

QUARANTINE COMPANION

Movie Guide: Ten Commandments

10 PLAGUES PARALLEL TRACK: TO THE EGYPTIANS AS “WAR OF THE GODS”

10 PLAGUES PARALLEL TRACK: TO THE SLAVES AS “SECOND UNCREATION”

SEVEN MAJOR MOVIE ERRORS:

1) We Are Family: In The Ten Commandments Moses does not grow up knowing his birth family and only later discovers he was, in fact, a Hebrew. In the Torah account of the story, although Moshe was taken from the Nile by Batya and lived in Pharaoh’s house, he continued to maintain a relationship with his birth family – even nursing from his birth mother. Which segues nicely to our next difference:



2) Moses’ Mother’s Name: The film calls her Yoshebel, which only shares the same first syllable as Yocheved, the name she’s called in the Torah. The name Yocheved means “God’s Glory,” while Yoshebel is made up.

3) Moses’ Oratory Skills: Unlike Charlton Heston, a classically-trained, masterful orator, the Torah says that Moshe had a severe speech impediment, and had to relay all of his messages through his brother, Aaron.



4) Moses' Egyptian girlfriend (or lack there of): Although the film gives Moses an Egyptian girlfriend named Nefertari who appears throughout the story, she does not appear in the Chumash (or any other parts of the Torah) at all. In the Torah, Moshe gets married to Tzipporah, a Giyores whom he saves by a well. Her father Yisro (Jethro) eventually converts as well, becoming the model for a righteous convert.



5) Pharaoh's Name: The Chumash only refers to them both the first and second as "Pharaoh," never giving their names. The film calls both of them Ramses.

6) Rays of Light: When Moses descended Mount Sinai, coming so close to the Almighty changed his face forever. It shone so bright, the Torah says he had to wear a veil from that point forward.

7) Dealing with the Golden Calf: While the film shows Moses shattering the Tablets in anger upon witnessing the Golden Calf, the Torah's account has Moshe "tearing up the contract" of the first set of tablets, and returning to the mountaintop for another forty-days to negotiate repentance and atonement on behalf of the Jewish people. When the golden calf was created and worshipped, not a single female participated in the idolatry. Neither did any man from the tribe of Levi.

File: Sanet.st.The.Ten.Commandments.1956.1080p.BluRay.H264.AAC-RARBG.mp4
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10 PLAGUES PARALLEL TRACK: TO THE EGYPTIANS AS “WAR OF THE GODS”

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TEN PLAGUES READ AS HEBREW POETRY

TYPES OF PARALLELISM IN HEBREW POETRY

1. Synonymous Parallelism

The second line repeats the first line.

2. Antithetical Parallelism

The second line contrasts with the first line.

3. Synthetic Parallelism

The second line adds to the first line.

4. Climactic Parallelism

The successive lines build to a climax.

5. Emblematic Parallelism

The figure of speech is explained in the second line.

6. Alternate Parallelism

The 3rd line repeats the 1st and the 2nd the 4th - ABAB.

7. Chiastic Parallelism

The 1st and 2nd lines are reversed in 3rd and 4th - ABBA.

TEN PLAGUES PARALLEL TRACK: TO EGYPTIANS AS “WAR OF THE GODS”

Akhenaten and Moses



On this stela, Egyptian King Akhenaten is seen with his wife Nefertiti and daughters bearing offerings to the sun-disk Aten.

Defying centuries of traditional worship of [the Egyptian pantheon](#), Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten decreed during his reign in the mid-14th century B.C.E. that his subjects were to worship only one god: the sun-disk Aten. Akhenaten is sometimes called the world's first monotheist.

Egyptian King Akhenaten, meaning “Effective for Aten”—his name was originally Amenhotep IV, reigned from about 1352 to 1336 B.C.E. In the fifth year of his reign, he moved the royal residence from Thebes to a new site in Middle Egypt, Akhetaten (“the horizon of Aten,” present-day Tell el-Amarna), and there ordered lavish temples to be built for Aten. Akhenaten claimed to be the only one who had access to Aten, thus making an interceding priesthood unnecessary. – Biblical Archaeology Society Newsletter

God Against the gods

by Kyle Butt, M.Div.

Can you imagine being an Egyptian during the time of the ten plagues? Think about how scared you would be, and how much you would have wished that Pharaoh would just release the Israelites. You might even have wondered why there were ten plagues, and what was important about each plague. After all, God could have used any plagues He wanted. He could have sent thousands of lions among the Egyptians, or He could have caused alligators to eat the people. Why did God choose the plagues that He did?

The Bible gives us a hint about why God chose the ten plagues. In Exodus 12:12, Moses recorded these words spoken by God: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.” God said that the plagues were against the gods of Egypt.

During the time of Moses, the Egyptians worshipped many different gods. They did not worship the one true God like Moses and the children of Israel. The Egyptians named different gods that were supposed to be in control of different areas of life. Each plague sent by the true God was designed to show the Egyptians that the gods they worshipped were false gods who could not control nature. Only the true God had (and still has) the power to control nature. Let’s look at each plague and see which Egyptian gods were proved false.

Water to Blood

The entire life of Egypt revolved around the Nile River. The Nile brought food to the Egyptians in the form of fish. It watered the crops and fertilized the land with the rich silt (dirt) that it deposited on its banks. The Egyptians literally worshipped the Nile as a god because it brought life. The Egyptian god Hapi was supposed to be the spirit of the Nile who controlled the water. The god Osiris supposedly used the Nile for his bloodstream. However, when God changed the Nile to blood, the river that once had brought so much life to the Egyptians brought only death and destruction. The Bible says: “The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt” (Exodus 7:21).

Frogs

Frogs were a common sight in the land of Egypt. The Nile River was a great place for frogs to live. The Egyptians chose frogs to represent Heket (also spelled Heka or Heqt). Heket was the goddess of fertility. She is drawn on many walls with the body of a woman and the head of a frog. Supposedly, Heket helped women deliver babies. To the Egyptians, frogs were a sign of fertility. In fact, it has been reported that anyone who injured a frog could be severely punished. Because of this, God sent thousands of frogs on the land. Imagine getting out of bed and seeing frogs in your shoes, clothes, sink, and shower. Just think about going to the kitchen and finding frogs in all the dishes and bowls. Since frogs were sacred, the Egyptians did not feel that they could kill the frogs. God used the frogs to show the Egyptians that they were worshipping the wrong things. When God caused the frogs to die, the Egyptians’ precious frogs that represented fertility became a sign of death. When the frogs died, the Bible says, “They gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank” (Exodus 8:14). How disgusting!

Lice (or Gnats)

The Hebrew word used to describe the third plague means some type of tiny insect like lice or gnats. These tiny insects came from the ground and infested both people and animals in Egypt. They would have crawled in the eyes, noses, and mouths of the Egyptians. According to the Egyptians, Geb was the god who controlled the dirt and the land. But when God caused the dust to turn into nasty little insects, He proved that Geb was not in control of the land. And whatever the true God ordered to come out of the ground, did so.

Flies

Moses was told by God to warn Pharaoh that swarms would be sent if Pharaoh did not obey. These swarms would have been insects like flies or beetles. Again, the Hebrew word used does not tell us exactly what kind of insects these were. When we read about these swarms of flies or beetles, remember that they were probably not like the flies we swat in our kitchens with fly swatters. These bugs could probably bite or sting. When we look back into Egyptian history, we find that the scarab beetle was considered sacred. This plague was probably against the god Khephi, who was supposed to be in control of insects.

Death of the Livestock

When God sent death on the Egyptians' livestock, He proved that their god, Apis, could not stop Him. Apis was shown in Egyptian art as a bull. In one discovery in Egypt, several huge burial tombs were found with "sacred" bulls buried inside. How silly it was for the Egyptians to worship something that God could destroy in a few days.

Boils

Boils came upon the Egyptians when Moses scattered ashes into the air. These boils would have been very painful swell-ings on the skin filled with puss and infection. The Egyptians worshipped the goddess Sekhmet, who they thought had the power over diseases. The god Thoth was also supposed to help with healing. Yet, the Bible says that even the magicians in Egypt had boils (Exodus 9:11). If the magicians of the Egyptian gods could not stop the boils, how did Pharaoh think he could stop the God Who caused the boils?

Hail

When God sent this plague upon the Egyptians, it wasn't a few pea-sized pellets of ice. On several occasions, the Bible says that the hail was "very heavy." It was so heavy, in fact, that it killed all the men and animals that were not under some type of shelter. Along with this hail came fire from the sky. This plague destroyed many of the crops and trees of the land. However, in the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived, there was no hail. With the plague of hail, God proved that He had power over the sky. The Egyptians worshipped a goddess named Nut, who they thought controlled the weather, but God proved them wrong.

Locusts

Huge swarms of millions of locusts have been documented around Africa. One swarm affected an area of five million square miles (twice as much land as in the United States). Locusts can eat their own body weight in food every day. With the locusts, God destroyed what was left of the crops in Egypt. He also proved that Seth, the god of the crops, was not really a god after all.

Darkness

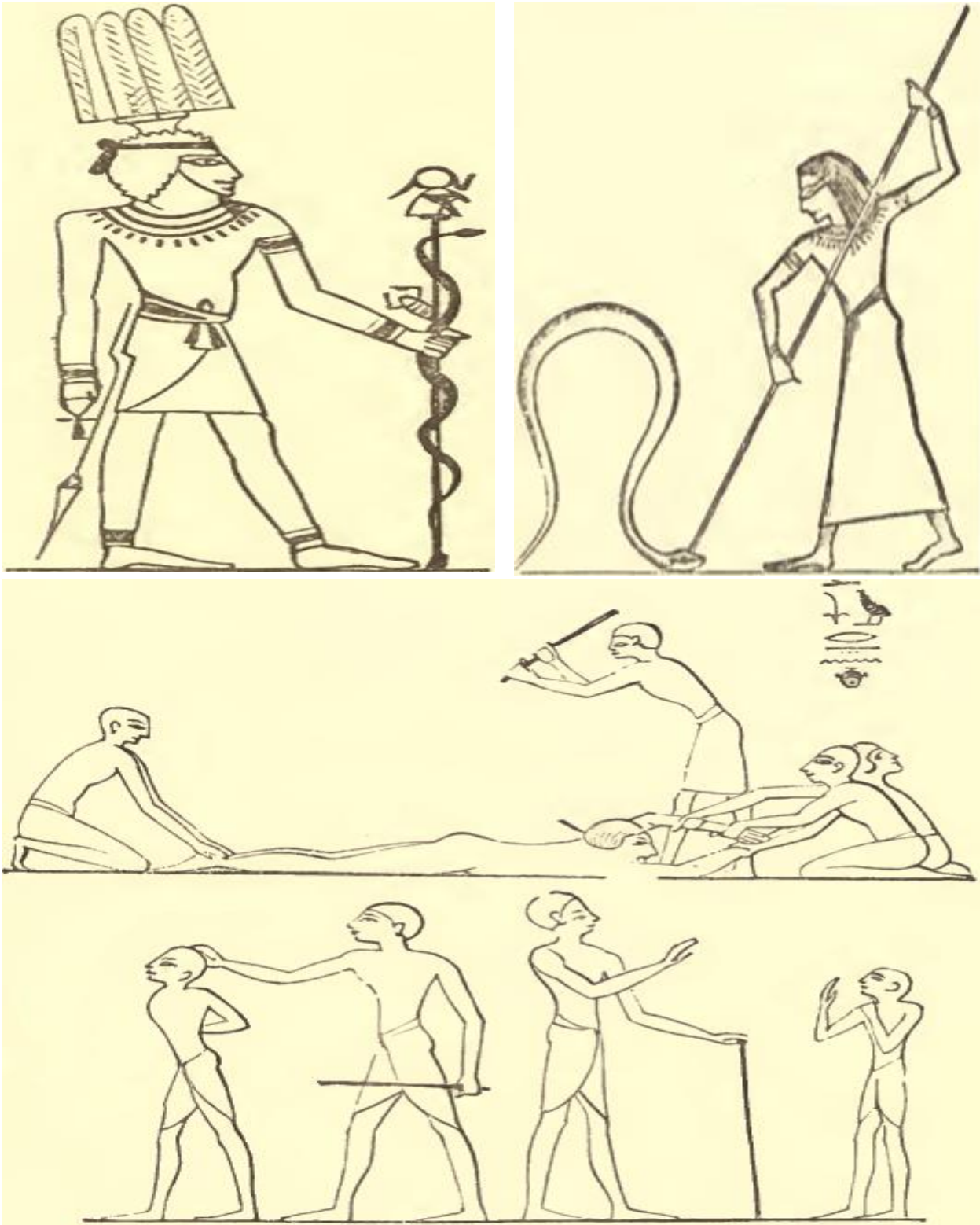
The darkness caused as the ninth plague was unlike any we have ever experienced. Exodus 10:21 says that it was a darkness “which may even be felt.” This plague was against one of the Egyptians most important gods, Ra—the Sun god. Ra was thought to be one of the strongest gods. He faithfully crossed the sky day by day, bringing sunshine and life to the crops, and joy to the people. The Egyptians wrote poems and songs of worship about Ra, the powerful Sun god. Yet, when the true God sent darkness across the land, Ra lost all his power (although he never really had any to start with).

Death of the first-born

Throughout all the plagues, Pharaoh would not obey God. Pharaoh should have repented and let the Israelites go after God defeated all the gods of Egypt, but Pharaoh would not. For this reason, God sent one more plague—the death of all the first-born in Egypt. Pharaoh was often worshipped as a god, and his first-born son would take his place. By striking Pharaoh’s first-born, God proved once and for all that no god could match the powers of the true, living God.



SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE PLAGUES: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STAFF



THE ROD CHANGED INTO A SERPENT

NOTWITHSTANDING the revelation which God had vouchsafed to Moses at the bush, the remembrance of the danger which he had experienced in his former attempt to deliver Israel rendered him fearful of any new effort. God therefore gave him a sign, both for the confirmation of his own faith and for the conviction of others. "The Lord said unto Moses, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And He said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee" (Exod. 4:2).

The Egyptians were accustomed to carry wands or rods in their hands, as badges of office, or indications of their rank. They were generally of acacia wood, which is even now sold by the monks of Mount Sinai for the same purpose, or of cherry, and specimens of them are still in existence. The Egyptian priests and others are represented in ancient sculptures walking with such rods; and in the 7th chapter of Exodus the magicians of Egypt are described as having wands in their hands by virtue of their calling. The rod which Moses had in his hand may have been that which he had been accustomed to carry as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. More probably it was a shepherd's staff, such as David took with him when he went to meet the Philistine, and such as he used to smite the lion and the bear which attacked his fold. God called Moses now to be the shepherd of his people, and that staff which he had carried when following the ewes great with young was henceforth to be the token of his pastoral office among the Israelites, and his help in bringing them forth out of Egypt.

The change from a rod to a serpent, and from a serpent back again into a rod, may have had reference to the serpent-worship which prevailed in Egypt, where the miracle was afterwards repeated in Pharaoh's presence: this will call for notice in its proper place (chap. 3.) For Moses also the miracle would seem to have had a particular significance. The serpent was recognised from the time of our first parents as a type of evil; but it was also, under some conditions, a memorial or emblem of good. It was the serpent that betrayed the woman, and brought all sin and sorrow into the world; but it was the serpent, lifted up in the wilderness, that healed all who looked upon it, and became thenceforth a type of Christ. Moses had trusted in his staff forty years before, when he slew the Egyptian, and it had brought him into trouble; if he had gone before Pharaoh now with no better dependence, it would again have failed him. God showed it to him, therefore, as a serpent, and he was afraid, and fled from it. But God bids him put forth his hand and grasp it; he obeys, and it becomes again a rod; and now it is no more a thing to be mistrusted, but a rod of divine virtue, a staff on which he may depend: God has changed the nature of it, and has given it to Moses as an efficient instrument by which Pharaoh is to be rebuked and Israel saved. That Moses regarded it in this light is evident from his mention of it when, starting at length upon his journey (chap. 4:20), "Moses took his wife and his sons and set them upon a donkey; and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand."

There is a similar lesson for us in this transformation, if we regard it as an emblem of the miraculous change that takes place in our human nature through the grace of God. An old writer says: "The devil is a serpent in hell: the world is a serpent in our hand: the flesh is a serpent in our bosom." We know that in us—that is, in our flesh—dwelleth no good thing, yet we are apt to trust to ourselves as Moses to his staff. "What is that in thine hand?" saith God. "It is mine uprightness, which I hold fast, and will not let it go," is the answer of self-righteousness. "Cast it on the ground," saith the Saviour. We obey him, and this righteousness wherein we trusted takes its proper form, and appears of the nature of sin; it becomes a serpent before us; and instead of relying upon it any longer, we are astonished, and flee from it. But again, God bids us put forth the hand and take it up; and now it turns to righteousness once more, yet not our own, but Christ's—a staff on which we may depend. Looking to the serpent in our hand and in our bosom, we are amazed and horror-stricken; but looking to the serpent lifted up for us, we take courage: from thenceforth we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us: in all our trials, his rod and his staff they comfort us. The second sign which God showed Moses may teach a similar lesson. He thrusts his hand into his bosom, and it becomes leprous, white as snow; at God's command he puts this unclean, leprous hand again into his bosom, and when he plucks it out, it is clean and whole; and thereafter, when he stretches forth that hand, the elements obey him; the river is turned into blood by it; he casts it out over the Red Sea, and the waters are divided. God has first shown him its natural feebleness, and has then endued it with his own supernatural power.

Without delay, Moses and Aaron now present themselves before Pharaoh, and declare their errand. "Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness;" and Pharaoh answers with contempt, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exod. 5:1, 2).

The history of Moses and Aaron appearing thus together at the Court of Pharaoh, the one working miracles and the other as his spokesman, may have given rise to the traditions of the Greeks and Romans, in which Jupiter and Mercury, both of them Egyptian deities worshipped as Hammon and Thoth, are described visiting the earth in a similar relationship. The latter was represented with the caduceus, a rod twisted about with serpents, and was the god of speech or eloquence. To such traditions the saying of the people of Lystra may be referred, when Paul had healed the cripple: "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men: and they called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker" (Acts 14:11).¹

¹ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

Call of Moses In the spring.

**1st appearance May.
before Pharaoh**

**First Series. 1st Plague. The Middle of
river smitten October.
after its
subsidence**

**2d, Frogs Middle of
November.**

**3d, Lice Middle of
December.**

Second Series. 4th, Flies January.

5th, The Murrain End of January.

6th, Boils and blains February.

Third Series. 7th, Hail Beginning of March.

8th, Locusts Middle of March.

9th, Darkness End of March.

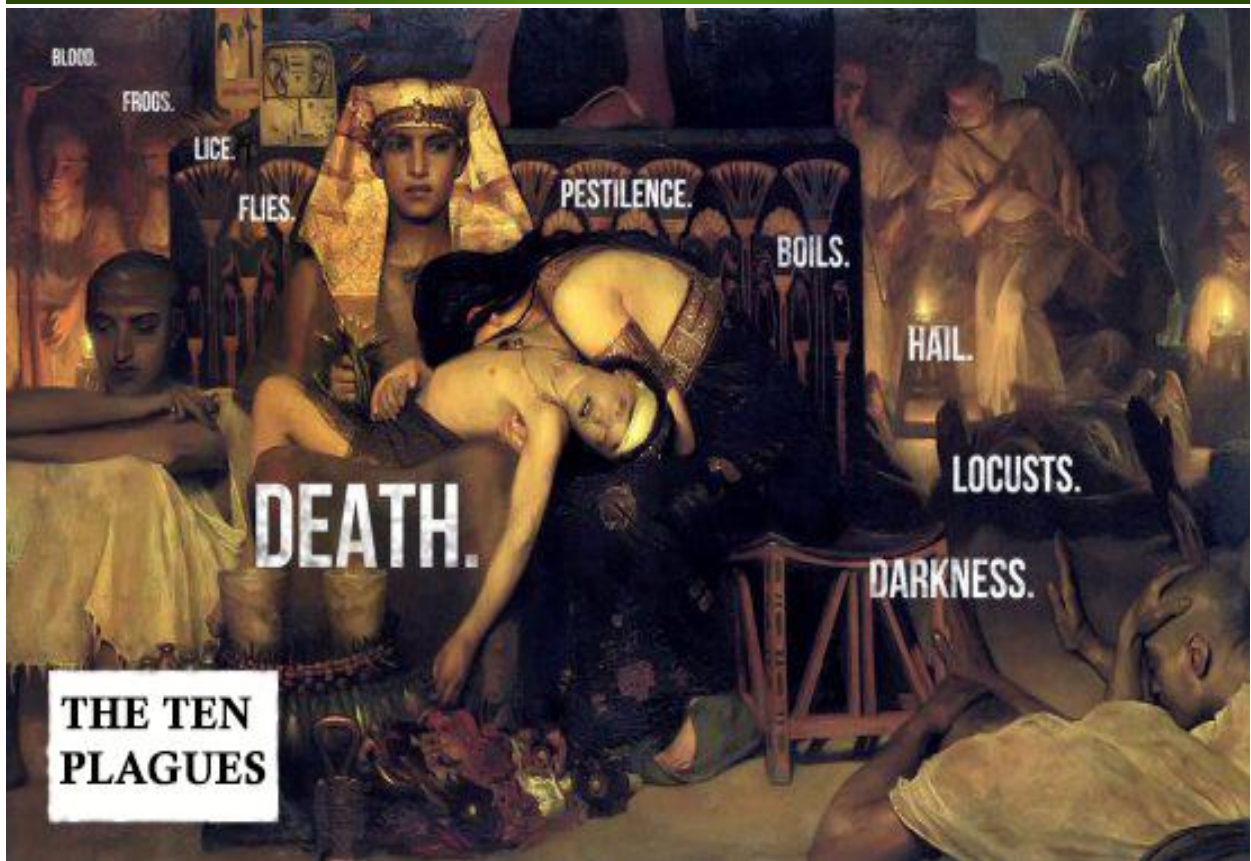
10th, Death of the first-born Beginning of April.

PLAGUE # MACROS: [1.](#) [2.](#) [3.](#) [4.](#) [5.](#) [6.](#) [7.](#) [8.](#) [9.](#) [10.](#)



EXODUS 1-11

10 PLAGUES OF EGYPT



THE TEN
PLAGUES

THE FIRST PLAGUE: THE RIVER OF BLOOD

First Series.

1st Plague. The
river smitten
after its
subsidence

Middle of
October.

2d, Frogs

Middle of
November.

3d, Lice

Middle of
December.



THE WATERS TURNED TO BLOOD

It may fairly be presumed that if Egypt had paid due attention to the first sign displayed by Moses and Aaron, which was not of the nature of a plague, but an exhibition of power only, by way of credential for their mission, not one of the punishments which followed would have been inflicted. But now these servants of Jehovah are sent a third time to the king, and with a much more serious communication.

“The LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened, he refuseth to let the people go. Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning: lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river’s brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand. And thou shalt say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith the LORD, In this shalt thou know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink of the water of the river” (Exod. 7:14).

The principal subject of the first great judgment was the river Nile. “The River,” as it was emphatically called, or “the River of Egypt,” for the name Nile is not to be found in Holy Scripture, was the chief source of wealth and prosperity to the Egyptians, by whom **it was regarded with superstitious reverence as the birthplace of the gods**. Let us endeavour to form some idea of the appearance it presented in the days of the Pharaohs. The source of the Nile was, even at that early period, the subject of much speculation and adventure, and it is only within the last few years that this has been ascertained. It takes its rise from a great lake or basin in Central Africa, and traverses a rich and beautiful country on its way northward to the sea. It is the longest river in the world. In some parts of its course it flows gently and peacefully, fertilising the land upon its banks; at others it rushes with great swiftness between lofty and precipitous rocks, broken here and there by mighty cataracts, or by a series of rapids extending over many miles. The description in the book of Job is very appropriate to some parts of this river—“He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing; he bindeth the floods from overflowing” (Job 28:10). In lower Egypt the Nile flowed through a rich plain, bounded by the desert and extending to the sea. On either side, as far as the eye could reach, luxurious crops of corn or barley grew, and ripened in the sun. Groves of sycomore and palm trees cast their grateful shade over the banks and paths; high rocks or hillocks rising from the plain were crowned with ancient cities, villages, or temples, of which a few crumbling ruins now alone remain, or whose memorial is altogether perished. Broad dykes, with roads running along upon them, served to connect these towns or hamlets at all seasons, even when the fields were overflowed. The less frequented parts of the river were lined with reeds and flags, and the far-famed papyrus, while the richly-scented and variegated flowers of the sacred lotus floated upon the surface. The waters abounded in fish, some of which were regarded with superstitious reverence, while others were in estimation only as articles of food. “We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely” (Num. 11:5), said the Israelites in the desert. There are but few fish in the river now, and the lotus and papyrus are scarce.

