

*“The Death of Aaron and the Consecration of Eleazar”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

(Durham, p. 84) By tracing the family line of Aaron and Moses back to the sons of Jacob, Exodus affirms that the momentous events about to take place are indeed the fulfillment of the covenant commitments which the Lord had previously made to Abraham and his descendants and that these events will play a crucial role in the accomplishment of God’s messianic plan for the salvation of humanity. This summary paragraph at the conclusion of the genealogy, with its dual repetition - **“It was this same Aaron and Moses...It was the same Moses and Aaron”** - precisely identifies the two sons of Amram and Jocebed as God’s spokesmen, the agents through whom He has chosen to implement His plan of salvation. The Hebrew text is most emphatic. It could well be translated *“it was the very same”* to convey the sense of the original in English.



“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” - 19th Century German Bible Engraving

God’s Judgement Upon Egypt Foretold Exodus 6:28-7:5

Now when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt He said to him, “I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you.” But Moses said to the Lord, “Since I speak with faltering lips, why should Pharaoh listen to me?” Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and though I multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay My hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgement I will bring out My divisions, My people, the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.”

“Now when the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt He said to him, ‘I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you.’” - This brief transition picks up the thread of the narrative which had paused for the genealogical identification of Aaron and Moses. The divine commissioning of Moses as God’s spokesman to Pharaoh is restated - ***“Now when the Lord speaks to Moses in Egypt, He said to him”*** - in a manner which emphatically reminds the reader that the word which Moses has been instructed to proclaim is not his own. Rather, in its totality (***“everything I tell you”***), the message which has been entrusted to Moses is the word of God Himself. The glaring contrast between the omnipotent Creator - ***“I am the Lord”*** - and the insignificant human monarch - ***“Pharaoh the king of Egypt”*** - who has foolishly dared to defy Him is unmistakably clear. The text also restates again Moses’ expression of his doubts as to the outcome of the mission, because of his own inabilities and weaknesses: ***“But Moses said to the Lord, ‘Since I speak with faltering lips, why should Pharaoh listen to me?’”***



“Moses” by Em. Laiten

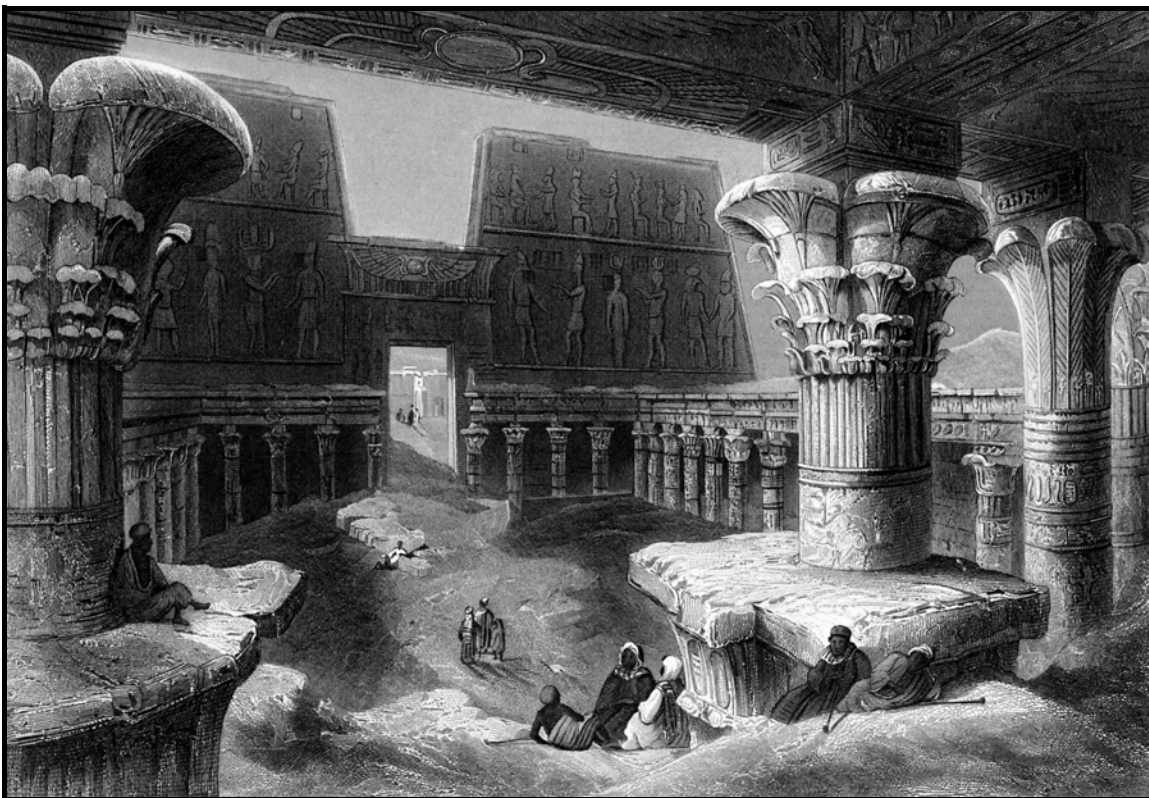
Based on the Marble Statue by Michealangelo

The reluctant messenger’s description of his lack of oratorical ability - ***“I speak with faltering lips”*** (literally - ***“I speak with uncircumcised lips”***) - is described here in exactly the same colorful terminology with which Moses had twice before attempted to evade his calling (cf. Exodus 4:10, 6:12). Its repetition for the third time is deliberately designed to focus the reader’s attention away from Moses, the greatest of the prophets of the Old Testament. His hesitations and fears at the outset of his mission serve to direct the focus toward God, reminding us again that the outcome of this great endeavor does not depend upon the messenger who is sent but upon the God who sends him.

*“It is **not** Moses who will make things happen in Egypt, or who will be trusted to bring powerful deliverance, or whose eloquence or lack of eloquence will matter at all, or whose coming to Pharaoh will inspire respect and receive attention. The determining Presence will be Yahweh’s.” (Durham, p. 86)*

The reassurance that Moses need not concern himself about success or failure since the power of God alone will accomplish the deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage has been a consistent theme throughout the opening chapters of Exodus (cf. Exodus 3:11-14, 19-20; 4:1, 8-12; 5:22-6:1).

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.’” - In response to Moses’ continuing personal insecurities, God provided a more detailed description of his relationship to Aaron and the role which his brother was to play in the negotiations with Pharaoh. Previously, the Lord had assured Moses that his relationship with his spokesman Aaron would be like that of a god: ***“It will be as if***



“The Ruins of the Temple at Karnak” - 19th Century Engraving

you were a God to him.” (Exodus 4:16) God here extends His metaphor as He declares to Moses: **“See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh.”** The words of the Hebrew phrase are still more forceful, literally asserting *“I have made you god to Pharaoh.”* These words are a commitment to Moses that the power needed to *“get the job done”* would be provided. At the same time, they are also a contemptuous dismissal of the divine pretensions of the kings of Egypt and her impotent idols. Egypt’s host of gods and goddesses were nothing more than helpless statues. In the inspired words of the psalmist: **“Their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see; they have ears but cannot hear; noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.”** (Psalm 115:4-8) In the same way, Pharaoh was hailed by his people as a living god. They ascribed to him divine honor and glory. They believed that he possessed divine powers. Magnificent temples were built throughout the land dedicated to the worship of Egypt’s god-kings. Commentator Peter Enns explains the point of the Biblical phrase in this way: *“In Egyptian royal ideology, the pharaoh was considered to be a divine being. So, by calling Moses God, Yahweh is beating Pharaoh at his own game. It is not the king of Egypt who is god; rather, it is this shepherd and leader of slaves who is God. And this Moses-God defeats Pharaoh in a manner that leaves no doubt as to the true nature and source of his power...Moses is not simply like God to Pharaoh. He truly is God to Pharaoh in that God is acting*



“The Divine Pharaoh (Rameses II) Enthroned Between Amun-Ra and Isis” - Wall Relief from the Temple at Abu Simbel

through Moses.” (Ryken, p. 195) But Pharaoh had no real power. He was only a man, not god. When God promised Moses **“I have made you like God to Pharaoh”** He was rejecting the blasphemous claims of this puny little man. With biting sarcasm God was telling his prophet - *“This human monarch may claim to be a divine king but I will give you god-like powers to work signs and wonders which will humble him and compel him to obey Me.”* Pharaoh also asserted that he was the *“mouth”* through whom the gods spoke to the people of Egypt. That claim was nothing more than an empty pretense, for the idols of Egypt **“have mouths but cannot speak.”** God instructed Moses that like the pagan gods of the ancient world who did not deign to address their subjects directly, he was not to speak to Pharaoh himself but would address him only through Aaron who would, in effect, serve as his prophet: **“And your brother Aaron will be your prophet.”** In this way, the role of Aaron would not only serve to alleviate Moses’s anxieties about his own speaking abilities, but would also be a veiled rejection of Pharaoh’s assertion of divinity.

“You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will



“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” Bible Woodcut by Hans Holbein - 1538

not listen to you.” - The Lord reiterates the role of Moses and Aaron as the agents of His Word for the second time in this segment. They need not concern themselves as to the content of the message which they are to bring to Pharaoh. All they need do is *“say everything I command you.”* The substance of that message is simple and direct: *“Tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.”*

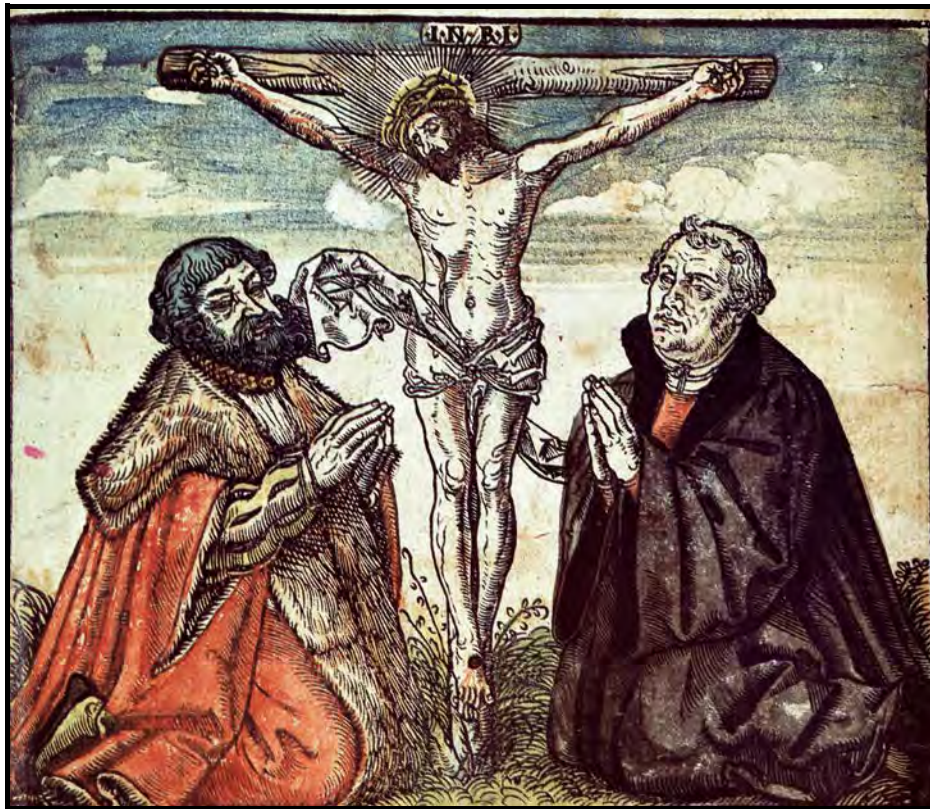
“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart..” God further informed Moses that he also need not concern himself with the outcome of the mission. Moses had been worried from the outset that the King of Egypt would not listen to him because of his own personal inadequacies. God assured His reluctant prophet that this prideful king would indeed scorn and reject his message, but that even the monarch’s rejection was a part of God’s plan. In the end Pharaoh’s stubborn resistance would become the opportunity for God to demonstrate His power as He multiplied *“miraculous signs and wonders”* and visited *“mighty acts of judgement”* upon the land of Egypt.

The phrase *“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart”* has been the subject of endless debate among Bible scholars and theologians throughout the history of the Church because of the inclination inherent in sinful man to place the logic of his own fallible mind over the clear testimony of the infallible Word of God. The metaphor of *“hardening the heart”* occurs fourteen times in the narrative of Exodus 7-14. Paul presented this episode as the classic example of the perfect righteousness of God sovereign judgement in his



*“The Prophet Moses”
by Fredric Leighton*

Epistle to the Romans (cf. Romans 9:14-24). Martin Luther prudently advised that although these verses contain *“the most excellent theology”* they are nonetheless *very strong wine, and the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect.*” Those who are perplexed or troubled by the logical inconsistency between the Biblical assertion of both human free will and responsibility on the one hand and divine sovereignty and predestination to salvation on the other, the reformer counseled, should humbly avoid speculation and *“purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Christ Jesus.”*



*“Martin Luther and Elector Frederick the Wise Under the Cross”
Cover Page Illustration from the 1546 Edition of the New Testament*

“Yet here I am issuing the warning that no man whose minds has not been yet purged, should rush into these speculations, lest he fall into the abyss of horror and hopelessness; but let him first purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Jesus Christ. For I myself would not even read these things if the order of the lection and necessity did not compel me to do so. For this is very strong wine and the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect, that is, the most

excellent theology, of which the apostle says: "Among the mature we do impart wisdom." (1 Corinthians 2:6) But I am a little baby who needs milk, not solid food (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). Let him who is a child like me do the same. The wounds of Christ, the "clefts in the rock," are sufficient for us." (LW, AE, 25, pp. 389-390)



"The Bondage of Israel in Egypt" - 19th Century Engraving



*“The Rage of Pharaoh Upon Learning of the Departure of the Israelites”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

In secular language, the term **“harden”** (Greek - *“skleryno”*) was typically used in a medical context as a description of tissue that becomes rigid or brittle and is thus unable to function normally. The word is utilized in the same way in its modern English derivative *“sclerosis.”* In Scripture, however, the metaphor shifted from the physical to the spiritual. *“Hardening”* took on the connotation of the gradual process of self-reinforcing insensitivity to God and His Word which could ultimately lead to final wrath and condemnation. God used this imagery to vividly condemn the sinful unbelief of the Israelites in the days of Zechariah:

“But they refused to pay attention. Stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by His Spirit through the earlier prophets.” (Zechariah 7:11-12)

When He foretold the spiritual rebirth of Israel through His prophet Ezekiel the Lord reversed the image: ***“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”*** (Ezekiel 36:26) In the same way, the Bible warned that God would punish those who resisted and defied His Word by intensifying the rejection and resistance they themselves had chosen. God’s judgement upon apostate Israel was that they were to

“Be ever hearing but never understanding; be ever seeing , but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people callused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”
(Isaiah 6:9-10)

Thus, the *“hardening of the heart”* by God in Scripture is always a judicial act carried out by the divine Judge in response to the stubborn opposition of the sinner who has first chosen to harden himself. 19th Century Lutheran theologian George Stöckhardt carefully delineated three distinct stages in God’s action - permission, abandonment, and being given over. Stöckhardt explained the progression in this way:

“Hardening of the heart of God’s part appears as the divine re-action against human conduct, as the adequate punishment for self-obduracy. It is contrary to Scripture and blasphemous to deduce obduracy from an absolute decree of reprobation, which already excludes the rejected from the love of God, the redemption of Christ, and the grace of the Holy Ghost...With regard to those who finally harden themselves and as punishment are hardened by God, God left nothing undone in order to convert them...Herein the self-obduracy of the sinner consists; he despises God’s earnestness and goodness, stifles all impressions of the divine Word, and opposes the Holy Ghost, who testifies in his heart and conscience and earnestly desires to convert him. In the long run, however, the great God, who is absolutely in earnest in His commands as well as in His saving grace, will not put up with man’s opposition to His Word and to His good and gracious will. With the perverse, He is perverse, and He hardens those who have hardened themselves. This does not mean that He effects and nourishes the perverse disposition in them. God never does evil. God’s hardening of the incorrigible sinner is first of all permissive. He gives them room and freedom, so that their malice operates fully and unhindered unto the last bitter fruit. Along with



“The Tenth Plague”

18th Century Bible Engraving by Gerhard Hoet

inhumanly and against the accusations of his heart toward the Children of Israel.” (FCSD, XI, 85) Accordingly, Dr. Joseph Fitzmeyer correctly summarizes the matter when he says that the hardening of the heart by God is *“the divine re-action to persistent human obstinacy against Him, the sealing of a situation arising not from God but from a creature that rejects divine invitation.”* (Fitzmeyer, p. 568)

God explained to Moses that the stubborn resistance of Pharaoh would continue despite the ongoing proliferation of *“My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt”* - in the form of the ten plagues which God would send down upon the land. Where any reasonable man would acknowledge the overwhelming power of God and yield, Pharaoh will defiantly persist in his opposition. The promise that God would enable

this are included together a second and third dimension. God’s hardening is abandonment and being given over. God ceases to work in man; withdraws His Spirit (Luther), and thus the possibility of conversion, and gives man over to his perverse, obdurate disposition and will and into the power of the devil, so that the latter can effect his work in him undisturbed.” (Stöckhardt, p. 439)

In the specific case of Pharaoh it is significant to note that the text of Exodus refers to Pharaoh hardening his own heart five times before the first reference comes to God hardening Pharaoh’s heart. Thus the hardening of the heart that God inflicted upon him was the result and consequence of his own sin. In the *“Formula of Concord,”* the Lutheran Confessions declare that God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart *“was a punishment of his antecedent sin and horrible tyranny which in many and manifold ways he practiced*

Moses to perform “*miraculous signs and wonders*” had been previously stated at the burning bush (cf. Exodus 3:20). Its restatement here serves to emphasize the remarkable obstinacy of the Egyptian monarch. The plagues would gradually increase in severity as the righteous judgement of God upon Egypt and her god-king intensified, culminating in the awful death of the first-born of every household in the land - “*Then I will lay My hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgement I will bring out My divisions, My people, the Israelites.*” The text emphasizes the nature of this struggle as warfare between God and the hosts of Egypt in the military terminology which is used to describe the Children of Israel - “*I will bring out My divisions.*” This language literally refers to the organized units of an army. It suggests that the departure of Israel from Egypt will not be a haphazard flight but the orderly advance of a military force.

