

Ancient Egyptian PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) and the Exodus Remedy

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Abstract

Egyptian archaeologist and medical professional team up to analyze the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) described by ancient Egyptians in various medical papyri and compare that to the trauma of the plagues of the Exodus event as described in the twelve encounters of Moses with Pharaoh of Exodus 5:1–12:33. Since the Bible describes the Exodus event as an intentionally trauma-inducing, paradigm-shifting upheaval in the lives of everyone who lived through it, this study will examine the effects that community and positive relationships have in healing broken people following that eternally-necessary stress-event. Then it will explore the ramifications this might have on personal evangelism and ultimately in the healing of the nations during the Millennium and beyond in the period following the Second Advent and the end of the era of sin.

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And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste.
For they said, "We shall all be dead." Exodus 12:33 (NKJV)

Introduction

The Exodus event was an intentionally trauma-inducing, paradigm-shifting upheaval in the lives of everyone who lived through it (including both Egyptians and Hebrews). This was a necessary stress-event with eternal consequences. This classification can be deduced because the plagues were not required in order to secure the release of the Hebrews. After all, a God who could send ten plagues, one at a time, could send all ten at one time. In fact, a God who could send these types of plagues, didn't actually need to send any plagues at all to secure the release of His people (as demonstrated in numerous biblical stories; for examples: Judg. 7–8; Kings 6:8—7:20; and Acts 12:1–19)—if that were His aim in sending the plagues on Egypt. In reality, there would have been nothing the Egyptians could have done to stop Him. Rather, the plagues on Egypt served a purpose different than and disconnected from the issue of the release of the Hebrews from their captivity in Egypt. That purpose is demonstrably tied to intentional paradigm-shifting, world-view upsetting trauma and the necessary restoration of purposely broken people in the remedy that followed the Exodus event. The implications surrounding the reasons for the plagues have direct ramifications (1) for the daily interactions of those belonging to the kingdom of God, (2) for those affected by the spreading the Gospel in those same daily interactions, and (3) ultimately by those restored following the Second Advent during the Millennium.

Plague Trauma

While there were ten plagues before Pharaoh was broken to the point that he relinquished his will regarding the release of the Hebrews, Moses is described as having twelve encounters with Pharaoh (the first two prior to the plagues). A close examination of these encounters reveals a pattern of subtle communication that increases in intensity and devastation from the first encounter to the twelfth. This subtle communication was not just between God and Pharaoh but between God and people in Egypt (Egyptian, Hebrew, and other foreigners).

Twelve Encounters					
Ramification	Encounter #	Summary	Hand	Purpose	Topic
WARNING	1	Warning 1 — Bricks	N/A	Introduction of God	Presence in Egypt
	2	Warning 2 — Serpent	Aaron		
IRRITATION	3	Plague 1 — Blood	Aaron	Authority of God	Abundance or lack
	4	Plague 2 — Frogs	Aaron		
	5	Plague 3 — Lice	Aaron		
HARM	6	Plague 4 — Flies	God	Superiority of God	Health and wellness
	7	Plague 5 — Pestilence	God		
	8	Plague 6 — Boils	Aaron/Moses		
DESTRUCTION	9	Plague 7 — Hail	Moses	Power of God	Infrastructure
	10	Plague 8 — Locusts	Moses		
	11	Plague 9 — Darkness	Moses		
DEATH	12	Plague 10 — Firstborn	Destroyer	Dominion of God	Future

Purpose of the Plagues. After the first encounter (Exod. 5) Moses turned to God for an explanation of why God sent him to Egypt, since the first encounter had only resulted in life for the Hebrews becoming more severe (Exod. 5:22–23). God’s response (Exod. 6:1—7:7) revealed the real purpose for the plagues. In this passage, the plagues are said to have had a two-fold purpose. First, the plagues were designed to provide the evidence for the faith the Hebrews would need moving forward (Exod. 6:6–8); a beautiful revelation of the character of God and His requirements for His people. Here, He told Moses that He would bring the Hebrews out of Egypt so that when He did they would believe that He was able to bring them out of Egypt. In other words, God did not require the Hebrews to have faith in something that had never happened but did require them to have faith that God could do it again in similar situations going forward, once it had happened.¹

Second, the plagues were designed to illustrate to the Egyptians the nature of a true God (Exod. 7:3–5). Gods in ancient Egypt (as in all ancient cultures) were unfeeling, unresponsive, and distant. When one prayed, for example, to the sun for something to happen, it would only be by mere coincidence that this thing might actually happen. It wouldn’t have taken long before the Egyptians began to believe that their gods didn’t care too much about them. The only god they had that interacted with them in any way was Pharaoh on the throne, and he was egotistical, arrogant, and self-serving. God intended that the Egyptians come to know what a true God really was, and as a result, a large mixed multitude left Egypt with the Hebrews (Exod. 12:38). This seems to suggest that when a people have an erroneous understand of the nature of divinity, God sometimes puts them into a paradigm-shifting situation.

