure to leave time for reading part of the current lesson from the Word. Read at least Exodus 8:1-15. If you can leave sufficient time, the list of the ten plagues may be read to the class from the Junior Pupils’ notes, although you cannot discuss any but the second in detail.

The children of Israel stayed on in Egypt after Jacob and Joseph had died, and they had many children and became a very numerous people. After a while the Egyptians became jealous of these strangers in their land and began to be afraid that they were enemies. The Pharaohs forgot Joseph and all he had done for Egypt. They began to make slaves of the Hebrews. So then the Hebrews remembered their own land and wanted to go back there. The Lord told Moses that he was the one who should lead them out of Egypt.

He gave Moses power to work miracles, and his brother Aaron to help him. Pharaoh did not want to let the Hebrews go.

It took ten terrible plagues to make him consent to their departure.

In the first plague Moses turned all the waters of Egypt to blood so that the people could not drink it.

What was the second plague?

How did Moses and Aaron bring it about?

Who else showed the same power to bring frogs out of the river?

But the first and second plagues were the only ones in which the magicians could do what Moses did.

What did Pharaoh ask Moses to do?

What did Pharaoh promise?

Did he keep his promise?

We ourselves often go on stubbornly doing wrong in spite of the lessons we have had.

It was only after the tenth plague, when all the firstborn in the land died in one night, that Pharaoh actually let the Hebrews go.

Don't you think he was very foolish? Did you ever suffer from being naughty and then go right back and do the same thing over again? We are sometimes just as foolish as Pharaoh was.

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### Junior

Part of the connecting story has been given to the Juniors in the form of questions. Looking up in class the references given after the questions may take too much time. If the pupils cannot answer any given question, the teacher should answer it briefly, but the pupils should be encouraged to look up and read the Bible passages afterward at home. The lesson to be emphasized is suggested in the last paragraph of the pupils' notes.

The word *exodus* means a "going out," and the book of Exodus is the story of how the children of Israel were finally let out of Egypt and of the first part of their journey in the wilderness. The story of Moses is another very familiar story and you will probably be able to remember it.

What command had Pharaoh given? (Exodus 1:15-16)

What did Moses' mother do to save him? (Exodus 2:1-4)

Who adopted Moses? (Exodus 2:5-10)

Why did Moses have to flee from Egypt? (Exodus 2:11-14)

Where did he go? (Exodus 2:15)

Who was Moses' father-in-law? (Exodus 2:16-21)

Where was Moses when the Lord called him? (Exodus 3:1-6)

What did the Lord tell him to do? (Exodus 3:10)

What signs did the Lord give Moses? (Exodus 4:1-5)

Who did the Lord tell him would be prepared to help him? (Exodus 4:14-17)

What request did Moses and Aaron make of Pharaoh? (Exodus 5:3)

How did Pharaoh answer? (Exodus 5:4-9)

Now comes our lesson for today. Moses first showed Pharaoh the sign of his power which the Lord had taught him. Aaron cast his rod down and it became a serpent. Pharaoh called in the magicians and sorcerers of Egypt and they were able to do the same thing; only Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. These men knew how to do magic because they understood how things in nature are produced by things of the spirit or mind. This knowledge of correspondences had come down to the Egyptians by tradition, and it was one of their favorite studies. Because they and people like them used this knowledge for evil purposes, it was afterwards lost. Bad men can often do things which outwardly seem like the deeds of good men; but there are many things they cannot do because they are not good and the Lord's power is not available to them. So the magicians of Egypt could do only the simplest of the things Moses did.

Our lesson today shows us how the Lord through Moses and Aaron and the rod sent one plague after another upon the Egyptians. There were ten plagues in all:

1. All the water in the land was turned to blood.
2. Millions of frogs came up from the river and got into everything.
3. The dust of the earth was turned into lice (or gnats).
4. Swarms of flies covered everything in the land.
5. A murrain (a deadly disease) killed all the animals.
6. Everyone—even the magicians—had boils.
7. A terrible hailstorm and fire destroyed the young crops.
8. Locusts ate up everything that was left.
9. Absolute darkness was upon the land for three days.
10. The firstborn of everyone in the land died in one night.