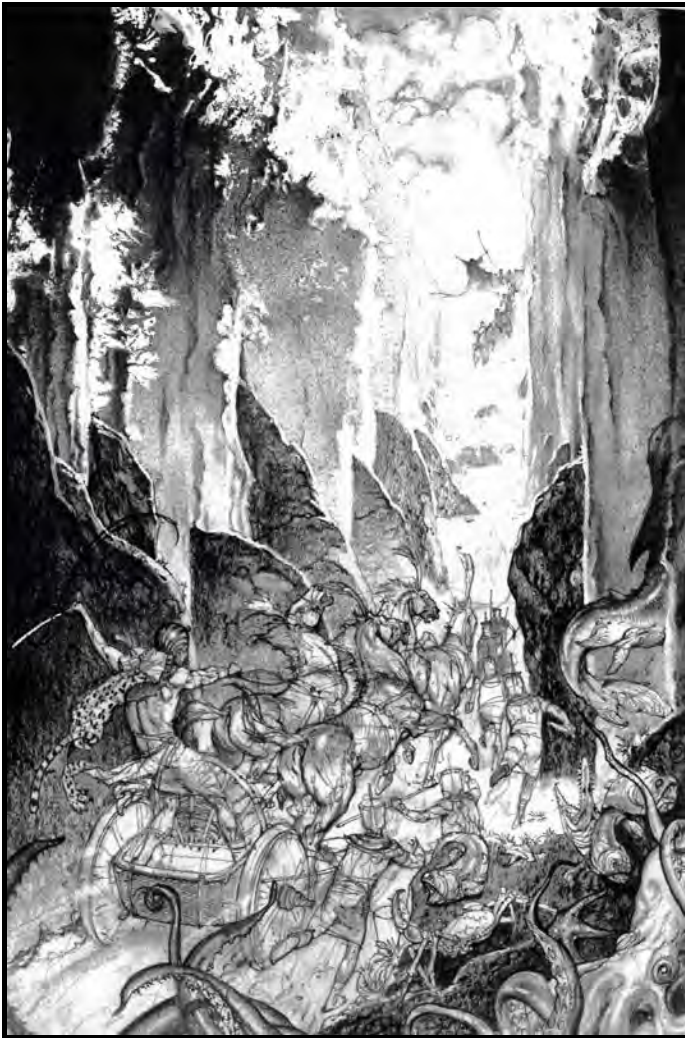


*“The Death of Pharaoh in the Red Sea” by Piero di Cosimo
Detail from a Fresco on the Wall of the Sistine Chapel in Rome*

“And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.” - Israel’s liberation from bondage was absolutely inevitable as a promise and decree of the almighty God. But the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh was to provide the opportunity for God to demonstrate His

Lordship and vindicate His judgement before Egypt and all the world. Moses must come to understand that his role in all of this is not to determine the outcome. That must be left to God. His role is not to succeed but to obey. John Durham effectively outlines the grand scheme of God's purpose when he says:

“Thus Yahweh is orchestrating, in a combination of opposing and unlikely forces, a deliverance that will above all be a proof of His active Presence. A reluctant Moses, an unbelieving Pharaoh, a crushed and dispirited Israel, a proud and ruling Egyptian people, a non-nation against the greatest of nations, are brought together, and the opposing sides are still set more firmly in their respective ways, so that the proof of God's Presence may be established irrevocably. Even as Moses and Aaron speak God's words of command to Pharaoh, Yahweh will increase Pharaoh's resistance, thus creating an impasse.” (Durham, p. 87)



“The Destruction of Pharaoh” by Simon Bisley

To “*know the Lord*” in Scripture may refer either to the saving faith of the believer or to the unbeliever's reluctant acknowledgment of God's sovereign power. In this instance, the latter is clearly intended. Pharaoh had contemptuously declared: ***“I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.”*** (Exodus 5:2) In a bitter parody of those words, God promised Moses that He would humble the pride of this arrogant fool - ultimately in the surging waters of the Red Sea. By the time the Lord was finished with great Egypt and her king, no one would be able to deny or defy Him. The liberation of His people and the humbling of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth would enable all men to “*know the Lord.*”



“Moses Before Pharaoh” by Arnold Friberg

Moses Before Pharaoh

Exodus 7:6-13

Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded them. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “When Pharaoh says to you ‘Perform a miracle,’ then say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,’ and it will become a snake.” Then Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts. Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet, Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.

“Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded them.” - The repetition of this phrase (cf. vss. 10,20) the text places particular emphasis on the obedience of Moses and Aaron. The reluctant doubters have been transformed into faithful servants. From this point forward, Moses and Aaron are not acting as independent agents. Their



“Moses Views the Promised Land Before His Death” - 19th Century Bible Engraving by Sir Frederic Leighton

actions are rather the precise implementation of the Word and command of God. It is customary to note the age a Biblical character at the major turning points in his life (cf. i.e. Genesis 16:16; 17:24-25; 25:26; 41:46) The relatively advanced ages of Aaron and Moses are indicative of God’s blessing upon them. Psalm 90:10 declares: ***“The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty; if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass and they fly away.”***

“In Israel, full adulthood began at twenty (e.g. 38:26). Forty years was considered sufficient time for a generation of adults to die off, assuming a life span of sixty years (Numbers 14:29, 33-34. Moses has already completed two forty year cycles, and will eventually complete two sixty year cycles, dying at 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7). Thus, Moses is two-thirds through his life when he begins his most important work.” (Propp, p. 283)

“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a miracle...’ - God anticipates that the skeptical monarch will require them to present their credentials as divine representatives by the performance of a miracle. Commentator T. E. Freitheim notes the irony of the king’s demand: “Pharaoh, who first suggests a wonder, will get many more than he bargained for.” (Propp, p. 322)

“‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,’ and it will become a snake.” This confrontation was much more than a mere test of wills between Moses and Pharaoh. In both instances, the man only represents the spiritual power which

empowers them. Phillip Ryken correctly places these events in the broader context of the ongoing struggle between God and Satan:

“The great confrontation in Exodus was not simply a dispute between Moses and Pharaoh, or a conflict between Israel and Egypt, but a battle between God and Satan...This battle pitted Jehovah, the true God, who moved Moses and Israel, against all the false gods of the Egyptian pantheon, backed by the host of fallen angels who had turned from God as a part of Lucifer’s original rebellion. The exodus was another engagement in the invisible war that continually rages between heaven and hell.” (Ryken, p. 203)

As St. Paul would later observe in his Epistle to the Ephesians: ***“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*** (Ephesians 6:12)

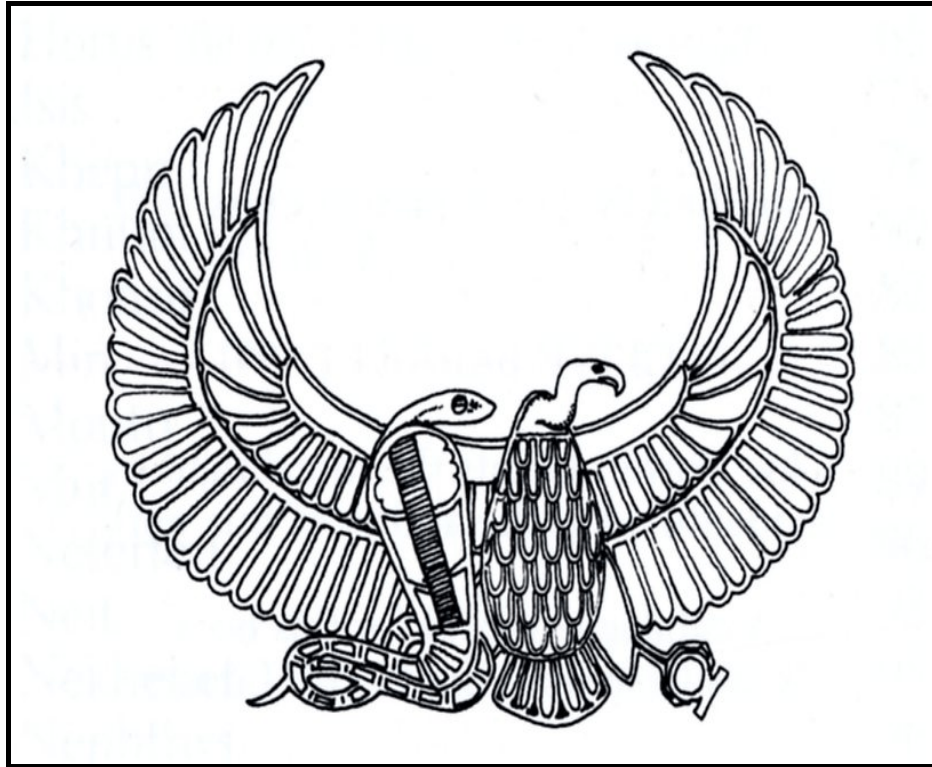


“Pharaoh at War - The Chariot of Ramesses II at the Battle of Kadesh

The unique status of Egypt's ruler in the ancient world should not be minimized. Pharaoh was not merely a king, but the absolute monarch of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth. He was the embodiment of humanity's most ancient and sophisticated culture. To emphasize this critical point, rabbinic tradition has embellished the circumstances of the first meeting between Moses and Pharaoh considerably:

“The day Moses and Aaron made their appearance before Pharaoh happened to be the anniversary of his birth and he was surrounded by many kings, for he was the ruler of the whole world, and this was the occasion on which the kings of the earth came to do him homage... Pharaoh's palace was surrounded by a vast army. It was built with four hundred entrances, one hundred on each side and each of them guarded by sixty thousand soldiers. Moses and Aaron were overawed by this display of power, and they were afraid. But the angel Gabriel appeared, and led them into the palace, observed by none of the guards...Not enough that the palace was guarded by a host, at each entrance two lions were stationed, and in terror of being torn to pieces, none dared approach the doors, and none could go within until the lion-tamer came and led the beasts away. Now Balaam, and all the other sacred scribes of Egypt advised that the keepers loose the lions at the approach of Moses and Aaron. But their advice availed naught. Moses had but to raise his rod, and the lions bounded toward him joyously, and followed at his feet, scampering like dogs before their master on his return home. Within this palace Moses and Aaron found seventy secretaries busy with Pharaoh's correspondence which was carried on in seventy languages. At the sight of the messengers of Israel, they started up in great awe, for the men resembled angels. In stature, they were as the cedars of Lebanon, their countenances radiated splendor like the sun, the pupils of their eyes were like the sphere of the morning star, their beards like palm branches, and their mouths emitted flames when they opened them for speech. In their terror, the secretaries flung down pen and paper, and prostrated themselves before Moses and Aaron.” (Ginzberg, II, pp. 331-332)

However fanciful all of this colorful expansion of the text may be, it does serve to emphasize the unique stature of Pharaoh and the magnitude of earthly power which was arrayed against Moses and Aaron.



*“Wadjet (the Cobra) and Nekhebet (the Vulture)
The Divine Emblems of Upper and Lower Egypt*

It was not mere coincidence that the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh began with the transformation of the staffs of both leaders into serpents and the subsequent destruction of the Egyptian serpents by that of Israel. The prevalence of serpent imagery in the mythology of ancient Egypt, particularly in regard to the cult of pharaoh, has been previously noted (cf. Notes p. 107). The rearing cobra, its hood spread wide in deadly menace, was the emblem of the king's divine power and his ability to strike down any and all who would dare to oppose him. The “*uraeus*,” that is, the rearing cobra, was the symbol of the Kingdom of Lower Egypt, its counterpart in Upper Egypt was the soaring vulture. Both the cobra and the vulture were depicted at the base of the Pharaoh's royal crown, identifying him as the divine “*Lord of the Two Lands*.” At the coronation of the king, the new Pharaoh placed the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt upon his head and prayed this prayer to the Great Serpent: “*O Great One, O Fiery Serpent! Let there be terror of me like the terror of thee. Let there be fear of me like the fear of thee. Let there be awe of me like the awe of thee. Let me rule, a leader of the living. Let me be powerful, a leader of spirits.*” (Frankfort, p. 108) Accordingly, the triumph of the Israel serpent over the serpents of Egypt was a potent symbolic demonstration of the superiority of the God of Israel.

over pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. Phillip Graham Ryken effectively summarizes the significance of Moses' action in this way:

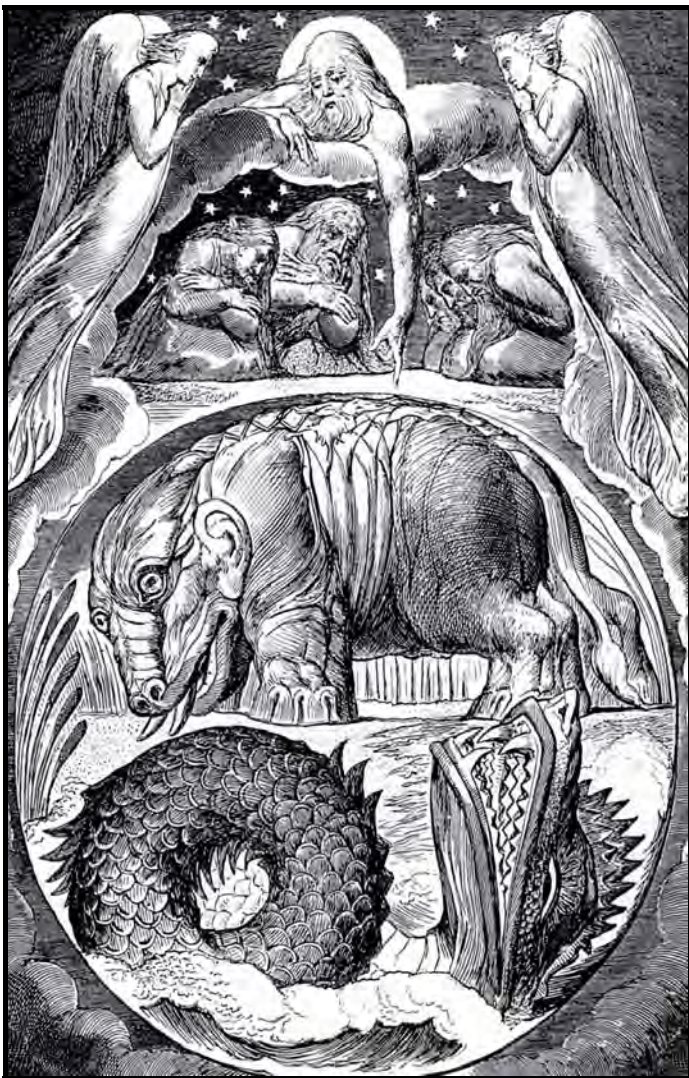
“He was taking the symbol of the King’s majesty and making it crawl in the dust. This was a direct assault on Pharaoh’s sovereignty; indeed, it was an attack on Egypt’s entire belief system. To draw a modern comparison, it would be like taking a bald eagle into the oval office and wringing its neck.” (Ryken, p. 207)

The Hebrew text heightens the drama of the confrontation by the use of the word

“tannin” to describe the reptile into which the staff of Aaron was transformed. In contrast to *“nakash,”* the ordinary Hebrew noun for *“snake,”* *“tannin”* refers to a huge or monstrous serpent. The Greek Septuagint reflects this distinction in its translation of the term as *“drakon”* (*“dragon”*). Other occurrences of *“tannin”* in the Old Testament reinforce the impression of monstrous size and strength. The prophet typically cited the fact that God created the *“tannin”* and had the ability to control or destroy them as a decisive indication of His divine power.

“It was You who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.” (Psalm 74:13-14; cf. 148:7)

“In that day, the Lord will punish with His sword, His fierce, great



“The Creation of Behemoth and Leviathan” by William Blake

and powerful sword, Leviathan, the gliding serpent, Leviathan, the coiling serpent, He will slay the monster of the sea.” (Isaiah 27:1)

“Awake, awake! Clothe Yourself with strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not You who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through? Was it not You who dried up the sea so that the redeemed might cross over?” (Isaiah 51:9-10)

“Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, has devoured us. He has thrown us into confusion, he has made us an empty jar. Like a serpent he has swallowed us and filled his stomach with our delicacies and then has spewed us out.” (Jeremiah 51:34)

The prophet Ezekiel, perhaps reflecting this episode, specifically compared the King of Egypt to the “*tannin*,” the primordial beasts of the sea, as he promised the downfall and destruction of great Egypt:

“Son of man, take up a lament concerning Pharaoh, King of Egypt and say to him: ‘You are like a lion among the nations; you are like a monster in the seas thrashing about in your streams, churning the water with your feet and muddying the streams.’ This is what the sovereign Lord says, ‘With a great throng of people I will cast My net over you, and they will haul you up in my net. I will throw you on the land and hurl you on the open field. I will let all the birds of the air settle on you and all



“The Destruction of Leviathon” by Gustav Dore



*“Thoth - The God of Wisdom and Magic”
by Clive Barrett*

the beasts of the earth gorge themselves on you. I will spread you flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your remains. I will drench the land with your flowing blood all the way to the mountains, and the ravines will be filled with your flesh.” (Ezekiel 32:1-6; cf. 29:3)

“Aaron threw down his staff in front of Pharaoh and his officials and it became a snake.” - The “tannin” into which Aaron’s staff was transformed must have been a massive, menacing beast which was designed to intimidate Pharaoh and terrify the members of his royal court.

“Pharaoh then summoned the wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same thing by their secret arts.” - But the proud stubborn monarch was not easily intimidated. Instead, he summoned the priest/magicians of Egypt and demanded that they duplicate the wonder which the

representatives of the God of Israel had performed. The crucial role of magic in the religion of ancient Egypt has already been indicated (cf. Notes p. 103 ff.). Thoth, the Ibis headed scribe of the gods and patron god of Egyptian magic, was believed to be the keeper of a huge library of magical formulas and spells:

“Among the Egyptian magicians, Thoth was called ‘the Elder’ and his followers claimed access to his library of magical books. Here they spent their time deciphering the pages and learning the secret formulae that held the power to control all the forces of nature, even how to

command the obedience of the gods themselves. Such was the magical knowledge of Thoth that his disciples named him 'Thoth, three times very, very greatest.'" (Barrett, p. 138)

The unique power of the priesthood in ancient Egypt was derived from their access to these secret spells and incantations. They alone had the ability to utilize that sacred magic on behalf of the king and his realm. In their distinctive leopard skin capes, the members of the priesthood were highly visible, present throughout the government. The priesthood was the single most influential component of Egyptian society.