The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled: "The reeds and flags shall wither; the paper reeds by the brooks, and everything sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no more: the fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament: and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish" (Is. 19:6).

On the banks of the river stood many a painted temple, many an airy pavilion, many a pleasant summer house. Here a group of women in picturesque costume came to draw water; there a herd of oxen or buffaloes were driven down to drink. Upon the rich pastures on either side cattle were seen grazing, as Pharaoh beheld them in his dream—"Well-favoured and fat-fleshed, which fed in a meadow, or in the marsh grass" (Gen. 41:18). As those visionary kine came up out of the river, so did all the fatness of the land depend upon the extent or failure of the annual overflow of the Nile. About the middle of August the river, after a gradual rise of many weeks, poured forth through the channels and openings prepared for it, and covered the lowlands with broad sheets of water, depositing upon them the rich alluvial soil brought down in its course from Upper Egypt. According to Pliny, "should the Nile not have exceeded twelve cubits in its overflow, famine was the sure result, while a rise of sixteen cubits ensured a plentiful harvest" (Hist. Nat. l. 18, c. 47). "The Egyptians have no occasion for the process or instruments of agriculture" says Herodotus (l. 3, c. 14). "As soon as the river has spread itself over their lands, and returned to its bed, each man scatters the seed over his ground, and waits patiently for the harvest."

It is not surprising that a river which was the source of such incalculable benefits to the Egyptians, should become an object of their religious veneration. It was regarded as an emanation from Osiris, and was worshipped under various names and symbols. One of its names was Hapi, or Apis, which is the same as the sacred bull. There is extant a hymn to the Nile, written about the time of the Exodus, beginning thus—"Hail, O Nile, thou comest forth over this land, thou comest in peace, giving life to Egypt, O hidden God!" Plutarch, following the jargon of the priests, calls the Nile "the Father and Saviour of Egypt" (Symp. 8, 8); and affirms, "There is nothing so much honoured among the Egyptians as the river Nile" (De Isid. et Osirid. c. 5). Even the fish and reptiles which it nourished, and the very reeds and flowers which grew in it, were held sacred. Herodotus says, "The Nile produces otters, which the Egyptians venerate, as they do the fish called lepidotus and the eel" (l. 2, c. 72). Strabo tells us, "The Egyptians worship two of the aquatic animals, the fish lepidotus and the oxyrhynchus" (l. 17, c. 40).

Maximus Tyrius relates the following story (dissert. 38):—"An Egyptian woman nursed a young crocodile, and the Egyptians proclaimed the woman blessed, as being the nurse of a god. Some of them also adored both her and the young crocodile. This woman had a son who was now a lad, and of an equal age with the god, his playfellow, with whom he had been nursed. The god indeed, so long as he was imbecile, was mild; but when he grew large he manifested his nature, and devoured the boy. The miserable woman proclaimed her son blessed in his death, as having become a gift to a domestic god."

About midsummer every year a great festival was celebrated throughout the country in honour of the Nile. Men and women assembled from all parts of the country in the towns of their respective Nomes; grand festivities were proclaimed, and the religious solemnities which then took place were accompanied with feasting, dancing, and a general rejoicing. A wooden image of the river god was carried by the priests through the villages in solemn procession, appropriate hymns were sung, and the blessings of the anticipated inundation were invoked.

By the miraculous change of the waters into blood, a practical rebuke was given to these superstitions. This sacred and beautiful river, the benefactor and preserver of their country, this birthplace of their chief gods, this abode of their lesser deities, this source of all their prosperity, this centre of all their devotion, is turned to blood: the waters stink; the canals and pools, the vessels of wood and vessels of stone, which were replenished from the river, all are alike polluted. The Nile, according to Pliny, was the “only source from whence the Egyptians obtained water for drinking” (Hist. Nat. l. 6, c. 33). This water was considered particularly sweet and refreshing; so much so that the people were in the habit of provoking thirst in order that they might partake more freely of its soft and pleasant draughts. Now it was become abominable to them, and they loathed to drink of it.

The Nile water is still esteemed above any other in Egypt. Mr. Lane says, “As the water of the wells in Cairo is slightly brackish, numerous sakkàs (carriers or sellers of water) obtain their livelihood by supplying its inhabitants with water from the Nile.... It is conveyed in skins by camels and asses. There are also many sakkàs who supply passengers in the streets of the metropolis with water. One of this occupation is called sakkà sharbeh: his kirbeh has a long brass spout, and he pours the water into a brass cup or an earthen kulleh for any one who would drink. There is a more numerous class who follow the same occupation, called ‘hemalees.’ The hemalee carries upon his back a vessel of porous grey earth: this vessel cools the water. From persons of the higher and middle orders he receives from one to five faddahs for a draught of water (five are about equal to one farthing); from the poor either nothing, or a piece of bread, or some other article of food.”—*Modern Egyptians*. The general cry of these men is “O may God compensate me!” Wherever this cry is heard it is known that a sakkà is passing with water from the Nile.

The river of Egypt supplied the people also with a great deal of their food. Herodotus says, “The Egyptians live principally upon fish, either salted or dried in the sun” (l. ii. c. 77); and Diodorus tells us “The Nile abounds with multitudes of fish of all kinds. Not only are these sufficient to supply the inhabitants, but an innumerable quantity is salted and sent abroad. No river in the world is more beneficial and serviceable to mankind than the Nile” (l. 1, c. 36). The Egyptians considered salt water fish to be unclean; but the fish of the Nile was much valued: a mortality among the fishes seems to have been an event not entirely unknown to them; for in a hymn to the Nile, written by the scribe Enna, such a calamity is attributed to the wrath of the Nile god Hapi.

By this first great wonder the supply both of meat and drink was cut off: the river itself was polluted, and the fish were all killed. God would show to this infatuated people the baseness of those natural creatures in which they trusted. “He turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink” (Ps. 78:44). “He turned their waters into blood, and slew their fish” (105:29).

Before the inundation, the comparatively clear stream of the river assumed a red and turbid appearance caused either by the red mud brought down from Abyssinia or by animalculæ; it next assumed a green appearance. The god Nilus was represented of a blue and red colour, in allusion, perhaps, to these different appearances. Assuming that this plague took place after the return of the waters to their bed, and not before the overflow (see p. 46), the change to blood could not be attributed to that deity, nor to those natural causes which prevailed only in the earlier part of the year.

Apart from the suffering occasioned by this plague, there was something awful in the very nature of the miracle: it was not merely a “wonder,” but a “sign.” Prodigies of this kind were always looked upon as very fearful, and the Egyptians were addicted, more than any other people, to observing omens.

But the sign in the river of Egypt had a particular meaning for those who dwelt upon its banks. The Egyptians, at an early period of their history, had been used to sacrifice human victims—a girl, or, as others say, a boy and a girl, to the Nile, at the time of its annual rising: this barbarous custom had long been discontinued; but at the time of the Exodus it was in a manner revived, **the male children of the Israelites being cast into the river as they were born. Pharaoh had “charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river” (Exod. 1:22).** The people, who hated all strangers, considering it an abomination even to eat at the same table with an Hebrew, had willingly lent themselves to this act of cruelty, and had made themselves partakers in their ruler’s guilt. Upon this river Moses had himself been exposed in an ark of bulrushes; he had been “drawn out of the water,” as his name implied, to be a god to Pharaoh, not like those wretched Nile deities which he adored, but armed with irresistible might, as an avenger of blood. **The cry of those many murdered innocents had come up before God’s throne, and Pharaoh and his people must answer for it.**

We are reminded in this history of the description of a future judgment in the book of Revelation. “The third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O LORD, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus: **for they have shed the blood of the saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy” (Rev. 16:4).** Here was an evident retribution for the cruelties of which they had been guilty; here, too, was a manifestation of God’s power and justice which all might understand. The natural effect of this would be to lead them to think seriously of the danger they were bringing upon themselves by daring to contend with One so great and righteous; and thus, by timely submission, to escape the greater evils of which this first plague was a warning and a *sign*.²

² Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

THE SECOND PLAGUE: A SWARM OF FROGS

First Series.

1st Plague. The
river smitten
after its
subsidence

Middle of
October.

2d, **Frogs**

Middle of
November.

3d, Lice

Middle of
December.



THE PLAGUE OF FROGS

GRIEVOUS and terrible as the first of the plagues of Egypt must have been, it does not appear to have called forth any expression of alarm, or any act of submission, from the king. “Seven days were fulfilled after that the Lord had smitten the river.” During that time there was no water to be had for any purpose, except in such small quantities as might be obtained by digging round about the river. Pharaoh, in his palace, would no doubt have enough of this; while water was to be had for labour, he would have it; and he cared but little for the affliction of his people as long as he himself could be exempt. But God was more merciful than Pharaoh; and although the king still refused what Moses had demanded, God at length removed the plague and made the river of Egypt to flow once more in its pure and unpolluted state. The Israelites suffered from this visitation as well as the Egyptians; the plague was upon them all, and they who were bondmen in the land would naturally bear even a greater share of the burden than the rest. If “all the Egyptians dug round about the river for water” (Exod. 7:24) doubtless the Israelites would be compelled to add this to their customary labours, and to dig, not for themselves only, but also for their masters.

God now sends his messengers again to Pharaoh to repeat their demand, and to urge it with new threats and judgments. The three plagues which followed—frogs, lice, and flies—were well calculated to humble the pride of this haughty monarch. They were such as he himself must suffer in common with his subjects; they were irritating and annoying, and yet brought with them no positive evil, beyond a temporary inconvenience: they were, at the same time, tokens of the almighty power of God, whose empire is over the waters, the land, and the air, and who makes even the meanest of his creatures to obey his will, and do him service.

The plague of frogs was threatened before it was inflicted; due warning of its approach was given; but Pharaoh, who had been unmoved in the presence of one great judgment, would not yield in the prospect of another. The sacred river was now made a second time the instrument of punishment. Out of its bed, and from its numerous watercourses, Moses called up an overwhelming swarm of frogs; upon the stretching out of Aaron’s rod these creatures issued forth in such enormous numbers, that the land was full of them: they entered into the king’s palace, and into the poor man’s hut; they found their way to Pharaoh’s bed-chamber, and leaped upon his bed; they spawned in the kneading-troughs and ovens; they spared not the king’s person nor his officers; they were upon his servants and his people, and over all the land of Egypt. Harmless and contemptible as these animals may appear, they were capable of causing the greatest annoyance and discomfort; there is only one kind of frog common in Egypt at the present day, the *Rana esculenta*, which is found also in most parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and even in England, and is valued in some countries as an article of food. Both the climate and soil of Egypt are very favourable to the production of these creatures, which are most abundant there in the month of September: the overflow of the river is then at its greatest extent, and **the whole country is filled with the noise of their croaking.**

The frogs of Moses were probably larger in size and of a more active species than these, since they were able to enter the apartments of the palace, and to climb up on to the couches, which in the houses of the rich were often of considerable height, and ascended by means of steps. The time of their appearance, too, was unnatural: the waters had subsided; for we are not told that they came up from the inundations, but from the rivers, canals, and ponds; and when the plague was removed, it is expressly said they remained in the river only. This is in accordance with the date suggested (page 46)—viz. the middle of November. The unseasonable nature of the visitation, as well as the sudden appearance and no less abrupt departure of the frogs, were not to be accounted for by any natural causes. It was evidently a miracle, and as such Pharaoh acknowledged it; and the meaning of it will become more apparent upon a due consideration of the following particulars.

The Egyptians considered it a necessary part of their religion to purify themselves by frequent washings in the river. It was by the river side that Moses was to wait for Pharaoh—“Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river’s brink against he come” (Exod. 7:15). **Pharaoh was by his office a priest as well as king; and the priests were required, according to Herodotus, to wash themselves in cold water twice in the course of the day, and as often in the night” (I. ii. c. 37).** The same writer describes other important ceremonies which call to mind the customs of the Scribes and Pharisees in later times, “as the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables” (Mark 7:4). “Of their customs,” he says, “one is to drink out of brasen goblets, which it is an universal practice among them to cleanse every day: they wear only linen, and that is always newly washed” (Herod. I. ii. 37). These ablutions were rendered impossible, the sacred river, and all other streams and pools, being a second time polluted. Pharaoh, advancing to the river’s brink, is greeted by the hoarse croaking of millions of slimy frogs; they bar his passage, they choke up the descent by which he would go down into the water; he and his priests must cease from their superstitious washings; they can no longer make clean the outside of the cup and platter, nor with pure hands practise iniquity.

There is no doubt that frogs were in Egypt the objects of some kind of superstitious regard. It is difficult to say whether they were most revered or feared, but, either as good agents or evil, they were numbered among the sacred animals of the Egyptians. The magicians used them in their divinations, and pretended to foretell future events by the changes and swellings which these creatures undergo. Frogs were supposed to be generated from the mud of the river. A frog sitting upon the sacred lotus was symbolical of the return of the Nile to its bed after the inundations. The name *Chrur*, which seems to have been derived from the sound of its croaking, was also used, with only a slight variation, *Hhrur*, to denote the Nile descending. Seated upon a date-stone, with a young palm-leaf rising from its back, it was a type of man in embryo. The importance attached to the frog in some parts of Egypt is further apparent from its having been embalmed and honoured with burial in the tombs of Thebes; and from its frequent appearance upon the monuments and inscriptions. Among the former is the god Pthah, having the head of a frog, and representing the creative power of the deity; there is also a frog-headed goddess named Heka, who was worshipped in the district of Sah, as the wife of Chnum, the god of the cataracts, and to whose favour the annual overflow of the Nile, with all the benefits which followed, was ascribed.

As the wealth and prosperity of Egypt depended upon the annual overflowing of the Nile, it is not surprising that the people of that land, who seem in every possible instance to have worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, should have ascribed peculiar honour to the frogs, which abounded most in the time of the inundations: they may have regarded them as in some sense the authors of their benefits, or rather as beneficent agents sent forth by their sacred river to assist and direct its fertilising process.

But it is probable that the sacred character of these animals was attributable, in some parts of Egypt at least, to the fears entertained for them by the Egyptians, as spirits of evil. St. John, in the book of Revelation, represents the frog as an evil spirit; and his emblems were generally derived from symbolical ideas which prevailed of old. "I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet; for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles" (Rev. 16:13). Such probably were the frogs which the magicians of Egypt brought forth in opposition to Moses, spirits of devils. Satan, who had greater license and a wider range in those dark times and places than he has now, sent out his demons in this form, at the call of his false prophets, to confirm the Egyptians in their rebellion against God; and "the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt" (Exod. 8:7).

And where are his priests,—his prophets? Can they not propitiate these unwholesome deities? Is there no sacrifice that they can offer to induce them to withdraw? Where are the magicians and sorcerers? Cannot they command their own familiar spirits? No; they can add to their number, and call forth more frogs upon the land, but they cannot deliver themselves from the intolerable burden with which they are afflicted.

"Verily God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen" (1 Cor. 1:28). If this were not a work of divine retribution, we might almost be provoked to smile at the strangeness of the visitation, and to amuse ourselves in thinking over some of the accidents with which it must have been attended; and the words of the Psalmist, descriptive of the high disdain of God for the miserable pride and arrogance of man, naturally occur to us—"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:4). "He poureth contempt upon princes" (Ps. 107:40).

That Pharaoh recognised this swarm of frogs as a miracle, notwithstanding the successful imitation of it by his own sorcerers, is evident from his appeal to Moses. It was the first time that he showed any sign of relenting. He called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Entreat the LORD, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the LORD" (Exod. 8:8). "And Moses cried unto the LORD because of the frogs which he had brought against Pharaoh, and the LORD did according to the word of Moses; and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the villages, and out of the fields. And they gathered them together upon heaps; and **the land stank.** But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said" (Exod. 8:12).³

³ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

THE THIRD PLAGUE: LICE AS SANDSTORM

First Series.

1st Plague. The
river smitten
after its
subsidence

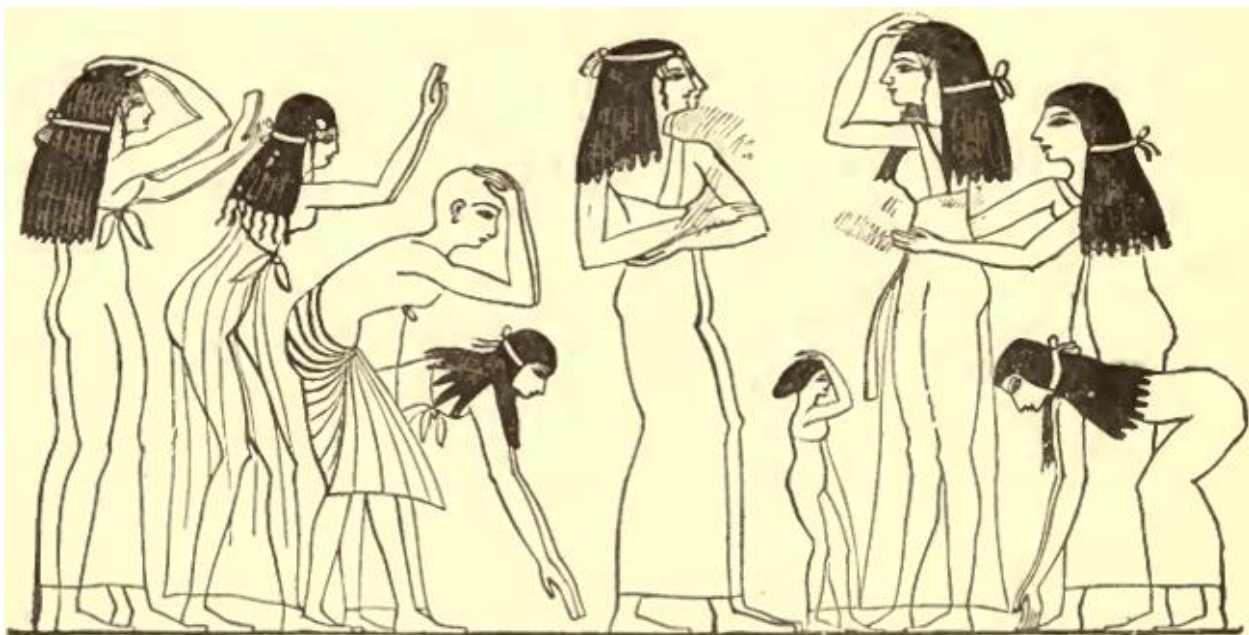
Middle of
October.

2d, Frogs

Middle of
November.

3d, **Lice**

Middle of
December.



THE PLAGUE OF LICE

Pharaoh had been compelled by the intolerable nuisance of the frogs, which thronged his own palace, even to the bed-chambers and the ovens, to humble himself and entreat that the plague might be removed. Moses, with a view perhaps to convince the king that neither the appearance of these creatures, nor their destruction, depended upon natural causes, had asked him to fix a time—any time that he might choose—for the removal of the plague. “Glory over me,” that is, command me, “when shall I entreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and from thy houses?” (Exod. 8:9). Pharaoh, hoping, no doubt, that the frogs might yet disappear without the word of Moses, puts off the deliverance, earnestly as he desires it, until the morrow; and Moses shows by his reply that he appreciates the motive of this strange delay, and, at the same time, accepts the challenge: “Be it according to thy word; that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the LORD our God.”

Yet, although the king had thus proved the power of God, and had put his servants to the test, as soon as he saw that there was respite he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them, and refused to let the people go, as the LORD had said.

The third plague, the plague of lice, was now sent upon the land without any warning. This time the dust of the earth was raised up and quickened into life for the punishment of those who dwelt thereon. “The LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the **dust of the land, that it may become lice** throughout all the land of Egypt” (Exod. 8:16). **Here was another blow aimed at their false deities, another reproof for the pretended sanctity under which so much iniquity and uncleanness lay concealed.** The Egyptian priests were very particular not to harbour any vermin, and considered it a dreadful profanation of their temple if any animalculæ or creeping things were carried into them. Herodotus says:—“The priests every third day shave every part of their bodies, to prevent any louse, or other detestable insect, from adhering to those who are engaged in the service of the gods” (l. ii. c. 37). “The people never wear any woollen garment when they are to enter a temple, nor is anything of this sort used in their burials, for it would be esteemed an impurity” (l. ii. c. 81). Plutarch also says, “The priests of Isis wear vestments of linen, which of all other kinds is least likely to breed lice or vermin” (De Isid. et Osirid. c. 4).

The plague of lice was not only in the garments, but also in the bodies of the people; wherever the dust fell, there these horrible parasites appeared; if it alighted upon their clothes, their clothes, whether of linen or flannel, were full of them; if it settled upon their naked skins, the skin was penetrated by them. It was a general plague; no part of the country was exempt. The words of the inspired history are, “All the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt” (Exod. 8:17). The Psalmist says, “He spake, and there came lice in all their coasts” (Ps. 105:31). It was a plague which spared neither age nor sex, neither clean nor unclean, neither things sacred nor things secular; wherever there was dust in Egypt, there it “became lice in man and in beast.”

Travellers speak of the dust of Egypt as in itself almost a plague, prevailing chiefly during the winter months. Pococke says, "We travelled to Achmim through clouds of **dust raised by a high wind, which intercepted our view as much as if we had been travelling in a fog; and arrived there on the eve of Christmas.**" **This is the date assigned to the plague of lice in our calendar of events (ch. 3).** Mr. Lane writes, "There is one great source of discomfort arising from the dryness of the atmosphere, namely, an excessive quantity of dust." The lice of Egypt are also described in very thrilling terms, "a sort of tick not larger than a grain of sand, which, when filled with blood, expands to the size of a hazel nut." These prevail at certain seasons to such an extent that Sir Samuel Baker says "it is as though the very dust were turned into lice." In Deuteronomy, where Moses forewarns the Israelites of the plagues which God would send upon them in the land of Canaan if they should rebel against him, he says, "The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed" (28:24). Their reminiscences of the land of Egypt would enable them to appreciate this figure.

The curse of lice was upon the soil of Egypt, which was esteemed sacred, and worshipped as the father of the gods. Under the name Seb, the black mud from the Nile, which, as it became dry under the rays of the sun (another of their deities), gave birth to these disgusting creatures, was especially venerated, and the country itself was called after it, *Chemi*, or black. The Egyptians were accustomed to humble themselves in many of their religious ceremonies, and especially in their acts of mourning, by throwing dust upon their heads. On the death of their kings or public men, and even when a cat or any other sacred animal perished, they ran through the streets lamenting and covering themselves with dust. At certain seasons of the year also public lamentations took place in honour of their gods, accompanied with the same gestures (see chap. xiii.—the Death of the First-born). The dust of the earth now turned against them, to reprove them for their superstition, for wherever they cast it, it became a loathsome parasite upon them.

The magicians who had succeeded in imitating the two former plagues were baffled by this. Satan had helped them at the first, so that they could produce the blood and the frogs, as if in rivalry with Moses; but the command of God was now upon him and his hosts—"Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther." "The magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not." **Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh—"This is the finger of God" (Exod. 8:18).**

This "finger," which may be held to represent the power of God exercised in its lightest form, a finger only, was sufficient to curb all the power of Satan, and to put his prophets to an open shame. They were helpless: they could neither make matters better for the relief of the people, nor worse for their own credit. The priests, being polluted by this horrible infection, could not stand to minister before their deities. The people could not, in their uncleanness, be admitted within the precincts of their temples. If they would offer sacrifice, there were no victims fit for the purpose. Even the gods, the oxen, and goats, and cats, were defiled with the vermin. The Egyptians not only writhed under the loathsome scourge, but felt themselves humbled and disgraced by it. Josephus notices this;—"Pharaoh," he says, "was so confounded at this new plague, that, what with the danger, the *scandal*, and the nastiness of it, he was half sorry for what he had done" (b. ii. c. 14).

The plague assumed the form of a disease, being “in the people” As Josephus says again, “The bodies of the people bred them, and they were all covered over with them, gnawing and tearing intolerably, and no remedy, for baths and ointments did no good” (*Ibid.*) But, however distressing to their bodies, the foul and disgraceful character of the plague, and the offence brought upon their religion by the defilement of their deities and the interruption of all their religious ceremonies, was its most afflictive feature.

And in this we may suppose the manifest propriety of the visitation must have been understood, if it was not acknowledged. It was a reproof to the Egyptians for the uncleanness of their religious ceremonies, which were carried on under an outward show of purity. God had sent upon them all a ceremonial and a real uncleanness. They recognised his judgment, and confessed—“This is the finger of God.”

If they had acknowledged this under the two former plagues, it would have been less remarkable; for then Moses had distinctly told them what they were to expect. He had pointed out to them beforehand the judgment which the God of Israel, the great I AM, would send upon them. But now they had received no such warning. They knew nothing of the command of God to Moses. They had not seen or heard of the outstretching of Aaron’s wand, by which the loathsome swarm of vermin was called into existence. They knew only that they and their deities together were once more rebuked and made contemptible, and that a miracle had been wrought by Moses, the servant of God, which it was beyond their power either to imitate or to resist.