None of these plagues afflicted the Hebrews. You would think that Pharaoh would soon have realized that he must let the Hebrews go. Several times when a plague was at its height, he promised to let them go, but when the plague was over, he would change his mind. Do we ever do that? When we do wrong things and get into trouble, we usually determine to do better, but when the trouble

is over, we often forget.

From time to time as the plagues went on, Pharaoh's magicians and his servants begged him to give in, but he was very stubborn. It is always hard for someone who is used to having his own way in everything to admit that he is wrong. The tenth plague finally broke his resistance and he let the children of Israel go, although you may remember that he afterward changed his mind again and pursued them and had to be overcome by the power of the Lord at the Red Sea.

When you come into the Intermediate class, you will study the deeper meaning of the plagues. Each one teaches us a particular lesson about what happens when we persist in refusing to obey the Lord. Everything good in our souls is gradually destroyed until the time comes when nothing can save us from spiritual death.

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### Intermediate

For this class the connection should be made by calling attention to the fault of the Hebrews in not returning to their true home, noting the death of Joseph in Egypt, and explaining the meaning of the difference between the Pharaoh who made Joseph ruler and the later Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph." This will make it easy to take up the general meaning of the plagues and of Pharaoh's stubbornness.

Recently we had a lesson in the right use of our memory-knowledge. The Pharaoh of Joseph's time represents a good principle ruling in the outmost plane of our mind, a principle which recognizes the wisdom which comes only with knowledge of the Lord and His purposes and is willing to put the desire to serve the Lord above all other motives, as Pharaoh set Joseph over the whole land of Egypt. Then in the Bible story Jacob and all his family were brought down into Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen in the rich Nile delta, where they could be preserved through the seven years of famine.

But today our picture is very different. Jacob and Joseph died in Egypt. You remember that Jacob pictures goodness in the outward or natural plane of life; and Joseph, the interior goodness

which should develop in us if we live rightly, and which is what connects us with the Lord. But sometimes when a person has reached the point where he lives a good outward life and perhaps by joining the church has made the acknowledgment that his life should be lived in service to the Lord, he settles down right there and feels that he is now a pretty good person and doesn't need to go any further.

The children of Israel, when they left the Holy Land, expected to go back to their true home as soon as the famine was over. But Joseph died, and they were too comfortable and too indifferent to go back. And gradually they forgot their own land and even their own God. When the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3), Moses had to ask Him by what name He should be called. In the story the children of Israel represent the higher part of our nature in which the Lord can dwell. The Egyptians represent the side of our nature which connects with the physical world. So you can guess what is meant by the time when the Egyptians had made slaves of the Hebrews. A Pharaoh has come to the throne who "knew not Joseph."

Chapters 7 through 11 of the book of Exodus tell the dramatic story of the ten plagues which were visited upon the Egyptians because of Pharaoh's hardness of heart. These plagues were not punishments, although Pharaoh felt them to be. Neither was it the Lord who "hardened" Pharaoh's heart, even though the letter of the Word says so. You remember that the letter of the Word often speaks in the language of "appearances," that is, it expresses the truth as the evil see it. Just as the Hebrews in the story blamed Moses for their troubles, so it seemed as if the Lord must be keeping Pharaoh from seeing his own folly. But Pharaoh's stubbornness was all his own, and the plagues were only outward manifestations of the evils in his own heart and of the falsities in his own mind.

When a person settles down to enjoy an easy natural life and forgets his duty to the Lord, the love of self and the world gradually perverts all good and destroys all truth in his heart and mind. This is what the plagues picture. The turning of the waters into



blood pictures the falsification of truth, that is, the use of truths to support evils of which we are fond. So, for example, people who do not want to go to church or think about religion but are quite willing to give a little something to charity, may point to their “good deeds” and quote the Lord’s saying, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” The frogs, lice, flies, and boils are particular types of evil and falsity which overrun the mind; the destruction of the crops and cattle is the killing out of goodness in the heart; and the darkness which finally covers the land is the final inability of such a mind to see anything spiritual. The final plague, the killing of the firstborn, pictures the fact that a person who has reached this state cannot produce any real and lasting truth or goodness in his life. Each plague is a wonderful study in correspondence.

One would think that Pharaoh would have been convinced long before he was, but his conduct is typical of those who do not want to change their selfish ways. When they are in trouble, they make promises of amendment, but once the trouble is past, they fall back into their former state. That explains why Swedenborg says that no one is regenerated in a state of physical illness or by the prospect of immediate death. Fear merely serves to check the accomplishment of evil desires. It does not really change the desire. Such change must be of our free choice.