The priest/magicians who were summoned by the Pharaoh are identified as "*hartumin*" ("*wise men*"). "*Hartumin*" is an Egyptian title which literally meant "*he that is at the head, chief.*" Its use here designated Moses' and Aaron's opponents as priest/magicians of the most exalted rank. These were the high priests of Thoth, the custodians of Egypt's ancient wisdom. They would have been the most skillful and powerful practitioners of magic in the land. Having used an unfamiliar Egyptian title, the text further identified the priests as "*sorcerers*" (Hebrew - "*kashaph*") and "*magicians*" (Hebrew - "*chartummim*"). In Scripture, these ominous titles labeled evil men who delved into the black arts and utilized supernatural power from the devil. The Bible clearly acknowledged the reality and the menace of such hellish



"Statue of Amen-aten, High Priest of the City of Heliopolis"

power. Its use, in any form, was forbidden among the Children of Israel on pain of death.

“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or a spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 18:9-12)



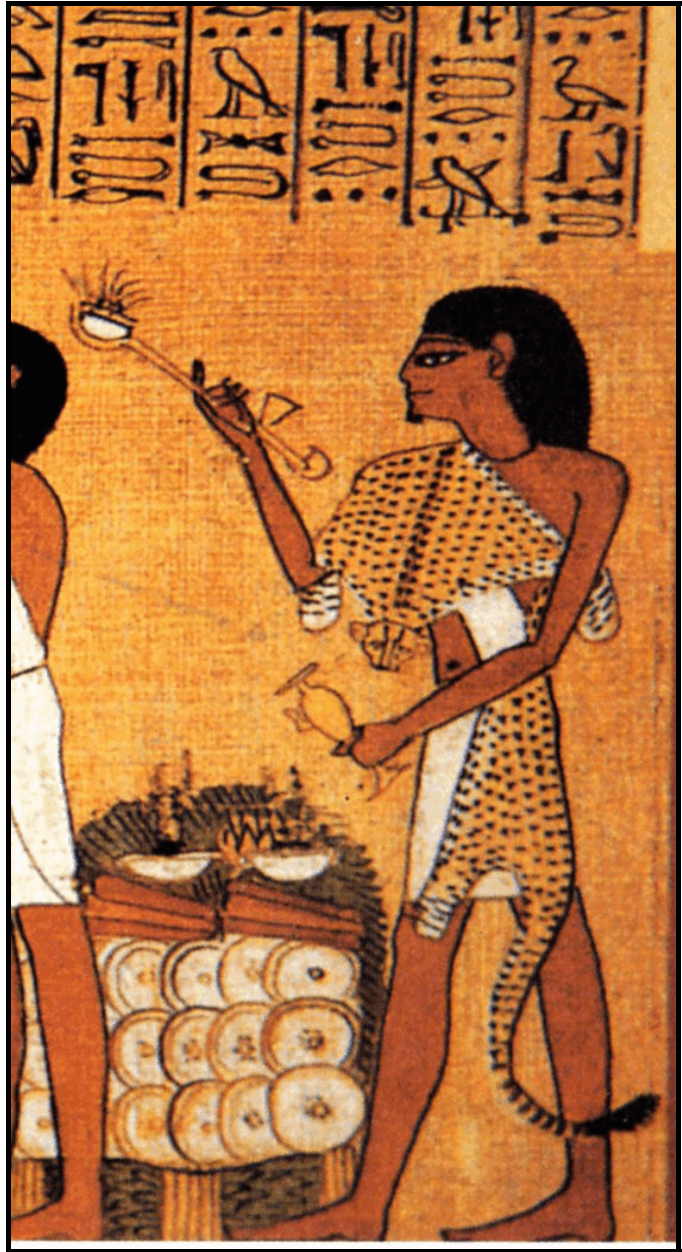
“Moses and Aaron Confront the Priest of Pharaoh” by J. James Tissot

The activities of Egypt’s priest/magicians in this series of confrontations should not be dismissed as mere trickery or sleight of hand. There was genuine supernatural power at work here, but it came from the devil, not from God. In his *Bible History*

Commentary, Lutheran theologian Dr. Werner Franzmann argues that “*the text leaves no doubt as to the reality of their ‘miracles.’*” (Franzmann, p. 227) Nonetheless, the miracles which the Egyptian priests performed were “*counterfeit*” (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:8,9) - because although they were genuinely supernatural, they served the cause of Satan and the lie. Almighty God permits the devil to empower his servants to work such miracles but only within the limitations which He Himself has ordained. In this instance, for example, the magicians of Pharaoh were unable to duplicate the signs of Moses and Aaron after the second plague (cf. Exodus 8:19).

The New Testament provides the additional information that the leaders of the priest/magicians who confronted Moses were named Jannes and Jambres: “*Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth - men of depraved minds, who as far as the faith is concerned are rejected.*” (2 Timothy 3:8) Rabbinic tradition further indicates that Jannes and Jambres were the sons of the Canaanite sorcerer Balaam who was the chief of Pharaoh’s magicians and would later be hired by the Moabites to place a curse upon the Children of Israel (cf. Numbers 22 - Sarna, p.37).

The priest/magicians of Egypt were able to duplicate the wondrous sign which had been performed by Moses and Aaron - “*the Egyptian magicians also did the same*”



“*Papyrus Illustration of a Priest Performing a Sacred Ceremony*”

things by their secret arts. Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake.” Their ability to accomplish this feat is attributed to *“their secret arts.”* The root of the Hebrew term used in this phrase (Hebrew - *“lahat”* - Greek - *“pharmakiais”*) means *“to be wrapped up”* or *“to be hidden.”* The reference is most probably to the sacred temple scrolls containing the secret incantations and spells which the priests used to perform their magic. No doubt Pharaoh smiled in smug satisfaction as the swarm of serpents coiled and writhed before him. The magic of Egypt’s gods seemed to have been vindicated. His gods appeared to be every bit as potent as the of the God of Israel.



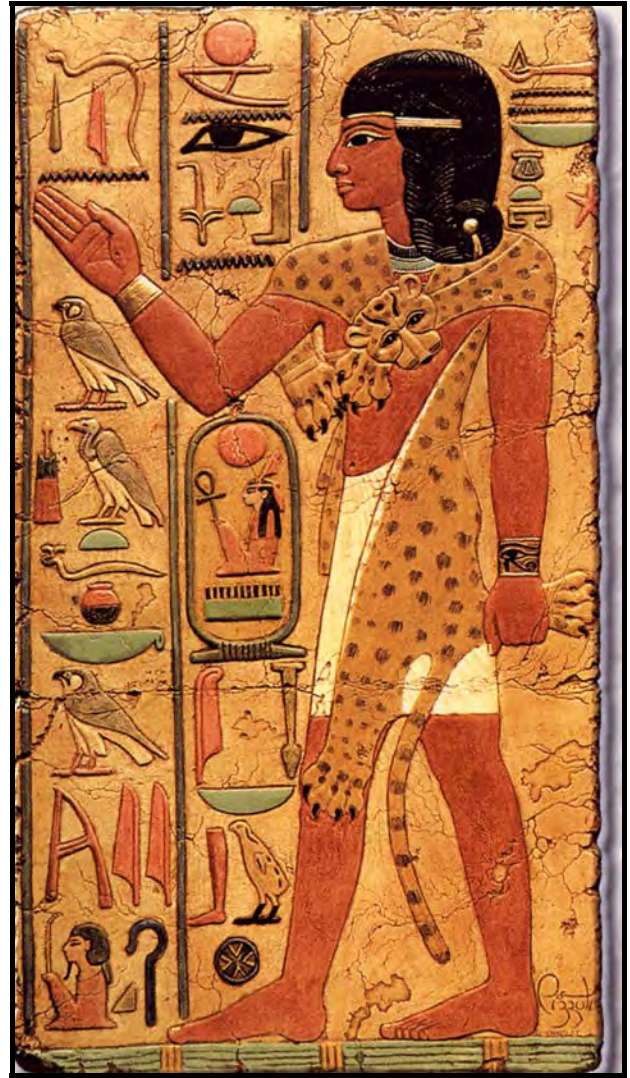
*“Aaron’s Rod Transformed Into a Serpent”
19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

“But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.” - But that smug satisfaction was promptly transformed into anger and dismay. It is profoundly significant that the Aaron serpent did not merely kill or destroy the Egyptian serpents, it swallowed them. John Currin explains:

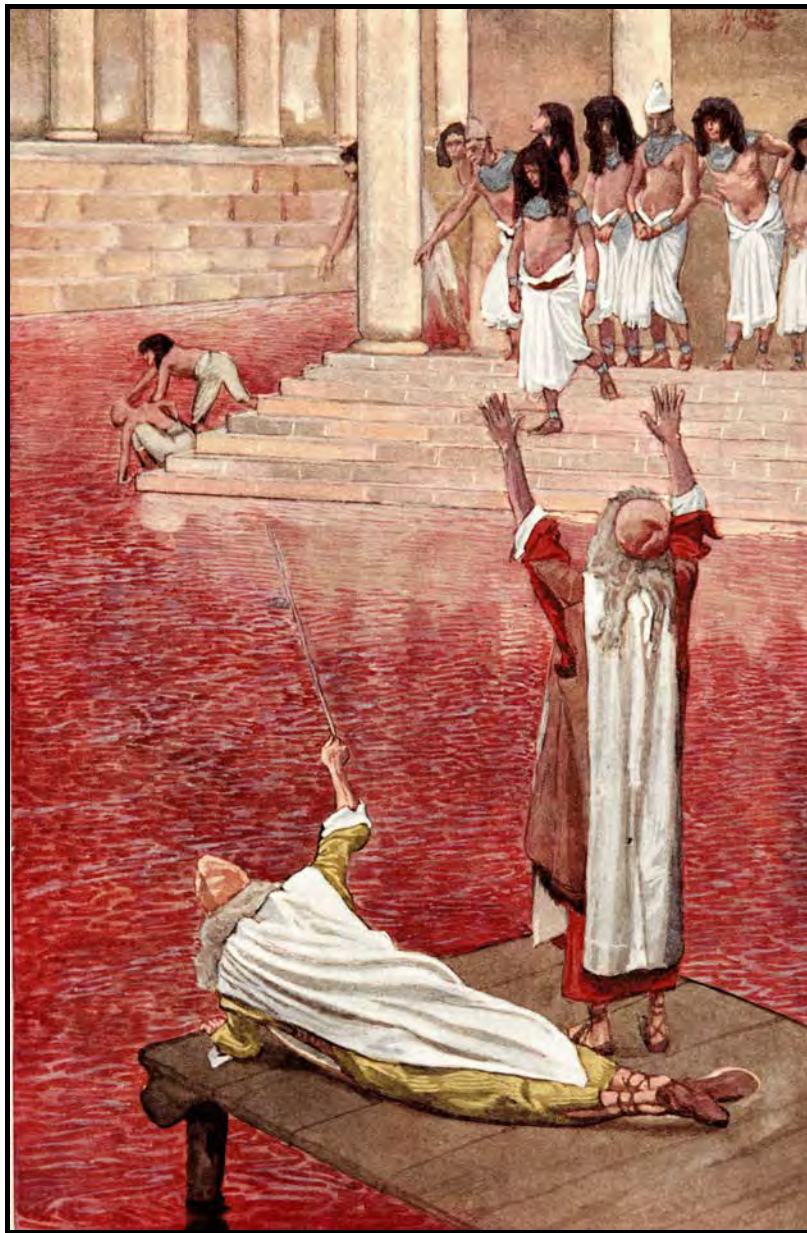
“The act of swallowing was of great significance in Egyptian magical praxis. Swallowing an object had a hostile function, meaning ‘to destroy,’ but it could also signify the acquisition of various traits associated with the object. Therefore, when Aaron’s rod devoured the staffs of the magicians it was destroying the authority and power those rods symbolized. The act, in addition, demonstrated true sovereignty lay in the hands of Yahweh.” (Currin, I, p. 162)

The point is stressed by the text’s deliberate reversion to the “*staff*” language, rather than referring to “*serpents*,” as might have been expected in this context. The “*staff*” - or to use the contemporary idiom, the “*wand*” of the magician - was the emblem of his power; the sign of his ability to perform his magic. In the impending plagues, this same staff of Aaron will become the instrument of God’s judgement upon the land of Egypt.

“Yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.” - Despite this demonstration of the formidable power of God, Pharaoh remained obstinately defiant. Having himself set up the challenge between the gods of Egypt and the God of Israel, Pharaoh could not back down at this point without acknowledging the superiority of Yahweh. To do so would not only have been a personal humiliation, but a repudiation of the world view upon which his entire kingdom was founded. ***“Pharaoh’s heart became hard.”*** The verb is in the perfect tense, indicating completed action. The King had made up his mind. He was no longer open to persuasion - ***“He would not listen to them.”*** At this point, Pharaoh’s refusal to accede to God’s demand is still the result of his own decision. God had foreseen that this would happen - ***“just as the Lord had said.”*** - but He was not yet causing it to happen. That would come later as divine judgement upon this man’s own willful arrogance.



Tomb Relief of a Priest of Horus



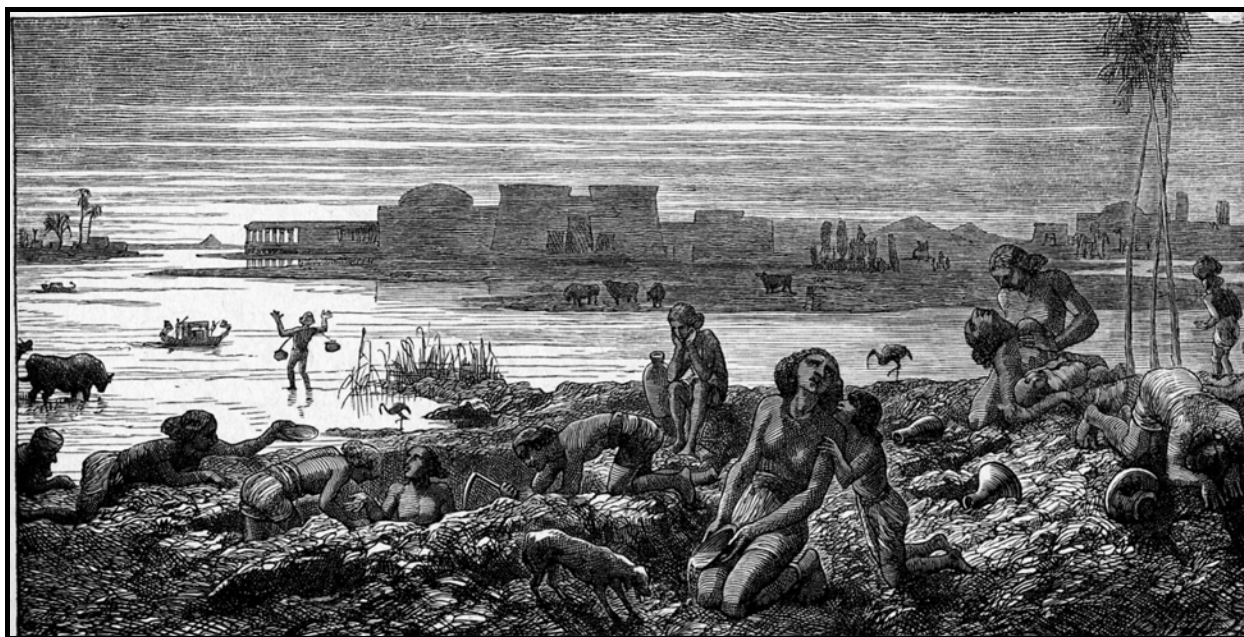
“The Waters of the Nile Turned to Blood” by J. James Tissot

The Plague of Blood

Exodus 7:14-24

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. Then say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you; Let My people go, so that they may worship Me in the desert. But until now you have not listened. This is what the Lord says; By this you will know that I am the Lord: with the staff that it is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile and

it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.” The Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt- over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs’ - and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars.” Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt. But the Egyptian magicians did the same thing by their secret arts, and Pharaoh’s heart became hard; and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said. Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water because they could not drink the water of the river.



“The Nile Turned to Blood” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding...’” - Once again, Pharaoh’s stubborn refusal to acknowledge the Lordship of God and accede to His demand for the liberation of His people is cited as the basis for the plague which will now be visited upon the land. Exodus 7:14 introduces a new term to describe the king’s spiritual condition - **“Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding.”** The Hebrew phrase literally says *“the heart of Pharaoh is heavy.”* This same adjective (Hebrew -