While not included in Exod. 6:1—7:7, a third purpose becomes clear through careful analysis of whose hand was active in each of the plagues. That purpose is the faith-building training Moses needed when, at the burning bush, he was confident that his hand was not able to accomplish what God was asking of him and he asked that God choose the hand of someone else (Exod. 4:13). God had already told Moses that it would not be by the hand of Moses that this would be accomplished but by the hand of God, Himself (Exod. 3:19–20). But Moses, who had been mighty

¹ This is seen again clearly when God required Zechariah to have faith that God could provide a baby to an old man and his old wife because He had already done this with Abraham and Sarah, and punished Zechariah for not exercising faith when there was clear evidence that God had already done something similar (Luke 1:11–20), whereas God did not punish Mary for wondering how a virgin could suddenly be pregnant without an interaction with a man (Luke 26–38).

in word and deed forty years earlier (Acts 7:22) had lost all confidence in his ability to do what God asked after he had killed the Egyptian with that hand and failed to liberate his people (Ex. 2:11–14). Thus, God, through the plagues, would show Moses that He was able to use Moses's bloodstained, guilty hand to accomplish the work of God not because of Moses's hand but because Moses would learn to lift God's hand when doing God's work.

The first three plagues were all done by the hand of Aaron (Exod. 7:19; 8:5, 16). It was almost as if God was pointing out to Moses that it wasn't Aaron's hand that turned the water in the Nile to blood, brought frogs continuously out of that renewed river where everything had just died a week earlier, and turned all the incredible amount of dust in Egypt to lice. Aaron, a slave, obviously couldn't do any of that. Even though Aaron raised his hand, it was God's hand Aaron was actually lifting, not his own. The next two plagues were not done by a human hand at all but rather God just did them Himself. It was almost as if God was illustrating to Moses that He didn't need a human hand at all. The sixth plague was a joint effort between brothers (Exod. 9:8–9). In this way, Moses was led to understand that God could use his hand, as guilty as it was. Then the next three plagues were all done by the hand of Moses (Exod. 9:22; 10:12, 21). In this way, Moses slowly understood that he was not lifting his hand but rather God's. And we see Moses lifting God's hand at the Red Sea (Exod. 14:21, 26) and again in the battle against the Amalekites (Exod. 17:11–12) so that when Aaron and Hur were holding up Moses's hands, they were in reality helping Moses lift up God's hands. And this is precisely why Moses was punished when he failed to elevate God at the stone in Kadesh but rather took credit, himself, for the water that would appear, "Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (Num. 20:7–12, *our emphasis*).

Thus, the purpose of the plagues was not liberation but rather education. The Hebrews had to be educated in faith. The Egyptians had to be educated in the nature of God. And God's leader, Moses, had to be educated regarding who really brought success in God's work.

In this paper, we are concerned mostly with the Egyptian experience as it relates to evangelism, since in evangelistic efforts, the first work is primarily in educating regarding the nature of God. This education is necessarily a radical paradigm shift.

Twelve Encounters. The Egyptians who left Egypt in the Exodus event, prior to the plagues, no doubt held the common Egyptian concept of the divine. The Egyptians believed that the gods desired humanity to work in partnership with them to maintain balance (called *ma'at*).² This partnership would serve to hold back the forces of chaos that were ever-endeavoring to unravel the tapestry of the universe and bring it back to its formless and empty state. In order to accomplish this, certain gestures and speeches had to occur. In fact, it is likely this emphasis on the spoken word and its connection to an action by a magic staff³ was the reason God had many of the plagues accomplished through Moses's shepherd's rod. This would have been familiar symbolism to the Egyptians (and to some extent by the Hebrews who had lost nearly all knowledge of God by this point and had become very Egyptian in their thinking and culture).⁴

The first two encounters (prior to the plagues) were designed to introduce God to the Egyptians. It was a commonly held belief among nearly all peoples of the ancient near-east that gods were territorial.⁵ When one people group defeated another in battle, it was common for the people to believe that the gods of that defeated people had abandoned them. Often the gods of the defeated people were taken as part of the plunder and considered to be on the side of the conquerors.⁶

² Jan Assmann, *From Akhenaten to Moses: Ancient Egypt and Religious Change* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 8–10.

³ LS Baker Jr, "Sanctuary Colors through Egyptian Eyes," *JATS* 32/1–2 (2021), 3.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 252.

⁵ This is not to suggest that they were bound to the earth. The ancient Egyptian, for example, believed that the gods lived in the divine realm but were connected to humanity, most directly, through their temples (and since most of the land was owned by temples, the territory of Egyptian gods was primarily the country of Egypt). For a good discussion of this, see Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁶ Just such a house of treasures was discovered by Leonard Woolley in Ur built by Ennigaldi-Nanna, the daughter of Nabonidus, where objects were labeled in three different languages (Louise Pryke, "Hidden women of history: Ennigaldi-Nanna, curator of the world's first museum," <https://theconversation.com/hidden-women-of-history-ennigaldi-nanna-curator-of-the-worlds-first-museum-116431> accessed May 8, 2023.)

God seems to have played into this belief throughout the prophets (major and minor) when He spoke of bringing in foreign countries to do His work in punishing the Hebrews. Famously, even a king of Israel adopted the gods of the defeated Edomites after battle (2 Chron. 25:14). And so it is not surprising that Pharaoh did not recognize the authority of God over him in the first encounter (Exod. 5:2). Pharaoh was not saying that he had no knowledge of the existence of YHWH, but rather, that he did not recognize the authority of YHWH.⁷ After all, the people of God were his slaves. If anything, God had abandoned His own people and had no more claim on them.