*Basic Correspondences*

Pharaoh = when good, the principle of right living; when evil, the principle of worldliness

the children of Israel = our spiritual possibilities

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**Senior**

The meaning of the individual plagues can be discussed in this class. The important lesson is the danger of allowing oneself to fall captive to worldly and materialistic reasoning because of its insidious effect on the mind and heart.

“The natural in the man who is being created anew, that is who is being regenerated, is entirely different from what it is in the man who is not being regenerated.” (AC 5326) This is a key to the meaning of our present lesson. The Pharaoh who made Joseph ruler of Egypt stands for the natural side of the person who is being regenerated, and the Pharaoh who stubbornly insisted on keeping the Hebrews as slaves, in spite of the plagues with which his land was afflicted, represents the natural side of the person who is not being regenerated. We need to remember that it is of our own free choice that we are or are not regenerated.

Egypt is the plane of memory-knowledge, and the Egyptians represent that part of us which lives on that plane and depends upon it for regular subsistence. The children of Israel—here and throughout the rest of the Old Testament—represent “the church” in us, that higher plane of our nature in which the Lord properly dwells. So the story of how the Pharaohs gradually forgot Joseph and came to make slaves of the Hebrews is the story of how, even in a life which has recognized the Lord and been set in outward order according to the Lord’s truth, worldliness can creep in and take possession, enslaving the higher nature.

We wonder sometimes how people become criminals, how anyone growing up can fail to see that “crime does not pay.” The Pharaoh of this lesson gives us the answer to this question. In the mind of a person who thinks himself wiser and more powerful than anyone else, any effort to show him the Lord’s truth—as pictured by the appeal of Moses and Aaron—awakens more and more stubborn resistance, and as the effort continues it reveals his inner state more and more deeply.

The ten plagues picture this progressive appearance of deeper and deeper falsities and evils which have developed in the inner life of the wholly materialistic and worldly person. The turning of the waters into blood is his turning of truth into falsity by making it support his selfish purposes. The frogs which were brought up out of the river afterward are the enjoyment he takes in his selfish reasoning. It is not hard to see why the magicians of Egypt could



reproduce these two miracles, but we should notice that Pharaoh had to appeal to Moses to get rid of the frogs. The magicians could not undo their work.

The plague of lice or gnats is a picture of how the mind of such a man is infested by sensual desires which spring from “the dust of the earth”—the same dust which the serpent was condemned to eat, you remember—and the swarms of flies which followed are the countless false thoughts which fly about and settle in his mind as a result of these sensual desires. The next discovery is that all his natural good desires have wasted away—the murrain or plague on the cattle—and his interior evils begin to break out on the surface, as boils reveal the presence of poison within the system. Then follow the hail and the locusts, the destruction of everything true and good in the outward life, and finally the plague of darkness, picturing the mind no longer able even to see truth. The last plague, the killing of the firstborn, represents the fact that there is no life left in any of the things in which such a person puts his faith, because there is no good left in the heart.

This picture of degeneration is a dark one, but it is very true, as anyone can testify who has tried to speak of spiritual things to a confirmed materialist. The only bright spot in the picture is the fact that the children of Israel are restless under the yoke of Egypt and that Moses and Aaron have been commissioned by the Lord to lead them out. As we have seen, we have to “go down into Egypt” many times during our lives, but we must always keep in mind the purpose for which we have gone there and the fact that our proper home is the Holy Land of spiritual living. And if we are captivated by the apparent advantages of a life in Egypt, we must break the chains that hold us there and take the difficult road back. In this journey it is Moses, the law of the Lord, who is our leader.

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### Adult

There are plenty of discussion topics here: the change in Egypt from the time

of Joseph to the captivity, the ten plagues themselves, the power of the magicians, Pharaoh's stubbornness. The quotations at the end of the lesson may also be used.

For anyone without a knowledge of correspondence, the chapters of Exodus which recount the story of the plagues present unanswerable questions. In the letter the Lord instructs Moses to lie to Pharaoh by telling him that the Hebrews merely want to go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to their God. In the letter it is said that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. The murrain, or plague, is said to have killed all the cattle of Egypt, but immediately afterward those Egyptians who fear the Lord are told to take their cattle into their houses to protect them from the hail. A question is raised, too, by the fact that the magicians of Egypt were able to perform some of the miracles which Moses performed.