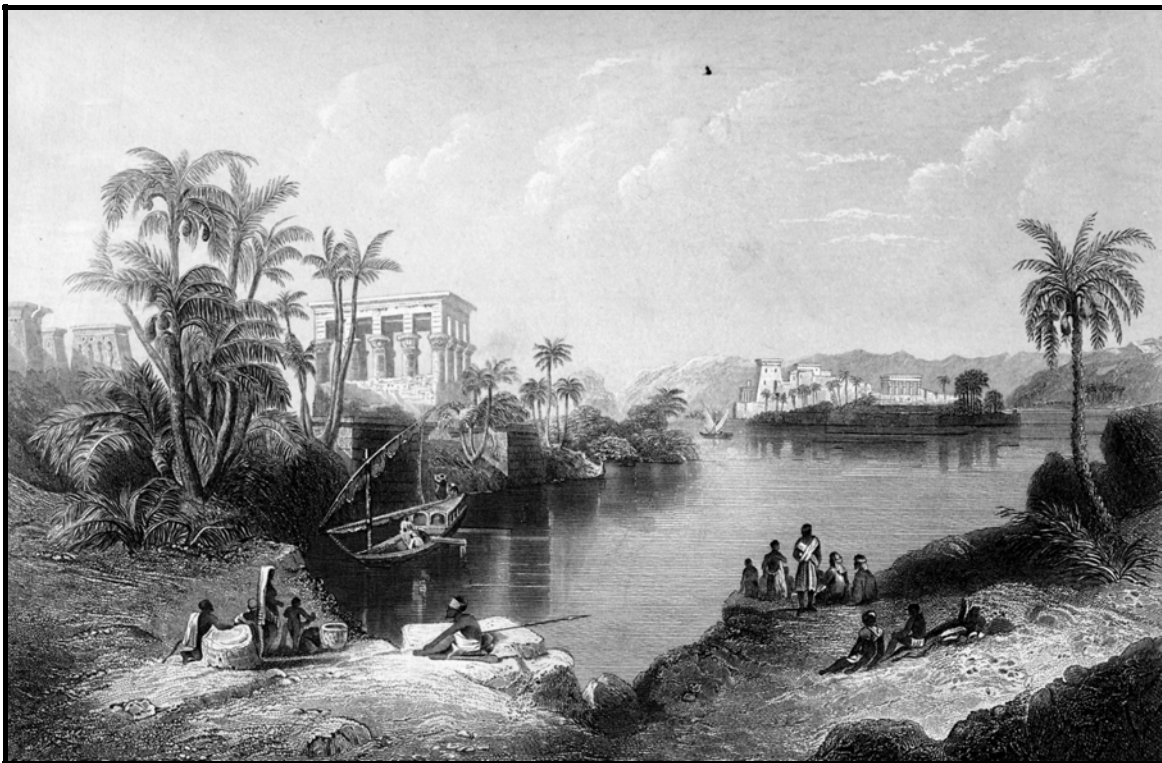


“The Weighing of the Heart” from The Book of the Dead

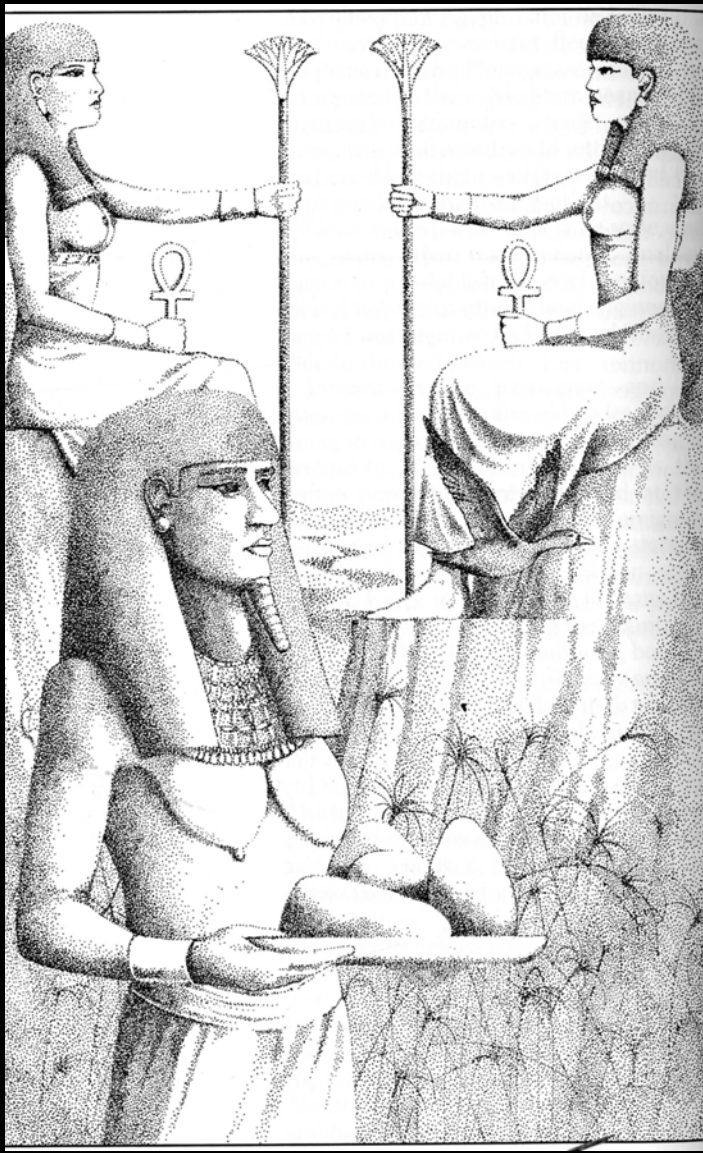
“*kabed*”) is used to describe the hands of Moses, weary from holding up his staff during the battle with the Amakekites (Exodus 17:12) and the flowing mane of vain Absalom’s hair (2 Samuel 14:26). In the context of Egyptian culture the phrase is particularly significant. The Egyptians believed that at the time of death, the heart of the deceased had to be weighed on the scale of divine justice before that person could be admitted into the afterlife. If the scale did not balance, indicating that the heart was heavy with the burden of injustice and corruption, the person was cast out and devoured. The weighing of the heart became one of the most enduring and widespread images of Egyptian religion and art. With this pervasive image in mind, the declaration that the heart of Pharaoh was “*heavy*” was nothing less than an indictment of the man as impure and corrupt. *“In the Exodus account, the verdict that Pharaoh’s heart was heavy reflects the concept of his heart being filled with iniquity and injustice. His dealings with Israel, and for that matter his own character in general were unrighteous.”* (Currid, I, p. 165)

Moses' initial *“miracle”* before Pharaoh - the transformation of Aaron's staff into a monstrous serpent and the destruction of the comparable serpents produced by the Egyptian priests - had signaled that wonders yet to come would be directed at the physical personifications of Egypt's gods and goddesses, revealing them to be nothing more than false and impotent idols. That expectation is fulfilled as the sacred river Nile became the target of the first of the ten plagues. James Boice perceptively categorized the focus of the plagues in this way:

“In order to understand these plagues, we need to understand that they were directed against the gods and goddesses of Egypt and were intended to show the superiority of the God of Israel to the Egyptian gods. There were about eighty major deities in Egypt, all clustered around the three great natural forces of Egyptian life; the Nile River, the land and the sky. It does not surprise us, therefore, that the plagues God sent against Egypt in this historic battle follow this three force pattern. The first two plagues were against the gods of the Nile. The next four were against the land gods. The final four plagues were against the gods of the sky, culminating in the death of the firstborn.” (Boice, p. 849)



“The Nile at Philae” - 19th Century Engraving



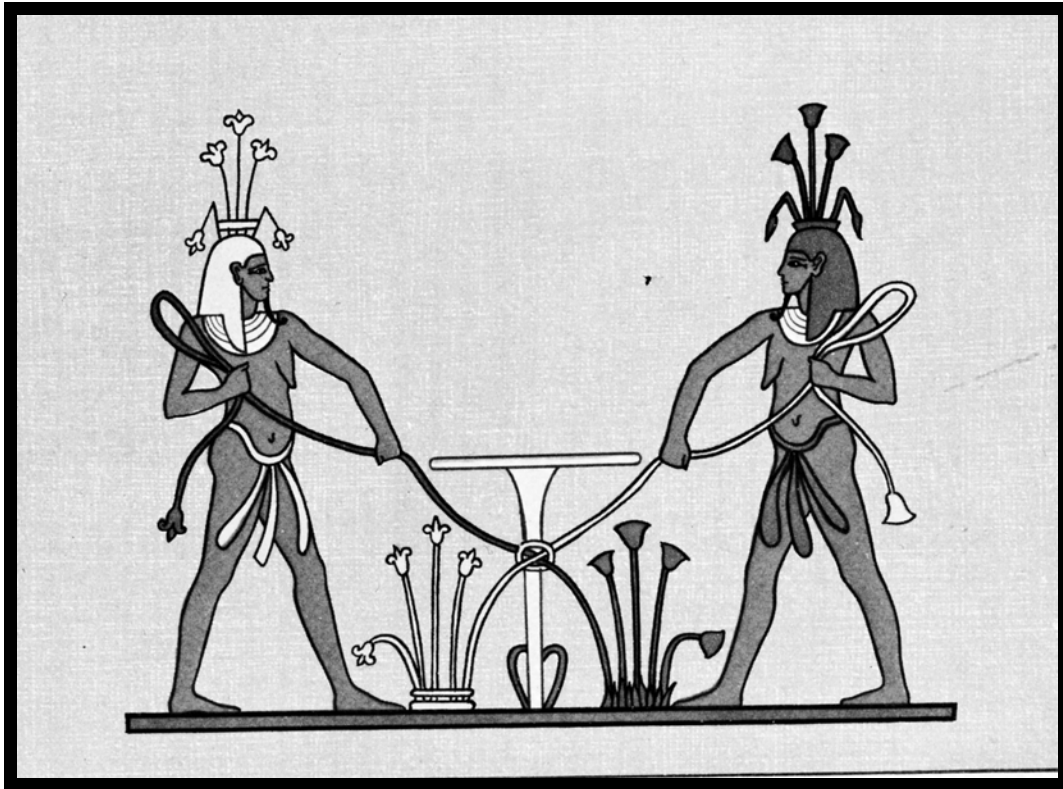
“Hapi -the God of the Nile” by Clive Barrett

great river. They personified the Nile in the God “*Hapi*,” depicted in art as an stout man with the pendulous breasts of a pregnant woman to signify both the abundance and the life-giving properties which the river bestowed upon the land. Hapi typically held a tray laden with gifts and was married to two wives, representing Upper and Lower Egypt. The annual floods of the Nile were perceived to have been caused by the tears of the goddess Isis, weeping over the death of her beloved husband Osiris. An ancient hymn of thanksgiving for the inundation eloquently described the importance of Hapi and the Nile in Egyptian life:

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus correctly observed that “*Egypt is the gift of the Nile.*” Surrounded by barren uninhabitable desert, the Kingdom of Egypt was absolutely dependent upon the life giving waters of the river. The headwaters of the great river are in Lake Victoria in Uganda (“*White Nile*”) and the highlands of Ethiopia (“*Blue Nile*”). The two streams join in the Sudan to flow north over a series of six cataracts toward the Mediterranean Sea. With a total length of over 4,100 miles, the Nile is considered by many to be the longest river on earth. Until the modern construction of the high dam at Aswan, the annual inundations of the Nile covered the farmlands of Egypt with a layer of rich silt which made the fields fertile and productive.

The ancient Egyptians were fully cognizant of their dependence upon the life-giving waters of the

*“Hail to your countenance, O Hapi!
You appear in this land, you come in peace and cause Egypt to live.
You are the hidden One,
And our Guide through the darkness when it is your will to lead us.
You water the fields which Ra has created,
You give life to all the animals
You make the land to drink unceasingly as you descend on your way from heaven.
You are the friend of bread and the Lord of Drink;
You cause the grain to grow, increase and be strong.
You make every workshop prosperous!
O Lord of the fish, when the inundation rises,
The waterfowl do not alight upon the fields that are sown with wheat.
You are the Creator of barley
And you cause the temples to endure for millions of years!
You are the Lord of the poor and needy!
If you were ever to be overthrown,
The gods in the heavens would fall down upon their faces and men would perish!*



“Hapi - the Nile God Here Presented with the Lotus of Upper Egypt and the Papyrus of Lower Egypt”

*When you shine upon the earth, shouts of joy ascend,
For all people are joyful and every mighty man receives food and every tooth is
provided with food.*

You are the Bringer of food; You are the Mighty One of meat and drink.

You are the Creator of all good things

The Lord of divine meat, pleasant and choice.

You make the grass to grow for the cattle;

You provide that which is sacrificed before every god.

The sweetest incense is that which arises before you.

You are the Lord of the two lands.

You fill the storehouses, you heap the granaries high with grain

You watch over the lives of the poor and needy-

You make the plants and the green things grow that the needs of all may be met.

Your strength is a shield for men.” (Budge, 2, 146)



*“Jochebed and the Infant Moses at the Nile”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

**“Go to Pharaoh in the morning
when he goes out to the water.” -**

The language of the phrase suggests that Pharaoh would be present at the river to perform a customary ritual in honor of the god of the Nile. Nahum Sarna argues that the ceremony in question most probably occurred during the September/October inundation when Pharaoh and the officials of his court would visit the river bank each morning to measure the level of the flood so crucial to Egypt’s prosperity. Such a setting would have made the theological significance of the first plague all the more evident. Moses was commanded to confront the king with **“the staff that was changed into a snake”** in his



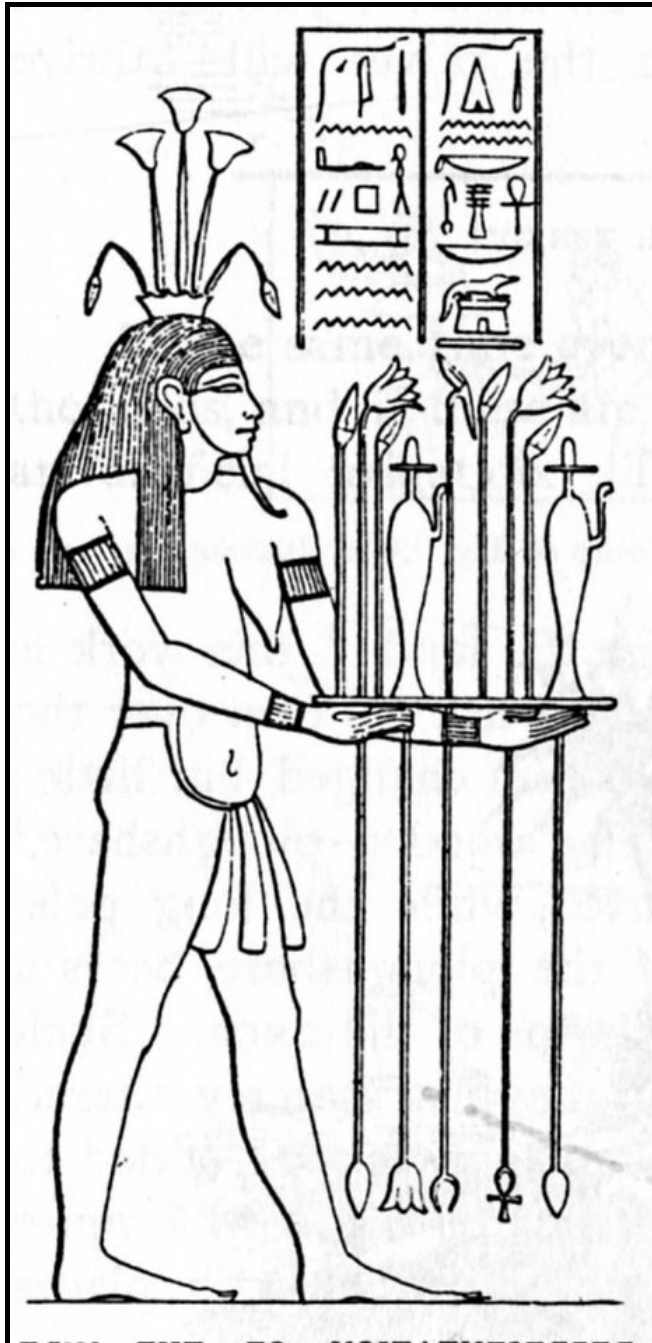
“The First Plague - The Nile Turned to Blood” by E. Bernard

hand. The emphatic identification of the staff through which the wonder was to be accomplished with the previous serpent transformation served to link the episodes together as parts of an ongoing series of confrontations with the god and goddesses of Egypt. The language of the phrase *“Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him”* also recalls the earlier experience of Moses’ mother Jocebed, who had been forced to place her newborn son in a basket *“and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile”* (Exodus 2:3) to be rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter who had gone down to the Nile to bathe. As the princess and her attendants *“were walking along the river bank she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it.”* (Exodus 2:5)

In a delightfully ironic manner, the deliverance of Israel would begin at the same place which had witnessed the reluctant abandonment of a Hebrew baby because of the cruel decree of the King that all the newborn Israelite boys were to be thrown into waters of the river (Exodus 1:22). That baby had been chosen by God as the deliverer and now the same river which had absorbed the blood of so many innocent babies would itself be transformed into blood.

“Then say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let

My people go...” Once again Moses is to be completely unambiguous in asserting his role as the spokesman of God. Moses was there to repeat the same message from God which he had previously presented to Pharaoh. The repetition is necessary, because Pharaoh has stubbornly refused to heed the Word of God.



“Hapi - The God of the Nile - Bearing Vases of Fresh Water and Plants as His Gifts to Egypt”

“This is what the Lord says...” The formal introduction *“This is what the Lord says”* (Hebrew - *“koh hamar Yahweh”*) was to become the standard introduction for prophetic utterance throughout the Old Testament. This is its second occurrence in Exodus (cf. 4:22). These words are an adaptation of the convention opening words of a royal herald proclaiming the decree of his king. *“It serves to secure the attention of the audience while emphasizing the unimpeachable authority behind the ensuing proclamation. Moses is to approach the Egyptian king as the emissary of the sovereign Lord of the Universe.”* (Sarna, p. 24)

“By this you will know that I am the Lord.” - The purpose of the ensuing signs and wonders is restated. (cf. 7:5) When Moses had first appeared before him, Pharaoh had haughtily declared: *“Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go!”* (5:2) Since Pharaoh was unwilling to acknowledge the Lord, God would now compel him to do so through signs and wonders which would

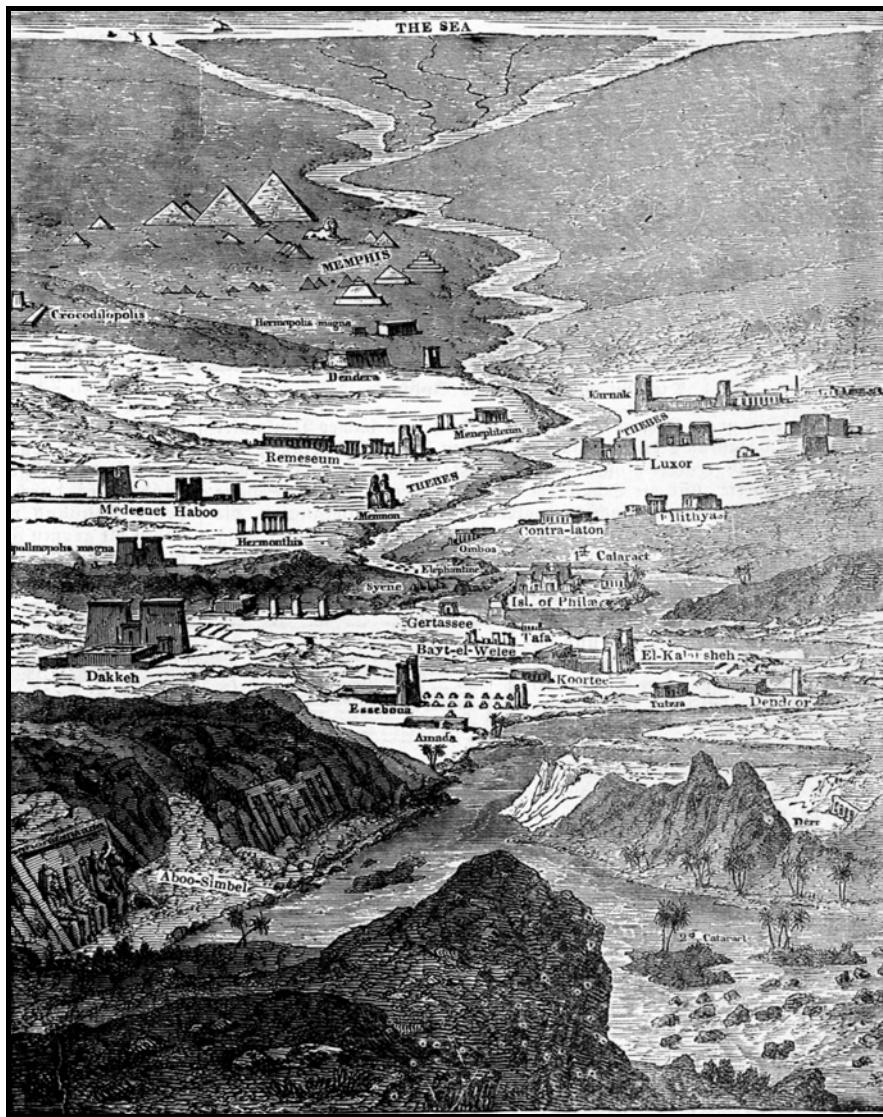


“In the Palace of Pharaoh” - 19th Century Engraving

undeniably demonstrate His divine power.