But although the magicians and priests were thus convinced, the heart of Pharaoh was still hardened, and he hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said. He would neither humble himself before Moses, nor even entreat for his people that the plague might be removed. He would bear the shameful burden, and writhe under it in sullen defiance, rather than **confess its justice**. But God will have mercy, and not sacrifice. He had pity upon the miserable Egyptians even when their own king had none. It was enough that priests and people had confessed the power and justice of Jehovah in the visitation. He had regard to their submission rather than to the obstinacy of their ruler; and as the plague had come suddenly upon them without warning, so now it was removed, as it would seem, without observation. The living creatures returned again to the dust from which they had been created, and the land, once more, had respite.⁴

⁴ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

First Series.

**1st Plague. The
river smitten after
its subsidence**

Middle of October.

2d, Frogs

**Middle of
November.**

3d, Lice

**Middle of
December.**

Second Series. 4th, Flies

January.

5th, The Murrain End of January.

**6th, Boils and
blains**

February.

THE FOURTH PLAGUE: FLIES THAT BITE!

THE PLAGUE OF FLIES

THE plague of flies is the first in order of the three which constitute the second group or series into which these visitations are generally divided. It came not without warning. Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and as he did not humble himself under the plague of lice, while it was yet upon the people, it could not be supposed that he would yield now that it was removed. Yet God gives him opportunity; before another judgment is poured out upon the land, Pharaoh has again the choice proposed to him, whether he will hearken to the word of God, or deliberately disobey it.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh (lo, he cometh forth to the water), and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me: Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are. **And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to-morrow shall this sign be” (Exod. 8:20).**

No answer seems to have been vouchsafed to this appeal; the message was undoubtedly delivered, but nothing is said of Pharaoh's reply; the narrative proceeds immediately, “And the LORD did so: and there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies.”



This fourth plague happened, in all probability, about the middle of January: that is, in Egypt, the coldest season of the year, and therefore the time when a swarm of flies would, in the course of nature, be least expected. Egypt has always suffered more or less severely in hot weather from the various sorts of flies which arise from the marshy lands. "The most numerous and troublesome among the insects which infest these countries," says Sonnini, "are flies, which cruelly torment both men and animals. It is impossible to form a just idea of their obstinate perseverance when they wish to fasten upon any particular part of the body, as when they are driven away they return and settle again in the same moment, and their pertinacity tires out the most patient sufferer. They particularly delight in fastening upon the corners of the eyes and the edges of the eyelids, to which tender parts they are attracted by a slight humidity." Mr. Lane says—"In spring, summer, and autumn, flies are so abundant as to be extremely annoying during the daytime, and mosquitoes are troublesome at night, unless a curtain be made use of to keep them away, and often in the day." Herodotus also makes mention of the flies of Egypt, and describes the nets with which the inhabitants protected themselves against them. In winter, however, these insects are rarely troublesome, and Pharaoh may have thought that the threat of such a plague was but little likely to be fulfilled. For the same reason the miraculous character of the visitation, when it came, was the more readily acknowledged. "Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land" (Exod. 8:25). "I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away: entreat for me" (8:28).

It is a question not easily to be answered, what kind of flies these were. The Hebrew word is very indefinite; but the Septuagint gives it, both here and in the 104th Psalm, as the κυνόμυια, or dog-fly. This insect is, in some seasons, a far worse plague in Egypt than even the mosquito. Its bite is sharp and painful, causing severe inflammation, especially in the eyelids. Coming in immense swarms, they cover all objects in black and loathsome masses, and attack every exposed part of a traveller's person with incredible pertinacity.

The flies of this plague were evidently of a formidable kind, and very grievous. The Psalmist says—"He sent flies among them, which devoured them" Ps. (78:45). There is a kind of beetle common in Egypt which is very destructive, inflicting painful bites, and consuming all sorts of materials. The mosquito also, which is a terrible nuisance in all hot climates, and especially in the vicinity of rivers, answers to this description; and the house-fly, which swarms in Egypt, carries corruption, and not unfrequently infectious disease, wherever it alights. It is probable, however, that the flies of this plague were of various kinds, including the above and many others, for David says again—"He spake the word, and there came all manner of flies," or "divers sorts of flies" (Ps. 105:31). The marginal reading gives a similar description, "a mixture of noisome beasts." There is no reason, therefore, for supposing that the plague was limited to any one species; on the contrary, as the flies were everywhere, upon the people and in their houses, on the ground and in the air, and in all the land of Egypt, it appears almost certain that they were of different habits, and therefore of different species. There were flies that devoured, and flies that stung; flies that corrupted, and flies that hovered whirring in the air; flies upon men, inflaming their eyelids and blinding them, and flies upon the cattle; there were beetles that crawled upon the ground, and perhaps also bees, and wasps, and hornets, pursuing the people fiercely.

It is doubtful whether some kind of flies were not among the sacred insects of the Egyptians. Some of them have been preserved, perhaps accidentally, in the mummy cloths, and some few, among which are the house-fly, the wasp, and the butterfly, are represented in paintings on the monuments and walls.

To make the miracle more evident, these pests, while vexing the Egyptians almost beyond endurance, giving them no rest either by night or day, were not suffered to approach the Israelites. **“In the land of Goshen were no flies.”** Although the tract of country occupied by the Jews appears to have been in that part of Egypt where flies would naturally be produced most freely—namely, in the low, well-watered regions—the flies which swarmed on all sides never crossed their frontier.

The Egyptians held all the four elements (as they were called) in idolatrous esteem. The air, from which the flies descended upon them was worshipped in the person of a god called Shu, the son of Ra, or in that Isis, the queen of the heavens. In the former plagues the power of Jehovah over the waters and the dry land had been manifested. Now the air sent forth its winged hosts to do his pleasure. Thus each element in turn was made an instrument of rebuke and punishment to Pharaoh, and the universal sovereignty of Jehovah was displayed, according to His word—“That thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.”

Against these flies, which are more or less troublesome in all hot climates, the ancients used to invoke special deities. The Greeks had their Zeus Apomyios, Jupiter the deliverer from flies; and the Romans their Hercules Myiagros, the fly-disperser. In the temples of these deities it is said that no flies were ever seen; and the altar of Venus at Paphos enjoyed a similar immunity.

Pliny tells us—“The people of Elis invoke their god Myiagros whenever the vast multitude of flies are bringing a pestilence upon them” (Hist. Nat. l. 10, c. 40); and in another place he observes—“It is generally believed that there is no creature less docile, or less intelligent, than the fly—a circumstance which makes it all the more marvellous that at the sacred games at Olympia, immediately after the immolation of the bull in honour of the god Myiodes, whole crowds of flies take their departure from that territory” (1. 29, c. 34).

Ælian, in his history of animals, asserts that not only the fly-god was worshipped, but that even the flies themselves were treated with divine honours. “At Actium,” he says, “they sacrifice an ox to the flies” (l. 2, c. 8).

These fly-gods, of which, as it will be presently seen, there were traces in Egypt, as well as among other nations, were all put to confusion by the plague which now swept over that country. Sacrifices, prayers, ceremonies, were of no avail: the priests could do nothing to deliver the nation from the worry and distress, the sickness and corruption, brought upon them. The God of Moses alone could command the flies, for they were his creatures; He could send them hither and thither, making a distinction between his own people and the worshippers of idols, causing them to spare the one and to afflict the other: but the gods of Egypt, the fly-destroyers and dispersers, were but vain things, and could not even deliver themselves and their altars from the swarms which lighted on them.

Although the plague of flies in Egypt is the most notable instance of the kind in history, it is far from being the only one. When God had brought out his people from captivity, and was leading them towards the land of promise, he said to Moses, "I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee" (Exod. 23:28); and in the book of Joshua we have the fulfilment of this promise: "I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites" (Josh. 24:12). The fly-god was doubtless among the idols of Canaan, having been imported from Egypt by the Phœnicians.

When Ahaziah had fallen down through a lattice in his upper chamber, and was sick, he sent messengers, not to the prophets of Israel, but to one of these idols: "Go, enquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of the disease" (2 Kings 1:2). For this the LORD rebuked him by his servant Elijah: "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." The meaning of the word Baalzebub is "the Lord of Flies;" *Zebub*, or *dthebáb*, is the name of a fly common in these days in the desert, and much feared by the Arabs on account of its causing a disease among their camels, to which they give the same name. In the Septuagint, where the word Baalzebub is translated "the Baal of Flies," the word Ekron is written Accaron (Δεῦτε και ἐπιζήτωσατε ἐν τῷ Βάαλ μυῖαν θεὸν Ἀκκαρῶν), and this is nearly the same as one of the gods of Egypt, named Acchor.

It would seem, then, that Ahaziah sent to consult one of the Canaanitish idols whose worship had been brought from Egypt; and it was just that the fly of that country should be summoned for the chastisement of a people who could be guilty of such an impiety.⁵

⁵ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

First Series.

**1st Plague. The
river smitten after
its subsidence**

Middle of October.

2d, Frogs

**Middle of
November.**

3d, Lice

**Middle of
December.**

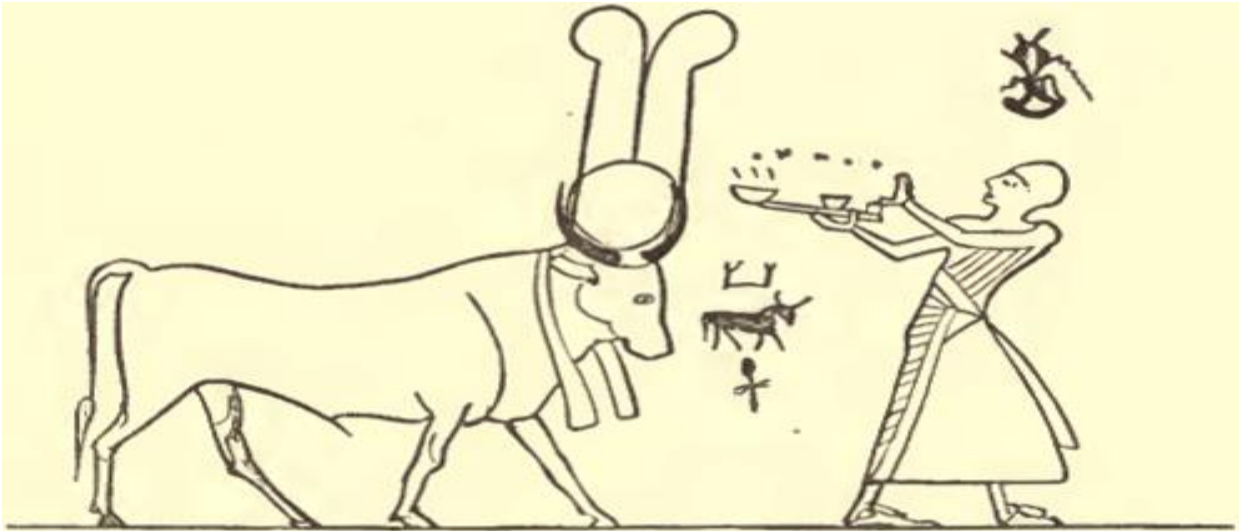
Second Series. 4th, Flies

January.

5th, **The Murrain End of January.**

**6th, Boils and
blains**

February.



THE FIFTH PLAGUE: MURRAIN OF CATTLE

THE VERY GRIEVOUS MURRAIN

WHEN Pharaoh, goaded into submission by the intolerable visitation of the flies, had sent for Moses and Aaron, and had bidden them “Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land” (Exod. 8:25), Moses answered him, “It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and shall they not stone us?” The “abomination of the Egyptians,” it need hardly be remarked, was the ox, to which that people paid divine honours. So Chemosh is called the abomination of Moab, and Moloch the abomination of Ammon (1 Kings 11:7). Throughout Egypt the ox was worshipped as the symbol or manifestation of their greatest deities, Osiris, Athum, Ptah, and Isis; and it may well have appeared an unheard-of and intolerable thing, that the deities of one country should be offered up in sacrifice to the god of another, and that a subject, people. This was the humiliation which Moses was about to inflict upon the Egyptians, although not in their presence.

When the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it into their temple at Ashdod, the idol Dagon was compelled to bow before it. “When they of Ashdod came early in the morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD” (1 Sam. 5:3). Being restored to his place, a still greater humiliation was prepared both for the idol and his worshippers; for “the next morning, behold, Dagon was fallen again upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon, and both the palms of his hands, were cut off upon the threshold” (v. 4). So now the Dagon of Egypt, the cattle which Pharaoh and his servants revered as deities, must fall down and perish before the God of Israel. It mattered not that the Israelites were at that time in the house of bondage: the ark of God, too, was in captivity when Dagon fell down before it. God had suffered his people to be afflicted, but he had heard their cry, and was come down to visit and relieve them; and that nation which evil entreated them he himself would judge.

Pharaoh would not have troubled himself about the humiliation of his gods; for he appears to have had very little religion of any kind, either true or false. He would have given up the sacred cattle to be slaughtered under his own eyes; but the priests and the people would not endure it. “Will they not stone us?” said Moses; from which it appears that the punishment of sacrilege among the Egyptians was the same which God afterwards appointed for the Israelites—“He that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him” (Lev. 24:16).

To compromise the matter, it was agreed that the Israelites should go a short distance into the wilderness to perform their sacrifices; and Moses, having received a promise to this effect from Pharaoh, entreated the Lord to take away the flies from the land. “And the LORD removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, and from his servants, and from his people: there remained not one. And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, and would not let the people go” (Exod. 8:31, 32).

But although the king may thus forbid the sacrifice of his cattle by the priests of Israel, he cannot prevent their destruction by the hand of God. One woe is past, but behold another woe cometh quickly. “Then the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me: for if thou refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still, behold the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain” (Exod. 9:1). Instead now of a few of the beasts of the Israelites being offered in the wilderness upon God’s altar, the cattle of Egypt everywhere are stricken, the horses and the asses, the sheep and the camels, perish with the oxen, and there is a very grievous murrain.

But while the cattle of the Egyptians are destroyed, those of the Israelites are untouched. Looking upon the pastures of Pharaoh, where the cattle were wont to feed, in the richest borders of the Nile, we see the consequences of sin bringing forth death: “For the wickedness of the land the beasts are consumed. How long shall the land mourn and the herbs of the field wither for the wickedness of them that dwell therein?” (Jerem. 12:4); but looking upon the fields of Goshen, we behold the blessedness of God’s protecting favour: “Their sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in their streets, their oxen are strong to labour, and there is no complaining” (Ps. 144:13). Happy are the people that are in such a case! happy are the very cattle which belong to them and serve them.

The Egyptians venerated a great variety of animals; but oxen were among their chief deities. Herodotus says—“The Egyptians esteem bulls as sacred to Epaphus; the females are sacred to Isis; they venerate cows far beyond all other cattle” (l. 2, c. 38, 41). “The god Apis or Epaphus is the calf of a cow which can have no more young. The Egyptians say that on this occasion the cow is struck with lightning, in consequence of which she conceives and brings forth Apis: the young one so produced and thus named is known by certain marks; the skin is black, but on the forehead is a white star of a triangular form: the tail is divided at the end” (l. 3, c. 28). It was pretended, moreover, that the tail of this animal increased or diminished in sympathy with the changes of the moon.

The same historian gives the following account of an image of one of these animals, and of the idolatrous worship paid to it, which he had seen with his own eyes:—"Mycerinus, the son of Cheops, having lost his only daughter, and wishing to honour her funeral with more than ordinary splendour, enclosed her body in a heifer made of wood and richly ornamented with gold. The heifer was not buried; it remained even to my time in the palace of Sais, placed in a superb hall. Every day costly aromatics were burned before it, and every night it was splendidly illuminated. The body of this heifer is covered with a purple cloth, whilst the head and neck are very richly gilt: betwixt the horns there is a golden star" (l. 2, c. 129).

Strabo describes the temple of the ox Apis at Memphis, where he says "he is held to be a god. In front of the sanctuary is a court in which there is another sanctuary for the dam of Apis: into this court Apis is let loose at times for the purpose of exhibiting him to strangers. He is seen through a door in the sanctuary, and he is permitted to be seen also out of it. After he has frisked about a little in the court, he is taken back to his own stall" (l. 17, c. 1). "At Heliopolis is a temple of the sun, and the ox Mnevis, which is kept in a sanctuary, and is regarded by the inhabitants as a god, as Apis is regarded by the people of Memphis" (*ibid.*) "An ox is also kept for worship at Hermonthis" (*ibid.*) "The people of Momemphis worship Venus, and a sacred cow is kept there, as Apis is maintained at Memphis, and Mnevis at Heliopolis: these animals are regarded as gods, but there are other places, and these are numerous, both in the Delta and beyond it, in which a bull or cow is maintained, which are not regarded as gods, but only as sacred" (*ibid.*) According to Ælian, the ox Mnevis was sacred to the sun, and Apis to the moon (de Nat. Anim. l. 2, 11).

Plutarch says—"The ox Mnevis is nourished at Heliopolis at the common expense of the city. He is consecrated to Osiris, and is said by some to be the sire of Apis" (de Isid. et Osirid. c. 33). Porphyry says—"The Egyptians and Phœnicians would rather feed on human flesh than the flesh of a heifer" (de Abstin. ii. 11). When Cambyses was at Memphis the god Apis was conducted to his presence with much ceremony by the priests, the Egyptians following him, clothed in their richest apparel and making great rejoicings. Cambyses, indignant at their folly, inflicted a mortal wound upon the beast with his dagger; "then turning to the priests, 'Wretches,' he exclaimed, 'think ye that gods are formed of flesh and blood, and thus susceptible of wounds? This is indeed a deity worthy of the Egyptians' " (Herodotus, l. 3, c. 27).

The very grievous murrain which now fell upon all the cattle of the Egyptians was another and more direct blow at the monstrous idolatries of that benighted people. By the former plagues their religious ceremonies had been interrupted and their sacred abominations defiled; but now their chief deities are attacked. In Goshen, where the cattle are but cattle, they remain untouched: "Of the cattle of the children of Israel there died not one" (Exod. 9:6); but in all other parts of the country, where they are revered as gods, the plague is upon them, and they die. Osiris, the saviour, cannot save even the brute in which his own soul is supposed to dwell; Apis and Mnevis, the ram of Ammon, the sheep of Sais, and the goat of Mendes, perish together. Hence Moses reminds the Israelites afterwards, "Upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments" (Num. 33:4); and Jethro, when he had heard from Moses the history of all that God had done in Egypt, confessed, "Now, I know that the LORD is greater than all gods; for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them" (Exod. 18:11).

It appears wonderful that, notwithstanding these judgments, by which even the heathen were convinced, the Israelites themselves should have been unpersuaded. It was natural that while they were in Egypt they should join in the idolatries of their masters; that they did so is evident from the language of Joshua, bidding their descendants “put away the gods which their fathers served in Egypt” (Josh. 24:14); but it was not to be expected that they would cleave to these abominations after the Lord had brought them out of the house of bondage, and had commanded them to serve him. Yet, in the wilderness, those same idols of Egypt which had perished under God’s hand were preferred before the LORD of Lords. “Make us gods which shall go before us” (Exod. 32), was the cry of Israel; and Aaron made them a calf, a molten calf, an image of the sacred bull which was dead; “and he said, These be thy gods, O Israel.”

That this calf was a representative of the Egyptian ox may be inferred from the description given of it, and of the ceremonies with which it was worshipped. Aaron, it is said, took the golden earrings, “and fashioned it with a graving tool after he had made it a molten calf.” Such fashioning they had observed upon the statues of Apis, in the form of sculptured wings and feathers, with ornaments of gold upon the neck and forehead as already described. “The people rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings: and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” Joshua “heard the noise of the people as they shouted; and he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for the mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome; but the noise of them that sing do I hear. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses saw that the people were naked, for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies.” Such shouting and singing, such playing and dancing, such nakedness and wantoning, they had witnessed at the feasts of Mnevis. But they were now not in Egypt, the land of sorcery and idols, but in Horeb the mount of God. This was the place where Jehovah had declared himself to Moses in the burning bush; this the spot where he had bidden him “Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” Here, where God had come down in answer to their cries and tears, they turned away from him, and set up their molten image; “they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass” (Psalm 106:20); and they whom God had brought hither by a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm, that they might sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians upon his altar, instead of sacrificing it, adored. Truly saith the Psalmist—“They that make such things are like unto them, and so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psalm 115:8). So foolish are they and ignorant, even as the beasts. But God’s mercy is even more amazing than man’s folly. As he had plagued Pharaoh, so in the wilderness he “plagued the people because of the calf which Aaron made;” **but he had compassion at the same time upon their ignorance; he did not destroy them.** “The Lord repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto them” (Exod. 32:14) before they had repented of their sin; and he consumed them not.

No human care, no form of quarantine, even if there had been time for such precautions, could have stopped the path of a pestilence like this: there is no parallel to it in the history of disease or climate; nor could there be a doubt that God had sent this plague, not in the way of any ordinary calamity, but as a mark of his special displeasure, a stroke from his own hand.

But it had no effect upon Pharaoh. He sent to inquire in the land of Goshen; and when he heard that the cattle of Israel were safe, anger seems to have prevailed over every other feeling, and, instead of being warned by the judgment, he was hardened.⁶

⁶ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

First Series.

**1st Plague. The
river smitten after
its subsidence**

Middle of October.

2d, Frogs

**Middle of
November.**

3d, Lice

**Middle of
December.**

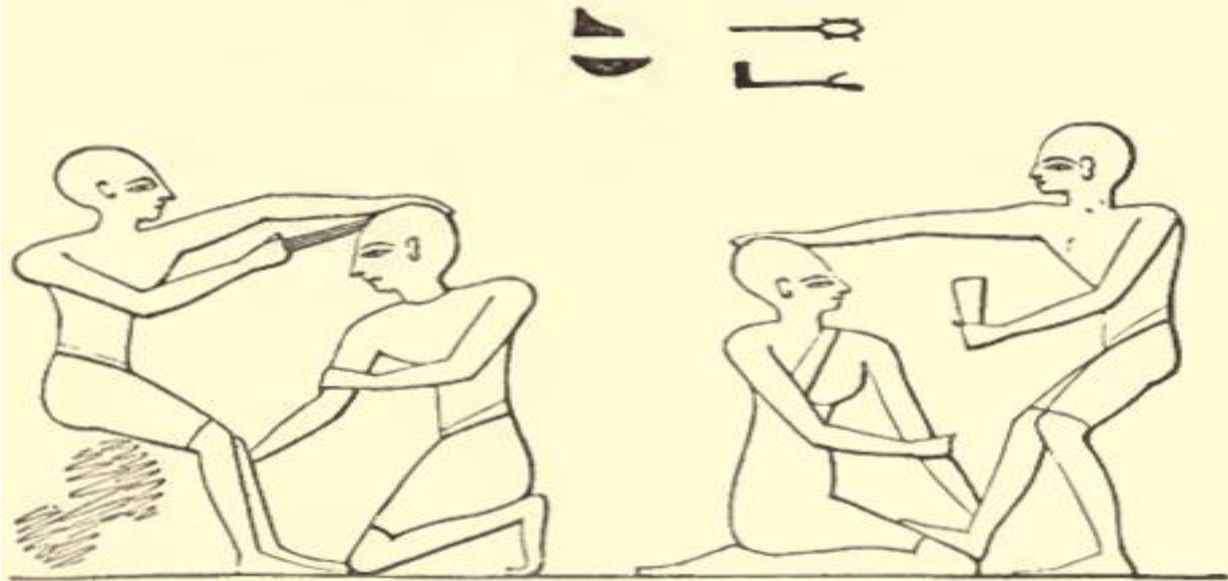
Second Series. 4th, Flies

January.

5th, The Murrain End of January.

**6th, Boils and
blains**

February.



THE SIXTH PLAGUE: BOILS AND BLAINS

BOILS AND BLAINS UPON MAN AND BEAST

THE plagues with which Egypt was afflicted begin from this point to assume a new and more serious character. Hitherto they had been grievous, rather on account of the annoyance and inconvenience which they caused, than from any personal affliction threatening or affecting life. Pharaoh, however, is unmoved by all these visitations; his heart is still hardened. God, therefore, now presses upon him more heavily. **Since the degradation of their gods and the death of their cattle does not affect them, the pestilence is now sent upon their own bodies.** "There shall be boils and blains both upon man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt" (Exod. 9:10).