But a knowledge of the essential nature of the letter of the Word, as revealed by the Lord in His Second Coming, not only answers all these questions but makes the whole story of the plagues a wonderful study in the specific evils inherent in a materialistic philosophy of life and their destructive effects.

In the first place we recognize that the letter of the Word took its form from the impact of divine truth upon the minds of those through whom it was written. Thus, the deception practiced by Moses represents the measure of his ability to comprehend and fulfill his mission. His own fearfulness intervened to twist the message, just as later his own pride prompted him to take credit for bringing water out of the rock and so condemned him to die without entering the Holy Land. The Lord permitted these appearances in the literal account for our instruction. In the same way, Pharaoh's stubborn resistance to enlightenment is permitted to appear as an act of God, because there are people who can be restrained only by fear of God and of punishment by Him. Pharaoh's repeated changes of mind were foreseen by the Lord indeed, but they were the result of Pharaoh's free choice.

We recall that the Pharaoh who made Joseph ruler over Egypt

pictures the principle which rules the natural level of the mind of the person who is regenerating—what Swedenborg calls the “new natural.” Recent biblical research tells us that this Pharaoh was of the line called the “shepherd kings.” The Pharaoh of our lesson today—who was of a different line—represents the principle of worldliness which rules the natural level of the mind of the person who is not regenerating. This principle resists with all its power any effort to set free in the mind those higher spiritual faculties which are represented by the children of Israel. Perhaps we have had the experience of trying to introduce New Church teachings into the mind of some thoroughly worldly person and have been shocked at our inability to make any impression and at the revelation of what lay back of an apparently orderly and pleasant exterior. The story of the plagues is the story of such a revelation.

There were ten plagues, preceded by the miracle of the rod becoming a serpent, and followed by the “spoiling” of the Egyptians. These plagues were not in any sense arbitrary manifestations of divine power. Pharaoh, stubbornly insisting upon the bondage of the Israelites, pictures the natural level of the mind insisting on keeping the spiritual level in subjection. When a person is in this state, true order is inverted and power from the Lord flowing into his will and understanding is turned to destruction, the destruction of what is good and true. This destruction proceeds gradually, by successive steps, represented by the successive plagues; at first only annoying for a time, but later beginning to destroy the necessities of life and finally depriving him of all that is dearest to him. Swedenborg tells us that all noxious things are created through evils in men.

The plagues in Egypt actually took place, but they were wrought not as punishments from the Lord but as materializations—for our instruction—of the actual, inevitable results in the soul of centering one’s affections and thoughts on the natural world and on self-gratification through it. In reading the story we note that the magicians of Egypt were able to reproduce the first two plagues but no further ones, and that as soon as their power was insuf-

ficient, they recognized that Moses had power from the divine (Exodus 8:18-19). We learn from the writings that the magic practiced in the eastern countries was accomplished by means of the knowledge of correspondence which they had by tradition from the Ancient Church.

A point which always strikes us in this story is Pharaoh's seeming stupidity in requiring so many disasters to convince him. But our own experience may be cited in answer. Have we, for example, never suffered from overeating, and did we learn from one such experience? When we are suffering from the effects of some physical indulgence, we think how foolish we were to do it and resolve to change our habits, but how quickly we forget once the suffering is over! We are taught that no one is regenerated through punishments. Punishments, however, are inevitable results of wrongdoing, and the plagues are a wonderful study in the progressive devastation wrought by persistent materialism, one of the most universal temptations of our modern world.

The meaning of the various plagues can be studied in detail only by reading the *Arcana*, but we should note that they follow each other logically. For example, the first plague, the turning of the water into blood, represents the falsification of truth—what we do when we use truth or twist it to support what we want to believe—and when this is done, the next step is to derive enjoyment from constant reasoning from this falsity. This is the plague of frogs. Swedenborg develops the meaning of each of the plagues and gives many illuminating illustrations.

#### *The Plagues*

1. All the water in the land was turned into blood: Truth being falsified.
2. Frogs were brought up from the river and filled everything in the land: The mind becoming full of the enjoyment of arguing from falsity.
3. The dust of the earth was turned into lice (or gnats): Sensual desires excited by the contemplation of earthly pleasures.