“With the staff that is in My hand, I will strike the water of the Nile and it will be changed into blood.” - The first person pronouns - ***“My hand, I will strike”*** - stress the mere instrumentality of Moses and Aaron. It is substantively God who acts in and through the men who represent Him. Therefore, although the hand which holds the staff and strikes the water may be Aaron’s and the voice which addresses Pharaoh may be that of Moses, it is God Himself who acts and speaks through the men whom He has chosen to be His instruments. Bible critics who ascribe the *“inconsistency”* in the pronouns in these verses to a variety of textual sources (i.e. Propp, p. 324) not only contradict the nature of Holy Scripture as the Word of God but also fail to recognize the capabilities of almighty God to utilize the holy men who spoke for Him ***“as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** (1 Peter 1:21)

“I will strike the water of the Nile and it will be changed into blood...” - Many commentators, even those of the most conservative persuasion, have attempted to



*“The Course of the Nile Through the Land of Egypt”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

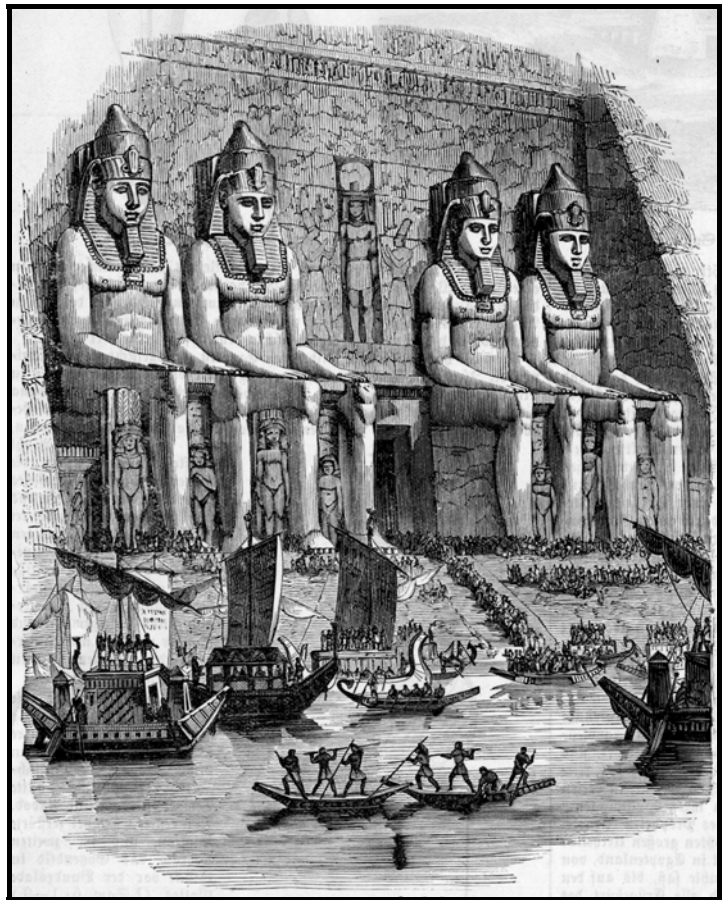
explain the first plague in a naturalistic way, attributing the change in the color and flavor of the Nile, to red clay, bacteria, or volcanic ash. Thus, for example, the normally reliable Lutheran commentators Keil and Delitsch contend:

“The changing of the water into blood is to be interpreted in the same sense as in Joel 3:4, where the moon is said to be turned into blood; that is to say, not a chemical change into real blood, but as a change in color which caused it to assume the appearance of blood (2 Kings 3:22). According to the statements of many travelers, the Nile water changes its color when the water is lowest, assumes first of all a greenish hue and

is almost undrinkable, and then, while it is rising, become as red as ochre, when it is more wholesome again...The reddening of the water is attributed by many to the red earth, which the river brings down from Sennaar, but Ehrenberg came to the conclusion, after microscopic examinations, that it was caused by cryptogamic plants and infusoria. This natural phenomenon was here intensified into a miracle, not only by the fact that it took place immediately in all the branches of the river at Moses' word and through the smiting of the Nile, but even more by a chemical change in the water which caused the fishes to die, the stream to stink, and, what seems to indicate putrefaction, the water to become undrinkable.” (Keil/Delitsch, p. 367)

All such naturalistic explanations contradict the clear and repeated assertions of the text that the waters of the Nile were miraculously transformed into blood. The water did not merely change color or look like blood. It literally became blood, and the consequences which followed, the non-drinkability, the death of the fish and the stench, were the results of that literal transformation. Dr. John Durham, who, like most modern scholars, does not accept the historical accuracy of the Exodus text, properly ridicules those who, although more conservative than he, have attempted to evade the clear sense of the text:

“The whole point of this narrative is the miraculous nature of this act for which Yahweh is given unequivocal responsibility...The effect of Yahweh's blow is that the Nile turns into blood, not into the muddy or algae laden and thus red looking water the naturalistic commentators never tire of suggesting...Yahweh struck the Nile and instantaneously, 'before the very eyes' of Pharaoh and his court, it



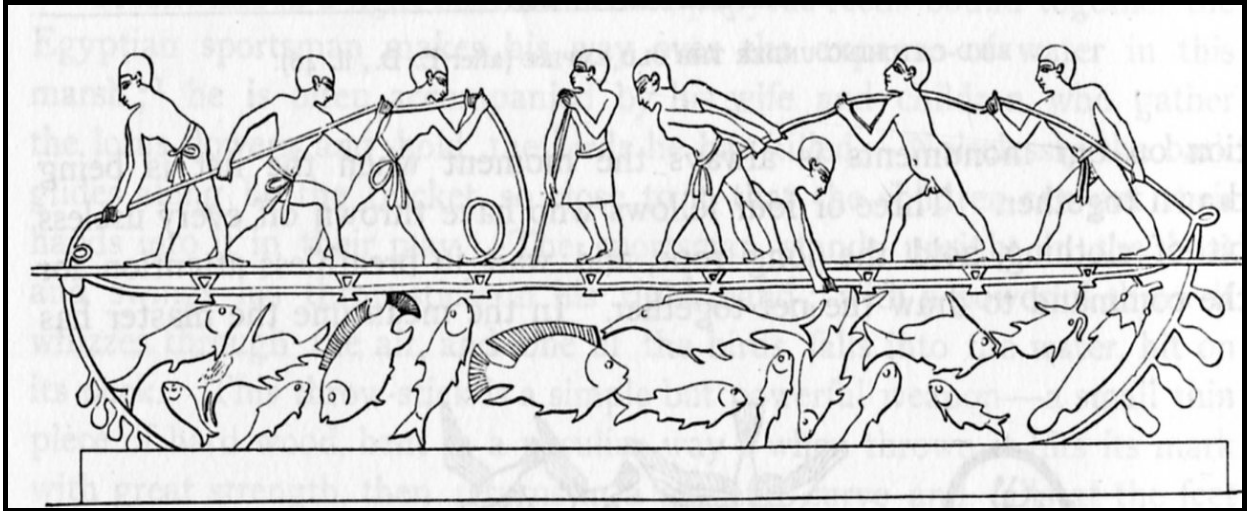
“The Temple at Abu-Simbel on the Upper Nile”

changed into blood. Whatever difficulties such an assertion may pose for the readers of another age, they must not be allowed to diffuse or even to alter what the text actually says, for that inevitably either obscures or removes entirely the real point of the narrative in the first place.” (Durham, p. 97)

“The fish in the Nile will die and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.” - The Nile and its tributaries teemed with fish and the fishing industry was a vital component in the economy of ancient Egypt. Fish was a staple of the Egyptian diet, the major food source for much of the population. Fishermen are widely depicted in Egyptian art. Historian Adolf Erman points out that fish were the least expensive food source in Egypt and were thus particularly important to the “lower orders.”



“Fishermen on the Nile” - Old Kingdom Wall Relief



“Nile Fishermen Hauling In an Abundant Catch’ - Tomb Wall Relief

“Dried fish were a great feature in Egyptian housekeeping. No larder was complete without them, and they formed the chief food of the lower orders. They were the cheapest food in the land; much cheaper than corn, of which the country was also very productive. The heart-felt wish of the poorer people was that the price of corn might be as low as that of fish. Fish was also a favorite dish of the upper classes; and the epicure knew each variety, and in which water the most dainty were to be caught.” (Erman, p. 239)

The impact of the death of all the fish in the Nile watershed upon the Egyptian population would have been immediate and catastrophic. Commensurately, the political pressure on Pharaoh to promptly resolve the situation and restore normal conditions would have been overwhelming.

“And the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.” - The people of Egypt worshiped the divine Nile as *“the Lord of the Fish - the Bringer of Food - the Lord of Majesty, Sweet of Fragrance.”* (Davis, p. 102) In bitter mockery of their praises to a helpless idol, God warns that the transformation of the river’s water into blood and the consequent destruction of its fish would fill the entire land with the stench of death and decay. The blood which the river had become would be putrefying in the hot sun and the surface of the blood/water would be covered with millions of rotting fish whose bloated bodies would float up to add to the repugnant smell. To attempt to drink such repulsive filth would have been absolutely unthinkable.



“The Upper Nile” - 19th Century Engraving

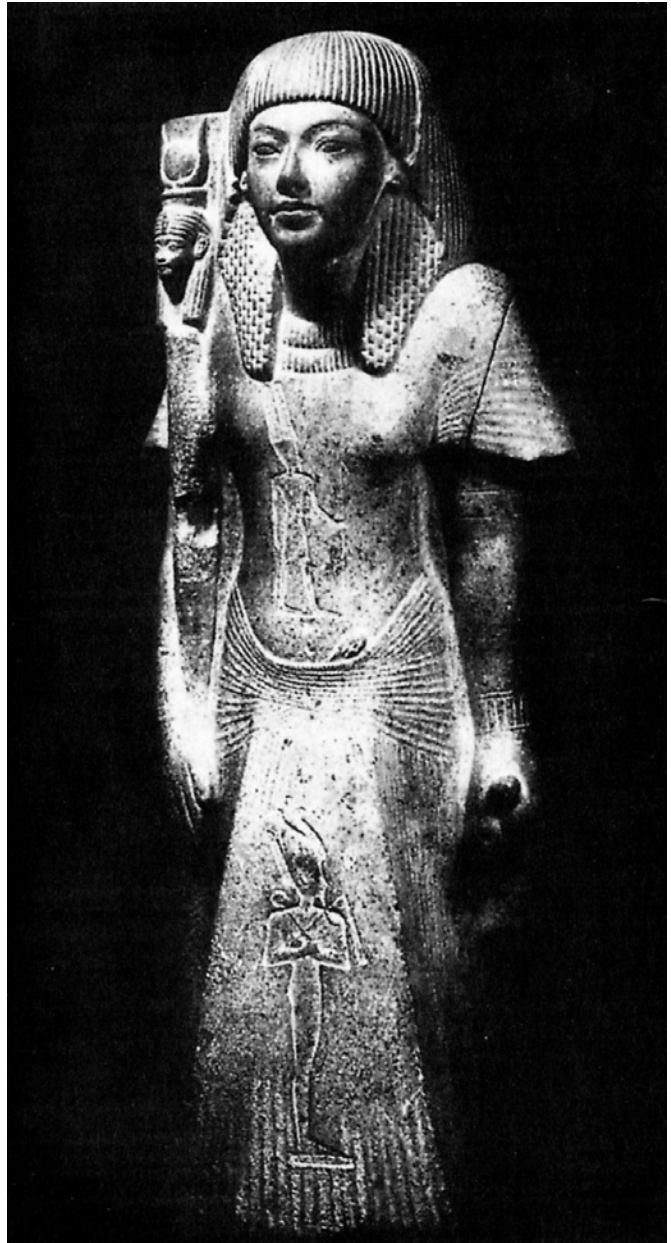
“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt - over the streams and canals, over the ponds and over all the reservoirs’ - and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars.” - As had previously been the case, Aaron would act as Moses’ representative before Pharaoh. God commanded Moses to instruct Aaron to take up the serpent staff (cf. vs. 15) in his hand and stretch it out in every direction *“over the waters of Egypt.”* God specifically indicated that the transformation would not be restricted to the major channels of the Nile but would include *“all of its streams and canals”* and all of the *“ponds”* and *“reservoirs”* which drew their water from the river. The Lord’s command concluded with the chilling summary - *“Blood will be everywhere in Egypt.”* The grim image which the

language conveys is that of blood gushing out from a major artery to flow throughout all of the veins and arteries of the body. The pervasive extent of the transformation was emphasized by the additional phrase - *“even in the wooden buckets and stone jars.”* The Hebrew text does not include the words *“buckets”* and *“jars.”* Instead, it literally reads, *“in the wood and the stone.”* The reference to the containers is the interpretive addition of the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. While this understanding of the text is possible, it may be preferable in this context to understand the reference to wood and stone more broadly as a figurative description of the whole realm of nature.

“Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded.” God’s representatives

faithfully complied with His instructions and everything took place precisely as the Lord had said it would. At the end of His instruction to Moses in Verse 19, the Lord had predicted - ***“Blood will be everywhere in Egypt.”*** The summary of events in vss. 20-21 concludes with words deliberately designed to indicate the fulfillment of that prediction - ***“Blood was everywhere in Egypt.”*** John Durham aptly reflects the text’s intent to indicate the perfect fulfillment of God’s warning in his suggested translation of Verse 21 - *“And sure enough, there was blood everywhere in Egypt.”*

“But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh’s heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.” - Again Pharaoh correctly perceives the wonder performed by Moses and Aaron as a challenge to the power of the gods of Egypt. He summoned his own priest/magicians and commanded them to duplicate the miracle which the God of Israel had accomplished. They were able to do so ***“by their secret arts.”*** As in the previous instance with the transformation of the rods into serpents (cf. 7:11-12), the phrase refers to the use of supernatural power from the devil. The text does not specify the manner in which the priest/magicians achieved the transformation of water into blood nor the amount of water which was involved. It was, however, evidently sufficient to satisfy Pharaoh that the gods of Egypt had met the challenge and equaled the power demonstrated by the God of Israel. Given the massive scope of the blood produced by Aaron and the havoc which it produced throughout the land of Egypt, it is difficult to imagine how this could have been the case. However, human beings have an amazing capacity to believe whatever they



“Statue of a High Priest of Hathor, Identified as the First Prophet of Amun-Re”

choose to believe no matter how much evidence to the contrary there may be. Given the excuse that he needed, the proud king refused to heed the Word of the Lord. Despite the wonder that had been performed and the devastation which it inflicted upon the people of his country, he turned his back and walked away - ***“Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart.”*** The language of the text suggests a brief sequence of continuous events involving the actions of Moses and Aaron in the presence of Pharaoh and the consequent response of the priest/magicians. Evidently, the initial transformation of the Nile into blood was instantaneous rather than gradual. The priests, perhaps those already present for the ceremony on the banks of the river, quickly duplicated the transformation. At the conclusion of the episode, the still defiant King returned to his palace.



“Tomb Painting of a Priest and Priestess Presenting a Dedicatory Offering”

“And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river. Seven days passed after the Lord struck the Nile.”
- While the confrontation itself may have been relatively brief, the impact of the plague upon the country’s water supply was more prolonged. The phrase ***“Seven days passed after the Lord struck the Nile”*** defines the duration of the first plague. For an entire week, the river water remained blood and the people were forced to look elsewhere for their drinking water. It would appear that springs of ground water which were not drawn from the river remained unaffected by the plague of blood.



“The Plague of Frogs” -18th Century Bible Engraving

The Plague of Frogs

Exodus 8:1-15

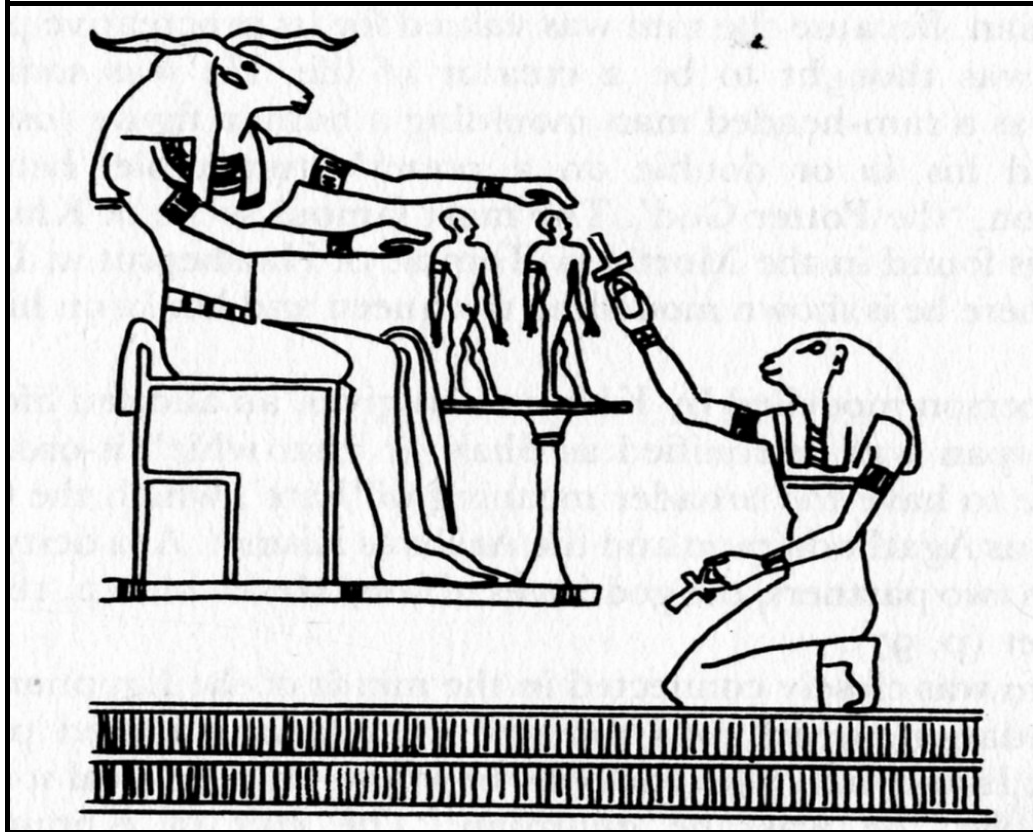
Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let My people go, so that they may worship Me. If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and onto your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. The frogs will go up on your and your people and all your officials.’” Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the streams and canals and ponds, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’” So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. But the

magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord." Moses said to Pharaoh, "I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile." "Tomorrow," Pharaoh said. Moses replied, "It will be as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people; they will remain only in the Nile." After Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the Lord about the frogs he had brought on Pharaoh. And the Lord did what Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. They were piled into heaps and the land reeked of them. But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh and say to him...'" - The time interval between the conclusion of the first plague and the onset of the second is not specified. However, the report of the second plague is linked to the preceding paragraph with a generic conjunction - variously translated as *"and," "next,"* or *"then"* - which suggests that the two episodes were relatively close together. The



Lord instructed Moses to *"Go to Pharaoh and say to him..."* These words follow the observation that at the conclusion of the previous confrontation, Pharaoh had angrily returned to his palace. (7:23) Thus, to now *"go to Pharaoh"* meant to seek him out *"in the midst of his magnificent palace where he dwells like a god."* (Cassutto, p. 100) The demand from God which Moses was to present to the king was exactly the same as before - *"This is what the Lord says, 'Let My people go so that they may worship Me.'*" Once again, the demand was followed by the threat that disobedience would result in the



“Wall Relief of Khnum, the God of Creation, Fashioning the Body and Soul of the Queen as His Consort, Heket Bestows Upon Her the Gift of Life”

imposition of a plague upon the land of Egypt.