To illustrate that God was present in Egypt and more mighty than all other gods, God condescended to use Egyptian mythology in the second encounter: rod to serpent. Egypt was a country to two lands. The statement that Pharaoh was king of the two lands is in every single mention of the titulary of his throne name (termed, prenomen). Upper Egypt was all the land south of Memphis (where the Nile, which flows south to north, branches and the cliffs that line the Nile valley give way to a flat plain referred to in modern times as the delta). Lower Egypt was all the land north of Memphis (this swampy marshland of the delta). As such, Egyptian kings had two crowns (one for each land) and Egypt had two divine protectresses (one for each land). *Nekhbet* was the vulture goddess of Upper Egypt.⁸ *Wadjet* was the cobra goddess of Lower Egypt (where the Exodus event took place).⁹ Thus, a rod turning into a serpent would easily communicate the connection between God's presence in the land in which His people (and the northern capital of Egypt at this time) were present. In fact, when *Wadjet* appeared on the crown of the king, she did so as the *Uraeus* serpent because the rule of the king was also protected by this territorial deity. Further, nine magic serpent rods have been discovered in archaeology illustrating that even magic (*Heka*;¹⁰ the cosmogonic energies that humanity was to engage through specific gestures and sayings) was presented as a serpent (cobra).

But the *piece de resistance* was what Aaron's serpent did to the magicians' serpents. The Egyptians had a god named *Nehebu-kau* who was an ancient snake god known at least as far back as the Old Kingdom (when the pyramids were first built).¹¹ His name means, "He who harnesses the life forces (or breath of life)."¹² All living beings (including the gods) owed their lives to him. Thus, in this way at least, *Nehebu-kau* was the most powerful god. To illustrate this, Egyptian mythology told the story of how he swallowed seven cobras. Thus, when Aaron's serpent swallowed the serpents of the magicians, God was communicating to the Egyptians using their own mythology that He was the most powerful of all—literally the One who held their very breath in His hand (cf. Dan. 5:23). Thus, the presence of God and His effectiveness was established in this one simple miracle.

Similar analysis can be made of each of the many gods associated with every single plague in the next ten encounters with the main point being that God was communicating with the Egyptians the inherent ineffectiveness of their deities (cf. Num. 33:4b). This was not illustrated over the course of a few days but rather over the course of several months (three months at the very least and most likely four or more). The Egyptian calendar had three seasons, each consisting of four months. Thus, for an entire season of the Egyptian's lives, their gods were proved to be ineffectual. Further, God covered nearly every aspect of their lives so as the plagues increased in severity, the entire corpus of their world was destroyed.

The first two encounters served as a warning, as God's presence in Egypt was established. No plague need fall if His presence, and thus His authority, was recognized and heeded. The next three plagues (the next three encounters) served as irritations, as God's authority regarding abundance or lack was established. Life revolved around the Nile. The dualistic fundamental aspect of Egypt itself was targeted by these first three plagues. The next three plagues were harmful as God established His superiority through health and wellness. Egyptians typically lived on average about 35 years. The average lifespan for royals was in the mid- to low-40's due to better diet and medicine. Wounds, pestilence, and sores, if not treated, could lead to sickness and that to death. The next three

⁷ In this way, Egypt with nearly 1500 gods and goddesses, where everything was associated with divinity, should never be considered a symbol of atheism, but rather, this statement of Pharaoh is similar in attitude to atheists (and anti-theists) that do not recognize the authority of God.

⁸ Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 213–15.

⁹ Wilkinson 2003, 226–28.

¹⁰ Wilkinson 2003, 110.

¹¹ For context, the Exodus event took place in the New Kingdom (either in the 18th or 19th dynasties). Between the Old and New Kingdoms was a Middle Kingdom. Thus, there is a lot of time (how much time is a matter of chronological debate) between the rise of *Nehebu-kau* and this second encounter.

¹² Wilkinson 2003, 224–25.

plagues were destructive, as God's power was established over the infrastructure of Egypt (primarily agricultural and architectural). However, the most devastating plague of all was the darkness of plague nine, which directly targeted the most fundamental aspect of their religion (the regular rebirth of the sun each morning).¹³ By the sun going dark and staying that way, the forces of darkness would have seemed to have won. Not knowing that this would only last three days would have turned the belief system of the Egyptians upside down. And thus, this ninth plague, would have rocked every single Egyptian to their very core.