This sixth plague is ushered in with a peculiar ceremony. Moses appears before Pharaoh bearing a censer in his hand filled with ashes from the furnace. **He has no message for him now, and gives him no warning of the impending disaster.** The sorcerers and priests, the officers and servants, stand round about, anxiously watching what this new sign may mean. None dare to lift up hand against him. The king, whose word was law, who might have doomed him to instant death, is speechless. Moses fears him not, strong in the protection of his unseen God. The idols stare upon the assembled multitude from the sculptured walls; but neither god nor man of the Egyptians can move hand or foot against the servant of the Lord.

He swings the censer, and the ashes fly up towards heaven: the winds take hold of them and carry them in all directions, scattering them far and wide. The small dust descends upon the persons of all present; it is spread through the courts and chambers of the king's house; it is borne upon the wings of the wind through all the land of Egypt; and wherever it falls it burns: like sparks from a furnace it stings and blisters every place it touches; boils and blains spring forth under it; the magicians cannot stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boil is upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians: hitherto they had withstood him, but now they sink down in his presence, overcome with pain and sickness. Jannes and Jambres shall no more oppose the messengers of God; "they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be manifest to all men" (2 Tim. 3:9).

The censer filled with ashes was an instrument well calculated to remind the Egyptians of those sins for which God was now exacting retribution. They had compelled the Israelites to labour in the brick-kilns; they had made their lives bitter with hard bondage in the heat of the furnace. Moses reminds the Jews how God brought them forth "out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt" (Deut. 4:20). These ashes of the furnace were now taken from the oppressed and cast upon the oppressors. The burns and smartings of the bondsmen were inflicted upon their masters; and their violent dealing returned thus upon their own pate.

The dust of the Typhonii, when scattered to the winds, was supposed to carry with it the blessings of the gods to whom the human sacrifices had been offered. The act of Moses was therefore in marked antagonism to this custom of the idolators. The ashes which he scattered bore with them a curse instead of a blessing; and the event must have displayed, both to Jew and Gentile, the power and justice of that God who thus avenged his people.

History tells us that the Egyptians had many deities, whose especial office it was to preside over medicine, and to whom the people looked for relief under all maladies and pains of the flesh. Numbers who had been deprived of their eyes, and other organs of their bodies, recovered them by their application to Isis." "Orus, the last of the gods who reigned in Egypt, is reported to have learnt the science of physic, as well as prophecy, from his mother Isis" (l. 1, c. 25).

The Egyptians professed to be able to foretell what epidemics or other disasters were about to happen. Diodorus says, again, "The Egyptian priests foretell both famine and plenty, grievous diseases likely to seize upon man and beast, earthquakes and inundations; and, through long experience, they are able to predict with such accuracy as would be thought impossible for the wisdom of man to attain to" (l. 1, c. 81). With all their wisdom they could not foretell the murrain upon the cattle, nor the boils and blains upon man and beast, nor any other of the plagues.

Tacitus presents us with a confused account of this particular plague, mixing up truth with fiction, and attributing to the deities of Egypt a part in the exodus of the Jews which belonged to one who is above all gods. He says—"Many writers concur in the following account: that when Egypt was overrun by a pestilent disease, contaminating living bodies, and very foul to behold, Bocchoris, the king, applying for a remedy to the oracle of Jupiter Hammon, was ordered to purge his kingdom, and to remove into another country, that generation of men (the Jews) so detested by the deities" (Hist, l, 5, c. 3).

As it is said in Revelation—“There fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image” (Rev. 16:2). This sore was known in after times as “the botch of Egypt” (Deut. 28:27). It was different from all other sores, both in its origin and in its course; and different from all other epidemics, inasmuch as it stopped short upon the frontier of the land of Goshen. It spared also the person of the Jew, though he might have his dwelling in the midst of it, in the cities of the Egyptians; wherever a child of Israel appeared the small dust was either wafted aside or fell upon his flesh harmless.

Their laws compel them to cherish animals: a certain number of their men and women are appointed to this office, which is esteemed so honourable that it descends from father to son. In the presence of these animals the inhabitants of the cities perform their vows. It is a capital offence designedly to kill any one of them. In whatever family a cat by accident happens to die, every individual cuts off his eyebrows; but on the death of a dog they shave their heads and every part of their bodies” (I. 2, C. 65).

Diodorus writes thus:—“The adoration and worshipping of beasts among the Egyptians seems to many, and with reason, a strange and an unaccountable thing; for they worship some creatures most extravagantly when they are dead as well as when they are alive, as cats, ichneumons, dogs, kites, the ibis, wolves, and crocodiles, and many other such like.” “He that wilfully kills any of the sacred beasts of Egypt is put to death; but if any kill a cat or the bird Ibis, whether intentionally or not, he is dragged away to death by the multitude without any formal trial or judgment. So great is the superstition of these people, that when the Romans were about making a league with Ptolemy, and all the people were anxious to show the greatest kindness and favour to the Latin nation, and to avoid everything that might give offence to them, yet when a Roman soldier had chanced inadvertently to kill a cat, the people ran in a tumult to seize him, nor could the fear of the Romans, nor the persuasions of the princes who were sent to them from the king, deliver the soldier from the fury of the populace. Of this I was an eye-witness at the time of my travels into Egypt” (I. 1, c. 83).

All these “preposterous deities” were involved in the calamity which now fell upon their land; the plague of boils and blains lighted upon them in common with their worshippers; the physicians of Egypt could do nothing, and the gods of Egypt were equally helpless. “According to the number of their cities are their gods” (Jer. 11:13); but have any of them delivered his land? Instead of saving others, they are themselves cut off. Yet Pharaoh knows not yet that Egypt is destroyed. He still exalts himself against the God of Israel, and will not let his people go that they may serve him.⁷

⁷ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

Call of Moses In the spring.

**1st appearance May.
before Pharaoh**

**First Series. 1st Plague. The Middle of
river smitten October.
after its
subsidence**

**2d, Frogs Middle of
November.**

**3d, Lice Middle of
December.**

Second Series. 4th, Flies January.

5th, The Murrain End of January.

6th, Boils and blains February.

Third Series. 7th, Hail Beginning of March.

8th, Locusts Middle of March.

9th, Darkness End of March.

10th, Death of the first-born Beginning of April.

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE: HAILSTORM FIRE

THE PLAGUE OF RAIN, HAIL, AND FIRE

It has been seen that notwithstanding the severity of the fifth and sixth plagues, they produced no effect upon the stubborn will of Pharaoh. He did not yield for a moment to the demand of Moses. He did not humble himself so much as even to entreat that they might be removed. Plague followed, therefore, upon plague; judgment upon judgment; yet not without sufficient warning, not without opportunity afforded to escape the evil. **God now sends Moses to the king with a message of strange and terrible significance—"I will at this time send all my plagues upon thy heart" (Exod. 9:14).** The plagues which had befallen hitherto were upon the creatures of Egypt, upon the land and water, upon the sheep and oxen, upon the bodies of the people, and there only skin deep. But now "all God's plagues" are threatened, and these upon the heart of Pharaoh, and upon his servants, and upon his people.

It may be well to consider here what was the particular sin which brought this dreadful judgment upon Egypt. It was not idolatry, though that was abominable and excessive. God did not send Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh with the command to put away his paltry deities, and to cast his idols to the moles and to the bats. He did not require of the Egyptians that they should worship Him or do Him service. He would take no bullock out of their house, nor he-goat out of their flocks. **The great offence which called for so great a punishment was this: that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, stood between the God of Israel and his people;** that he forbade the sacrifice and service which their Lord required of them, and which they were willing to render. "Israel is my son, my first-born" (Exod. 4:22), was the message of God to Pharaoh; "Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first-born." Pharaoh, whose official designation was Si Ra, the son of the god Ra, would understand the force of this manner of speech. In numberless inscriptions on the monuments the Pharaohs are styled "own sons," or "be-loved sons," of the deity. **God now calls Israel by a similar name—"Israel is my son, my first-born."** Before Pharaoh was a king, before Egypt was a nation, God had established his covenant with Abraham, and had said: "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, and I will be their God" (Gen. 17:7, 8). And Pharaoh, the creature of a day, now exalts himself against this divine appointment, and lays his cruel hand upon the people of God's choice, and says they shall not serve him.

The words of our Saviour to his disciples seem to find application and example here. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believeth in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned" (as Pharaoh and his host were drowned) "in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

While this spiritual judgment is pronounced upon the heart of the king, the outward and physical judgments do not cease. The Lord will wrest from Pharaoh that obedience which he will not yield of his own accord. "As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people? Behold, tomorrow about this time, I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof, even until now" (Exod. 9:17).

This, although **the seventh in order of the plagues of Egypt, and the beginning of the third and last series, is the first, so far as we are informed, that struck at the life of any human being;** and now there is a merciful exception made, not of the Israelites alone, but of all who should believe the message. **God makes a way of escape for those who choose to seek it.** “Send, therefore, now,” He says to Pharaoh, “and gather thy cattle and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.”

Moses, having pronounced this solemn warning, now goes forth into the fields, and stretches out his hand toward heaven; and the windows of heaven are opened, and the wrath of God pours down. That firmament which had rained water upon the old world, and fire upon Sodom, now sends forth both fire and water upon the land of Egypt. “Fire and hail,” saith the Psalmist, “fulfil God’s word” (Ps. 148:8). **God himself speaks of “the treasures of hail” (Job 38:22), as his weapons which he has reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war.** “The hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt, all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field.” “He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in the land” (Ps. 105:32). “He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore-trees with frost” (Ps. 78:47). He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts: he smote their vines also, and their fig trees, and brake the trees in their coasts.” “The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire” (Ps. 18:13).

A plague of hail, with lightning and thunder, must have been far more awful and portentous in Egypt than in any other country; for there rain was almost unknown, thunderstorms were of rare occurrence, and lightning, when it appeared, was generally of a harmless kind. Modern travellers, indeed, speak of snowstorms, and of thunder and lightning happening occasionally in lower Egypt; but such phenomena appear to have been almost unknown in earlier times. Herodotus says—“During the reign of Psammenitus, Egypt beheld a most remarkable prodigy. There was rain at the Egyptian Thebes, a circumstance which never happened before, and which, as the Thebans themselves assert, has never occurred since. In the higher parts of Egypt it never rains; but at that period it rained in distinct drops” (l. 3, c. 10). Plutarch also observes that “In Egypt no moisture of the air is ever condensed into showers” (de facie, c. 25). Pococke mentions a storm of hail followed by rain in the province of Arsinoe, which “the natives were so far from considering as a blessing, that they observed rain was productive of scarcity, and that the inundation of the Nile alone was serviceable.”

The Egyptians were much given to the observance of all unusual phenomena, and looked upon them as portentous. According to Herodotus, “Whenever any unusual circumstance occurs they commit the particulars of it to writing, and mark the events which follow” (l. 2, c. 38). If “distinct drops of rain” were regarded as a prodigy worthy of being thus recorded, what must have been the effect of a storm like this, when the hail fell with sufficient violence to destroy both man and beast, and the fire also ran along the ground.

“The Egyptians,” says Diodorus, “denominated fire Hephaistos, esteeming it a mighty deity, which contributed largely towards the generation and ultimate perfection of beings” (l. 1, c. 1). According to Lucian, “The Persians sacrifice to fire and the Egyptians to water” (de Jove trag. c. 24). Porphyry says—“Even to this day, at the opening of the temple of Serapis, the worship is made by fire and water, for they reverence water and fire above all the elements.” These deities now came down upon Egypt with destruction and terror; the very gods in which they trusted turned against them.

“The hail,” we are told, “smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field.” The Egyptians bestowed great care upon their gardens, which were tastefully laid out, and planted with ornamental and fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, and watered by engines and artificial rivulets. They were also very fond of flowers; no people (says Wilkinson) appear to have made so much use of flowers on every occasion. “Every visitor received a bouquet of real flowers as a token of welcome on entering a house: it was the pipe and coffee of the modern Egyptians; and a guest at a party was not only presented with a lotus or some other flower, but had a chaplet placed round his head and another round his neck, which led the Roman poet to remark the ‘many chaplets on the foreheads’ of the Egyptians at their banquets: everywhere flowers abounded; they were formed into wreaths and festoons, and crowned the wine bowl, as well as the servants who bore the cup from it to the assembled guests.” **Flowers and fruits also were presented upon the altars of the gods, the former in bouquets or chaplets, the latter in baskets or trays.**

Gardens and fields, trees and herbs, were now alike destroyed, and the superstitions of the country met with a fresh reproof; for the Egyptians, incredible as it may seem, not content with making to themselves gods of the elements and of living animals, revered the produce of the soil as sacred.

Such is the sarcastic exclamation of the Roman poet, Juvenal (Sat. 15, v. 9).

These trees were greatly prized for the shade afforded by their widespreading branches; they were sacred to Nepte, as the tamarisk was to Osiris, and the perseae to Athor. The sycomore is especially mentioned as having suffered under the plague of hail, and it is remarkable that the widow of Thotmes, who is supposed to have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus, after her husband’s overthrow, imported a great number of these trees from Arabia Felix (Speaker’s Commentary). The goddesses Athor and Nepte are represented in the sculptures in their respective trees, the perseae and sycomore fig, presenting their fruits as the ambrosia and nectar of Heaven, to those who were judged worthy of admission to the regions of eternal happiness. Monkeys, also, which were sacred animals, are shown gathering the sycomore figs. These sacred trees were now beaten down by the hail, and withered by the fire; and in the plague that followed all that remained of them was eaten by the locusts. Those who revered them could hardly fail to recognise in this, as well as in the other visitations the Divine intention and reproof.

“The flax and the barley was smitten; for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was balled.” The mention of these productions enables us to ascertain the time of year when this great storm took place—viz. about the beginning of March; and hence we are able to infer the probable seasons and duration of the other plagues (see Chap. III.) The destruction of the flax and barley was a terrible blow to the wealth and commerce of the country.

The destruction of the flax deprived the people of the material for their chief manufacture, and put a stop to the trade which they carried on with neighbouring nations, who sent their treasure into the country to pay for it. The ruin of the barley was equally injurious. Egypt appears to have been from a very early period the granary of the world. Thither Abraham went down to sojourn when the land in which he dwelt was visited with famine; and thither the sons of Jacob, under a similar necessity, naturally turned for help,—“And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands” (Gen. 41:57). No country was so fertile as Egypt; none yielded such enormous crops of corn. When, therefore, the flax and the barley were smitten, it was no ordinary loss that fell upon the people, but a double famine, such as they had never before experienced; a famine, of the material by which the people were accustomed to earn their living, and a famine of the bread on which they must subsist.

The effect of this great desolation upon Pharaoh was remarkable. The people had already shown some signs of yielding; for there were some “among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD” (Exod. 9:20), and had made their cattle flee betimes into the houses; and now the king himself is humbled. He sends for Moses and Aaron, and not only prays that the plague may cease, but **confesses his fault** before them. “I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the LORD, for it is enough, that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer” (9:27). It was another lying subterfuge, and Moses knew it; nevertheless he yielded to his prayer. “As soon as I am gone out of the city, he said, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD, and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail, that thou mayest know that the earth is the LORD’S; but as for thee and thy servants, **I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD.**”

And so this man of God went forth into the field, walking without fear through the storm and tempest, by which all other living things were beaten down: he went through fire and through water, amid ruin and desolation, with the dying and the dead of man and beast around him; he walked where the crashing hail fell down, breaking the mightiest trees to fragments, and where the fire ran along the ground, withering and burning up the herbs; and **wherever he stepped the hail ceased, and the lightning glanced aside.**

Pharaoh and his people had confessed the power of Jehovah as a God, the God of the Jews, the God of Goshen perhaps, one God among many others; but they would not acknowledge him as the God of the universe: the words of Moses were again fulfilled, “I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God.” “When Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses.”

Egypt was beaten down with hail, and Sodom burnt with fire; yet it shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Egypt and for Sodom than for that people who in these days of better light and knowledge harden their hearts against the LORD, refuse obedience to his will, and hinder others also.⁸

⁸ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

Call of Moses In the spring.

**1st appearance May.
before Pharaoh**

**First Series. 1st Plague. The Middle of
river smitten October.
after its
subsidence**

**2d, Frogs Middle of
November.**

**3d, Lice Middle of
December.**

Second Series. 4th, Flies January.

5th, The Murrain End of January.

6th, Boils and blains February.

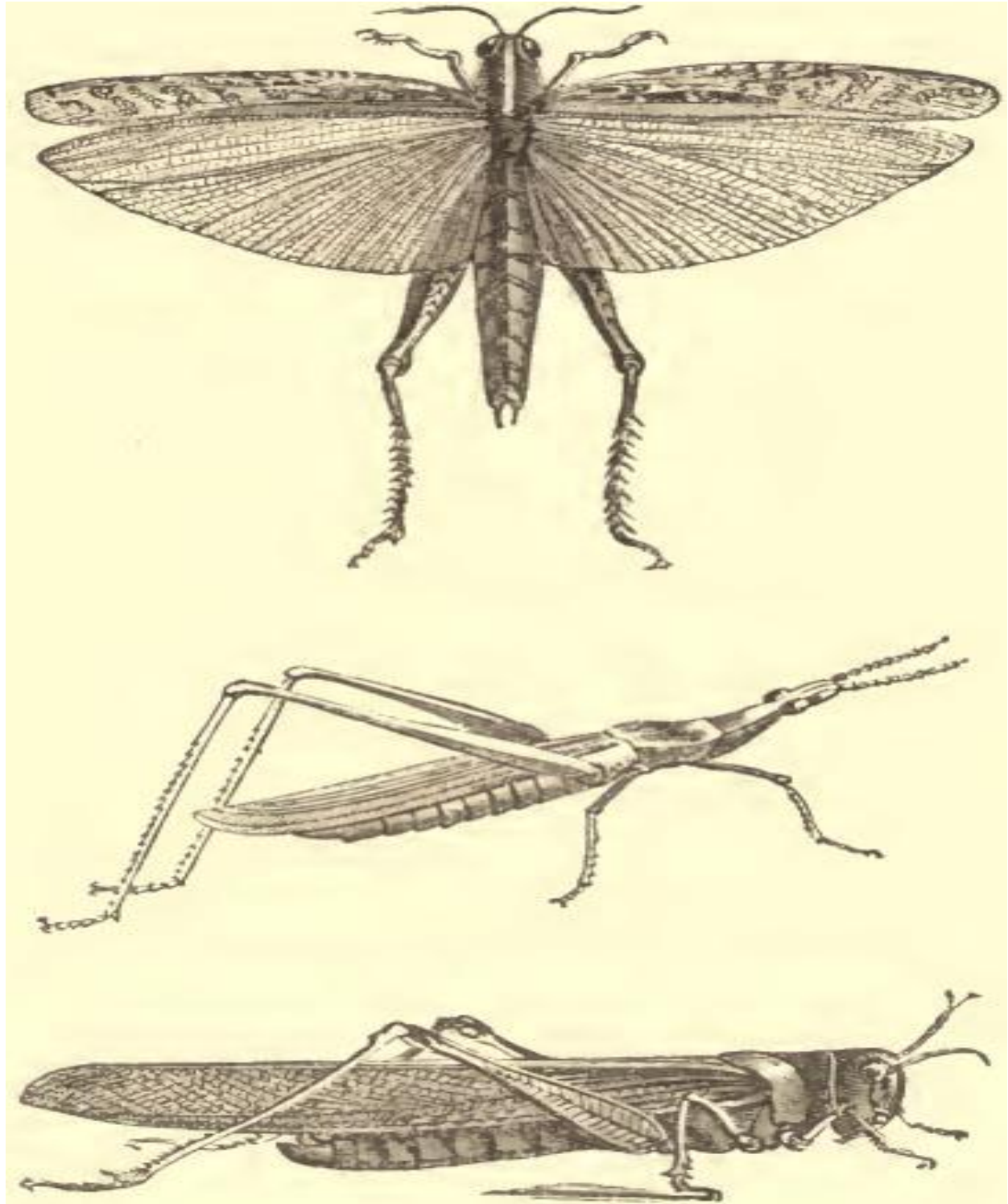
Third Series. **7th, Hail Beginning of March.**

8th, Locusts Middle of March.

9th, Darkness End of March.

10th, Death of the first-born Beginning of April.

THE EIGHTH PLAGUE: EATING LOCUSTS



THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS

It has been already observed that the plagues of Egypt, as they succeeded each other, were characterised by gradually increasing severity. The plague of locusts following the grievous visitation of boils and blains upon man and beast, and the yet more fatal and alarming storm of hail and lightning, appears at first sight to be an exception to this order. And yet it is evident that the **Egyptians were more alarmed in the prospect of this judgment than by any of those which preceded it.** As soon as the warning of Moses was made known to them, Pharaoh's servants came to him and said, "How long shall this man be a snare unto us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed? (Exod. 10:7). **This was the first time that Pharaoh's servants or officers had ventured to intervene before the infliction of any plague.** Pharaoh himself, although his heart was hardened against God, as we are told three times in as many verses, could not but share the common anxiety. Moses had left him abruptly, and without the usual ceremonies of a royal interview, for as soon as he had delivered, his message, "he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh:" yet the king sends for him again, and almost yields to his demand—"Go and serve the LORD your God," he says; "but who are ye that shall go?" Moses answers him, "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds, will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD." The Egyptians honoured their gods in this manner, visiting their shrines in vast numbers, and with all the members of their households; much more must the people of Israel observe a general festival to the LORD. "At the feast of Bubastis," says Herodotus, "the natives report that seven hundred thousand men assemble, not to mention children" (l. 2, c. 60). But when Pharaoh hears of the departure of all their host, and of their flocks and herds, his insolence once more gets the better of him, and he defies both Moses and his God—"Let the Lord be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones" (Exod. 10:10); and they are driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

The very name of locust was terrible to the Egyptians, for they had had frequent experience of the ravages committed by those creatures in former visitations which were not miraculous. In one of the papyri, the locust is mentioned as the common enemy of the husbandman. The accounts of modern travellers enable us to understand the alarm with which an extraordinary plague of this kind must have been expected. "In the present day," says Mr. Poole, "locusts suddenly appear in the cultivated land, coming from the desert in a column of great length. They fly across the country, darkening the air with their compact ranks, which are undisturbed by the constant attacks of kites, crows, and vultures, and making a strange whizzing sound like that of fire, or many distant wheels. Where they alight they devour every green thing, even stripping the trees of their leaves. Rewards are offered for their destruction, but no labour can seriously reduce their numbers. Soon they continue their course, and disappear gradually in a short time, leaving the place where they have been a desert" (Smith's Dictionary of the Bible). Major Moore describes a cloud of locusts extending over 500 miles, and so compact while on the wing, that, like an eclipse, it completely hid the sun.

The prophet Joel, foretelling the invasion of Israel by hordes of merciless Assyrians, compares them for number and destructiveness to locusts. "A nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek-teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white." "The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen: howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men" (Joel 1:6–12). "A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong: there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations, A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them" (2:2, 3). "Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks" (2:6, 7). "The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining" (2:10).

This figurative description of the dreadful enemies which were to come upon Israel is evidently based upon the well-known terror and loss which a visitation of locusts brought with it; their number was such that the sun was hidden as behind a cloud, and their withering effects upon the trees and herbage so terrible as **to leave famine and disease behind them wherever they had halted**. Their steady flight, and the impossibility of making any defence against them, is well represented by the march of disciplined armies, to which the author of the book of Proverbs also likens them: "The locusts have no king, but they go forth all of them by bands" (Prov. 30:27).

The following is from Pliny:—"Swarms of locusts are looked upon as a plague inflicted by the anger of the gods: for as they fly they appear to be larger than they really are, while they make such a loud noise with their wings that they might be readily supposed to be winged creatures of another species. Their numbers, too, are so vast that they quite darken the sun; they cover vast tracts of country, in clouds, which bode destruction to the harvests. Scorching numerous objects by their very contact, they eat away everything with their teeth, **even to the doors of the houses**. In Syria people are placed under martial law, and compelled to kill them: in so many countries does this dreadful pest prevail" (Nat. Hist. l. 11, c. 35).

Orosius, a Spanish priest, contemporary with St. Augustine and St. Jerome, who settled in Africa in the early part of the fifth century, gives the following account of a plague of locusts:—"In the consulship of Marcus Plautius Hypsaeus and Marcus Fulvius Flaccus" (about the year of Rome 628, and 125 years before the Christian era), "when Africa had scarcely recovered itself from the miseries of the last Punic war, it underwent another desolation, terrible in its effects, and contrary to all experiences. For, after that immense numbers of locusts had formed themselves in a huge body all over the region, and had ruined all hopes of any fruits of the earth; after they had consumed all the herbage of the field without sparing the roots, and the leaves of the trees with the tendrils upon which they grew, and had gone so far as to penetrate with their teeth through the bark, however bitter, and into the dry and solid timber; by a sudden blast of

wind they were wafted away in different portions, and having for a while been supported in the air, they were ultimately all plunged into the sea. After this, the surf threw up upon that long extended coast such immense heaps of their dead and corrupted bodies that there ensued from their putrefaction a most unsupportable and poisonous stench. This soon brought on a pestilence, which affected every species of animals, so that all birds, and sheep, and cattle, also the wild beasts of the field, died; and their carcasses being soon rendered putrid by the foulness of the air, added greatly to the general corruption. In respect to men, it is impossible, without horror, to describe the shocking devastation. In Numidia, where at that time Micipsa was king, eighty thousand persons perished. Upon that part of the sea coast which bordered upon the region of Carthage and Utica, the number of those who were carried off by this pestilence is said to have been two hundred thousand” (Contra Paganos Hist. l. 5, c. 11, quoted by Bryant).

