

The Ten Plagues

Blood

When Pharaoh persisted in his refusal to liberate the children of Israel, Moses and Aaron warned him that G-d would punish both him and his people. First, the waters of the land of Egypt were to be turned into blood.

Moses walked with Aaron to the brink of the river. There Aaron raised his staff, smote the water, and converted them into streams of blood. All the people of Egypt and the King himself beheld this miracle; they saw the fish die as the blood flowed over the land, and they turned with disgust from the offensive smell of the sacred river.

It was impossible for them to drink of the water of the Nile, far famed for its delicious taste; and they tried to dig deep into the ground for water.

Unfortunately for the Egyptians, not only the floods of the Nile but all the waters of Egypt, wherever they were, turned to blood. The fish died in the rivers and lakes, and for a whole week man and beast suffered horrible thirst.

Yet Pharaoh would not give in.

Frogs

After due warning, the second plague came to Egypt. Aaron stretched forth his hand over the waters of Egypt, and frogs swarmed forth. They covered every inch of land and entered the houses and bedrooms; wherever an Egyptian turned, whatever he touched, he found there the slimy bodies of frogs, the croakings of which filled the air.

Now Pharaoh became frightened, and he asked Moses and Aaron to pray to G-d to remove the nuisance, promising that he would liberate the Jewish

people at once. But as soon as the frogs disappeared, he broke his promise and refused to let the children of Israel go.

Bugs

Then G-d ordered Aaron to smite the dust of the earth with his staff, and no sooner did he do so than all over Egypt bugs crawled forth from the dust to cover the land. Man and beast suffered untold misery from this terrible plague.

Although his counsellors pointed out that this surely was G-d's punishment, Pharaoh steeled his heart and remained relentless in his determination to keep the children of Israel in bondage.

Wild Animals

The fourth plague to harass the Egyptians consisted of hordes of wild animals roving all over the country, and destroying everything in their path. Only the province of Goshen where the children of Israel dwelt was immune from this as well as from the other plagues.

Again Pharaoh promised faithfully to let the Hebrews go out into the desert on the condition that they would not go too far. Moses prayed to G-d, and the wild animals disappeared.

But as soon as they had gone, Pharaoh withdrew his promise and refused Moses' demand.

Pestilence

Then G-d sent a fatal pestilence that killed most of the domestic animals of

the Egyptians.

How the people must have grieved when they saw their stately horses, the pride of Egypt, perish; when all the cattle of the fields were stricken at the word of Moses; and when the animals upon which they looked as gods died smitten by the plague! They had, moreover, the mortification of seeing the beasts of the Israelites unhurt.

Yet Pharaoh still hardened his heart, and would not let the Israelites go.

Boils

Then followed the sixth plague, which was so painful and loathsome that it must have struck the people of Egypt with horror and agony. G-d commanded Moses to take soot from the furnaces, and to sprinkle it towards heaven; and as Moses did so, boils burst forth upon man and beast throughout the land of Egypt.

Hail

Now, Moses announced to the king that a hail-storm of unprecedented violence was to sweep the land; no living thing, no tree, no herb was to escape its fury unhurt; safety was to be found only in the shelter of the houses; those, therefore, who believed and were afraid might keep in their homes, and drive their cattle into the sheds.

Some of the Egyptians took this counsel to heart; but the reckless and the stubborn left their cattle with their servants in the fields.

When Moses stretched forth his staff, the hail poured down with violence; deafening thunder rolled over the earth, and lightning rent the heavens, and ran like fire along the ground. The hail did its work of destruction; man and

beast who were exposed to its rage died on the spot; the herbs were scattered to the wind, and the trees lay shattered on the ground.

But the land of Goshen, untouched by the ravages of the storm, bloomed like a garden amidst the general devastation. Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and acknowledged his sins. "The Lord is righteous," he said, "and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the Lord that there should be no more thundering and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."