The last plague was almost certainly considered to be the first of three by the Egyptians, just as all the others had been. It was death itself, as the dominion of God over the future of every family was established. It is through the words of the Egyptians themselves, as they voiced their fear that if the Hebrews did not leave the next plague would be their death (Exod. 12:33). They probably believed that if there would be an eleventh plague all Egyptians would be dead, leaving only Pharaoh. And if there was a twelve plague, Pharaoh himself would be dead. We can see in this sentiment that they were aware of the five-fold progressive nature of the encounters (warning — irritation — harmful — destructive — death). In addition, they also seem to recognize the tripart groupings of the plagues themselves.¹⁴

Nature of God. Throughout the course of these few months, not only had their deities been proven to be impotent, but their lives had been turned upside down. During the plague of blood, they had had no fresh water, since even the water that had previously been collected also had been turned to blood. Thus, being relegated to drinking just juice and beer (a staple given even to children immediately after weaning).¹⁵ For a week, they would have been dehydrated or drunk. Unable to make bread (without water) or wash any of the dead fish (no fresh water) they would have been hungry. The copper-metallic smell of blood would have been ever-present because life itself revolved around the river. And they were unable to wash themselves and be clean. Further, without the ability to be clean, no religious services could have taken place, since priests had to ritually wash before conducting the sacred services. They didn't know that this plague would only last seven days and so quickly they would have begun to worry about the future. *Khnum* (the source of the Nile),¹⁶ *Hapi* (the Nile during flood and thus the bringer of life and gifts from the gods),¹⁷ and all aquatic deities such as *Sobek*¹⁸ and *Taueret*¹⁹ would have been severely undermined.

When the water was back, so too were frogs in a never-ending stream from the river. They are described as being everywhere and in everything. As a result, the Egyptians would have experienced poor sleep, and hindrance in walking or sitting. Because they were in the kneading bowls and ovens (Exod. 8:3) they would have hindered bread making. But they also would have hindered all sorts of normal tasks from scribal work to linen production. And the sound of the croaking would have been deafening. *Heket*, the goddess of midwifery,²⁰ of whom was thought to actually give the gift of life would have been seen to have given herself too much of the gift of life in that the frogs never ceased coming up from the river until the plague ended and they all died and polluted the land with their stench.

¹³ John Coleman Darnell and Colleen Manassa Darnell, *The Ancient Egyptian Netherworld Books* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 4–15.

¹⁴ The emotion, fear, often was accompanied by the determinative of *Seth* (Randa Baligh, "Emotions and Deities in Ancient Egypt" *Council of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists* 17/1 (2014), 49–83). *Seth* is also used for the determinative for Sutekh, the Hittite storm god, known in Phoenicia as Ba'al. *Seth* was the enemy of *Horus* and as such was the god worshiped by the Asiatic Hyksos who ruled Egypt during the 15th dynasty of the Second Intermediate Period just prior to the period of the Exodus. *Seth* was personified in the body of the hippopotamus, the most dangerous land animal in ancient Egypt who killed a few kings. *Horus* was personified in the person of the king. Thus, emotional fear was directly associated with *Seth* and by extension those who worshiped him. This is likely why the Hyksos adopted him as their god. Since the Hebrews were ethnically related to the Hyksos, there likely was some syncretizing by the Egyptians with the god *Seth* and the Hebrew's God as their fear subtly hints.

¹⁵ Ana Maria Rosso, "Beer and Wine in Antiquity: Beneficial remedy or Punishment Imposed by the Gods?" *Acta Medicohistorica Adriatica: AMHA* 10/2 (2012), 261. Women seem to have breastfed for three years (Amandine Marshall, "The Nurture of Children in Ancient Egypt," *Göttinger Miszellen* 247 (2015), 51). The alcohol content was not as high as it is in modern versions of beer and because it was considered healthy, a child's diet included "alcoholic cake" (Amandine Marshall, *Childhood in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2022), 158).

¹⁶ Wilkinson 2003, 194–95.

¹⁷ Wilkinson 2003, 106–08.

¹⁸ Wilkinson 2003, 218–20.

¹⁹ Wilkinson 2003, 185–86.

²⁰ Wilkinson 2003, 229.

The third plague was almost certainly lice and not gnats. Gnats would not have prevented religious ceremonies from taking place (Exod. 8:18–19) but lice would have. Cleanliness from lice is the reason priests shaved all the hair from their bodies. Lice eggs hatch after a week or two and the cycle repeats every three weeks if not treated.²¹ Since there was no supernatural end to the lice plague, it is likely something that continued for some time. Obvious discomfort, the necessary shaving of the body, burning of clothes, and other irritations to normal life would have been all-consuming. As stated, the priests could not pretend to have replicated this because of the nature of the plague and so the practice of religion would have taken a public relations hit. In fact, it is likely most normal activities would have halted as everyone had to deal with this reality for a time. The most obvious gods affected by this plague were those associated with the land itself. *Geb*, for example, the god of the earth, would seem to have abandoned those who walked on his body.²²

Egypt had long prided itself as the stinging bee and one of the symbols of kingship was the bee/wasp. A gold necklace, shaped in the form of biting flies (similar to horseflies), was given to those who had performed acts of valor in service of the king.²³ Because these flies create wounds in their victims in which they lay their eggs and these wounds are designed to rot allowing the larvae food to eat when they hatch, meat and skins were corrupted (cf. Ex. 8:24b). Since the flies are only active in daytime most tasks would have been halted. Further, the wounds would have made sleeping hard. The mental stress associated with swarms of biting flies would have increased compared to the mental stress associated with the first three plagues. And all deities associated with insects (such as *Khepri*)²⁴ or their associated gods (such as *Ra*)²⁵ or deities associated with medicine (such as *Thoth*)²⁶ would have been affected. And ultimately the king and his strength against other nations would have seemingly (excuse the pun) come back to bite him.