Experience of such calamities as are here described may well have excited the most lively terror and anxiety among the Egyptians, especially as they would now anticipate a visitation far more dreadful than even the worst that had previously been known. All the plagues of Moses were of a miraculous character, and the miracle, in the instance now threatened, would consist not so much in the nature of the plague as in its extent and severity.

There were various species of locusts, which are called in the Bible by nine different names; the name in this place signifies “multitudinous:” and it is probable that the visitation consisted of several different varieties. “They shall cover the face of the earth,” said Moses, “that one cannot be able to see the earth” (Exod. 10:5). The expression is literally “they shall cover the eye of the earth,” in allusion perhaps to the darkness produced by their flight; it is, however, worthy of remark that the name of Egypt is written in hieroglyphics with an eye; and “the eye of the earth” may have applied to this, as signifying that the entire country should be covered, wherever it was called by that name; or, in reference to the excellence of the land to be devoured, which the Egyptians regarded with pardonable vanity as the most precious spot, the “eye,” of all the world. “They shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field: and they shall fill thy houses and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers’ fathers have seen, since the day when they were upon the earth unto this day.” And accordingly we are told, after the event, “Very grievous were they; before them were no such locusts, neither after them shall be such.”

The land which had just before been smitten by the storm of hail and fire, must, by this judgment following so swiftly, have been utterly desolated. The flax and the barley had been already lost; the wheat and the rye were now also destroyed, this latter being one of the most important cereals among the Egyptians, and the only one which is portrayed upon the sculptures. Every herb of the field had been beaten down and every tree broken; but these might soon have regained their usual luxuriance; in that fertile soil, and under those genial influences, the herbage might have recovered itself, and the trees put forth new buds; now, however, every green thing was devoured, and the trees stripped of their bark, and there could be no hope of any speedy restoration. At other times the ravages of the locusts had been confined to certain districts; here and there a tract of country of a few miles’ extent might be devastated, and the inhabitants of that particular district reduced to want; but these locusts covered the whole land of Egypt, and ate up all that the hail had left in every part of it.

The petition of Pharaoh received an immediate and favourable answer. Moses went out from Pharaoh, and intreated the LORD, and the LORD turned a strong west wind, which took away all the locusts, and cast them into the Red Sea: there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt. The east wind had brought them, and the west wind took them away. By profane historians, also, the coming and going of the locusts is generally ascribed to the action of the wind. "In the spring time," according to Diodorus, "the south winds rise high, and drive an infinite number of locusts out of the desert, of an extraordinary size: these afford plentiful food for the inhabitants of those parts" (l. 3, c. 2). Strabo mentions a people whose food consists of locusts, "which the south-west winds, when they blow violently in the spring time, drive in bodies into the country" (l. 16, c. 4). Pliny thus describes the departure of the locusts: "The winds carry them off in vast swarms, upon which they fall into the sea and standing waters" (l. 11, c. 35). But the removal of this plague was not less miraculous than its infliction: **it was sudden and complete; no heaps of the dead insects were left upon the ground; no stores of them remained to be preserved, after the manner of that country, to supply the food of which they must have been sorely in need:** they were carried away, "all of them in bands," as they had arrived: "there remained not one in all the coasts of Egypt" (Exod. 10:19).

Thus, the winds from the four corners of heaven obey the command of Jehovah. At God's command the east wind brought the locusts, in twenty-four hours, from the uttermost parts of the east, collecting them, it may be, from the far-off deserts of Arabia and Persia; and at God's command the west wind carried them away again, as far as the Red Sea. There they all fell down and perished. "I am tossed up and down as the locust" (Ps. 109:23), says David. These creatures were tossed up and down by the winds wherever God would send them. He had used them as his scourge, an instrument of punishment, in which he could have no pleasure; and **when their ungrateful task was done he drowned them in the sea. To those same depths the infatuated king who refused to be warned by the chastisement was presently to follow them, and with his miserable people, in their turn, to perish.**⁹

⁹ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

Call of Moses In the spring.

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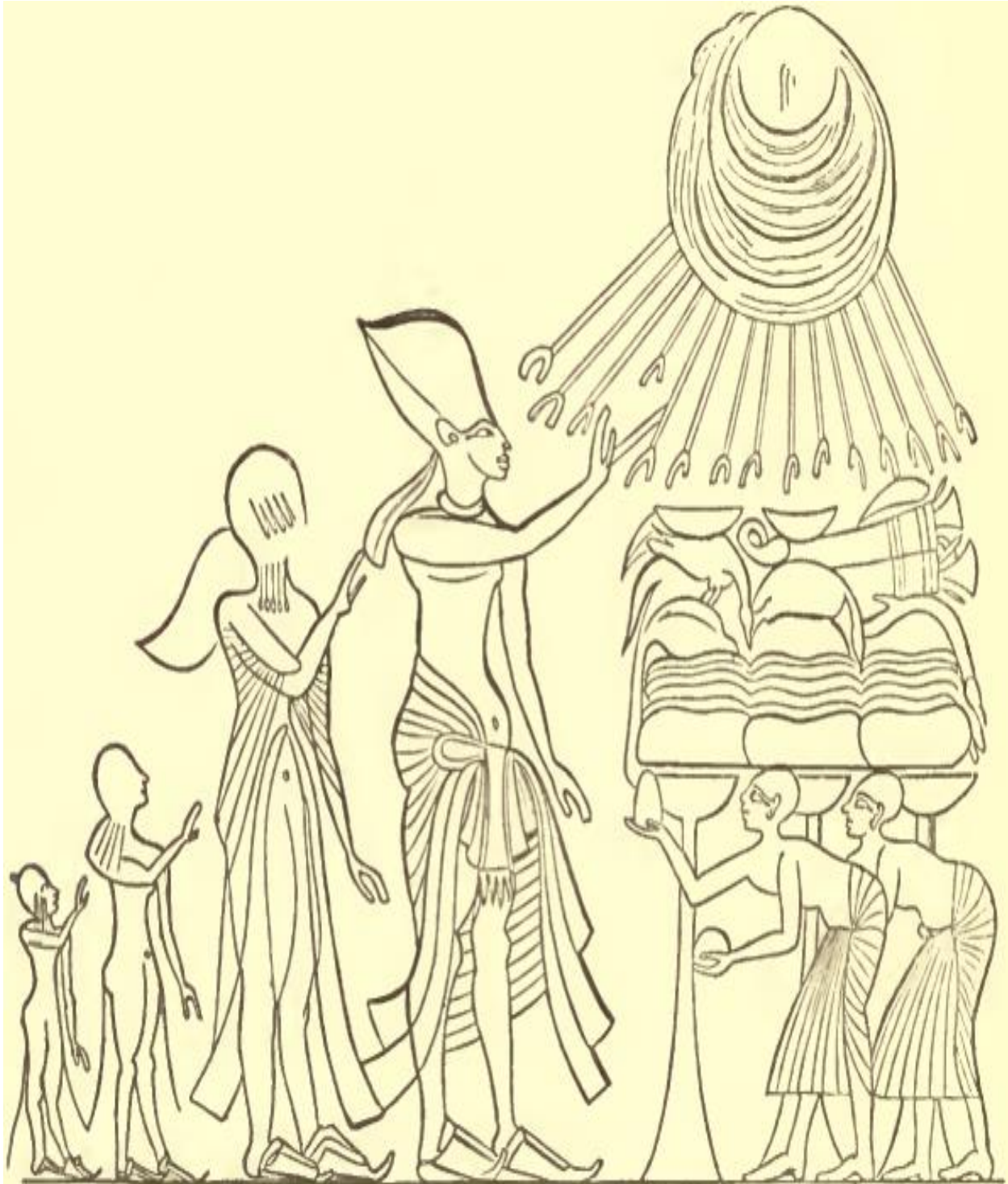
Third Series. **7th, Hail Beginning of March.**

8th, Locusts Middle of March.

9th, Darkness End of March.

10th, Death of the first-born Beginning of April.

THE NINTH PLAGUE: FEELING THE DARK



DARKNESS TO BE FELT

THE locusts are gone, not one of them is left; as a dark cloud in the heavens they came, and as a cloud they are vanished away; the shadow which they cast over the land of Egypt has passed, and the bright shining of the sun beams forth again upon the fated land. Pharaoh looks abroad, and sees that there is respite; he casts away once more his repentance and humility; his heart again is hardened, and he will not let the children of Israel go.

“Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?” was the plea of Pharaoh’s servants before the locusts came. No; he knew it not; he would not know it. Even now, with the scene of utter desolation everywhere around him, with the fields scorched and barren, and the naked trees stretching out their white and shattered boughs like ghastly skeletons, with even the **walls of his houses and the furniture of his chambers marked by the gnawings** of those “very grievous locusts,” with all these terrible witnesses before his eyes, Pharaoh knew it not.

The course of divine judgment, therefore, again proceeds: almost in the same sentence in which the destruction of the locusts is recorded, the plague of darkness is announced. “And the LORD said unto Moses, stretch out thine hand toward Heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even **darkness which may be felt**. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward Heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: **they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings**” (Exod. 10:21).

“Darkness that may be felt.” It has been proposed by some learned commentators to render this passage, “They shall grope in darkness;” as if it meant only that they should feel their way before them with their hands, in moving from place to place. This interpretation requires an alteration, though a slight one, in the Hebrew text; but why should one jot or one tittle be changed, when the sense is already sufficiently plain?

Darkness may have been produced by a deprivation of sight. The sun may have risen and set as usual upon the land, yet the eyes of all the Egyptians being closed and blinded, no ray of light could reach them; this, if it were attended with pain in the organs of vision, might be properly described as “darkness to be felt.” Moses, in Deuteronomy, where he threatens the people with the botch of Egypt, reminding them of the plague of boils and blains, says immediately afterwards, alluding, probably, to this plague, “The LORD shall smite thee with blindness and thou shalt grope at noonday as the blind gropeth in darkness” (28:27–29).

Darkness, such as is here described, may have been occasioned by a thick cloud resting upon the earth, and pervading all the lower regions of the atmosphere: this would enfold the people so as “to be felt,” and would intercept the sun’s rays effectually by its density. Something of this kind appears to be described in the book of Ezekiel. The destruction of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar is there foretold; and the judgments threatened in the future seem to have reference generally to the plagues which had been inflicted in the past. Thus, in the 29th chapter—“I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.... I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales.... Behold, therefore, I am against thee, and against thy rivers” (29:3, 4, 10). “I will also water with thy blood the land wherein thou swimmest, even to the mountains; and the rivers shall be full of thee.” (32:6). Again, “I will put a fear in the land of Egypt” (30:13). And again, “I

will set fire in Egypt” (30:16). In these passages reference is evidently made to the judgments against the river and the fish deities, to the fire which ran along the ground in the great storm, and to the terror which prevailed during most of the judgments. Then follows in the 32d chapter—“I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the LORD God” (32:7, 8). It is a reasonable conjecture that the figures employed by the prophet, of **the sun covered with a cloud**, and darkness set upon the land, may be derived from the reality which Egypt had already suffered.

God is often described as manifesting his displeasure in a cloud. Joel speaks of the day of God’s vengeance as “a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness” (Joel 2:2); and Zephaniah employs nearly the same language (1:15). *The pillar that went before the Israelites, and gave them light, was to the Egyptians “a cloud and darkness” (Exod. 14:20).* The darkness which was upon the face of the earth “in the beginning,” is described by Jehovah in the book of Job as a cloud: “When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it” (Job 38:9). So now the land of Egypt may have been wrapped about by a thick palpable cloud, cold, damp, impenetrable: the people would feel it upon their limbs, as swaddling-bands; the sun would be blotted out by it, and all things reduced almost to a state of death—of which this ninth plague was in a certain sense the shadow cast before.

It was an horror of great darkness; it rested on them like a pall; they knew not what dangers might be around them, what judgment was next to happen: they had not been forewarned of this plague, and they could not tell but it might be only a prelude to some more awful visitation: their soul melted in them, for fear of those things that might come upon them: they dared not move from chamber to chamber, nor even from seat to seat: wherever they chanced to be at the moment when the darkness fell upon them, there they must remain. Pharaoh might call in vain for his guards; they could not come to him. Moses and Aaron were no longer within reach, for none could go to seek them. Masters could not command their slaves, nor slaves hasten to obey their master’s call: the wife could not flee to her husband, nor the child cling to its parents: the same fear was upon all, both high and low; the same paralysing terror and dismay possessed them every one. As says the patriarch Job, they “laid hold on horror” (Job 18:20). And this continued for three days and nights: **they had no lamps nor torches**: either they could not kindle them, or they dared not move to procure them: **they were silent in darkness**, like men already dead. Hope and expectation of returning light might at first support them; but hope delayed through seventy-two weary hours would presently die out, and leave them to despair. The darkness would become more oppressive and intolerable the longer it continued; **“felt” upon their bodies as a physical infliction, and “felt” even more in their souls in agonies of fear and apprehension.**

Darkness is a type of Satan’s kingdom; and Satan had some liberty in Egypt to walk up and down upon the land, and to go to and fro in it. The Jewish Rabbis tell us that the devil and his angels were let loose during these three dreadful days; that they had a wider range and greater liberty than usual for working mischief. They describe these evil spirits going among the wretched people, glued to their seats as they were, with terror; frightening them with fearful apparitions; piercing their ears with hideous shrieks and groans; driving them almost to madness with the intensity of their fears; making their flesh creep, and the hair of their head to stand on end.

The Egyptians, like the Persians, Phoenicians, and other ancient nations, worshipped the sun under the name of Osiris, regarding it both as their common ancestor, and as their lord. We read in Diodorus—“The first generation of men in Egypt, contemplating the glory of the world above, judged that there were two chief gods which were eternal—viz. the Sun and the Moon, the first of which they called Osiris, and the other Isis” (l. 1, c. 11).

Plutarch says—“Horus, the son of Isis, was the first who sacrificed to the sun. The Egyptians offer, three times every day, incense and sweet odours to the sun” (De Isid. et Osirid. c. 52). Porphyry has handed down to us a prayer which was used in Ethiopia at funerals, the remains of the dead person being lifted up towards heaven in an ark or coffin while it was recited. “O Sovereign Lord, the Sun, and all ye other deities, who bestow life upon mankind, receive me, I beseech you, and suffer me to be admitted to the society of the immortals” (de Abstin. l. 4). The Egyptians were intimately connected with the Ethiopians, and their ceremonies and religious customs were, for the most part, alike. The kings of Egypt were also regarded as descendants of the sun, and as the representatives of that luminary upon earth. The name Pharaoh, which was the common title of the native kings of Egypt, is expressed in hieroglyphics by the same symbol which represents the sun. **Many of the kings of Egypt were named Rameses, “born of the sun.”**

The sun was, during the continuance of the plague of darkness, blotted out from the Egyptian sky: either their chief god had forsaken them, and turned against his vicegerent upon earth, or the God of Moses had prevailed against them both.

“At the sacrifice solemnised at Sais the assembly is held by night: they suspend before their houses in the open air lamps, which are filled with oil mixed with salt: a wick floats on the top, which will burn all night: **the feast is called the feast of lamps.** Such of the Egyptians as do not attend the ceremony burn lamps in like manner before their houses, so that on this night, not Sais only but all Egypt is illuminated.” (Herod. ii. 62). Night, being supposed to divide the empire of the heavens with day, received also its share of divine honours. **Darkness existed before light; and therefore darkness was revered as the most ancient of all deities.** Among the verses usually ascribed to Orpheus is a hymn addressed to Night, beginning—“Night, parent of gods and men!” (Hymn. ad Noct. v. 1.) Plutarch says—“The Egyptians reverence the blind mouse, because they consider darkness to be more ancient than light” (Sympos. l. 4, qu. 5). This creature has been found embalmed in the tombs of Thebes.

Not less miraculous than this plague of darkness was the fact that during all the time that it prevailed in Egypt the children of Israel had light in their dwellings. From some of the former plagues the land of Goshen had been exempt: there were no swarms of flies in Goshen; in the land of Goshen was no hail: but the plague of darkness, it would seem, not only spared the Jewish quarter, but also the separate houses and families of Israel, wherever they might be situated. It is evident, from the history of the passover (Exod. 12:27), “where the destroying angel is said to have passed over the houses” upon which the blood was sprinkled, that though the bulk of the Jewish people may have dwelt in Goshen, yet there were many families living in the towns and streets of Egypt, being compelled to do so either by their occupation or by the will of their taskmasters. But no matter where they dwelt.

God had said to Pharaoh “I will put a division between my people and thy people;” now, therefore, though darkness filled the houses of the one—a darkness so profound, so gross, that it must have seemed to them as if the sun were blotted from the heavens—the others still enjoyed their customary light, and warmth, and cheerfulness. “There was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings” (Exod. 10:22).

Thus, again, **the vanity of the religious practices of Egypt was plainly shown.** Where were now their gods? The Israelites, on the contrary, who had never, as a nation, bowed the knee to these creatures, nor had been attracted by their glory to give them the homage due to God alone, were filled with light and warmth. The LORD of heaven and earth sent down his blessing upon their houses, singling them out wherever they might be, and made **even the darkness to be light about them.**

There was darkness in Sodom for one night; there was darkness in Egypt for three days; there was darkness in Jerusalem and on Mount Calvary for three hours; a solemn portent in every instance of the awful destruction which was to follow. The darkness which is reserved for the impenitent will also be a darkness to be felt,—dimness of anguish for ever.¹⁰

¹⁰ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

Call of Moses In the spring.

**1st appearance May.
before Pharaoh**

**First Series. 1st Plague. The Middle of
river smitten October.
after its
subsidence**

**2d, Frogs Middle of
November.**

**3d, Lice Middle of
December.**

Second Series. 4th, Flies January.

5th, The Murrain End of January.

6th, Boils and blains February.

Third Series. 7th, Hail Beginning of March.

8th, Locusts Middle of March.

9th, Darkness End of March.

10th, Death of the first-born Beginning of April.

THE DEATH OF THE FIRST-BORN

THE last and most dreadful of all the plagues of Egypt was foretold to Pharaoh in the first message which God sent him. **“Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my first-born. And I say unto thee, let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first-born.”** A warning was thus given from the very first of the desolation which must surely follow if the king of Egypt should persist in his infatuated opposition to the demands of Jehovah; and **this warning was repeated before nearly every one of the plagues, which by their increasing and cumulative severity after each successive refusal,** marked the downward course of this unhappy nation, and showed them the fatal end to which they were approaching.

Nine plagues had now been sent upon Egypt, and after a short period of affliction each of the nine had been removed. The first six had fallen upon the waters, upon the cattle, upon the plants, and upon the persons of the Egyptians, but had not struck directly at the life of any human being. Then came the plague of hail, by which those only who refused to take shelter from it were destroyed; after that the locusts; and then the plague of darkness. This was probably the most alarming of the nine; and may have caused insanity and death to many.

All these successive visitations had produced no salutary effect upon Pharaoh and his people. God had stricken them, but they were not sick; he had beaten them, but they felt it not (Prov. 23:35). **The judgments had been mercifully graduated, with a view rather to chasten than to destroy, to save life and not to kill; if they had yielded when their creature comforts were attacked they need not have suffered any serious loss; if they had obeyed when their cattle were destroyed, their children had been spared. Men and nations who will not observe the signs of God’s displeasure have only themselves to thank for the weightier judgments, by which their stubborn spirits are at last subdued and broken.**

The plague of darkness seems to have made so much impression upon Pharaoh as almost to have induced him to consent to God’s demand. He called for Moses, and said, “Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you” (Exod. 10:24). Moses insists that all the cattle must go with them;—“there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God, and we know not with what we must serve him, till we become thither. The king, who would release the people, will not part with their cattle; all or nearly all the oxen and sheep of Egypt had perished in the storm of hail and lightning, and these herds of Goshen were of immense importance. He is enraged at the demand of Moses, and, reckless of consequences, drives him out of his presence;—“Get thee from me; take heed to thyself; see my face no more: for in that day that thou seest my face thou shalt die.” **And Moses takes him at his word—“Thou hast spoken well,” he answers; “I will see thy face again no more.”** But before he leaves the presence chamber he has one last message to deliver. He turns upon the king with the solemn and now familiar preface “Thus saith the LORD!” When God speaketh, even kings must hear. Pharaoh cannot choose but listen to this speech. He knows the man and his communication, and he would fain shut his ears against him, as he will certainly shut his heart; but whether he will hear, or whether he will forbear, he knows too well that God’s threatenings are not a vain thing like his own, but will surely come to pass.

“Thus, saith the LORD” has been the prelude to many grievous judgments already; and in spite of his angry boastings, Pharaoh’s heart stands still as the words of awful import are pronounced, and becomes as a stone within him. He is impressed also with the change that has come upon Moses, this meekest of men. Moses can now be angry as well as the king: he is not afraid to brave the power of Pharaoh, and to pour contempt upon his threats. **“The man Moses,” we are told, was at this time “very great in the land of Egypt in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants, and in the sight of the people” (Exod. 11:3). He now asserts his dignity and magnifies his office before Pharaoh as a prophet of the Most Highest.** “Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: **that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.** And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger.”

Immediately after this God prepares his people for the great event by which he designs to bring about, at one and the same time, the destruction of the Egyptians and the deliverance of Israel. They are here spoken of as the **“congregation” of Israel, which implies an united and organised body;** and to them, **as a congregation, the ordinance of the passover, with the command to be in readiness immediately afterwards to leave the country is given.**

It is to be observed that in this last plague God is represented as descending in his own person. It is no longer the man Moses, standing as a mediator between the king of Egypt and the King of kings. God himself awakes to judgment; he hath girt his sword upon his thigh, and is come down;—“Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt” (Exod. 11:4). This solemn assurance, though it might well strike terror into the hearts of the miserable Egyptians, would encourage and confirm the Israelites. What God had undertaken, could not fail, could not miscarry. The course of Moses’ policy with Pharaoh hitherto had brought them no deliverance, but some increase of their sufferings, and many disappointments. Now they might feel assured that the promised rescue was at hand. The God of their fathers has given over the Egyptians appointed unto death, and is gathering the Israelites together for safety and release. **Through the fall of Egypt salvation is come unto Israel; and the judgment which slays the one people is ordained as a type of mercy and redemption for the other, to be commemorated evermore.**

The death of the first-born has of course been made the subject of many objections and many explanations. By some it is attributed to a sudden sickness or epidemic like the plague. In the wilderness, when the people murmured after the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, a plague fell upon the people, in which, during the short interval while Moses was entreating the Lord, and Aaron was running in haste to put on incense, and to make an atonement, there died 14,700; and this, although a plague or pestilence, is described as God’s own doing; “Get you up from among this congregation,” he had said to Moses, “that I may consume them as in a moment” (Num. 16:45). When David numbered Israel, a pestilence cut off in three days 70,000 men (2 Sam. 24:15); and in that instance it was “the angel of the Lord” that “destroyed the people.”

So now in Egypt it may have been “the pestilence that walketh in darkness” which slew the first-born in every house of the Egyptians, God himself going with it, and directing it. David says: **“He made a way to his anger; He spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; and smote all the first-born in Egypt, the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham”** (Ps. 78:50, 51).

If God thus made use of natural means in a supernatural manner, as in the case of the locusts, and generally of the other plagues, the miracle would not, on that account, be less miraculous. But there are circumstances in the account of this plague which distinguish it from any known or specific form of disease. The first-born only were smitten; these were singled out in every family with unerring precision, the houses of the Israelites, wherever the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the door-posts, being passed over. The death of all those thousands, both of man and beast, took place at the same instant—**“at midnight.”** Every one of these extraordinary events had been foretold by Moses. Whatever explanations modern scepticism may suggest, they were admitted without hesitation both by the Egyptians and the Jews to be the Lord’s doing, and marvellous in their eyes. Pharaoh rose up in the night, and sent for Moses and Aaron in haste; the king and his servants, and all the Egyptians together, were startled from their sleep: there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not an house where there was not one dead. The God whom they knew not had come among them, and made his presence felt: they stood face to face with their creator. Fear fell upon them, and an horrible dread overwhelmed them; their flesh trembled for fear of Him, and they were afraid of his judgments. **The sins of the parents were now visited upon the children; the seed of evil doers was cut off. Slaughter was prepared for the children, for the iniquity of their fathers.**

Is God unrighteous, then, that taketh vengeance? No; this is an act of retribution. The Egyptians had slain the children of the Israelites, casting their infants into the river. Now the affliction is turned upon themselves; the delight of their eyes is taken from them; all their first-born are dead, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat upon his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in his dungeon.