Moses replied: "When I am gone out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to the Lord; and the thunder will cease, and neither will there be any more hail, that thou mayest know that the earth is the Lord's."

And it happened as Moses had said: the storm ceased, but Pharaoh's heart remained hardened.

Locust

The next time Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh, he appeared somewhat relenting, and asked them who was to participate in the worship the Israelites wanted to hold in the desert.

When they told him that everyone without exception, young and old, men and women, and animals, were to go, Pharaoh suggested that only the men should go, and that the women and children, as well as all their possessions should remain in Egypt.

Moses and Aaron would not accept this offer, and Pharaoh became angry and ordered them to leave his palace. Before leaving, Moses warned him of new and untold suffering. But Pharaoh remained adamant, even though his advisers counselled against further resistance.

As soon as Moses left the palace, he raised his arms toward heaven and an east wind brought swarms of locusts into Egypt, covering the sun, and devouring everything green that had escaped the hail and previous plagues.

Never in the history of mankind had there been such a devastating plague of locusts as this one.

It brought complete ruin upon Egypt, which had already been thoroughly ravaged by the previous catastrophes. Again Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and implored them to pray to G-d to stop the plague. Moses complied, and G-d sent a strong west wind that drove the locusts into the sea.

When relief came, Pharaoh's obstinacy returned to him, and he refused to liberate the people of Israel.

Darkness

Then followed the ninth plague. For several days all of Egypt was enveloped in a thick and impenetrable veil of darkness which extinguished all lights kindled. The Egyptians were gripped with fear, and remained glued to their places wherever they stood or sat.

Only in Goshen, where the children of Israel dwelt, there was light. But not all of the Jews were saved from this plague. There were a few who wanted to be regarded as Egyptians rather than as members of the Hebrew race, and who tried, therefore, to imitate the Egyptians in everything, or, as we call it, to assimilate themselves. They did not want to leave Egypt. These people died during the days of darkness.

Again Pharaoh tried to bargain with Moses and Aaron, bidding them depart with all their people, leaving their flocks and herds behind as a pledge.

Moses and Aaron informed him, however, that they would accept nothing less than complete freedom for the men, women, and children, and that they were to take all their belongings with them.

Now Pharaoh became angry and ordered Moses and Aaron to leave and never to return. He warned them that if they were to come before him again they would die. Moses replied that it would not be necessary for them to see Pharaoh, for G-d would send one more plague over Egypt, after which Pharaoh would give his unconditional permission for the children of Israel to leave Egypt.

Exactly at midnight, Moses continued, G-d would pass over Egypt and smite all firstborn, man and beast. Of the children of Israel, however, nobody was to die. A bitter cry would sweep Egypt, and all the Egyptians would be gripped with terror, lest they all die. Then Pharaoh himself would come to seek out the leaders of the Hebrews, and beg them to leave Egypt without delay!

With these words, Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, who was seething with rage.

Death of the First-Born

Midnight of the fourteenth to the fifteenth of Nissan came, and G-d smote all first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of King Pharaoh, down to the first-born of a captive in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle, exactly as Moses had warned.

There was a loud and bitter wail in each house a loved one lay fatally

stricken. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron during that very night, and said to them:

"Arise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord as you have said; and take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also."

At last, then, the pride of the stubborn king was broken. Meanwhile the Hebrews had been preparing for their hasty departure. With beating hearts, they had assembled in groups to eat the Paschal lamb before midnight, arrayed as they had been commanded.

The women had taken from the ovens the unleavened cakes, which were eaten with the meat of the roasted lamb. The preparations were at last concluded, and all was ready.

At the word of command, the whole nation of the Hebrews poured forth into the cool, still Eastern morning. But not even amidst their trepidation and danger did they forget the pledge given by their ancestors to Joseph, and they carried his remains, with them, to inter them later in the Promised Land.

http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1830/jewish/The-Ten-Plagues.htm