Although the pestilence that followed, in the fifth plague, that resulted in the death of cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep (Exod. 9:2), was over as soon as those animals were dead, the impact it had on the Egyptians was tremendous. Without horses, the military ground to a halt as the entire chariot wing was rendered useless. Without oxen and donkeys to pull supplies even the ground troops were grounded (so to speak). Transportation aside from ships was also stopped. There were no beasts of burden to help with the harvest (this is the season in which the Exodus event took place). No animal products would be available in the near future such as wool, hair, milk, or meat. Until the animals were replaced, the life of the people and of the government was severely restricted. The authority and goodwill of *Sekhmet*,²⁷ the goddess who sent plagues, such as pestilence, would have been greatly diminished. The same is true for all deities associated with the beasts that were killed, such as *Khnum*,²⁸ *Ptah*,²⁹ and *Hathor*³⁰ (but there are many more).

Since some of the same types of animals were killed in the seventh plague (hail) as were killed in the fifth plague (pestilence) the sixth plague (boils) must have lasted longer than we think. There had to be time for these animals to be replaced or not every single animal was killed.³¹ There is no supernatural end to the boils (as was also true with the plague of lice). The boils were so bad that even the magicians (i.e. priests) were unable to conduct their

²¹ I.F. Burgess, “How Long do Louse Eggs Take to Hatch? A Possible Answer to an Age-old Riddle,” *Medical and Veterinary Entomology* 28/2 (2014), 119–124.

²² Wilkinson 2003, 105–06.

²³ Ahmose, the soldier, was awarded the golden flies of valor seven times in his life by various kings (Bill Petty, *Ahmose: An Egyptian Soldier's Story* (Littleton, Colorado: Museum Press Tours, 2014), 114, 159).

²⁴ Wilkinson 2003, 230–33.

²⁵ Wilkinson 2003, 205–09.

²⁶ Wilkinson 2003, 215–17.

²⁷ Wilkinson 2003, 181–82.

²⁸ Once a deity is cited, they won't be cited again when they appear in a subsequent plague. For example, since Khnum was cited earlier, we won't refer the reader to the same citation again.

²⁹ Wilkinson 2003, 123–26.

³⁰ Wilkinson 2003, 139–45.

³¹ This gets into the topic of the scope of geographic territory that experienced the plagues. After all, when God warns that “tomorrow” such and such will happen unless you do something (such as in the plague of hail) then the plagues can logistically only cover the territory that word could reasonably be expected to travel, unless we are to believe that God punishes some without any hope of warning. As a result, replacement animals might have been simply a two-day journey away at the least.

services (Exod. 9:11), so the practice of religion was again directly attacked. This would have included directly any deity associated with medicine and healing (such as *Isis*,³² *Thoth*, and *Serket*³³). Further, people would have been in constant pain and discomfort. Without good sleep and with all that had happened, it is doubtful that many would have been in a proper and healthy state of mind.

Because of the mention that flax and barley had already begun to grow but wheat and spelt had not yet begun to grow (Exod. 9:31–32) it is clear that the seventh plague (hail) came toward the end of January or early February. Since the Exodus was at the time of Passover (literally the very next morning after Passover), and that falls (at the earliest) in mid-March, there is some understanding that there was still about a month and a half (at the earliest) between the plague of hail and the Exodus event. Because beer, food for horses, and food for the poor was made from barley, and linen was made from flax, these no longer would be available in the upcoming year. The hail also destroyed all the trees (Exod. 9:25) and, presumably, then, all buildings also made of wood (or that had wood rooves (as was true in most structures). This meant that there would be no fruit from any of the trees that were destroyed in the area. Anyone or any animal foolish enough to remain out in the field because they disregarded the warning, died (Exod. 9:19). The emotional impact of the death of anyone in the field combined with the loss of animals once again (having just replaced those lost in the pestilence) would have been heavy. The prestige of gods of earth and sky (such as *Geb* and *Nut*³⁴) as well as any associated with agriculture (such as *Nepri*)³⁵ would have been diminished as they would have been seen to have abandoned the Egyptians or proven impotent before the almighty power of the God of the Hebrews.

The devastation of locusts was known and feared (Exod. 10:7). They ate everything the hail had not destroyed (Exod. 10:15). This would have wiped out any foodstuffs or potential future food. It has been suggested that if the Exodus event took place in the early 18th dynasty, the devastation of the hail and locusts provides a likely explanation behind the reason the northern capital was abandoned early in the reign of Amenhotep II.³⁶ The abandonment of the northern capital reveals the complete loss and inability to see the way forward after these events. This again speaks to the mental wear this season of devastation had. The same or similar gods that were affected in the previous plague would have been affected in this one as well.

The most devastating plague to this point was the ninth. Not only did the entire religious paradigm of the Egyptians revolve around the regularity of the sun and the seasons, the tri-part nature of the plagues to this point would have hinted at the end of the world. To this point, both the third (lice) and sixth plagues (boils) had not had an ending. Then suddenly the sun went dark, stayed that way, while the moon and the stars (considered gods) did not shine. If the Egyptians were noticing the pattern (as it seems they did), this would have shook them to their very core. Solar deities such as *Ra* or *Aten*³⁷ and lunar deities such as *Thoth* were at the core of the entire religious system. The Egyptians believed that *Ra* battled twelve dangers each night and having overcome the forces of evil, we reborn each morning.³⁸ For *Ra* to suddenly go dark, would have been thought a clear sign that the forces of evil had prevailed. They had no idea that this would only last three days (Exod. 10:22).³⁹ It is quite likely that they thought this was the new normal. This would have seemed to them like the end of the world simply from the fact that the darkness was so dark that it could be felt (Exod. 10:21). No one moved from wherever they were until it was over (Exod. 10:23), so

³² Wilkinson 2003, 146–49.