There was a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt on that fearful night; a cry for help, where there was none to answer it. From every house the wretched people ran forth, calling in haste for the physicians of Egypt; but all their art was now of no avail. In every family the same sad tale was told, each crying to the other for help and sympathy, and each pre-occupied with his own distress. And soon **this cry for help was changed into a cry of mourning**—Egypt weeping for her children. So, the word of the Lord was fulfilled, “I will slay thy son, thy first-born: **there shall be a cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it anymore.**”

The Egyptians were accustomed more than any other nation to utter loud and clamorous lamentations, not only for their dead, but also as an accompaniment of many of their religious ceremonies. Herodotus writes thus:—“With respect to their funerals and ceremonies of mourning, whenever a man of any importance dies, the females of his family, disfiguring their heads and faces with dirt, leave the corpse in the house, and run publicly about, accompanied by their female relations, with their garments in disorder, their breasts exposed, and beating themselves severely; the men do the same; after which the body is carried to the embalmers” (l. 2, c. 85).

The grief and clamour of the Egyptians on this occasion exceeded everything, either real or ceremonial, that had ever been known before... it was a woe that no cries or wailings could equal, a desolation which no language could assuage; their first-born—the pride and hope of every house—were dead; the delight of their eyes was taken away by a stroke; and they lamented, not as a matter of ceremony or of outward show, but with a doleful lamentation. Thus, once more was Egypt judged according to her works.

And now Pharaoh calls again for Moses and Aaron while it is yet night, and bids them “Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone: and bless me also. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men” (Exod. 12:31–33). So the Lord honoured Moses in the sight of all Egypt, and brought to pass the word which he had spoken in great wrath to Pharaoh,—“After that I will go out.” **There was no longer any question of permission.** The king would thrust them out altogether. The people brought their jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them freely to everyone that asked. “Only begone!” was the cry. “Take away this doom from us; carry all your flocks and herds with you; go in peace, and **bless us also!**”



FINAL THOUGHTS

The signs and wonders which preceded their deliverance were intended not only as a reproof to the Egyptians but as a warning to Israel. “When thy judgments are upon the earth,” saith Isaiah, “the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Is. 26:9); and such, St. John declares, will be the glorious and universal end of all God’s visitations—“All nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest” (Rev. 15:4).

The history of all that Egypt had suffered was not without its intended result upon the nations round about. Its effect upon Balak and the Moabites has been already noticed. It went before the armies of Israel everywhere, and struck terror into the hearts of the Canaanites. “I know,” said Rahab, to the spies in Jericho, “that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you when ye came out of Egypt” (Josh. 2:9). “It came to pass when all the kings of the Amorites which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until they were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them anymore, because of the children of Israel” (Josh. 5:1). The Gibeonites hastened to make peace with Joshua, “because of the name of the LORD thy God; for,” said they, “we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt” (9:9). In the battle at Aphek, when the ark of God was brought into the camp of the Hebrews, the Philistines were afraid, and said, “Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hands of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods which smote the Egyptians with all their plagues in the wilderness!” (1 Sam. 4:8).

Thus, was fulfilled the promise of God to his people, “I will send my fear before thee” (Exod. 23:27). “I will put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear reports of thee, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of thee” (Deut. 2:25).¹¹

¹¹ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

Immediately before Moses started on his journey from Horeb, God had repeated this warning, and in a manner explained it, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall not let the people go." This sentence occurs so often in the subsequent history of God's dealings with Pharaoh, and has been the subject of so much controversy, that it is well we should inquire briefly into its meaning before proceeding further.

God is here represented sending messages to Pharaoh, and at the same time exercising such power over his heart as to cause him to reject those messages. The Most High punishes the king and people with a series of unheard-of plagues, and finally with complete destruction, because they will not obey His commands; and yet darkens their minds and hardens their hearts, so that they can neither understand His purpose nor yield to His will.

In explanation of this it has been suggested that the sentence "I will harden Pharaoh's heart" means only, "I will leave him to his natural obstinacy; I will suffer him to harden himself;" like the doom of Ephraim: "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone" (Hos. 4:17). But this is rather an evasion of the difficulty than a solution; the words are too plain and too important to be disposed of thus. The LORD Himself says to Moses, distinctly and emphatically, "I will harden," or, "I have hardened;" and the words are equivalent to "I, even I," "I for my part," or, "as for me, I have hardened." Moreover, in the 9th chapter Moses is instructed to tell Pharaoh: "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up (or made thee to stand), for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." It must be admitted, therefore, that it was God himself who hardened Pharaoh's heart, and that He did it by a direct act of His own, and for a wise and righteous purpose.

Yet God cannot be either directly or indirectly the author of sin; He doth not tempt any man. It is not to be believed for a moment that He created Pharaoh for no other purpose than to destroy him, or that He predestined him to do evil, in order that his punishment might be conspicuous and his example profitable as a warning to others. Nor is there anything in the history before us to point to such a conclusion. Pharaoh was a cruel and idolatrous heathen; his people were sunk in the grossest superstition and vice: God designed to punish both for their excesses, which even the law of nature and of conscience must have condemned; and at the same time to lead forth His own people, and deliver them from their misery and degradation. He might have accomplished these objects as well by one sign as by ten. He might have destroyed Egypt in a moment, and set Israel free with a stroke; but He chose rather to make the process gradual, and to give respite and punishment alternately, that He might show the necessary consequences of disobedience, and hand down a lesson and a warning to all future generations. Thus the overthrow of one nation might be made the salvation of another, and the punishment of Egypt the instruction of the world.

Instead, therefore, of executing upon Pharaoh and his people the immediate vengeance which they had deserved, God visited them with a judicial blindness. The obstinacy which He imposed upon them was itself a part of their punishment. We have no reason to suppose that Pharaoh might not, at one period of his life, have controlled his temper and his conduct; or that there was anything, either in his natural character or in the circumstances of his position, which rendered him, of necessity, more vicious than others. He sinned at first willingly, and God bore with him patiently; but his day of grace was now past. As in the history of Nebuchadnezzar, whose heart was taken away, and a beast's heart given him instead, as a punishment for wickedness and pride, so Pharaoh's heart was now rendered insensible—made heavy," for such is the literal

interpretation of the word, like the heart of one of his own brute deities. The sentence which he had deserved long ago was at length executed upon him, "Make his heart fat and his ears heavy, and shut his eyes" (Isa. 6:10); "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev. 22:11); and now God would make use of him as a warning to others: He would raise him up, or "continue" him upon the throne of Egypt, that he might become a proverb and an example to all generations: He would make use of him for His own ends, and get to Himself honour from him in his death, by judging him *openly* for all the rebellion and dishonour of his life.

Nor are we to conclude that the punishment of Pharaoh was of any other than a temporal kind. A special judgment was appointed as the consequence of each new act of disobedience; and the last offence of all was followed by his death in the Red Sea. There his history ends. God judges men according to their opportunities; their punishments are proportioned to their knowledge and privileges. Pharaoh said truly that he "knew not the Lord." "That servant who knew not his Lord's will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes" (Luke 12:47); how few, God, in His mercy, will show us hereafter. The sins of Pharaoh were his own, and his punishment, so far as we are informed of it, was certainly no greater than they deserved. We are never told that his condemnation was increased on account of that judicial hardness which was itself a part of it. The ruin which advanced upon him with successive strokes, and which finally destroyed him, was nothing more than he had merited a thousand times over before God hardened him and judged him.

The same may be said of the Egyptians as a nation. The sufferings they incurred had been justly merited by their own wickedness. God was not wroth with all the congregation because of one man's sin. Far from Him the purpose of destroying the wicked with the just. All Egypt was sunk in the grossest immorality; and all Egypt suffered for the sins of their own flesh. If, at the time of the Passover, "there was not an house where there was not one dead," it was because there was not an house which was not full of wickedness. God was not extreme to mark iniquity when He judged Egypt; He did but suspend the appointed vengeance, enduring for a time the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, that the blow, when it fell, might be recognised as coming from His hand, and as the due reward of their misdeeds.¹²

¹² Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

The Ten Plagues: The Ten Greatest Battles Ever Fought

By Olen Holderby

An Introduction

We are, obviously, discussing the ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt. These are recorded in Exodus 7-12. When one studies the Bible record, along with some history of biblical Egypt, the plagues will be seen to contain more than one purpose — to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt. At least two more purposes must be added to this one: (1) God would make sure the Egyptians knew who he was, and (2) God would, also, convince the Hebrews of his reality and position. In view of this, we offer a longer introduction than we otherwise might. Harry Rimmer's book, *Dead Men Tell Tales*, furnishes some excellent material on the background to the plagues.

Hatshepht was the daughter of Pharaoh who drew Moses out of the waters of the Nile. The king of Egypt, Tuthmosis I, died and Tuthmosis II came to the throne. He was a weak monarch. Hatshepht married him, and he dies soon thereafter; but, she continues to reign as queen. Hatshepht had been pushing Moses toward power and prominence. To make her position more secure, she marries her young half-brother, the rightful heir, Tuthmosis III. When he was 21 he forced Hatshepht to abdicate, and she soon disappears. This king, Tuthmosis III, ruled about 53 years altogether (1501-1447 B.C.); and, this would make him the Pharaoh of the oppression. The elevation of Moses by Hatshepht would anger Tuthmosis III, and he, no doubt, would consider Moses a competitor. This could account for the hasty departure of Moses from Egypt when he killed the Egyptian.

The first basic idea which I wish to lay before you is this: All Old Testament events point toward or contribute to the bringing of Christ into the world. If this is so, the ten plagues must fit into God's plan for that great future event. But, how?

Let us first consider the case of Abraham; he first enters the biblical picture in the chronology of Genesis, chapter 11. In chapter 12, God makes four promises to Abraham, repeating the land promise in Genesis 15:5-21. In verses 13 and 14 of this chapter God said, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in the land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterwards they shall come out with great possessions." This appears to be the first reference in the Bible to the Egyptian bondage. The reader may wish to compare these two verses with Exodus 3:18-22.

Now, let us return to Egypt for a few more thoughts. The “Land of the Nile” thought their Pharaoh had “inherent wisdom” and was descended from the gods. They appear to have been more religious than any other race of men, and were one of the most polytheistic nations ever known. It has been suggested that they had some 2200 gods and goddesses. What was the first of the commandments given at Sinai? “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Harry Rimmer refers to a time when they almost became monotheistic, in their worship of the sun (Amon-Re was the usual designation). Each of these gods had a particular *theophany*, or way to appear to the Egyptians. Usually this was in a form of some animal or creature depicted in art and statue as part man and part animal. This will later prove to be very problematic for both Egyptians and Israelites.

In contrast with the Egyptian gods, the Israelites accepted the idea of one true God. We cannot know exactly how well informed they may have been, since we know of no general law to them at this point. God directly spoke with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Genesis 46:1-4, God speaks with Jacob about going down into Egypt. Much time passes and the next person that God singles out with whom to speak appears to be Moses. So Jacob and his descendants, 70 of them in all, go down into Egypt (Gen. 46:27). Here, in Egypt, the Hebrews could observe the worship of the Egyptians with their many gods, sacrifices, and formalities. This, undoubtedly, contributes to some of their disobedience to Jehovah God at a later date.

With this information before us, we are ready to approach the plagues. In Exodus 3, is recorded God’s conversation with Moses. He sends him back into Egypt, with his brother, Aaron, as his spokesman. Concerning the plagues God said, “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand over Egypt” (Exod. 7:5). Here we see the second purpose in God’s plan behind the plagues. Each of the ten plagues will be seen to be a direct blow at some Egyptian god or goddess; and, sometimes more than one is involved. The stage is set for a real conflict — ten great battles. The “war of the gods” is about to begin.

In the introductory scene, we see 80 year old Moses standing before the younger king to request permission for a three-day's journey to sacrifice to God (Exod. 3:18). **The reasoning behind this three-days journey may be seen by reading Exodus 8:26; sacrificing animals that were sacred to the Egyptians could only cause difficulties for the Israelites.** In Exodus 5:1-3, we have the first appearance of Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh; they were pointedly refused permission to make the three-day's journey.

The Case of the Serpents Before Pharaoh

God said to Moses, "When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent" (Exod. 7:9). Now, Moses was educated in the learning of the Egyptians and Pharaoh knew this. Perhaps Pharaoh wanted to see just how Moses would operate after his being gone for 40 years. The Egyptian magicians did in "like manner with their enchantments," throwing down serpents, but "Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods." **This swallowing up proves the Egyptian gods to be powerless in the face of Israel's one God and gives some hint as to what is ahead.** After all the plagues have passed and the Israelites are in the wilderness, Moses said, ". . . upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments" (Num. 33:4). So, let us turn our attention to those ten great battles.

The First Plague — Turning the Water to Blood (Exod. 7:19-25)

This would be a blow at many Egyptian gods; the sacred Nile was the "bloodstream" of Egypt. Osiris (judge of the dead), was considered the source of the resurrection and everlasting life. He was the greatest of all the gods of the underworld. Osiris, along with the Nile god, Hapi, and the god of the annual inundation, Satet, were disgraced. Jehovah was greater than the Nile. There were some 30 other gods involved with the Nile River in some way. All fell before the Hebrew God.

Verse 22 says, "The magicians did so with their enchantments." One is made to wonder why these magicians didn't reverse the act of Moses. This would surely prove their power. The Egyptians are forced to dig for water to drink, and the condition stayed thus for seven days. They must have been wondering, "Where are our gods?"

We are told that this plague was called forth “in the sight of Pharaoh.” I challenge the reader with this question: Why was Pharaoh coming down to the river? If it was not to pay homage to that sacred stream, then for what did he come? He must have been made to wonder the whereabouts of his gods. The first “battle” is over and the victory is clearly Jehovah’s.

The Second Plague — The Frogs (Exod. 8:1-14)

This second battle is to be after Pharaoh is plainly warned of the consequences of his refusal. The magicians apparently duplicated this feat also. Heqt was the frog goddess; and the frog was her theophany. The frog, among other things, was the symbol of fertility, insuring a fertile year for farm and family. Can one imagine this slimy creature crawling all over everything? What the Egyptians had revered, was now becoming disgusting. They could not live normal lives this way, and where is their frog goddess? She could give them no relief. The second battle is Jehovah’s.

Verse 8 is quite an admission for Pharaoh, “Intreat the Lord that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people.” His gods could not do the job. This compels him to make a promise to let the Israelites go, if he is given relief. **He gets that relief, but changes his mind when respite comes.** Another Egyptian deity hits the dirt. I can hardly imagine any Egyptian ever again worshiping Heqt.

The Third Plague — The Lice (Exod. 8:16-19)

I know of no particular god or goddess involved here; but it is obvious that it would involve any that cared for life and comfort. This plague seems, at least to this writer, to be a kind of follow-through on the previous two plagues. It certainly is a transitional plague; for the first time the Egyptian magicians fail and admit “this is the finger of God.”

The Egyptians were noted for their cleanliness; their priests were required to be absolutely clean when they approached their sacred altars. The lice would virtually make their worship impossible. How could they be considered clean with lice all over their bodies and clothing?

To add to this disgusting scene, the Egyptians could look across and see the Jews in comfort; while they, themselves, were busy fighting the lice. No doubt, they wondered “Where are our gods?” Alas, they have just been defeated by Jehovah God. In spite of this loss, Pharaoh refuses to permit the Jews to leave.

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Thanks to Connie Clarkson (See Exodus 7-12)

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**I'VE GOT YOU DOWN FOR BLOOD, FROGS,
LICE, LOCUSTS AND HAIL ... WOULD YOU
LIKE ANY FLIES WITH THAT?**

The Fourth Plague — The Flies (Exod. 8:20-32)

From this point on the Egyptian magicians retire from trying to duplicate Moses' feats; though they do hang around for a while. **There are several creatures included in this word “flies”:** the Gadfly, cockroach, and the Egyptian beetle **all appear to be included, though there were others.** The Ichneumon fly is the one most probably under consideration; at least, swarms of these flies have been known to invade the land of Egypt. Uatchit was their fly-god; but he could bring no relief from the present swarms. Thus, their fly-god is disgraced. To those observing, just about any god would be preferred over their fly-god, even the God of the Hebrews.

Pharaoh does not call for the magicians, but calls for Moses and Aaron. He tells them to go “sacrifice to your God in the land.” This is Pharaoh’s first offer at a compromise. We have already noticed (vv. 26-27) why this would be unacceptable; Moses demands permission to go as originally requested. Pharaoh bends a bit and offers another compromise, “ye shall not go very far away.” This seems to be the first time that Pharaoh offers a compromise with the original request.

Moses warns Pharaoh against being deceitful and the flies are removed. Pharaoh changes his mind again after relief came. But, another victory is chalked up for Jehovah. Are the Egyptians getting these great lessons? Better still, are the Hebrews getting them?

The Fifth Plague — The Animal Murrain (Exod. 9:1-7)

This battle will pit some of the most powerful of Egyptian gods and goddesses against the Hebrew God. Many Egyptian gods will here meet their Waterloo; for this blow is at both the Egyptian worship and livelihood: cattle, horses, asses, camels, sheep, and oxen.

Hathor (cow-goddess) was worshiped throughout Egypt and depicted, for the most part, with a human body, but the head of a cow, since the cow was her theophany. She was supposed to be the “mother principle” of deity and to give nourishment to the soul of the dead. But, where is she now? If the mighty Hathor couldn’t protect her followers, what god could?

When Hathor fell so also did the god Apis (sacred bull symbol). He had temples scattered throughout Egypt and was thought to be of great power. But what happens to his followers now? He cannot protect them against Jehovah. Without boring the reader with too much detail, I would like to identify a couple more of the Egyptian deities involved in this battle. Mut, wife of Amon-Ra (king of gods), was associated with the life-giving sun. Mut, goddess of the sky and wife of Geb, produced the egg out of which the sun was hatched.

This is quite an array of Egyptian deities that fell in this battle, receiving the fatal blow with the coming of the murrain. Pharaoh sends to check on the cattle of the Hebrews and not a one had been lost. He still will not permit the people to go. To what god will he turn now? Another battle fought and another battle won by the one true God.

The Sixth Plague — The Boils (Exod. 9:8-12)

This plague can be best understood by noticing the Egyptian belief at the time. They had altars upon which they burned sacrifices and the ashes from these altars were thrown into the air to avert evil. One can easily see here the motive of God in ordering this plague. Instead of averting evil, the ashes thrown into the air brought boils with blains upon both man and beast.

Imhotep was the Egyptian god of medicine and prayers were offered to him for cures and protection from physical illnesses. But he failed the Egyptians here. Little comfort could be found by noticing that the Jews were resting with unblemished skins and in comfort.

We may notice that the magicians were still hanging around at this point, perhaps watching for an opportunity of their own; however, the boils and blains proved too much for them — “They could not stand before Moses.”

This battle was little more than a skirmish, but it struck a fatal blow at their god of medicine; he could not help them one bit. Another victory for the God of heaven! Yet, for all this, Pharaoh would not let the people go.

The Seventh Plague — Hail Mingled With Fire (Exod. 9:13-35)

Now, more of their livelihood is to be taken away, destroyed by hail and burned with fire. Reshpu and Qetesh were gods of storm and battle, controlling all the natural elements except light. Where are these gods now? Some of Pharaoh’s servants believed the warning and brought their cattle in from the fields, while others did not. The wheat and rye were not smitten, because they had not yet grown up.

There was no hail in Goshen, where the Hebrews dwelt. Can't the Egyptians see that the Hebrew God is more powerful than all the Egyptian gods?

Pharaoh, for the first time admits, "I have sinned" and he promises to let the people go if he has relief. Alas, he changed his mind again and refused to permit them to leave Egypt. God's plan is proceeding, more Egyptian deities have fallen. Battle number seven is over and won by Jehovah.

The Eighth Plague — The Locusts (Exod. 10:1-20)

With this plague God specifies another purpose for these battles. Speaking to Moses, God refers to his signs which he had wrought in Egypt and says, ". . . that ye may know how that I am the Lord." **The Hebrews needed much the same lesson as did the Egyptians.**

Pharaoh's servants, for the first time, begin to plead with him to let the Jews go, pointing out that Egypt was virtually destroyed. Pharaoh offers another compromise — the Israelite men could go and worship. Moses says, "No" and the locusts come. Now Pharaoh gets in a hurry and "in haste" sends for Moses and Aaron. And for the second time he admits to sinning, "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you." His gods could not remove the locusts, so he ask Moses and Aaron, "intreat the Lord your God."

The Lord removes the locusts, not leaving even one in all the land of Egypt. Still the Jews are not permitted to leave as requested. But, another mighty battle has been won and God's plans are still proceeding.

The Ninth Plague — The Darkness (Exod. 10:21-29)

Egypt did not have much rain; the sun, moon and stars were seldom obscured. Now Moses is going to call for darkness over this sunny land, darkness so thick that it could be felt. **But there would be no darkness in Goshen.** They were to have six nights in one. We should remember that light figured in their system of worship.

Recall Osiris and Isis, who controlled the movements of the sun, moon, and stars? They could not remove the darkness so they loose another battle. The most essential thing in all the physical realm is light, and the Egyptians seem to have realized this, ascribing to their gods the job of keeping it thus. Three days of darkness and the Egyptians didn't venture out.

Noticing some other gods involved here will help us see the importance of this battle. Thoth was the arranger of the celestial system, to offend him was to invite eternal death. Now for Jehovah to engage Thoth in battle must have caused even the Hebrews to tremble. Sekhmet was the goddess of artificial light, but she could do nothing. Horus, a greatly revered god, was said to be at his best at noon-day when the sun was the hottest. Three noons had passed; where was Horus?

One more of their deities should be mentioned because he is going to play a big part in the next and tenth plague. **Ra, the king of the gods, was at times said to appear in the form of the first-born of a cow, if that first-born was a bull.** There were other gods involved here but these will suffice to show how God is dealing with this polytheistic nation of idol worshipers.

Nine great battles have been fought and the stage is set for number ten and last battle of this "War of the gods."

The Tenth Plague — The Death of the First-Born (Exod. 11:1-12:12)

As the previous plague had come to an end, we hear Pharaoh tell Moses that if he saw his face again that he should die. Moses accepts this verdict and promises, "I will see thy face again no more."

God told Moses, "Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he will surely thrust you out hence altogether."

Before looking at this plague, let us get a few facts that are obviously introductory to this plague. In Exodus 11:3, the attitude of the Egyptians toward the Hebrews has changed. The Egyptians would put on their best jewels for worship. Now, since the Hebrews were leaving to worship their God, the Egyptians would be loaning them their best, urging them to take it and use it. Thus, they are going to “spoil the Egyptians.”

In Exodus 12:1ff, the Passover is instituted. God said to Moses, You shall eat it, “with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and he shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord’s Passover . . . against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord” (vv. 11, 12).

When Moses threatened the life of the first-born in all the land of Egypt, he defied all Egyptian gods at once; all of them were interested in life and death. **The first-born of the Egyptians were dedicated to their gods. What a challenge this was!**

The Passover has been observed as God directed, and death of the first-born of all Egyptian families, *as well as that of their cattle*, has come. Pharaoh rose up in the night and hearing all the mourning, he sends a message to Moses and Aaron and commands them to leave as requested (vv. 31-32). **“And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men”**(v. 33). We see here the spoiling of the Egyptians and the enrichment of the Israelites, just as God had said would happen. Another mighty battle has been fought and the victory is obvious.

In Exodus 12:37, we see “six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside the children” leaving Rameses. The Egyptian gods were powerless and the Egyptian religion was defeated. Jehovah proved his supremacy and Israel was free. The Egyptians and Hebrews alike were to get these powerful lessons. But, do they? For how long? Is it any different with us today?

Whatever we might think of the Egyptians in their relying upon their false gods, these gods were very real to them. Now, what better evidence could one desire to show the folly of idol worship and the existence of the one true God to whom all men are accountable?

TEN PLAGUES PARALLEL TRACK: TO SLAVES AS “SECOND UNCREATION”

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE PLAGUES: THE FIRST UNCREATION

CREATION, UN-CREATION, RE-CREATION

A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11

JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP

The Cataclysm

The Hebrew-Language Version of the Great Deluge

The central and structurally the most important unit in the genealogical pentad in Genesis 1–11, and the dividing line between the old world and the new, is the story of the great deluge. The story has given rise to centuries of discussion and debate, defending or calling into question the literal truth of the biblical account: how flood water could cover the highest mountains to a depth of more than 22 feet; how a vessel of the dimensions given in the biblical account could accommodate representatives of all the myriad species of insects, mammals and birds known to exist; how the biblical chronology can be reconciled with the inconceivably greater time scale of human history and so on. Beginning in the early modern period, the subject has generated, and continues to generate, an endless succession of theories including catastrophism, diluvianism, scriptural geology, close calls with comets, pre-Adamites, creation science, to name some of the better-known examples.

