



"There is nothing more frightening than ignorance in action."
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

04-Dec-20

Why Was God So Angry With Israel? (Part One)

When the Israelites, camped at Kadesh in the wilderness, refused to enter the Promised Land, God's anger flared at them, saying, "I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them" ([Numbers 14:12](#)). What caused [God](#) to become so enraged at them? To answer this question adequately, we need to realize the story starts a few years earlier.

Everyone is familiar with the story of the plagues God inflicted on Egypt in the run-up to the Exodus. But what was their purpose? Were they intended to free the Israelites from Egyptian slavery? Yes, absolutely! However, God had a second—perhaps more important—purpose, which we find in [Exodus 3:19-20](#):

But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.

God's other purpose was to demonstrate *all* His wonders, not just to send one spectacular plague, like turning the Nile to blood, and then miraculously free His people Israel. So, He hardened Pharaoh's heart against letting Israel go, to give Him adequate time to display His power. Notice [Exodus 7:3-5](#):

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians *shall know that I am the LORD* , when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them. (Emphasis ours.)

But why show these wonders at all? [Exodus 5:1-2](#) holds the answer:

Afterward [Moses](#) and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" And Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD , that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go."

In answer to Pharaoh's question, "Who is the LORD?" God replies, "Allow Me to introduce Myself to you." And the plagues commenced. God knew that if He could bring a mighty nation like Egypt to heel, all nations in the region would hear about it loud and clear. In today's parlance, we might call the ten plagues a "public relations media blitz." Moses cites this tactic in [Numbers 14:12-16](#), arguing that God's proposed actions against stiff-necked Israel—wiping them off the face of the earth—would be "negative press" for Him:

"I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

And Moses said to the LORD: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in

a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.'"

The Gibeonites verify that the news of God's miraculous deeds in Egypt had come to their ears: "So they said to [Joshua]: 'From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt'" ([Joshua 9:9](#)).

God wants all [the world](#) to know and experience Him in all His power and glory! He even mentions this fact in His response to Moses in [Numbers 14:20-21](#): "Then the LORD said: 'I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. . . .'" This revelation of Israel's God was the reason for the ten demonstrations of power to Pharaoh.

More to the point, He needed to introduce Himself to the enslaved Hebrews. They had only a cursory acquaintance with God through hand-me-down knowledge from Abraham, [Isaac](#), Jacob, and Joseph. After over four hundred years—and a good portion of it in slavery—among the larger population of Israelites, the knowledge of God had faded to a bare whisper. They knew their forefathers had worshipped God, but the Israelites had no priesthood or temple, no altar, no sacrifices or rituals, nor did they know anything about His way of life, understanding nothing of the [Sabbath](#) or any of the other commandments. They were, almost literally, spiritual orphans. Moses even had to ask Him His name ([Exodus 3:13](#))!

However, after seeing the ten plagues nearly destroy Egypt—and leave the children of Israel protected and largely unscathed from the final seven—they should have been delighted and inspired that God was on their side. However, they still doubted His power and willingness to provide for them. We can understand why, since their only substantive experience with God was watching Him demolish the once-mighty civilization around them. This experience did not automatically translate into thinking of Him as a [merciful](#)

God who would care for all their needs. God, in His [wisdom](#), mercy, and understanding, recognized their uncertainty and acted patiently despite their faithless, impulsive attitudes.

But, as the Israelites tremble in fear at Kadesh two years later, refusing to move forward, God's [patience](#) has run out. The Israelites have pushed Him to the brink of starting all over with Moses and his descendants. But there is yet more to this story and more reasons for God's anger, which we will uncover in Part Two.

- Mike Fuhrer

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Numbers: The Book of Judgment](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The difference between a pilgrim and a wanderer is that the pilgrim knows his destination. God wants our pilgrimage to be a direct route with very few side-trips to the world. The book of Numbers—a record of God's judgments, tests, and evaluations for ancient Israel, preparing them for their inheritance of the Promised Land—should provide us a roadmap for our pilgrimage to the spiritual Kingdom of God. Like our forebears, we live daily in uncharted territory, but the sobering account in Numbers provides a roadmap, establishing God's pattern of judging and evaluating our pilgrimage conduct.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Why Israel? \(Part One\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Even the beginning Bible student knows that Israel plays a prominent part in Scripture. Why? Richard Ritenbaugh explores God's stated purposes for choosing and using the children of Israel throughout His Word—and beyond.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G.
Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email
Subscriptions page](#).