³³ Wilkinson 2003, 233–35.

³⁴ Wilkinson 2003, 160–63.

³⁵ Wilkinson 2003, 117.

³⁶ A late-date Exodus (in the 19th dynasty) has a little harder time explaining how life continued for that next year. Douglas Petrovich, “Amenhotep II, and the Historicity of the Exodus-pharaoh,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 17/1 (2006), 81–110.

³⁷ Wilkinson 2003, 236–41.

³⁸ Recorded in the Book of the Hidden Chambers (aka. the *Amduat*) that tracked the sun’s journey through the 12 hours of the night (see Erik Hornung and Theodor Abt, *The Egyptian Amduat: The Book of the Hidden Chamber*, trans. David Warburton (Zurich: Living Human Heritage Publications, 2007).

³⁹ Because this was a supernatural phenomenon (by the simple statement that only the Hebrews had light in their homes), and not a natural occurrence from an eclipse or volcano explosion (neither of which could account for that detail), it is possible that looking out of their houses from the inside, they might have seen normal daylight – the only way they would have known three days had passed).

the Egyptians would have been lonely with little or no hope. Hunger and other personal needs would have to be set aside. Everyone had lots of time to just think,⁴⁰ which was important, since the next plague would be death.

The tenth plague was the twelfth encounter. It was the death of all firstborn from the throne to the dungeon, including animals (Exod. 12:29). Not only did it result in the loss of the eldest from every family of every generation in a family line, but it also resulted in the loss of a large slave population as the Hebrews left Egypt the very next morning (Exod. 12:31, 41). This would have had a devastating effect on families and their future but also on the ability to conduct large-scale building projects (such as the two cities they were still actively building; Exod. 1:11). The most famous death was the crown prince, who would have grown up to be the new *Horus*,⁴¹ but with his death would not be.

Thus, the ten plagues took a devastating toll on the Egyptians not just physically and spiritually, but quite clearly mentally as well. But this was by design. That the Egyptians dealt with some sort of mental trauma is without question. The reason and remedy are more in question.

Ancient Egyptian Analysis

The emotional toll the plagues took on the Egyptians seems clearly to have been intentionally world-changing. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, witnessing traumatic events “such as a natural disaster, act of violence, or serious accident,” is termed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is hard to suppose that the plagues would not qualify. Because those who experience a traumatic event often cannot stop thinking about what has happened, “people who have PTSD may continue to feel stressed or frightened, even though they are not in danger.”⁴² This physical, emotional, and/or mental harm is replayed and the fear remains that it might happen again. In addition to fear, the body defends itself physically or mentally with pain, distress, distrust, and loss as defense mechanisms.

Ancient Egyptians recognized mental disorders. Their medical arts were advanced for their time.⁴³ This seems demonstrated by the fact that there are a number of medical papyri that have been recovered through the years: the Kahun Gynaecological Papyrus (reproductive health), the Ramesseum Papyri (eyes gynecology, pediatrics, and muscles and tendons; 17 individual papyri), the Edwin Smith Papyrus (trauma surgery procedures; 48 cases),⁴⁴ the Ebers Papyrus (over 800 remedies for various illnesses, mostly herbal; the Brugsch Papyrus and the Carlsberg Papyrus VIII appear to be along the same lines), the London Papyrus (all supernatural prescriptions), the Hearst Papyrus (various medical prescriptions), the Chester Beatty Medical Papyrus (headaches and anorectal ailments; primarily using supernatural prescriptions), and the Brooklyn Papyrus (poisons from snakebites, scorpions, and tarantulas).

A characteristic of ancient Egyptian medicine is its desire to restore balance through various remedies, all of which particularly highlighting “the idea of community and communication.”⁴⁵ *Ma’at* was the goddess associated with balance (and legally, justice).⁴⁶ It appears that she was the governing paradigm over all medicinal thought. Restoring balance (i.e. *Ma’at*) was accomplished largely through “obedience to the gods” and through maintaining “the proper relationships between the communities.”⁴⁷ It is important to note that this was not a mechanistic relationship where the gods were compelled to respond favorably. But to secure the favor of the gods and thus provide the best situation in which the gods were more likely than not to respond, the healer had to concoct the appropriate gestures and words to say so that the afflicted one could engage magic (the cosmogonic energies the gods intended humanity to use to maintain *Ma’at*) and be healed. Communication between the human world and the spiritual world was thus

⁴⁰ Compare with Acts 9:9 for similar time period of darkness, dedicated to review of events and resulting in conversion.

⁴¹ Wilkinson 2003, 200–03.

⁴² <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>, accessed May 28, 2025.

⁴³ For a complete study, see John Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022).