A great deal has been written about the literary character of the deluge narrative which is instructive but not immediately relevant to our purpose in this study. One observation about literary structure as a guide to meaning should, however, be made. The narrative pivots on the moment when God remembered Noah, the moment when the fate of the human race hung in the balance:

God remembered Noah, and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. (Gen. 8:1)

Leading up to that point, the water rises steadily, incrementally and inexorably, and after it the subsidence of the flood waters is measured out in precise dates. As in the creation account (Gen. 1:26–28, the creation of the first human beings), the narrator tends to adopt a kind of rhythmic *recitative* as the story approaches its climax. The narrative therefore rises and subsides with the rising and subsidence of the water. God speaks before the deluge, announcing the decision to destroy and giving specifications for the construction and provisioning of the ark. Immediately prior to the storm of water Noah is told to enter the ark (Gen. 7:1–4), and after it is over he is told to come out (8:15–17), but for the duration of the cataclysm (*kataklysmos*, the LXX translation of the Hebrew *mabbûl*, ‘deluge’) God is silent. We must imagine the disaster taking place in utter darkness and silence. Hence the dramatic moment of God’s remembering at the point when the entire earth had been returned to the watery chaos which was there before God spoke in the first creation. The task of articulating what this means for the relationship between God and humanity, and how we are to understand why the deluge happened in the first place, is left to the reader.

Why Then Did It Happen?

In the biblical version the emphasis is on the spread of moral evil among humanity, enunciated in the first announcement of the disaster:

When Yahweh saw that the wickedness of humankind had increased on earth, and that all their inclinations and thoughts tended always towards evil, he regretted that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him bitterly. Yahweh said: ‘I shall blot out humankind which I have created from off the face of the earth, human beings together with beasts, reptiles and birds of the sky. I regret that I made them.’ Noah, however, found acceptance in the sight of Yahweh. (Gen. 6:5–8)

This statement, in the form of internal monologue, is surprising and even shocking since it seems to imply that over the time which had passed since the first creation Yahweh had learned something about human beings, something inseparable from their nature, which he had not known at the time of their creation and which now led him to regret having created them. The problem lies in the connection between wicked conduct, the immediate reason for the verdict, and the innate tendency to evil from which the conduct springs. The problem is mitigated if not entirely removed in the final statement about the one exception to the prevailing evil. In the following verse, which is the introduction to the central *toledot* unit, we learn that righteousness is possible in spite of the innate tendency to the evil impulse:

These are the descendants of Noah. Noah, a righteous man, was the one blameless person of his time. Noah walked with God. (Gen. 6:9)

The negative implications for Noah's contemporaries of this emphasis on his moral uniqueness are then set out in terms:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and it was filled with violence. When God saw that the earth was corrupt on account of the corrupt conduct of everyone on it, God said to Noah, 'I am about to make an end of all humankind, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I will destroy them together with the earth.' (6:11–13)

What God sees when he looks at the earth recalls the first creation. The contrast in v. 12 (translated more literally) has a bitter poignancy:

God saw the earth and, behold, it was corrupt.

God saw all that he had made and, behold, it was really good. (Gen. 1:31)

Emphasis on moral corruption and violence leading to a final judgement on society reflects prophetic preaching following a trajectory from creation to destruction and the possibility of a new beginning.

The decree of destruction which exempted only Noah and his family raises the same acute problem of the justice of God, and on a much vaster scale, as the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah taken up between Abraham and God in Gen. 18:22–33. Hence the insistence on the total depravity of that generation: only total depravity can account for the totality of destruction. It is assumed that the entire line descended from Adam and Seth had died before the deluge, presumably including Methuselah who, according to the biblical chronology, died the year in which the deluge began (1656 AM).

For the believer, the incommensurability of human thought and expression with the character of God and God's activity with respect to humanity means that a satisfactory answer to the question why God chose to destroy what God had created will always evade us. The narrative itself appears to acknowledge the problem by speaking of the irruption of evil into human history from sources beyond humanity. In the meantime, however, there remains the task of reading and interpreting the text before us, which brings us to the account of the event itself and its outcome.

Noah's Ark Sanctuary

As brief as it is, the account of the building of the ark (Gen. 6:14–16) contains too many obscure and rare technical terms for it to be fully intelligible. The term 'ark' itself (*tēbâ*), perhaps of Egyptian origin, occurs elsewhere only with reference to the papyrus-reed basket plastered with pitch in which Moses was deposited in the Nile (Exod. 2:3–5). The 'nests' (*qinnîm*) which Noah was told to incorporate in the structure are obviously not birds' nests but must have a derived technical sense, somewhat like a ship's 'crow's nest', for example. The reference would presumably be to sections, compartments, rooms or something of the sort.

The wilderness sanctuary has the same breadth as the ark, it is one third its length, and Solomon's temple is one fifth as long. The measurements of Zerubbabel's temple in Ezra 6:3 and 1 Esd. 6:25—60 cubits (about 90 feet or 27 metres) in height and width—are not helpful. The correspondences should not be pressed, but it would be natural to represent the ark as a sanctuary, a place of refuge in the time of judgement, and it is no surprise that early Christian writers interpreted it along those lines, for example Augustine in *The City of God* 15:26 (Louth 2001: 130–50).

To this spatial symbolism corresponds symbolic representation along the temporal axis. The author seems to have simply juxtaposed two different chronological systems, though he may have had his own way of reconciling them. The deluge itself lasted exactly 150 days or five months (Gen. 7:24; 8:3), beginning on the 17th day of the 2nd month of Noah's 600th year (7:11) and ending with the ark grounded on Mount Ararat on the 17th day of the 7th month of the same year (8:4). Another 73 days would pass before the tops of the mountains would be visible (8:5), and the decisive date, marking the final retreat of the flood water, took place on New Year's Day of the following year (8:13, the first day of the first month of Noah's 601st year).

This date aligns the emergence of the new world with the New Year's Day of the first creation, the cosmic temple, when the first clod of earth emerged from the watery chaos. It is also synchronized with the setting up of the wilderness sanctuary on the first day of the first month of the year following the exodus from Egypt (Exod. 40:1, 16–17). The information on the structure of the ark and the chronology of the deluge, as defective and at times confusing as it is, confirms the homology with temple and worship apparent, as we have seen, in the creation account in Genesis 1.

The Cataclysm Described

The coming disaster is announced once again as Noah and his family prepare to embark:

I am about to bring a deluge of water on the earth to destroy from under heaven everything on it in which is the breath of life. Everything on the earth must perish. (Gen. 6:17)

This is the first indication of the nature of the imminent cataclysm. It is to be death by water. According to the J source the lead-up period of 7 days will be followed by forty 24-hour days of torrential rain (Gen. 7:4, 12, 17). We may detect at this point a note of bitter irony in that, at the beginning, it was the absence of rain which prevented the earth from being filled with life in its many forms (Gen. 2:5).

What happens is *mabbûl* ('deluge' 'flood'), which came to be used for the deluge in a temporal sense as event—such and such happened or so and so was born so many years after the deluge (Gen. 10:1, 32; 11:10). In the only occurrence of the term outside Genesis, in Ps. 29:10, the word may however have a more primitive and basic meaning. **This is one of those psalms which praises Yahweh as lord of creation and victor over the forces of chaos and disorder:**

Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood [*mabbûl*],
Yahweh sits enthroned as king forever.

The precise meaning of the first line is contested. In his Anchor Bible commentary on Psalms 1–50, Mitchell Dahood understood the preposition *lamed* governing *mabbûl* in a temporal sense, resulting in the reading ‘Yahweh sits enthroned since the *mabbûl*’, though Dahood took it to refer not to the deluge of Genesis 6–8 but to Yahweh’s conflict with the forces of chaos at the first creation (Dahood 1965: 175, 180). This reading is certainly possible, but the alternative seems to be more in keeping with grammatical usage.

The *mabbûl* is therefore not only the deluge as event but the source of the inundation, namely, the abyss or the deep (*těhôm*) of the creation account (Gen. 1:2). According to P, the inundation occurred when ‘all the springs of the great abyss [*těhôm rabbâ*] were burst open, and the windows of the sky were opened’ (Gen. 7:11). **In the first creation God divided the upper from the lower waters to make a space for dry land on which human history could be played out (Gen. 1:6–10). Now, as the deluge begins, this creative act is undone. Water comes from above and below; the windows of the sky are opened and the springs or fountains of the great abyss burst forth cancelling distinctions and obliterating everything in between. The deluge is an undoing of what was done in creation, a return to chaos, an obliteration of the precarious space for ordered human life. It is therefore an act of un-creation.** This reading of the narrative is confirmed by the manner in which the deluge was brought to an end: the springs of the abyss and the windows of the sky were closed, and God made a wind blow over the earth, the same wind which in the beginning was swirling over the surface of the water (Gen. 1:2). Moreover, we shall see that the new world which met Noah’s gaze when he was able to look out of the ark emerged from the watery chaos on New Year’s Day, corresponding to the New Year’s Day of the first creation (Gen. 8:13).

The brief description of the deluge itself presents in dramatic rise and fall, *arsis* and *thesis*, the inexorable surging of the flood water and its eventual subsidence:

The water kept on increasing; it bore up the ark so that it rose high above the ground;
The water kept on increasing greatly over the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water;
The water swelled more and more over the earth until it covered all the highest mountains everywhere under heaven;
The water kept on increasing until it covered the mountains to a depth of fifteen cubits;
Every living thing that moved on the earth perished—birds, cattle, wild animals, every creature that crawled on the ground, and all humankind.
Everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.
God blotted out everything that existed on the face of the earth—humankind, cattle, crawling things, birds of the sky—they were all blotted out.
Only Noah and those who were with him remained alive.
The water kept increasing over the earth for one hundred and fifty days. (Gen. 7:17–24)

The pivot of the narrative, the *peripateia*, occurs at this point, with the flood water at its highest point, almost 7 metres above the highest mountain. God remembered Noah, the water began to recede and the vessel was grounded on Mount Ararat in Armenia. God remembering Noah is not the reaction of an absent-minded God who suddenly recalls what he had done. Remembering is rarely a purely psychological process. To speak of God remembering is a way of maintaining a meaningful linkage with significant events in the past. God remembers at moments

of crisis. The suggestion was made earlier that the history of early humanity is, so to speak, superimposed on the historical experience of Israel, and that the deluge is metaphorically correlative. In that case, **God remembering Noah will bring to mind that God also remembers his people when in exile either in Egypt (Exod. 2:24; 6:5) or in Babylon (Lev. 26:42, 45).** The further implications of this remembering will be seen more clearly when we consider the account of the covenant which sets up and confirms the new dispensation in the postdiluvian world.

The New Dispensation

The repetition of the creation blessing on humanity (Gen. 1:28; 5:2) and the command to populate, or repopulate, the earth (Gen. 1:28; 8:17) give the impression of a repetition of the first creation, and this impression is strengthened by the command to procreate with which the first of the two inaugural discourses of God begins and ends (Gen. 9:1, 7). The command is addressed to Noah's three sons who are to be the progenitors of a new humanity. This first discourse is followed by a covenant between God and all living creatures, announced solemnly at the beginning and end of the second discourse (Gen. 9:8–9, 17). **The question naturally arises at this point, the inauguration of a second creation, as to what difference the catastrophe of the deluge and the mass death of early humanity has made. One difference becomes apparent at once: there is a profound shift in the relations between humankind and other animals: 'The fear and dread of you shall come on all the earth's living creatures—all the birds of the sky, everything that creeps on the ground, all the fish of the sea [at last the fish are mentioned!]; they are placed in your power' (Gen. 9:2). This goes well beyond the mandate to rule over the animal world in the first creation which, as we saw, should be given a benign interpretation (Gen. 1:28). Now, however, the key words are 'fear' and 'dread'.**

The extent of the alienation becomes apparent at once: 'Every living creature that moves and lives shall be food for you. As I gave you the green plants, so now I give you everything' (Gen. 9:3). **The vegetarian diet of the first creation is abrogated (Gen. 1:29–30) and, with it, the kingdom of peace and harmony comes sadly to an end. It is now acceptable to kill for food. This, too, is an ancient topos. In a certain sense this new mandate can be seen as a kind of normalization, a realistic acceptance of life in a world which has lost its innocence. There remains nevertheless a deep and sad sense that this is not the way it was meant to be. The new order is therefore by no means a complete restoration. The deluge came about on account of the violence which had increasingly infected the antediluvian world. Now God makes concessions to violence and sanctions it within certain clearly stated limits which acknowledges the reality of the ineradicable inclination to evil in the human heart (Gen. 8:21), it seems as if the deity had come to terms with the limitations of human moral capacity. This is now a damaged world calling for damage control.**¹³

¹³ Blenkinsopp, J. (2011). [*Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11*](#) (pp. iii–205). London; New York: t&t clark.

Were Men Vegetarians before the Flood? By Eric Lyons

After the creation of man and land animals on day six of the Creation week, God instructed Adam saying, “I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food” (Genesis 1:29). There is no record of God telling Adam and Eve that they could butcher cows or smoke chickens, but He did authorize them to eat the seeds and fruits of plants and trees. In the very next chapter of Genesis, it is recorded where God told Adam that he could eat “of every tree of the garden” (except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—2:16-17). Notice that nothing is said here about animals—only vegetation. Then again, in Genesis 3, when God sentenced Adam and Eve to a life outside of the Garden of Eden, He said: “And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground” (3:18-19). Three times in the first three chapters of the Bible, God instructed man regarding his diet. Each time, the Bible records only where God permitted man to eat vegetation (some of which could be made into bread—3:19). The Bible nowhere mentions man receiving permission from God to eat any kind of animal until **after** the Flood. It was then that God said:

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, **even as the green herbs** (Genesis 9:1-3, emp. added).

Just as God had authorized mankind to eat “green herbs” many centuries earlier, after the Flood, God gave His permission for mankind to eat “all things”—including all animals that move on the Earth and swim in the sea. [NOTE: It appears that laws regarding the **eating** of clean and unclean animals were not given until the Law of Moses (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14:3-21). Although a difference was made between clean and unclean animals prior to the Flood (cf. Genesis 7:2-3), this distinction seems to have applied only to the matter of which animals were suitable for sacrifice, not for consumption (cf. Genesis 8:20).]

To answer the question, “Were all men prior to the Flood vegetarians?,” one merely can conclude that the Bible reveals God giving instructions only regarding the eating of food made from vegetation prior to the Deluge. God’s Word is conspicuously silent regarding the eating of animals. However, just because God apparently did not authorize man to eat animal flesh before the Flood, does not mean that mankind abided by this regulation. It seems likely that there were some people who went beyond what God allowed, and ate various kinds of animals anyway. It is not difficult to imagine those living just prior to the Flood, whose every thought was evil continually (Genesis 6:5), leaning over a sacrificial sheep, smelling the sweet aroma, and taking a bite out of the lamb’s leg (cf. 1 Samuel 2:12-17). Some have asked why Adam’s son Abel raised flocks, if he and his descendants were supposed to be vegetarians? Although the Bible does not say exactly why Abel was a “keeper of sheep” (Genesis 4:2), most likely it was because by raising sheep, Abel could provide clothing for himself and others, as well as provide animals that people could get from him to sacrifice to Jehovah. One thing we can know assuredly is that before the Flood, we never read of God granting permission to humans to eat animal flesh. Yet, at least three times prior to the Flood the Bible mentions God authorizing the fruit of the Earth for man’s consumption. Furthermore, Genesis 9:2-3 stresses that after the Flood a vastly different relationship existed between animals and humans. Animals developed a fear of humans, and humanity was permitted to use the flesh of animals for food, “even as the green herbs” were permitted since the beginning of the Creation (9:3; 1:29).

Towards a Biblical Theology of Creation

The question which we have heard calling for an answer throughout Genesis 1–11 is how evil could have infiltrated so quickly and established itself so firmly and ubiquitously in a creation declared by God to be good. This we have taken to be the central theme of Genesis 1–11. The commentary was based on the assumption that the initial act of creation cannot be detached from the sequence of events leading to the deluge as an act of un-creation followed by a renewal of creation under changed circumstances. To confine oneself to the initial act of creation involves leaving the post-deluge world, the world which was born out of disaster, in other words, the damaged but as yet intact world in which we live, without an adequate explanation. This is, after all, the world the author was really concerned about, as we the readers also are. The purpose of the history of the pre-deluge world, constructed as we saw from originally independent origin stories, is precisely to explore the mysterious onset of evil in a world created good.

If the first Christians were more concerned with the end than with the beginning of history, they were also more concerned with the negative aspects of the created order in need of salvation than with the positive and optimistic view of a world declared to be very good by God at the beginning. Paul, whose correspondence is chronologically the earliest extant Christian writing, begins his great statement in Romans with the universality of sin, a condition common to Gentile and Jew alike (Rom. 1:18–3:20). Then, at a later point, he provides what we might call a historical—typological explanation of this situation by speaking of Adam as the type of sinful humanity. Paul is obviously aware of the role of Satan under the guise of the snake (Rom. 16:20) and of Eve’s seduction by the snake (2 Cor. 11:3), but the introduction of these other actors would have distracted from the Adam—Christ, first man—last man typology, which he develops in Rom. 5:12–19.

Turning now to the Gospels, the conviction that the Christ event is a new creation is intimated in the superscript to Matthew’s Gospel where he describes the genealogy of Jesus as a *biblios geneseōs* (‘a book of generations’) in imitation of Adam’s *sēper tôlēdôt* (‘book of generations’) in Gen. 5:1. The same point is made even more clearly in the opening words of John’s Gospel, announcing a new *bērē’šīt*, ‘in the beginning’, a new Genesis. No one in New Testament times addressed the issue of the origin of evil with reference to the biblical traditions of human origins in a formal, systematic way. Apart from the fact, noted earlier, that the focus was more on the end than the beginning of human history, no one would have denied the role of supernatural agencies, present in human history since the beginning, in the ubiquitous presence of evil in its many forms.¹⁴

¹⁴ Blenkinsopp, J. (2011). [*Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11*](#) (pp. iii–205). London; New York: t&t clark.

Invoking Creation in the Story of the Ten Plagues

Demonstrating God's Control of the World to the Israelites by Prof. Z. Zevit

Introduction: Final Form of the Ten Plagues

The account of the ten plagues as we have it, in its final, redacted form, is a crafted piece of religious historiographical literature.^[1] In my essay "[The Ten Plagues and Egyptian Ecology](#),"^[2] I addressed the possibility that this account is based on some sort of historical occurrence in Egypt, but the final form of the text is certainly much more than a distant recollection of Egyptian natural disasters. To understand what the redactors of this text were trying to express when they drew together P and non-P material, we need to consider some statements in the text.^[3]

The Purpose of the Plagues

To Teach the Egyptians

According to Exodus 7:4–5, the function of the plagues is didactic:

I will lay my hands upon Egypt and deliver hosts, my people, the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with great acts of judgment. And the Egyptians shall know that I am God when I stretch out my hand against Egypt.^[4]

Despite the reference to the Egyptians learning a lesson—namely, the Lord's power—it seems clear that the Egyptians were never meant to be the real beneficiaries of the plagues. If the education of the Egyptians is the reason for the plagues, the lesson is certainly lost on them.

To Teach the Israelites

The true beneficiaries of the lesson that God said he would teach are the Israelites. As we read in Exodus 14:31:

When Israel saw the mighty act [literally ‘hand/arm’] which the Lord had done in Egypt, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.^[5]

What ignited the faith of the Israelites was not their physical redemption from Egypt, but rather “the mighty act which the Lord had done in Egypt”—that is, the plagues.

What was there about the plagues that triggered Israel’s response in faith? The answer, I believe, has to do with their invoking the image of God as Creator. Through the plagues, the Lord demonstrates that he is the God of creation. As we examine the narrative closely, we will see how this notion is conveyed.

Undoing Creation

Blood (Plague 1)

To initiate the plague of blood, we are told that Aaron is to take his staff and hold it over all of Egypt's bodies (or gatherings) of water. The Hebrew word used in Exodus 7:19 to describe the "bodies" or "gatherings" of water is מקוה. This is the same word that appears in the opening chapters of Genesis when God creates the seas:

"God called the dry land Earth, and the gatherings (מקוה) of waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10).^[6]

The use of the unusual word מקוה in connection with the plague of blood^[7] cannot fail to evoke an association with the creation of the seas in Genesis 1:10 and indicates the cosmic import of the plague.

Similarly, the expression in Exodus 7:19 "Let them be(come) blood" (וְהָיָה דָם) echoes the use of the same verb (though not in the exact same form owing to a different linguistic context), "Let there be(come)" (יְהִי), in the creation story in Genesis.^[8]

However, in contrast to the creation, where the primeval waters are not altered by a creative act, the first plague demonstrates that God is able to change the very nature of things.

Frogs, Lice, and Flies (Plagues 2, 3 & 4)

The next three plagues form a triad. The frogs are associated with *water*, the lice with *earth*, and the flies with *air*. Each of these three elements are part of the creation story as well.

Frogs (#2) emerged from the rivers, canals, and ponds of Egypt, swarmed together entering the houses, sleeping chambers, beds, and even the bake-ovens and kneading troughs of all Egyptians and their slaves (Exodus 7:28-29 + 8:1-2). This refers to what God says in Gen 1:20, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures." Both Genesis and Exodus use the root sh-r-ts).

Understood against the background of Genesis, in Exodus, the frogs, who usually occupied outdoor ecological niches by the waters of Egypt, temporarily moved into new niches within the homes of the Egyptians. They acted in a way incongruent with their own nature.

Similarly, lice (#3) come forth from the clumped earth (Exodus 8:12–13). The description of lice corresponds to that of crawling creatures (*remes*) that come forth from the earth in Genesis 1:24. Lice, however, discomfort the Egyptians, even though many of them—according to Egyptian tomb paintings—shaved their body hair.

Flies (#4) (or a swarm of insects; Exod 8: 16-21) correspond to the flying creatures of the creation story. In Genesis God orders that “flying creatures multiply in the land” (Genesis 1:22). In Egypt, the flies not only multiply in the land, they fill the land. After the fly plague, the situation in Egypt is a complete reversal of the one anticipated by the divine blessing to humanity in Genesis 1:28, where God tells people to “Rule the fish of the sea, the winged creatures of the heavens, and all living creatures which creep on the earth.” In Egypt, these creatures are totally out of control; it is they that rule the humans, not the other way around.

Pestilence (Plague 5)

The plague of pestilence affects animals, specifically field animals. In Genesis 2:18–20 the animals are created specifically for man. In the plague of pestilence, the domestic animals that were under man’s dominion were taken away from the Egyptians. That which was first created for the first man was *first* removed from the Egyptians by the *first* plague directed specifically against created things.

Boils (Plague 6)

The one plague that does not fit easily into the pattern I have been describing is boils, but it still fits quite well with the Priestly Text’s worldview, particularly when it comes to the laws of purity. A person afflicted with boils is ritually unclean (Leviticus 13:18–23). This is quite similar to Egyptian notions of priestly purity as well, and is complemented by the stringent demands of Egyptian religion during the New Kingdom (1550–1080 B.C.E.), concerning the ritual and physical purity required of priests before entering a sanctuary.^[9] Egyptians considered themselves superior to other peoples. Pharaoh himself was a god and his officers were priests. Perhaps the image of these superior, “holier than thou” individuals suffering from boils, a painful and unaesthetic affliction, was humorous to the Israelites and was considered a barb against Egyptian religion.

Hail and Locusts (Plagues 7 & 8)

The next two plagues, hail and locusts involve the destruction of another part of creation—primarily vegetation. What was not destroyed by the hail was consumed by the locusts. When these two plagues had run their course, Egypt could be contrasted to the way the world appeared after the third day of creation: “The land brought forth vegetation: seed bearing fruit with seed in it” (Genesis 1:12).^[10] By contrast, in Exodus 10:15 we are told that “nothing green was left of tree or grass of the field in all the land of Egypt.”^[11]

Darkness (Plague 9)

Perhaps the most surprising of all the plagues is darkness. In Exodus 10:21–23 we read that a thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days.

People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings” (Exodus 10:23).^[12]

What is described here is not simply the absence of light. The darkness is something physical; it is actually palpable: “a darkness that can be touched (אֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׁעוּ)” (Exodus 10:21b).

The Torah describes here the cessation of the alternation of light and darkness, of day and night. Yet darkness and light exist side by side in geographically distinct places. The Israelites did have light. In short, in Egypt, God has reverted the relationship between darkness and light to what had been prior to the end of the first day of creation—that is, to the state that existed briefly between Genesis 1:4 and Genesis 1:5.