“If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs.” - For the first time, the text uses the term *“plague”* to describe the judgement which God is about to inflict upon the land. The Hebrew word (*“nagap”*) literally means to strike a blow or to smite. The transformation of the Nile into blood had been a demonstration of the powerlessness of Hapi, the god whom the Egyptians worshiped as the personification of the waters of the river. The focus of the second plague was also a major member of Egypt’s pantheon, namely the goddess Heket. Heket was a fertility goddess, the consort of Khnum, the Egyptian god of creation. She was the giver of life, the patron goddess of pregnancy and birth. Heket was closely associated with the institution of the monarchy in Egypt and was believed to act as midwife in the births of kings and queens. Heket’s sacred animal was the frog because *“the Egyptians believed that frogs were generated spontaneously in the Nile fertilized mud and they associated Heket with the origin of life.”* (Mackenzie, p.115) Heket was often depicted in Egyptian art as a woman with the head of a frog. In his classic study

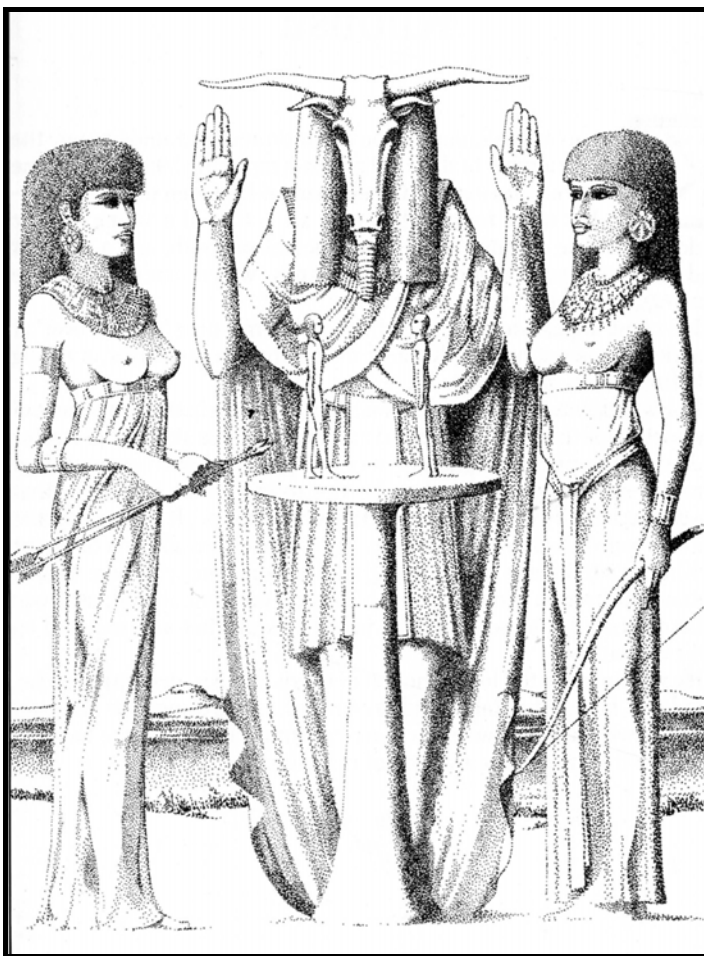
“The Gods of the Egyptians,” Dr. E.A. Wallis Budge notes both the antiquity and the prominence of the frog goddess in the religion of ancient Egypt:

“The frog appears to have been worshiped since primitive times as the symbol of birth and fertility in general...The cult of the frog is one of the oldest in Egypt, and the frog goddess was believed to have played very prominent parts in the creation of the world.” (Budge, II, p. 378)

Heket was revered as a symbol of regeneration because of the transition of the frog from egg to tadpole to adult frog. In the central story of Egyptian mythology, Heket played a crucial role in the restoration of Osiris to life after he had been murdered by his evil brother Set. Centuries later, when Christianity came to Egypt, this tradition

was reflected in the use of the frog as a symbol of the resurrection of Christ by the early Coptic Christians. God used the plague of frogs as a powerful demonstration of the emptiness and falsehood of these pagan beliefs. The country was overrun with frogs and their destruction would again fill the land with the stench of death. The symbol of life and regeneration would *“become a curse and a symbol of degeneration.”* (Rushdooney, p. 89)

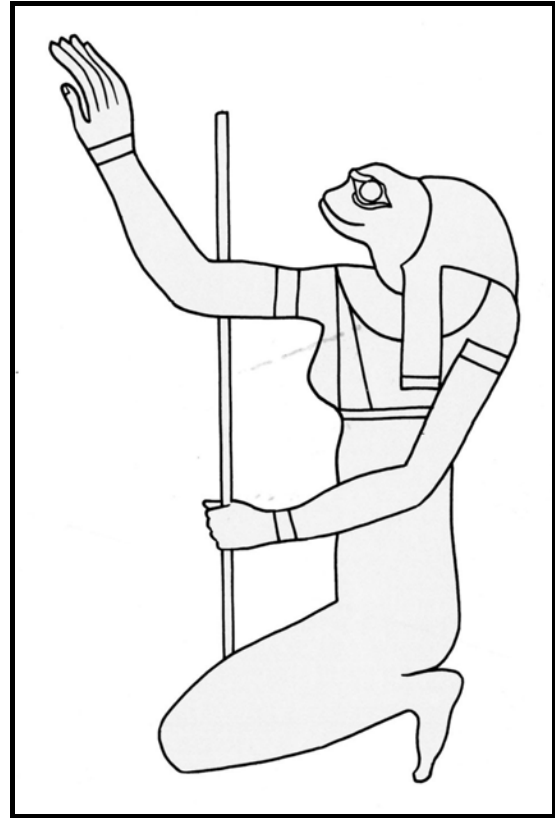
According to the perfect justice of God, the punishment always fits the crime. In his ruthless attempts to limit the growth of the Hebrew population, Pharaoh had commanded the Hebrew midwives to murder every male child born among their people (cf. Exodus 1:15-16). When that effort failed, the



*“Khnum, the Creator God, Fashioning the Body and Soul of the Pharaoh with His Two Wives”
by Clive Barrett*

King had ordered the Hebrew boy babies thrown into the water of the Nile (Exodus 1:22). Phillip Ryken notes the correlation between that grim history and the nature of the first two judgment plagues visited upon Pharaoh and his nation:

“Given that background, it seems significant that God’s first two plagues struck blows against the gods of Egypt’s river and the goddess of Egypt’s midwives. It was a matter of strict justice; God was punishing the Egyptians for their sins. The very river which Pharaoh had used as an instrument of genocide was turned to blood, and the first goddess to be humiliated was the one who governed labor and delivery. There was a connection between Pharaoh’s crime and God’s punishment.” (Ryken, p. 229)



“Temple Relief of Heket Serving as Midwife at the Birth of Horus”

“They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, and into the houses of your officials, and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. The frogs will go up on you and your people and all your officials.” - The text goes to great lengths to emphasize the invasive presence of the frogs throughout the land of Egypt. They would be everywhere, intruding into the most intimate and personal parts of Egyptian life from the palace of Pharaoh to the hut of the lowliest serf. They would even be hopping up Pharaoh’s legs and onto his royal person - ***“The frogs will go up on you and your people.”*** Contemporary poet Weldon Keys effectively captured the eerie sense of fear which would have filled Egypt as the frogs began to multiply and spread in his poem *“The Coming of the Plague”*:

*“And one day in a field I saw
A swarm of frogs, swollen and hideous;
Hundreds upon hundreds, sitting on each other,
Huddled together, silent ominous,
And heard the sound of rushing wind.”*

(Atwan, p. 124)



“The Plague of Frogs” - 18th Century Luther Bible Woodcut

“Because Pharaoh rejected God’s Word of warning, he must be plagued with the croaking and the stench of frogs. All those who despise the servants of God, and fling their words to the wind, will receive the sense of those words to their own dismay.”

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand and your staff over the streams and canals and ponds, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’” - The text assumes that Moses did precisely as he had been commanded and the warning of God had been conveyed to Pharaoh. The specific implementation of God’s instructions are not included in the narrative. It is also evident that once again Pharaoh had defiantly refused to comply with God’s demand for the release of His people. So now the second judgment plague must come upon the land. As in the previous instance, so that there could be no doubt as to the origin of this wonder, the plague was to be initiated by the gesture of Aaron’s staff, in this case, toward not only the Nile itself (*“the streams”*) but also *“over the... canals and ponds”* - all of the natural dwelling places of the frogs. The repetitious language re-emphasizes the comprehensive nature of the frog infestation. ***“So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frogs came up and covered the land.”*** At the command of the Creator God, the frogs miraculously multiplied and came forth to spread

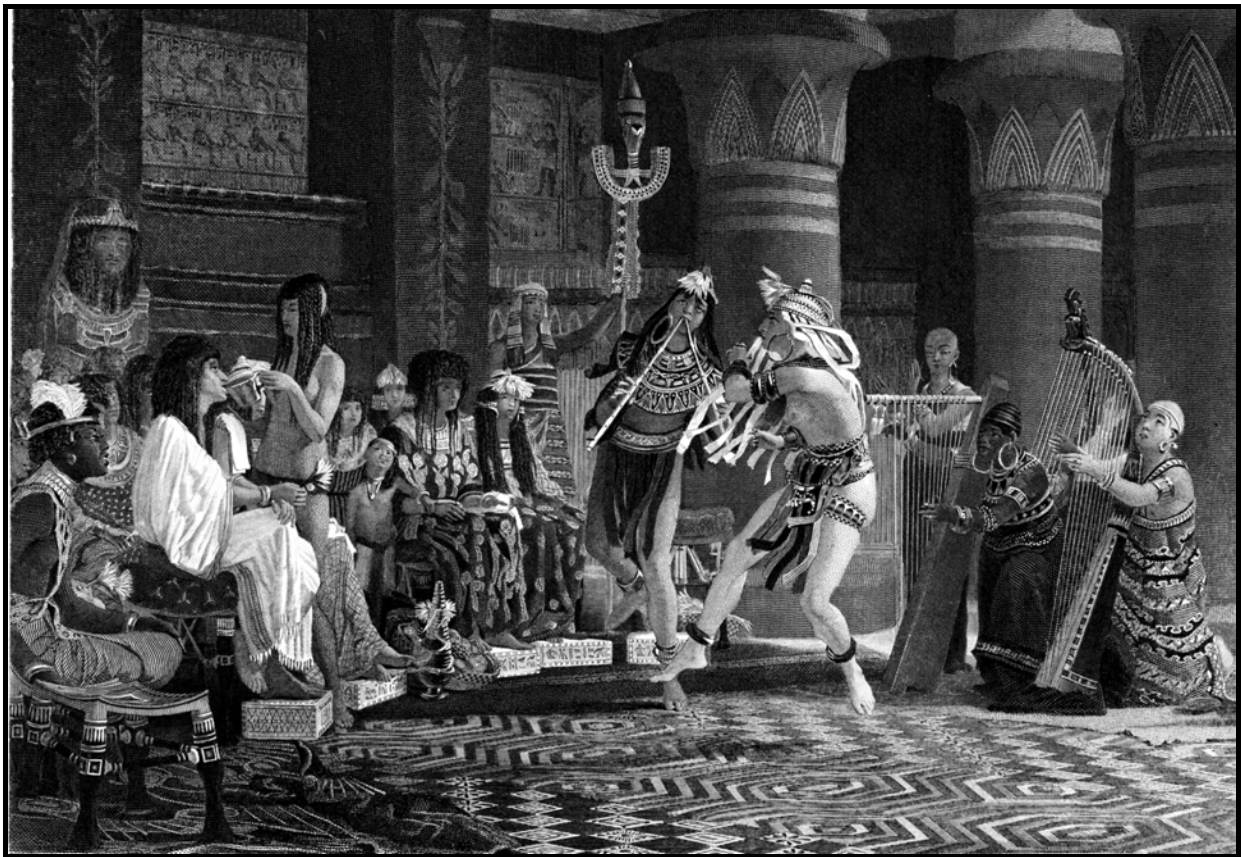
throughout the entire land of Egypt. *“Gradually village after village, city after city, street by street, house by house, room by room, everything became filled with frogs.”* (Cassutto, p. 102) Two dramatic descriptions of the chaos which the arrival of the frogs would have created in Egypt will have to suffice. Dr. Harry Rimmer, in his classic study of Biblical archaeology entitled *Dead Men Tell Tales* says it this way:

“Like a blanket of filth, the slimy, wet monstrosities covered the land, until men sickened at the continued squashing crunch of the ghastly pavement they were forced to walk upon. If a man’s feet slipped upon the greasy mass of their crushed bodies, he fell into an indescribably offensive mass of putrid uncleanness, and when he sought water to cleanse himself, the water was so solid with frogs, he got no cleansing there.” (Rimmer, p. 105)

Professor Louis Untermeyer graphically depicted the infestation in his 1928 biography of Moses:

“Small green peepers, no larger than locusts, distended toads the color of excrement, mottled frogs like bloated vegetation, frogs that were lumps of bronze, frogs with the eyes of unblinking demons, frogs subtler than salamanders, frogs motionless, frogs that leaped into the laps of screaming children, wart-breeding frogs, frogs like droppings of mud, frogs trailing their slime after them, flying frogs that built nests in high reeds, frogs that died and bred death. Once again, the sacred Nile was the source of the pollution.” (Untermeyer, p. 184)

“But the magicians did the same thing by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.” - The priest/magicians of the royal court had been able to turn their staffs into serpents and transform water into blood, using ***“their secret arts,”*** that is, supernatural power granted to them by the devil. As the plague of frogs infests the entire land of Egypt, they duplicate the wonder which the God of Israel had performed as ***“they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.”*** However, while the devil can often imitate or mimic the power of God, he is never able to overcome God’s power or undo what He has done. The satanic action of the priest/magicians only served to intensify the misery of Pharaoh and his people as their frogs were added to the millions which had already covered the land. It is important



“In the Palace of Pharaoh” - 19th Century Engraving

to note that the text does not indicate that Pharaoh took the same smug satisfaction in the limited ability of Egypt’s magicians in this instance. The beleaguered king wanted relief, not more frogs.

“They do something; but their action was not a cure for the plague...They may have boasted, saying to Pharaoh; Behold, we too can do what these foreigners have done. But without doubt Pharaoh was not pleased with his magicians; he was not asking for a supplementary plague, but for a cure of the affliction. But this was not within their power.” (Cassutto, p. 102)

“Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.’” - The previous wonders had not impacted Pharaoh personally. The warnings and descriptions of the frog plague, however, had stressed that everyone in Egypt, including her mighty king, would find themselves covered up with the

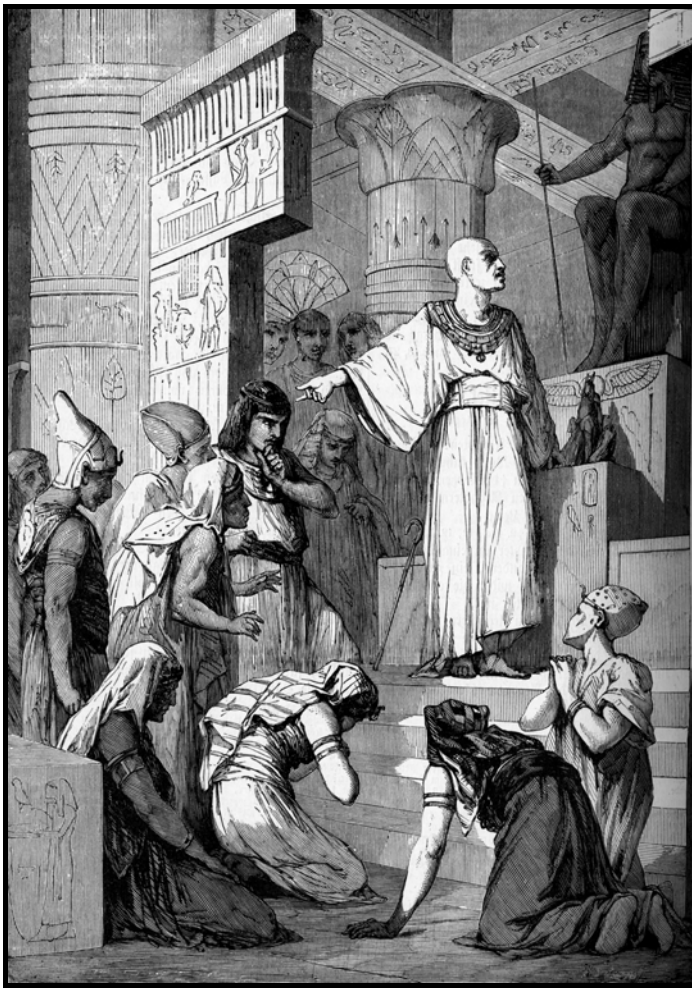
annoying amphibians: ***“They will come up into your palace, in your bedroom and onto your bed...The frogs will go up on you...”*** (Exodus 8:3-4). There is, accordingly, a great deal more urgency in this matter for Pharaoh himself. The proud monarch had previously banished Moses and Aaron from his palace with the curt dismissal - ***“Get back to your work!”*** (Exodus 5:4) Now, the great house of Pharaoh had been overrun with croaking, crawling frogs and the king was compelled to invite the two Hebrew leaders back into his home and beg them to intercede on his behalf with the God of Israel. Pharaoh had insolently scorned God with his blasphemous declaration - ***“Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.”*** (Exodus 5:2) Now that they had been properly introduced, a thoroughly humbled king was more than eager to acknowledge the Lord and comply with His demand: ***“Pray to the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.”*** In the Hebrew text, Pharaoh’s plea begins and ends with *“Yahweh,”* the sacred name of God to stress his newfound eagerness to recognize and placate the Lord. The term that he uses for prayer (Hebrew - *“atar”*) indicates humble supplication. Sarna perceptively translates the phrase - *“Plead with the Lord.”*



“The Throne Room of Pharaoh” by J. James Tissot

Subsequent events, however, would demonstrate that all of this humble piety was little more than desperate pretense.