⁴⁴ Gonzalo M. Sanchez and Edmund S. Meltzer, *The Edwin Smith Papyrus: An Updated Translation of the Trauma Treatise and Modern Medical Commentaries* (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2012).

⁴⁵ Laura M. Zucconi, *Ancient Medicine: From Mesopotamia to Rome* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 9.

⁴⁶ Wilkinson 2003, 150–52.

⁴⁷ Zucconi, 84.

essential.⁴⁸ It's quite likely that any healing that occurred came more directly from the gestures (actions such as binding a wound, affixing a poultice, or the like) but it would be incorrect to say that the Egyptians saw these gestures as separate from the communication process, for in their belief system, words spoken had to be accompanied by deeds done. Mental illness, stemming from trauma, was no different.

Ancient Egyptians associated mental disorders (such as epilepsy and dementia) with demon possession.⁴⁹ PTSD is now recognized as one of the disorders described in these Egyptian medical texts. PTSD is associated in Egyptian literature with crocodile attacks, attacks from Asiatics, trauma associated with the assassination of a father, and fear of water.⁵⁰ To this, we can now add, the plagues of Egypt (although it is possible the ancient Egyptians would have categorized the plagues under "attacks from Asiatics" because it was the God of the Hebrews that sent the plague attacks).

It is recognized by modern scholars that ancient peoples sought "assistance from their deities" and found "comfort in their religion" when dealing with trauma.⁵¹ Is it possible that God had a remedy for the mental trauma he intentionally caused that was religious in nature? And would such a remedy be recognized in modern medical studies?

Modern Medicine Analysis

Mental trauma can be healed. Modern research shows that this happens best through the building of relationships in a community. "Many diverse philosophical theories converge upon the same fundamental insight that the social, or interpersonal, realm is a central element of human nature. This is implicit in any consideration of mental disorders, mental health, and psychological well-being. As human beings, we can be individual agents, acting independently as well as group members (e.g., family, neighborhood, society), acting interdependently."⁵² In other words, people were made to be around people and we heal with people.

An 80-year Harvard study of adult development led by Robert Waldinger discovered that "close relationships and social connections are crucial for our well-being as we age. Having supportive and nurturing relationships is a buffer against life's stresses and protects overall health." Good relationships, "keep us healthier and happier." Those with "robust social connections showed lower rates of diabetes, arthritis, cognitive decline, and other chronic conditions" led the researchers to hypothesize that close relationship act as "stress regulators" helping our bodies calm down and return to equilibrium following challenging events.⁵³

Adults are usually the focus of these sorts of studies. But children also experience mental trauma and need healing. Psychiatrist Bruce Perry discovered that medications and therapies are not enough to promote healing and recovery in children who experienced trauma. Children will not heal fully "without lasting, caring connections with others." He discovered that children also need a strong social network and support that is tolerant of their weakness and vulnerabilities and that is patient with them as they slowly build new skills. This, he characterized as "consistent, patient, repetitive loving care."⁵⁴ "Because humans are inescapably social beings, the worst catastrophes that can befall us inevitably involve relational loss. As a result, recovery from trauma and neglect is also all about relationships-rebuilding trust, regaining confidence, returning to a sense of security and reconnecting to love."⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Zucconi, 85.

⁴⁹ Mina Adeeb Ebrahim, "Psychological Traumas Induced Mental-Disorders in Ancient Egypt" *Shedet* 12/12 (2024), 39–56; 41.

⁵⁰ Ebrahim, 41–43.

⁵¹ Erika Kelly (2022), "Coping with Trauma: Evidence that Suggests the Ancient Egyptians used Transpersonal Psychology to Cope with Birth- Related Trauma," *History in the Making*: Vol. 15, Article 6. Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol15/iss1/6>, 32.

⁵² Andreas Maercker and Tobias Hecker, "Broadening Perspectives on Trauma and Recover: a Socio-interpersonal View of PTSD" *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 7/1 (2016) <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v7.29303>, accessed on November 8, 2025. Also cited in this quote: H. Rackham "Politics," *Aristotle* 23 volumes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), vol. 21 (sect. 1.1253a) and P. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵³ Adrian Gostick, "Harvard Research Reveals the #1 Key to Living Longer and Happier," 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adriangostick/2023/08/15/harvard-research-reveals-the-1-key-to-living-longer-and-happier>, accessed on November 9, 2005.

⁵⁴ Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz, *The Boy Who was Raised as a Dog* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 260.

⁵⁵ Perry and Szalavitz (2017), 260.

“One avenue for cultivating our relationships is through our focused attention. Without the curiosity of others, we miss the opportunity to understand and be empathetic.”⁵⁶ It seems that too often, the busy lifestyle most of the world experiences daily, leads those around us, who are suffering from mental trauma, to be unintentionally marginalized and not receive the healing they need simply because we don’t have the time to focus on them as people. This realization has led to the conclusion that “negative post-trauma cognitions warrant further investigation as a potential mechanism by which social support influences PTSD. This potential mediating role may be more relevant for the presence of negative social interaction than the absence of positive social interaction” for as those who have suffered significant mental trauma find themselves in a negative social support environment, their PTSD worsens. On the other hand, positive social support environments greatly reduce PTSD and in many cases it disappears altogether.⁵⁷ The bottom line is that people need to know that they matter⁵⁸ and this happens in community.