4. Swarms of flies settled on everything in the land:  
All sorts of false thoughts filling the mind.
5. A murrain—a wasting disease—killed all the cattle:  
All natural good impulses being gradually destroyed.
6. The people broke out with boils: Interior evils manifesting  
themselves on the surface of the life.
7. The hail and the fire following it destroyed the young crops:  
Falsity from evil destroying in the mind the truths of the  
church learned in childhood.
8. Locusts ate up the later crops: Falsity on the outermost  
plane destroying all remaining goodness.
9. Absolute darkness was upon the land for three days:  
The mind having become unable to see any genuine truth.
10. The firstborn of everyone in the land died:  
The “damnation” of those who are in faith separate from  
charity.

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#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 7273: “*And I will multiply My signs and My wonders* (Exodus 7:3). That this signifies warnings of every kind, nor shall anything be wanting, is evident from the signification of ‘signs and wonders,’ as being confirmations of the truth . . . and also means of Divine power . . . here warnings; for thereby they both saw that they were in falsities, and saw the Divine power, and in this way were warned. The reason why it is said that to those who are in falsities warnings are given of every kind, nor shall anything be wanting, is that the condemnation of those who are in evils is not effected in a moment when they come into the other life, but after they have first been visited, that is, examined. The examinations are made in order that they themselves may take notice that they cannot but be condemned, because they have not lived differently, and also in order that spirits and angels may know that they have been of such a character; so that they can no longer be excused either by themselves or by others.”

*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 7280: “*And the Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah* (Exodus 7:5). That this signifies that they shall be in fear of the Divine, is evident from the signification of ‘knowing that I am Jehovah,’ as being to be in fear of the Divine (of which below); and from the signification of ‘the Egyptians,’ as being those who are in falsities and infest. As regards the fear



of the Divine in which they who are in falsities and infest will be, be it known that fear is the only means of restraining the infernals and holding them in bonds. For fear is a common bond, both for those who are upright, and for those who are evil; but for those who are upright the fear is internal, which is fear for the sake of salvation, namely, lest they should perish as to their souls, and so lest they should do anything contrary to conscience, that is, contrary to the truth and good which are of conscience; consequently they have fear lest they should do anything contrary to what is just and fair, thus contrary to the neighbor; but this is holy fear in so far as it is conjoined with the affection of charity, and still more as it is conjoined with love to the Lord. . . . Such is the ‘fear of God,’ so frequently spoken of in the Word. But with those who are in evil there is no internal fear, namely, for the sake of salvation, and thence for the sake of conscience; for such fear they have utterly rejected in the world, both by their life, and by the principles of falsity favoring their life; but instead of internal fear they have external fear, namely lest they should be deprived of honors, of gain, or of reputation for the sake of these, lest they should be punished according to the laws, or be deprived of life. These are what are feared by men who are in evil, while they are in the world. As, when such men come into the other life, they cannot be restrained and held in bonds by internal fear, they are held by external fear, which is impressed on them by punishments. From this they are in fear of doing evil; and at last they are in fear of the Divine, but as before said external fear, which is devoid of any desire to desist from doing evil from the affection of good, but only from dread of the penalties, which they at last feel horror at.”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What mistake did the children of Israel make after Joseph’s death?  
*stayed in Egypt*
- J. Why did the Egyptians become afraid of them? *multiplied*
- P. What did the Pharaohs do to them? *made them slaves*
- P. Whom did the Lord raise up to lead them out of Egypt? *Moses*
- J. What power did the Lord give Moses? *to plague Egypt*
- J. What sign did he give him to use to prove his power? *rod → serpent*
- P. Who was chosen to help him? *Aaron*
- P. What did Moses ask of Pharaoh? *let people go*
- J. How did the Lord tell them to try to convince him? *threaten plagues*
- P. How many plagues were there? *ten*
- P. What was the first plague? *water → blood*



- P. What was the second? *frogs*
- J. What was the last one? *firstborn died*
- J. How many of the plagues could the magicians imitate? *first two*
- I. What does Egypt represent in our lives? *plane of worldly knowledge*
- I. What is pictured by the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt? *our higher nature enslaved by worldliness*
- S. What in general is represented by the ten plagues? *successive steps of degeneration of a stubbornly worldly person*