“Moses said to Pharaoh, ‘I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile.’” - Moses’ response indicates a serene confidence in the absolute power of God. He offered to pray for the removal of the plague of frogs and the return the country to its normal condition - ***“except for those that remain in the Nile”*** - at any time specified by the king. It is significant to note that in the absence of specific instruction from God in this matter, the prophet is unwilling to commit the Lord to a particular timetable or method for frog removal. Pharaoh was not given the opportunity to control the actions of God, only the actions of His prophet. There is both a willingness to take Pharaoh at his word and a healthy



“The Idolatry of Egypt” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

septicism as to his sincerity in these carefully chosen words. The NIV’s rendering ***“I leave to you the honor”*** conveys the sense of the original which literally says ***“Glorify yourself over me as to when I should pray for you.”*** The mocking irony of Moses’ words should have warned Pharaoh that God’s prophet clearly understood what he was up to and that the dangerous game which he had chosen to play could only end badly for him and for his people. The gracious offer to allow the unbelieving king the right to designate the timing of the miracle which he had requested is similar to the offer which God would later make to another unbelieving king, Ahaz, the King of Judah, through the prophet Isaiah: ***“Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ‘Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest***

heights.” (Isaiah 7:10) In both instances, the Lord was providing the opportunity for a stubborn sinner to repent as he witnessed the power of God at work in the wonder which he himself had specified. Sadly, in both instances, the sinner chose to spurn God’s grace and continue in the way of his sin.

“Tomorrow,” Pharaoh said. Moses replied, ‘It will be as you say so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people, they will remain only in the Nile.’” - In a futile attempt to salvage something of his pride and self-respect Pharaoh would not allow himself to plead for the immediate removal of the frog infestation. Instead, as if this were a matter of indifference to a personage as exalted as himself, the king indicated that Moses could remove the frogs *“Tomorrow.”*

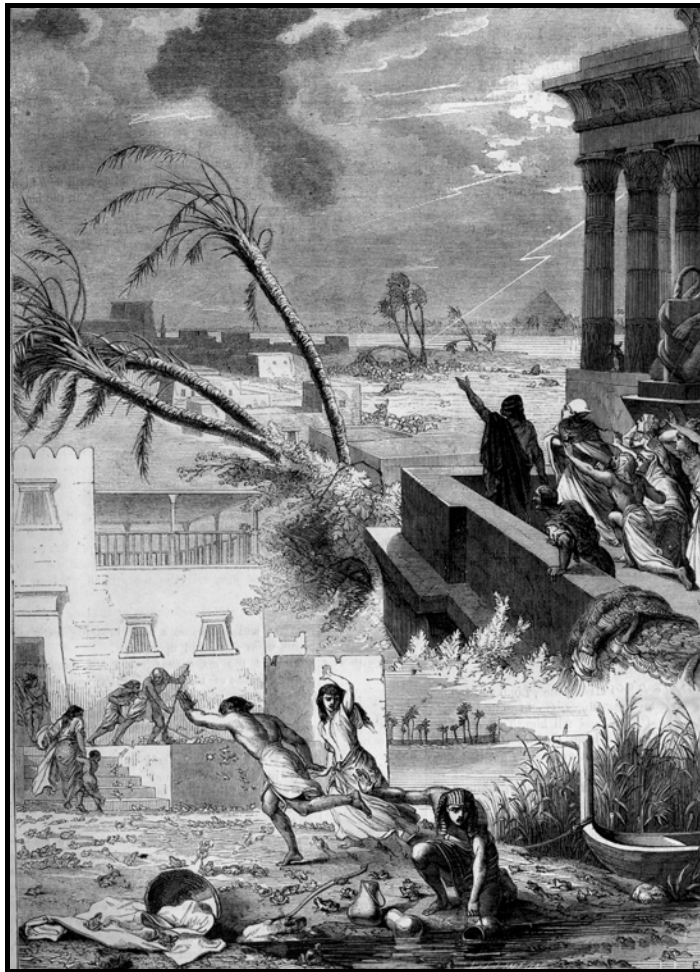
Moses indicated his willingness to comply precisely with the timetable that Pharaoh had set so that the timing of the event would itself become one more decisive demonstration of the unique power of the God of Israel - *“It will be as you say so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God.”* That which Moses will ask the Lord is restated once again in detail to emphasize that it will actually happen just as Moses had said - *“The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people, they will remain only in the Nile.”*

“After Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the Lord about the frogs he had brought on Pharaoh. And the Lord did what Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. They were piled into heaps and the land reeked of them.” Upon leaving the presence of the king, Moses approached the Lord in prayer. The term used here for the prayer of Moses is the Hebrew word *“tsa’aq.”* It means to cry out to God for deliverance from a particularly painful or life



“The Plague of Frogs” by Phyllis Tarlow

threatening situation. The word conveys a sense of great urgency. The same word was used in Exodus 5:15 in reference to the plea of the Hebrews for deliverance from the oppression of their slave drivers and in Exodus 14:15 of the prayer of the people to God as they were trapped by the host of Pharaoh at the shores of the Red Sea. Its use here indicates that Moses clearly understood the urgency of this situation. The integrity of his mission as God's spokesman before the king and the glory of God Himself was at stake in this matter. The subject of his prayer was ***"the frogs which He had brought upon Pharaoh."*** The language is profoundly personal, as if the plague were an individual confrontation between God and Pharaoh as the individual personification of the gods and the entire nation of Egypt. In a very real sense that is exactly what was taking place in all of the plagues.



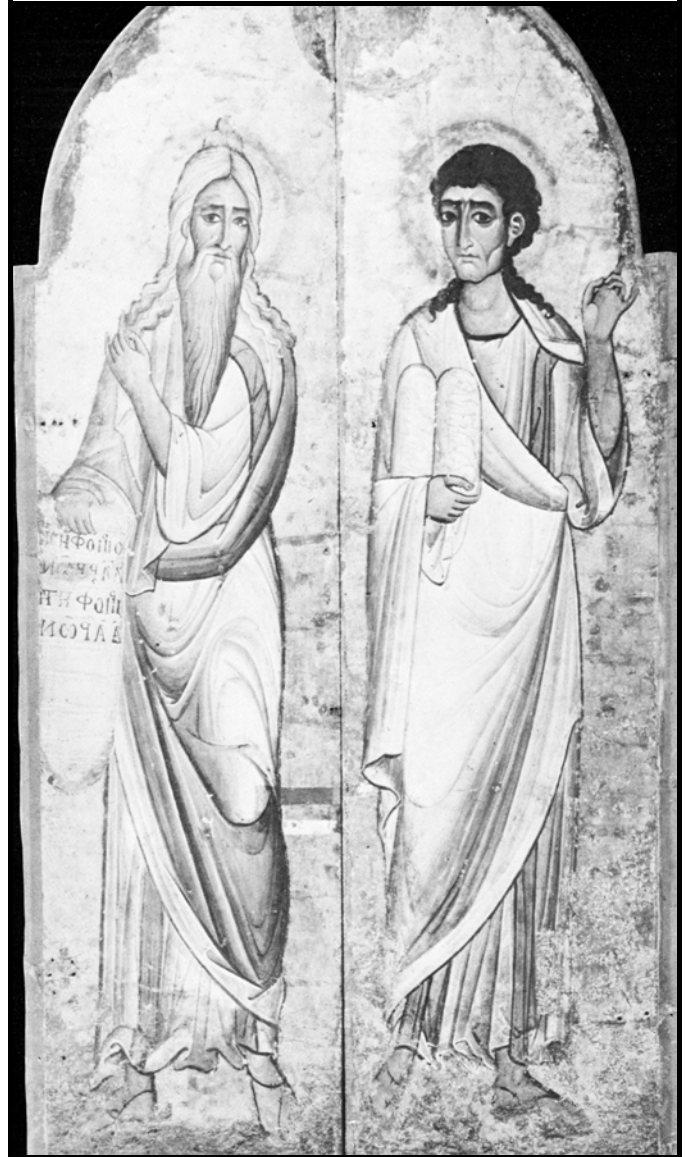
"The Plague of Frogs and the Plague of Hail"
19th Century Bible Engraving

"And the Lord did what Moses asked." - God's response to the prayer of His servant was prompt and effective. Notice that the Lord does not act on the basis of Pharaoh's request but upon that of Moses. The original text makes that point more forcefully as it literally reads - ***"And the Lord did according to the word of Moses."*** God's spokesman had made a commitment. God graciously chose to honor that commitment. God's decision was completely efficacious, that is to say, it happened exactly as God willed. Like the Word of God in creation, as again and again Genesis 1 reiterates the phrase - ***"The Lord God said, 'Let there be and there was...'"*** so also here the will and Word of God makes things happen, immediately and completely. Moses had prayed that God would cause the frogs to ***"leave you and***

your houses, your officials and your people.” And so it was. At the command of the Almighty God *“The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields.”* By the millions and the tens of millions, the frogs which had overrun the land of Egypt died. The repetitive language of the text stresses the comprehensive miraculous nature of the event. The sudden demise of the great horde of frogs left the entire country covered with their stinking corpses. *“They were piled into heaps and the land reeked of them.”* Once again, Egypt was filled with the stench of corruption and death.

The association of frogs and toads with the forces of evil and the work of Satan remained consistent throughout the balance of Holy Scripture. In the ceremonial laws of Israel, frogs were designated as an unclean animals which defiled a man and disqualified him from entry into the tabernacle. *“But all the creatures in the streams and seas that do not have fins and scales - whether among the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water you are to detest. And since you are to detest them, you must not eat*

their meat and you must detest their carcasses.” (Leviticus 11:10-11) In the imagery of the Book of Revelation, John clearly alludes to the plague of frogs in Egypt when he depicts the demonic evil spirits which came forth from the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet as *“three evil spirits that looked like frogs...They are the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.”* (Revelation 16:13,15)



*“Aaron and Moses”
8th Century Byzantine Icon from the Monastery of
St. Catherine*

“But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.” - The frogs were gone. Their dead bodies were being piled up and hauled away throughout the land. As far as Pharaoh was concerned, the crisis was over and the problem was solved. The text literally says *“when Pharaoh saw there was room.”* He had achieved what we might call today a little *“breathing space.”* Without the pressure of the frogs hopping up his legs and into his bed, he promptly broke the promise which he had made to Moses and Aaron - ***“He hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.”*** *“Pharaoh was the kind of man who says anything to get out of trouble, but as soon as his troubles are over, he goes right back to his old selfish ways.”* (Ryken, p. 234) In the plagues still to come, this would become a consistent pattern. The King would say whatever he had to in order to put an end to the plague, but as soon as the consequences of the plague were removed, he would quickly go back on his commitments and refuse to set the people free. This is precisely the pattern of willful deliberate sin, gradually growing more severe, which God had foretold. That self-destructive pattern would culminate in horrendous judgement upon Pharaoh and his people.



“The Demon Frogs Coming Forth from the Mouth of the Dragon” by Albrecht Dürer



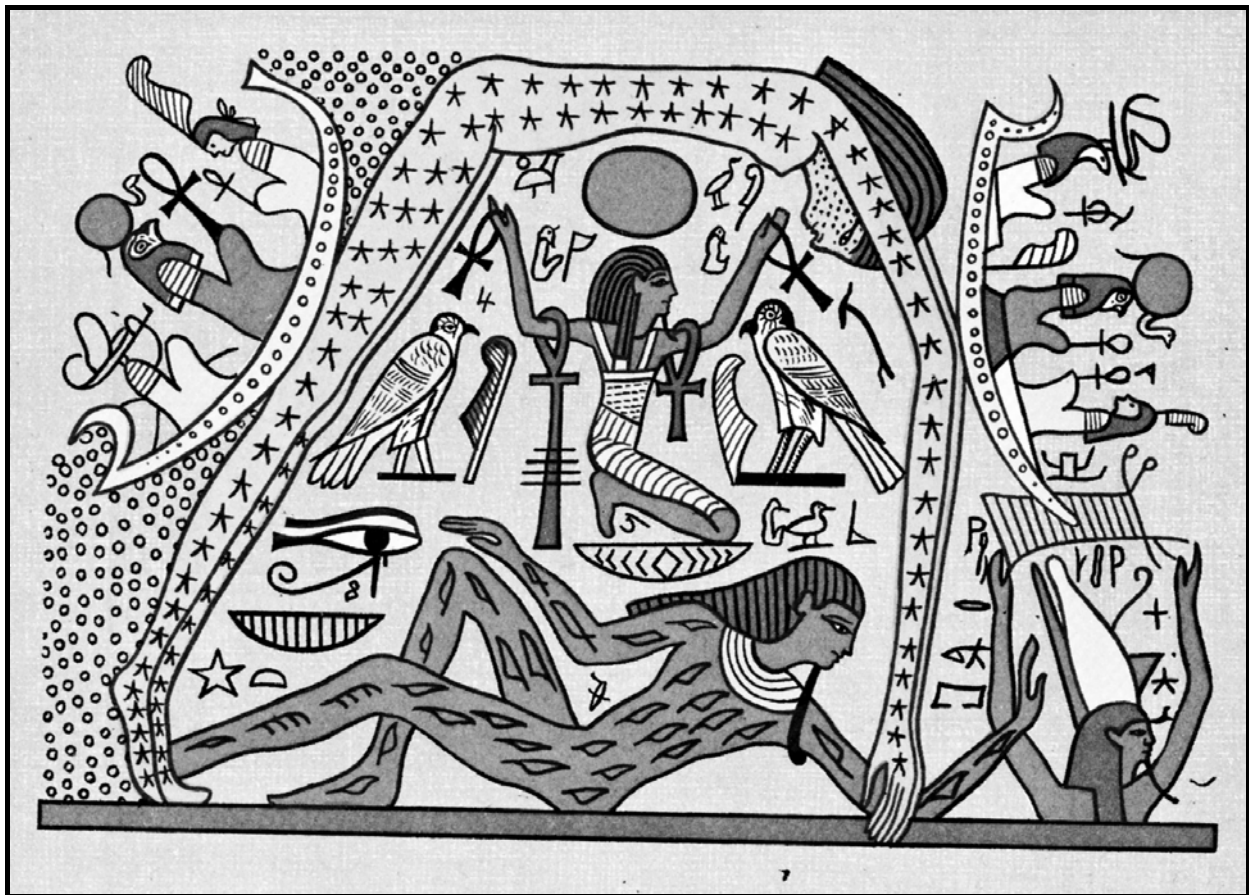
“The Plague of Gnats” by J. James Tissot

The Plague of Gnats ***Exodus 8:16-19***

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground,’ and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats.” They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals. The magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said.

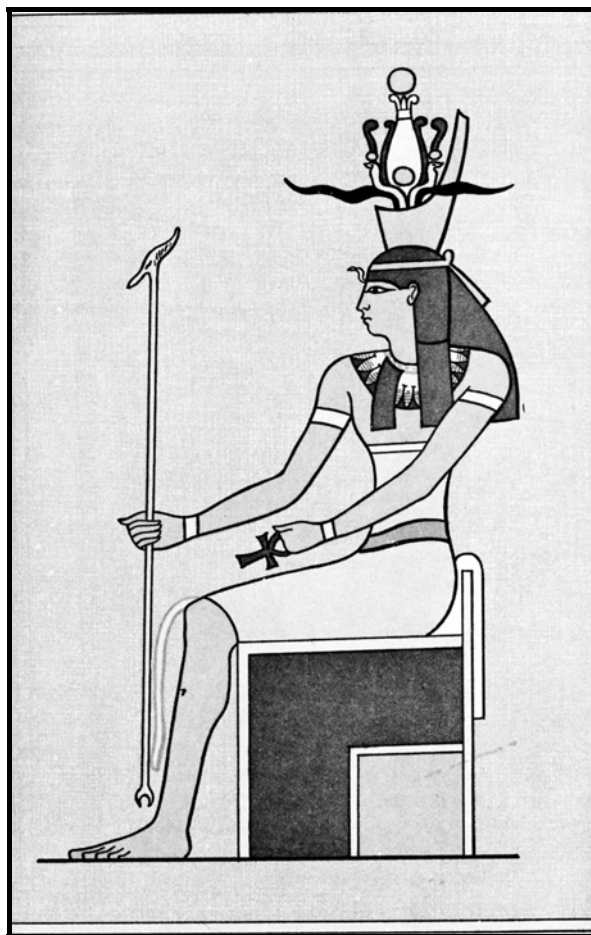
“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground...’” - Unlike its predecessors, the third plague comes upon Pharaoh and his kingdom without warning. The ancient rabbis noted that the plagues come in three groups of three, followed by the tenth and final plague - the death of the firstborn - which is the culmination of them all, the decisive judgement of God upon Egypt and her idols. In each triad, the first plague is introduced as Moses confronts Pharaoh early in the morning (cf. Exodus 7:15; 8:20; 9:13). The second plague follows a meeting in the palace of the king (cf. Exodus 8:1-3; 9:1; 10:1). The third plague in the series comes without warning (cf. Exodus 8:16; 9:8; 10:21). The recognition of this pattern demonstrates the logical structure of gradual intensification which characterizes the judgement of God upon Pharaoh. This was not a haphazard process. The interval between the conclusion of the frog plague and the initiation of the plague of gnats is not specified.