Death of the First Born (Plague 10)

The final plague, the death of the first-born, is only a forerunner to the complete destruction of all the Egyptians at the Red Sea, or Reed Sea.^[13] Here we discern an echo of what expressed in Genesis 1:26, where God said, “We will make man in our image and after our likeness.” Instead of creating, he is destroying human males who in form are like the prototype human, in his image and his likeness—first, the first-born, and then, at the sea, all of Egypt.

The Lord of Creation is Israel's Redeemer from Egypt

At the end of the narrative in Exodus, Israel looks back over the stilled water of the sea at a land with no people, no animals and no vegetation, a land in which creation had been undone. Israel is convinced that its redeemer is the Lord of all creation. It is this implicit theological principle that motivates the literary pattern. He who had just reduced order to chaos was the same as he who had previously ordered that which had once been unformed and void (Genesis 1:2).

Jeremiah 4:23-28 predicts a similar undoing of creation in Judah, in the sixth century BCE:

רְאִיתִי אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה תְהוּ וְנָחָהּ וְאֵל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵין אִוְרָם... רְאִיתִי וְהִנֵּה אֵין הָאָדָם וְכָל עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם נָגְדוּ. רְאִיתִי וְהִנֵּה הַכְּרָמִל הַמְדַבֵּר... מִפְּנֵי יְ-הוָה מִפְּנֵי חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ

“I look at the earth, it is unformed and void; at the skies, and their light is gone... I look: no man is left, and all the birds of the sky have fled. I look: the farm land is desert...because of the Lord, because of the His blazing anger” (NJPS).

Why Ten Plagues?

Is their significance to the number ten in the Exodus tradition? The answer, I believe, is again to be found in the Priestly creation story. The number of plagues in Exodus was intended to correspond to the *ten divine utterances by which the world was created and ordered* (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29), though not necessarily to the order of creation.^[14]

The destruction of Egypt was part of the redemption of Israel, so the Exodus narrator tied his story of redemption to the story of creation through allusions, echoes, and word plays.^[15]

1. This piece has been adapted by the author and the editors of TABS from, Ziony Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues," *Bible Review*, June 1990. That article had its origins in, Ziony Zevit, "The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 67 (1976) 193-211.
2. See my TABS essay, ["The Ten Plagues and Egyptian Ecology."](#)
3. See, R. E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003, pp. 132-44), covering Exod 8:1-14:31. This brief essay assumes that the P redactor is working not only with his own P material but that, as he works, he is familiar with JE material, already redacted, and with other P traditions about the primeval period. In other words, he knows Genesis 1:1-2:4a, the priestly creation account as well as the Garden of Eden story, exclusively J, in Genesis 2:4b-4:2.
4. וַנִּתְּנֵי אֶת־יְדֵי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־צִבְאוֹתַי אֶת־עַמִּי בְּגִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֵנִי יְ-הוָה בְּנֹטְתִי אֶת־יְדֵי עַל־מִצְרַיִם. ...
5. וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְ-הוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירָאוּ הָעַם אֶת־יְ-הוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּיְ-הוָה וּבַמֶּלֶכֶּה עַבְדּוֹ:
6. וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־לֵהִימֹם לִיבְשֹׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמַקְנֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יִמִּים וַיֵּרָא אֶל־לֵהִימֹם כִּי־טוֹב:
7. This word is only found nine times in the entire Hebrew Bible!
8. The same verb is used the 3rd plague (lice, 8:12-13) and the 6th plague (boils, 9:9).
9. J. Cerny, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: Hutchison's University Library, 1952), 118; S. Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 37-39. For a similar observation about this plague, see Gary Rendsburg's TABS essay, ["Reading the Plagues in their Ancient Egyptian Context."](#)
10. וַתּוֹצֵא הָאֶרֶץ דָּוָשָׁא עֲשׂוֹב מִזְרִיעַ נֹרַע לְמִינָהּוּ
11. וְלֹא־נוֹתֵר כָּל־יִגְרֵק בְּעֵץ וּבַעֲשׂוֹב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
12. לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אֶחָיו וְלֹא־קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתַּחַתָּיו שֶׁלִּשְׁתַּיִם וְלִכְל־בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אוֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֵהֶם:
13. See Bernard F. Batto, "[Red Sea or Reed Sea?](#)" *BAR* 10:04.
14. Cf. Mishnah *Aboth* 5:1, 4.
15. This conclusion does not contradict the findings of source criticism. According to source criticism, the final redactor of the plague narratives and of the creation stories was from the Priestly school, P.

**META-NARRATIVE IN THE SUBTEXT:
DEATH & DECOMPOSITION**

FORENSICS: 1ST THRU 2ND SERIES BIOLOGICALLY LINKED

From Book "Maggots, Murder & Men" by Zakaria Erzincioğlu

Page 186: "The sequence of plagues, was, therefore: frogs; maggots (not lice); flies; and a disease of livestock. Greenberg points out that a mass outbreak of frogs would be followed by the death of these creatures, the accumulated heaps of whose bodies would not dry out quickly (unlike the case with individual frogs), thus providing the ideal breeding ground for flies. However, basing his argument on the Authorized Version alone, Professor Greenberg made no reference to the plague of 'lice' and argued that the plague of flies would have been the natural consequence of the death of so many frogs. However, the fact that the plague that followed that of the frogs was of maggots provides further evidence in support of Greenberg's argument; the missing link, so to speak, between the frogs and the flies. Finally, having had a plague of flies, it is perfectly reasonable to expect a murrain to follow.

It is important to remember that this sequence of events was described by people who did not necessarily understand the biological link between them. Their given order seems to indicate that they actually took place and were recorded faithfully. I would add one last point: a plague of frogs does not strike me as being so terrible.

If I wanted to make up a fictitious catalogue of horrors, I could think of far worse things to be plagued by than frogs. To my mind, the plague of frogs gives credibility to the whole account since it is unlikely to have been mentioned unless it actually happened.”

Page 187:

“The plagues of Egypt raise another entomological point of interest. We have seen that the Authorized Version referred to ‘lice’ attacking men and beasts, whereas the New English Bible corrected this to ‘maggots’. The word lice was probably used in the earlier version, because these insects were familiar and known to be closely associated with humans. But what about the ‘beasts’? The human louse does not normally attack animals, being very closely dependent upon people. Maggots, however, are far less discriminating.

This raises another matter. Less well known is their association with the living, for the maggots of many flies will, under certain circumstances, lay their eggs on live animals and people; the maggots that eventually hatch feed parasitically upon the living tissues, causing a disease known as myiasis...”





"G-d WILL PASS OVER THE DOOR AND WILL NOT SUFFER THE DESTROYER TO COME IN UNTO YOUR HOUSES TO SMITE YOU" *EXODUS 12:23*



SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE PLAGUES: A HARDENED HEART

Immediately before Moses started on his journey from Horeb, God had repeated this warning, and in a manner explained it, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall not let the people go." This sentence occurs so often in the subsequent history of God's dealings with Pharaoh, and has been the subject of so much controversy, that it is well we should inquire briefly into its meaning before proceeding further.

God is here represented sending messages to Pharaoh, and at the same time exercising such power over his heart as to cause him to reject those messages. The Most High punishes the king and people with a series of unheard-of plagues, and finally with complete destruction, because they will not obey His commands; and yet darkens their minds and hardens their hearts, so that they can neither understand His purpose nor yield to His will.

In explanation of this it has been suggested that the sentence "I will harden Pharaoh's heart" means only, "I will leave him to his natural obstinacy; I will suffer him to harden himself;" like the doom of Ephraim: "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone" (Hos. 4:17). But this is rather an evasion of the difficulty than a solution; the words are too plain and too important to be disposed of thus. The LORD Himself says to Moses, distinctly and emphatically, "I will harden," or, "I have hardened;" and the words are equivalent to "I, even I," "I for my part," or, "as for me, I have hardened." Moreover, in the 9th chapter Moses is instructed to tell Pharaoh: "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up (or made thee to stand), for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." It must be admitted, therefore, that it was God himself who hardened Pharaoh's heart, and that He did it by a direct act of His own, and for a wise and righteous purpose.

Yet God cannot be either directly or indirectly the author of sin; He doth not tempt any man. It is not to be believed for a moment that He created Pharaoh for no other purpose than to destroy him, or that He predestined him to do evil, in order that his punishment might be conspicuous and his example profitable as a warning to others. Nor is there anything in the history before us to point to such a conclusion. Pharaoh was a cruel and idolatrous heathen; his people were sunk in the grossest superstition and vice: God designed to punish both for their excesses, which even the law of nature and of conscience must have condemned; and at the same time to lead forth His own people, and deliver them from their misery and degradation. He might have accomplished these objects as well by one sign as by ten. **He might have destroyed Egypt in a moment, and set Israel free with a stroke; but He chose rather to make the process gradual, and to give respite and punishment alternately, that He might show the necessary consequences of disobedience, and hand down a lesson and a warning to all future generations. Thus the overthrow of one nation might be made the salvation of another, and the punishment of Egypt the instruction of the world.**

Instead, therefore, of executing upon Pharaoh and his people the immediate vengeance which they had deserved, God visited them with a judicial blindness. The obstinacy which He imposed upon them was itself a part of their punishment. We have no reason to suppose that Pharaoh might not, at one period of his life, have controlled his temper and his conduct; or that there was anything, either in his natural character or in the circumstances of his position, which rendered him, of necessity, more vicious than others. He sinned at first willingly, and God bore with him patiently; but his day of grace was now past.

As in the history of Nebuchadnezzar, whose heart was taken away, and a beast's heart given him instead, as a punishment for wickedness and pride, so Pharaoh's heart was now rendered insensible—made heavy," for such is the literal interpretation of the word, like the heart of one of his own brute deities. The sentence which he had deserved long ago was at length executed upon him, "Make his heart fat and his ears heavy, and shut his eyes" (Isa. 6:10); "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev. 22:11): and now God would make use of him as a warning to others: He would raise him up, or "continue" him upon the throne of Egypt, that he might become a proverb and an example to all generations: He would make use of him for His own ends, and get to Himself honour from him in his death, by judging him *openly* for all the rebellion and dishonour of his life.

Nor are we to conclude that the punishment of Pharaoh was of any other than a temporal kind. A special judgment was appointed as the consequence of each new act of disobedience; and the last offence of all was followed by his death in the Red Sea. There his history ends. God judges men according to their opportunities; their punishments are proportioned to their knowledge and privileges. Pharaoh said truly that he "knew not the Lord." "That servant who knew not his Lord's will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes" (Luke 12:47); how few, God, in His mercy, will show us hereafter. The sins of Pharaoh were his own, and his punishment, so far as we are informed of it, was certainly no greater than they deserved. We are never told that his condemnation was increased on account of that judicial hardness which was itself a part of it. The ruin which advanced upon him with successive strokes, and which finally destroyed him, was nothing more than he had merited a thousand times over before God hardened him and judged him.

The same may be said of the Egyptians as a nation. The sufferings they incurred had been justly merited by their own wickedness. God was not wroth with all the congregation because of one man's sin. Far from Him the purpose of destroying the wicked with the just. All Egypt was sunk in the grossest immorality; and all Egypt suffered for the sins of their own flesh. If, at the time of the Passover, "there was not an house where there was not one dead," it was because there was not an house which was not full of wickedness. God was not extreme to mark iniquity when He judged Egypt; He did but suspend the appointed vengeance, enduring for a time the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, that the blow, when it fell, might be recognised as coming from His hand, and as the due reward of their misdeeds.¹⁵

¹⁵ Millington, T. S. (1873). [*Signs and Wonders in the Land of Ham: A Description of the Ten Plagues of Egypt with Ancient and Modern Parallels and Illustrations*](#) (pp. i–231). London: John Murray.

Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?

by Kyle Butt, M.A. and Dave Miller, Ph.D.

In their perpetual quest to find discrepancies in the Bible, to undermine biblical ethics, and to find fault with the actions of God, skeptics have charged that God mistreated Pharaoh by overriding his free will and forcing him to resist the demand of Moses to allow the Israelites to exit Egypt. The skeptics focus on the verses about Pharaoh's heart, demanding that the God of the Bible is an unjust, cruel being. Steve Wells, the well-known skeptic writer, said: "God begins the process of 'hardening Pharaoh's heart' (see also Exodus 7:3,13, 9:12, 10:1, 20,27, 11:10, 14:4,8), thus making it impossible for any of the plagues that God sends to have any beneficial effect. But according to 1 Samuel 6:6, God didn't harden the Pharaoh's heart; the Pharaoh did it himself" (Wells, 2001). Kendall Hobbs, in an essay titled "Why I Am No Longer a Christian," added Pharaoh's story to a list of alleged atrocities committed by the God of the Bible. "There are plenty of other atrocities committed by God or at his command," Hobbs comments, then lists "the Exodus story when the Egyptian Pharaoh was repeatedly ready and willing to let Moses and his people go, until God hardened his heart, and then God punished him for his hardened heart by sending plagues or killing children throughout all of Egypt" (Hobbs, 2003).

Turning to the book of Exodus, most Bible readers must admit that they were at least slightly startled the first time they read about God hardening Pharaoh's heart, and then His punishing Pharaoh for that same hard-heartedness. In dealing with these allegations, three distinct declarations are made with regard to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. First, the text states that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8), and the hearts of the Egyptians (14:17). Second, it is said that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15,32; 9:34), that he refused to humble himself (10:3), and that he was stubborn (13:15). Third, the text uses the passive form to indicate that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, without giving any indication as to the source (7:13,14,22; 8:19; 9:7,35). The questions that arise from this state of affairs are: (1) did God harden Pharaoh on some occasions, while Pharaoh hardened himself on others? (2) Did God do **all** the hardening of Pharaoh, with the references to Pharaoh hardening himself being the result of God forcing him to do so against his own will? (3) Are all three declarations given in the text actually parallel expressions that mean the same thing? (4) Are the three declarations distinct from one another in their meaning, but all true in their own respects? Is the God of the Bible an unjust, cruel Being?

With that in mind, Bullinger's fourth list of idiomatic verbs deals with active verbs that "were used by the Hebrews to express, not the doing of the thing, but the **permission** of the thing which the agent is said to do" (p. 823, emp. in orig.). To illustrate, in commenting on Exodus 4:21, Bullinger stated: " 'I will harden his heart (i.e., I will permit or suffer his heart to be hardened), that he shall not let the people go.' So in all the passages which speak of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. As is clear from the common use of the same Idiom in the following passages" (1968, p. 823). He then listed Jeremiah 4:10, " 'Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people': i.e., thou hast suffered this People to be greatly deceived, by the false prophets...." Ezekiel 14:9 is also given as an example of this type of usage: " 'If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet': i.e., I have permitted him to deceive himself."

James MacKnight, in a lengthy section on biblical idioms, agrees with Bullinger's assessment that in Hebrew active verbs can express permission and not direct action. This explanation unquestionably clarifies the question of God hardening Pharaoh's heart. When the text says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it means that God would **permit** or **allow** Pharaoh's heart to be hardened.

A second equally legitimate explanation for the Exodus text is that the allusions to God hardening Pharaoh's heart are a form of figurative speech, very closely associated with metaphor, known as "metonymy," where one name or word is employed for another. For example, when we speak of "reading Shakespeare," we mean that we read his writings or plays. God hardening Pharaoh's heart would be "metonymy of the subject," that is, the subject is announced, while some property or circumstance belonging to it is meant. Specifically, under this form of the figure, "[a]n action is sometimes said to have been accomplished, when all that is meant by it is that an occasion was given" (Dungan, 1888, p. 287; cf. Bullinger, 1898, p. 570).

The Bible is replete with examples that illustrate this figure of speech. John reported that "Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John" (John 4:1). In reality, Jesus did not personally baptize anyone (John 4:2). But **His teaching and influence** caused it to be done. Jesus, the subject, is mentioned, but it is the circumstance of His **influence** that is intended. His **teaching** was responsible for people being baptized. Repeatedly in the book of 1 Kings, various kings of Israel are said to have "walked in the way of Jeroboam...who had made Israel sin" (e.g., 1 Kings 16:19,26; 22:52). But Jeroboam did not force either his contemporaries or his successors to sin. Rather, he set an example that they chose to follow. Judas was said to have purchased a field with the money he obtained by betraying Christ (Acts 1:18). But, in reality, he returned the money to the chief priests and then hung himself. The blood money was then used to purchase the field (Matthew 27:5-7). By metonymy of the subject, Judas was said to have done that which his action occasioned. Paul warned Roman Christians: "Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15). What he meant was that they should not set an example that lures weaker brothers into doing what they consider to be wrong. Paul told Corinthian Christians that they were in a position to "save" their unbelieving spouses (1 Corinthians 7:16). He told Timothy that he was in a position to "save" those who listened to his teaching (1 Timothy 4:16). In both cases, Paul meant that proper teaching and a proper example could influence the recipients to obey God's will for their lives.

Another instance of metonymy of the subject, closely aligned with the example of Pharaoh in Exodus, is the occasion of the conversion of Lydia, the businesswoman from Thyatira. The text states that the "Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:14). However, the specific means by which God achieved this action was the preaching of Paul. God's Word, spoken through Paul, created within her a receptive and responsive mind. In like fashion, Jesus is said to have preached to Gentiles as well as to the antediluvian population of Noah's day (Ephesians 2:17; 1 Peter 3:19). Of course, Jesus did neither—directly. Rather, He operated through agents—through Paul in the first case and through Noah in the latter. Similarly, Nathan accused king David: "You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword" (2 Samuel 12:9). In reality, David sent a letter to his general ordering him to arrange battle positions where Uriah would be more vulnerable to enemy fire. On the basis of metonymy of the subject, David, the subject, is said to have done something that, in actuality, he simply arranged for others to do.

In the case of Pharaoh, “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” in the sense that God provided the circumstances and the occasion for Pharaoh to be forced to make a decision. God sent Moses to place His demands before Pharaoh. Moses merely announced God’s instructions. God even accompanied His Word with miracles—to confirm the divine origin of the message (cf. Mark 16:20). Pharaoh made up his own mind to resist God’s demands. Of his own accord, he stubbornly refused to comply. Of course, God provided the occasion for Pharaoh to demonstrate his unyielding attitude. If God had not sent Moses, Pharaoh would not have been faced with the dilemma of whether to release the Israelites. So God was certainly the instigator and initiator. But He was not the author of Pharaoh’s defiance.

Notice that in a very real sense, all four of the following statements are true: (1) **God** hardened Pharaoh’s heart; (2) **Moses** hardened Pharaoh’s heart; (3) the **words** that Moses spoke hardened Pharaoh’s heart; (4) **Pharaoh** hardened his own heart. All four of these observations are accurate, depicting the same truth from different perspectives. In this sense, God is responsible for everything in the Universe, i.e., He has provided the occasion, the circumstances, and the environment in which all things (including people) operate. But He is not guilty of wrong in so doing. From a quick look at a simple Hebrew idiom, it is clear that God did not unjustly or directly harden Pharaoh’s heart. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), He does not act unjustly (Psalms 33:5), and He has always allowed humans to exercise their free moral agency (Deuteronomy 30:19). **God, however, does use the wrong, stubborn decisions committed by rebellious sinners to further His causes (Isaiah 10:5-11). In the case of Pharaoh’s hardened heart, God can be charged with no injustice, and the Bible can be charged with no contradiction. Humans were created with free moral agency and are culpable for their own actions.**

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IF MOSES DID NOT EXIST...



**Then what are these found
at the bottom of the Red Sea?**

<https://youtu.be/JIQ-QAKTqZc>

<https://youtu.be/AOIRLsCk-TM>

<https://youtu.be/QeX966OVxwU>

<https://youtu.be/BKS00MJB0eY>

New Testament Hardened Hearts

- **BALE'S COMMENTS ON MATTHEW CHAPTER 23 VERSE 23**
“Did the Pharisees agree that these people were sick in sin? Were they condemned by the very principle of Matt. 9:12, which they were forced to acknowledge as being a valid principle? What other answer did Jesus make? (9:13). Is there tendency to write off whole groups as being so sick that a physician will not do any good?
- When we go to passages which speak of God's willingness to forgive, we find that God is willing and that the failure is with man. (Ex. 33:7-20; Matt. 23:36-37). Observe on Matt. 23:36-37 that this statement would include any who had blasphemed the Holy Spirit, for some in Jerusalem did. (2 Pet. 3:9). **Since no passage says that the sin against the Spirit will not be forgiven because God is not willing to forgive, should we say it? Is not the fault with man?**
- **BALES'S COMMENTS @ MATTHEW CHAPTER 12 VERSE 31**
The individual who has become so hardened that he can attribute such a clear work of God, a supernatural work which he admits to be supernatural, to the devil, has gone so far into darkness that he will never see the light. He has become so hardened that truth cannot penetrate.
- If the label is an accurate description of the contents, it is not wrong to apply the label. Of course, we should first show what is in the container and thus justify our use of the label. However, individuals may mislabel others in an effort to discredit them. – James Bales

Applying Principles Learned From the Plagues

The story of Moses and his spokesman Aaron going before Pharaoh with the demand of God to let his people go is rich with principles that drive home practical lessons.

The texts we are considering are Exodus 7-10. Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh and demand the release of the children of Israel who were being held captive and used as servants by the Egyptians. With each denial of the request, God sent a plague upon the land of Egypt. Nine plagues are delivered by the end of chapter 10.

Let's consider some lessons from these chapters.

1. Wrong on the part of others can be used to demonstrate the power of God (Exod. 7:4). Each time Pharaoh rebelled and stubbornly refused to heed the demand of God, it simply gave God an opportunity to demonstrate his power with another plague.

God used the apostasy of the Jews to bring the Gentiles in and the jealousy it created to win back some of the Jews (Rom. 11). Today, God can use (not cause) the depth of the sin of man to demonstrate this power to forgive (Col. 1:20-22). However great the sin, there is that much more grace (Rom. 5:20).

2. Our obedience should be just as we have been commanded. God had commanded Moses and Aaron to go before Pharaoh. "Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as the Lord commanded them, so they did" (Exod. 7:6). Our obedience should be "just as the Lord commanded." **Partial obedience is not true obedience. We cannot be selective in which commands are important and which are not. We must obey just as we have been instructed.**

3. **When the heart is not moved, it is hardened. After the first plague Pharaoh's heart was not moved (Exod. 7:23). The verse before says his heart grew hard (v. 22). Thus, I conclude that when one will not allow his heart to be moved by the message of God, his heart becomes harder. With each rejection it gets harder and harder until the gospel no longer can prick the heart (Acts 2:37).**

4. The absurdity of waiting until tomorrow. When the second plague (the frogs) came upon Pharaoh's land, he called upon Moses to entreat the Lord to take away the frogs (Exod. 8:8). Moses told Pharaoh to pick the time he wanted to frogs removed (v. 9). Pharaoh said, "Tomorrow" (v. 10). Why wait? Why not removed them now? In essence he said, "Let us spend one more night with the frogs." Sound strange? Yet, there are people in sin who want to be forgiven, but put it off. Though God is ready to forgive, they are saying, "Let me have more time, I'd rather have the frogs."

5. God takes care of his people. With the fourth plague (the flies) God specifically excluded the land of Goshen (where his people lived) so that they did not suffer like the wicked Egyptians (Exod. 8:22). I must conclude that God takes care of his people. He promises to put his eyes over us and have his ears attuned to our prayers (1 Pet. 3:12).

6. Some make promises and pleas only when they are down. Pharaoh cared little about God and his people. Only when the plagues had him in a corner did he cry out to God for deliverance and promise to release the children of Israel (Exod. 8:29ff). Yet when the plague was lifted he returns again to his stubborn rebellion against God. Today, there are those who continue in their lives of sin until all is out of their control and only then do they make promises of doing better if their situation is improved.

7. Those who fear God regard his word and obey. Exodus 9:20-21 shows a contrast between those who fear God and those who do not regard his word. Thus, those who fear God are those who regard the word of God. Later Moses told Pharaoh that he knew he would not fear God (9:30). The context shows that he meant he would not obey God.

8. God expects us to pass the knowledge of him on from generation to generation. God told Moses that as he showed his power and might in the plagues, he wanted told “in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things that I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord” (Exod. 10:2). The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Moses and Aaron should have been just as impressed with the mighty plagues as they were. God expects us to well inform our children so they will know the Lord God and be able to do the same for their children.

9. Stubbornness has consequences. No one has been any more stubborn in dealing with God’s requirements than Pharaoh was. However, his stubbornness led to the destruction of his land, his people, his power, and himself. Today there are people who are so stubborn that they refuse to obey the gospel lest someone get the impression they are being “pushed” or “forced” into doing what they don’t want to do. One who will not swallow his pride and submit to the Lord in obedience is stubborn. Stubbornness has consequences.

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