God’s Remedy

The ancient Egyptians, like many peoples in the ancient world, considered that the deity who sent/caused the illness, would also need to be the one responsible for remedying it.⁵⁹ It appears that God used this concept to draw the Egyptians to Him. By sending the plagues, He would also have been the One they would need to seek in order to be free from the plagues. This is reflected in the biblical text through the actions of Pharaoh (Ex. 8:8, 25; 9:27; 10:16; 12:31). It is reasonable to conclude that over the course of ten plagues, habits of seeking God would have formed among the Hebrews, among the Egyptians (and other non-Hebrew people groups in Egypt), and with Moses himself.

The remedy God offered was for all to become part of the community of believers. Foreigners were to accept circumcision and join the community of faith by fully participating through obedience to God’s direction (Ex. 12:48–49). This may explain the purpose of the location of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread and Firstborn instructions (Exodus 12:43—13:16) that interrupts the Exodus narrative in the text. Becoming part of the community not only allowed them to participate in the religious rituals, but, as recognized in modern medical analysis, would also have healed their mental trauma by providing relationships both with God and with other people.

Implications for Evangelism

Evangelism also is an intentionally paradigm-shifting activity. The entire purpose of evangelism is to lead people away from their formerly held world-view toward a new way of thinking by seeing the cosmic conflict either for the first time or in a more clear way. Some are not even aware that there is a cosmic conflict and then suddenly (over the course of a relatively short time in their lives) they come to learn about evil and good angels battling it out in the rooms where they live. Diet, activities, social-circles, lifestyle, spiritual beliefs, and many other parts of their lives change dramatically in rapid succession also during evangelism of necessity. It is important for those conducting evangelism (which should be every Christian) to realize that those they are leading to God are experiencing some very dramatic (and sometimes very traumatic) life-changing decisions. Some of which can radically change their relationships to life-long friend groups or even family relations.

Although, perhaps not to the same degree of trauma as a PTSD event, those who have a paradigm-shifting event in their lives through evangelism are in still, very much in need of mental healing. As a result of the analysis of the Egyptians who left Egypt in the Exodus event, it seems clear that the remedy God had in mind for the Egyptians (suffering, almost certainly, from PTSD) is the same remedy we need to be sure to extend to those involved in accepting God and major changes to their lives as a result of evangelistic efforts. This primarily includes community and the relationships formed as a result.

Further, lack of positive community support following a serious mental trauma experience does result in further strengthening the PTSD. This negative environment does great harm to new converts. It seems that unless a

⁵⁶ Marc S. Schulz and Robert J. Waldinger, *The Good Life: Lessons from the World’s Longest Scientific Study of Happiness* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2022).

⁵⁷ Donald J. Robinaugh, *et al*, “Understanding the Relationship of Perceived Social Support to Post-Trauma Cognitions and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 25/8 (2011), 1072–78.

⁵⁸ Jennifer Breheny Wallace, *Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic—and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Penguin, 2023).

⁵⁹ Zucconi, 9.

church has a plan for how to make provisions for the necessary healing new converts need through community building, evangelism likely should not be done as it will not result in the eternal results intended.

Further, community also seems to be the main remedy for healing during the Millennium and beyond. Revelation 22:2 says that the tree of life will produce a new fruit each month. Then it says “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Since there is no more pain or sorrow (Rev. 21:4) because sin has been destroyed (Rev. 20), the healing is likely mental and not physical. The nations were divided at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:8–9). This has been a characteristic feature of humanity ever since the nations and languages were divided at that time. The gospel is meant to heal this divide (Eph. 3:1–7) as much as is possible this side of eternity. However, the true healing, where all truly become one nation under God in His eternal kingdom (Dan. 2:44), will only begin to take place after the Second Advent, during the Millennium, and after the end of sin, throughout eternity as everyone gathers to eat the fruit of the tree of life, once a month for eternity. Each month, all will gather under the tree and engage in community building. And during this activity, we also will be healed of the trauma that we experienced in the era of sin and by watching loved ones (who chose to cling to sin) be destroyed.

Conclusions

It should not be surprising to find that humans, made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–28), are meant to connect with each other in the way God connects with Himself as the Triune God. We are also meant to connect with God through worship and diligently seeking Him (Heb. 11:6). It is through these connections that we heal from the damages done from living in the era of sin. But we shouldn’t wait until after the millennium to begin to heal. God intends that these relationships be formed now both with Him and with His people.

"We are all woven together in the great web of humanity, and whatever we can do to benefit and uplift others will reflect in blessing upon ourselves. The law of mutual dependence runs through all classes of society."⁶⁰

Thus, when we engage in evangelism, we must provide the necessary positive community-building structure to help those who have been broken necessarily, to heal quickly and healthily. This appears to happen best when they are made to feel that they matter. Often, this is best accomplished through having a role to play in the community; some task or responsibility that the community relies upon them to provide. It also is necessary to have a friend-group that provides in many ways for those that have been fragmented or lost as a result of the recent choices they have made based on the truths they have accepted from the evangelistic efforts. And most importantly, they will heal as they continue to learn more about the God they have decided to follow and their relationship with Him grows ever-stronger. All of this is part of the responsibility of the church, as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27).

⁶⁰ White (1958), 534–35.