The agents of God’s judgement in this instance are swarms of *“gnats”* which God



“Geb the Earth God Supporting Nut the Goddess of the Heavens”

brought into being from ***“the dust of the ground.”*** The precise identity of these insects is unknown. The Hebrew term *“kinnim”* is currently used in reference to lice and fleas. The text would appear to suggest that in this case, however, the insects in question flew through the air as they quickly infested the land of Egypt and afflicted both men and beasts. Most translators, therefore, suggest that gnats or mosquitoes are the intended sense of the word. *“A species of gnats, so small as to be hardly visible to the eye, but with a sting which, according to Philo and Origen, causes a most painful irritation of the skin. They even creep into the eyes and nose, and after the harvest they rise in great swarms from the inundated rice fields.”* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 370)



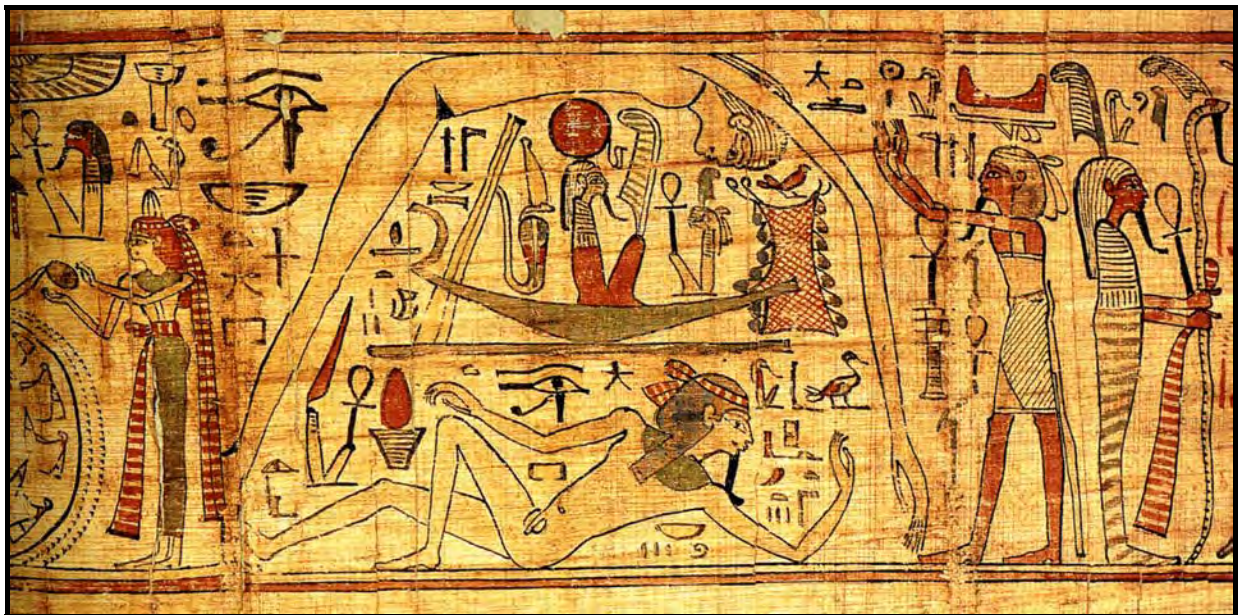
“Geb, the God of the Earth”

The significance of the third plague in reference to the gods of Egypt is signaled by the fact that the gnats originate from ***“the dust of the ground.”*** The Egyptians personified the earth in the form of the God *“Geb.”* Richard Wilkerson sums up the crucial role which this idol played in the theology of ancient Egypt in this way:

“Geb was the god who personified the earth and was one of the most important of Egypt’s primeval deities...The god’s power was sometimes inimical. Earthquakes were his laughter and he could withhold his blessings in dry times or in barren areas. More importantly, as the god of the earth, par excellence, Geb could also represent the grave and it is stated in the pyramid texts, for example, that the deceased king ‘will not enter into Geb’ or ‘sleep within his house.’ Geb usually had a more beneficent aspect, however. As the god of the earth, grain was said to sprout from his ribs and vegetation from his back. He was also the source of fresh water and ultimately all that the earth produced, so that Geb was directly associated with the fertility of both the earth and

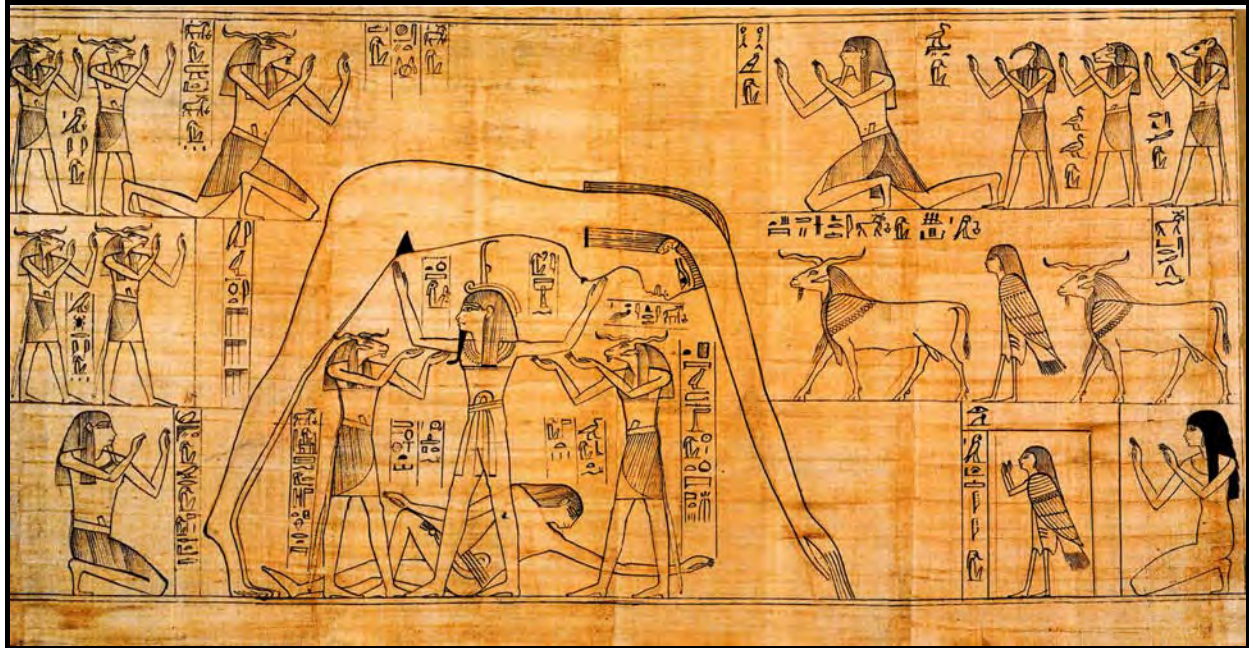
livestock; and Hapy, the god of the Nile inundation was said to be 'the friend of Geb.' ...Geb also maintained a strong association with kingship. The Egyptian king himself was called the 'heir of Geb' and was said to sit upon 'the seat of Geb.'" (Wilkerson, p. 105)

Geb is typically depicted in Egyptian art with green skin to symbolize the fertility of the land and is often covered with the images of reeds or plants. Geb was also viewed as a god of healing and was invoked for protection from the stings of poisonous insects, particularly scorpions. Once ancient magic text presents Osiris empowering Geb to restrain the malicious spirits which caused fevers and colds. Having demonstrated the impotence of Hapi, the Nile god in the first plague, and



"The Creation of the World Depicting Geb and Nut" - Papyrus Illustration

Heket, the goddess of creation, fertility and birth in the second, it was especially appropriate that the next idol to fall before the judgement of the true God, would be Geb, the god of the earth. The selection of gnats called forth from the dust of the ground was a delightfully ironic method of demonstrating the helplessness of this idol, the god of the earth, one of whose specialties was the healing of insect bites. Furthermore, the close association of Geb with the establishment of the royal office of Pharaoh would have made this demonstration of impotence particularly threatening to Egypt's king.



“The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth” - Papyrus Illustration

“They did this and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, the gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats.” - In immediate response to Aaron’s action of striking the earth with his staff the dust throughout the land of Egypt is transformed into vast swarms of stinging insects. The text emphasizes the comprehensive nature of the plague - *“All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats.”* This was not an isolated or local phenomenon. It involved the entire land of Egypt, thereby clearly indicating the helplessness of Egypt’s earth god before the power of the God of Israel. Not only men, but also animals were afflicted with this plague - *“the gnats came upon men and animals.”*

“But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals. The magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he would not listen.” - With this plague, the power of the Egyptian priest/magicians reaches its limit and this was their final attempt to compete with the wonders of God. The literal Hebrew text is almost sarcastic in its description of the heathen priests failure - *“and the magicians did so with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not.”* They went through the same motions, using the ancient incantations and rituals of their priesthood. But those secret arts which had previously enabled them to duplicate the wonders accomplished by Moses and Aaron in an extremely limited way were in this

instance completely unsuccessful. They could not produce gnats from the dust nor could they remove the gnats which had been imposed from the dust throughout the land - ***“And the gnats were on men and animals.”*** No explanation is offered as to why God restricted the use of supernatural satanic power in this particular instance. Keil/Delitsch comments:

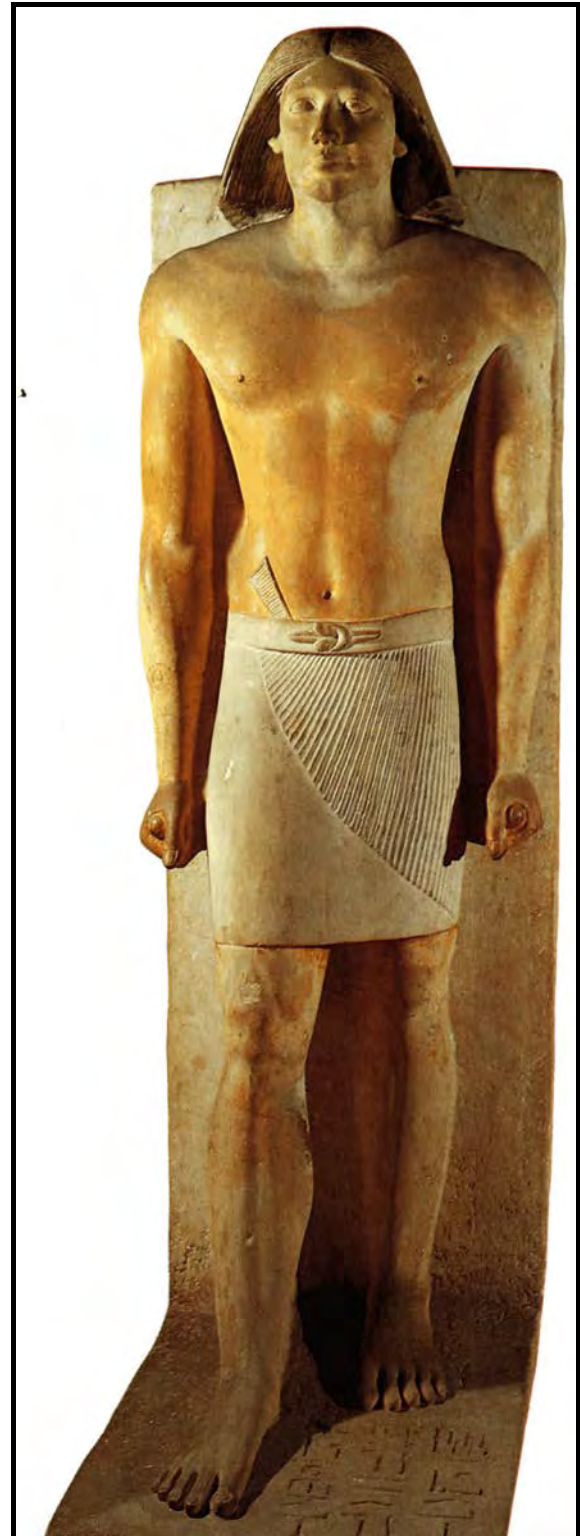
“The reason why the arts of the Egyptian magicians were put to shame in this case, we have to seek in the omnipotence of God, restraining the demonical powers which the magicians had made subservient to their purposes before, in order that their inability to bring out these, the smallest of all creatures, which seemed to arise, as it were, from the dust itself might display in the sight of everyone the impotence of their secret arts by the side of the almighty creative power of the true God.”
(Keil/Delitsch, p. 370)

The priests are quick to excuse their failure by acknowledging the superior power of the God of Israel - ***“The magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’”*** This admission should not be surprising within a polytheist culture which freely acknowledged the existence of other gods. The question was not did the other gods exist but rather which gods were more powerful. They are careful to avoid the use



“Egyptian Priests Performing the Incantations at a Burial Ritual”

of “*Yahweh*,” the proper name of God, which could have been construed as an acknowledgment of the God of Israel as the only true God. Instead the priests referred to God with the generic designation “*elohim*” which allowed them to maintain the fiction that the God of Israel was merely one of many national gods among the host of gods and goddesses worshiped by mankind. William Propp suggests that this significant distinction should be reflected in English by translating this phrase “*a deity’s finger*” rather than the traditional “*the finger of God.*” Because of their inability to duplicate the production of gnats from the dust, the wise men of Egypt had been compelled to grudgingly admit that genuine supernatural power is at work against them here, but they remained unwilling to recognize either the specific existence of “*Yahweh*” or His superiority over the gods of their homeland. Dr. Cassutto further argues that the priests’ reference to “*the finger,*” rather than the hand of God was also intended to be understood in a disparaging sense: “*Nor do they say ‘the hand of God,’ but just the finger of God, that is, they do not admit that it is a real act of God, such as a man performs with his hand, but only that it is a token or subsidiary form of assistance such as a person can render with one finger.*” (Cassutto, p. 106) These failed priest/ magicians were caught upon the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, they had to explain and excuse their own inability to equal or surpass the wonders of Moses. But at the same time, they could not recognize the unique power and authority of Moses’ God without completely discrediting



*Painted Limestone Statue of Renofer -
High Priest of Ptah c. 2520 B.C.*

Egypt's entire religious system. Accordingly, they conceded as little as possible, while in fact giving up the contest and sullenly retiring to the sidelines. *“Although it is probable that the Egyptian learned men are to be understood at best as making a declaration that is far short of a surrender, they have nevertheless been shaken, and their arrogant defense for the first time shows a crack.”* (Durham, p. 109)

“But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said.” - Despite the admission of failure from his priests, and their evident sense of uneasiness, Pharaoh remained adamant in his refusal to yield to the demands of Moses. The episode concludes with the phrase that will become the characteristic ending of each of the plagues. The Lord had foretold that He would utilize the arrogant stubbornness of this foolish man to demonstrate His sovereign power before Egypt and the world (cf. Exodus 7:3-5).



***“Senior Priest in His Leopard Mantle Supervising the Reception of Temple Offerings”
Old Kingdom Wall Relief***



“The Plague of Flies” - Luther Bible Woodcut

The Plague of Flies

Exodus 8:20-32

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let My people go so that they may worship Me. If you do not let My people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies, and even the ground where they are. But on that day, I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where My people live; no swarms of flies will be there; so that you may know that I, the Lord, am in this land. I will make a distinction between My people and your people. This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow.’” And the Lord did this. Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh’s palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt, the land was ruined by the flies. Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go sacrifice to your God here in the land.” But Moses said, “That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We

must take a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as He commands us.” Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the desert, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me.” Moses answered, “As soon as I leave you I will pray to the Lord, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.” Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord, and the Lord did what Moses asked: the flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people; not a fly remained. But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water...’” The second plague triad began in the same fashion as its preceding counterpart - the transformation of the Nile into blood - with an early morning confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh on the banks of the river. Evidently, the daily rituals and religious ceremonies of the royal court had continued despite the upheaval which had already been caused by the first three plagues. The king continued to pay homage to the discredited idols of his homeland. In words which by now must have become uncomfortably familiar to Pharaoh, Moses once again presented the demand of the Lord - *“This is what the Lord says, ‘Let My people go so that they may worship Me.’”*



“The Egyptian Dogfly - ‘Callifora erythrocephala’”

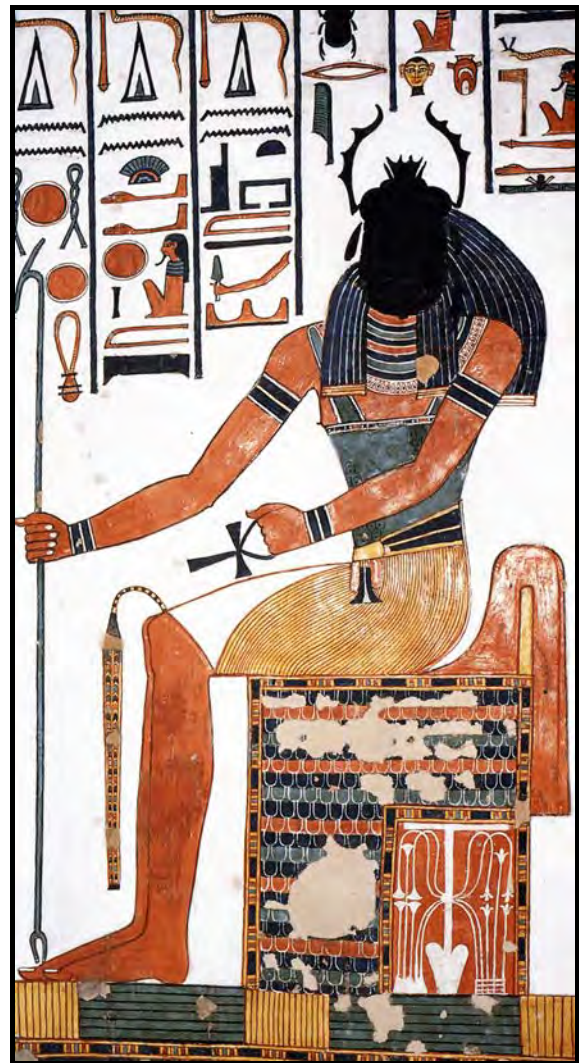
“If you do not let My people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies, and even the ground where they are.” - The specific nature of the fourth plague has been the subject of significant debate among Bible scholars across the centuries. The Hebrew text uses the somewhat ambiguous term *“arob”* to describe the agents of God’s judgement in this instance. The word is derived from a verb which means *“to mix”* or *“to blend.”* The word

occurs nine times in the Old Testament but all of the other uses are in reference to the fourth plague itself. So, for example, Psalm 78:45 recalls: ***“He sent swarms of flies (“arob”) that devoured them and frogs that devastated them.”*** In a similar celebration of God’s victories over His enemies, Psalm 105:31 declares: ***“He spoke, and there came swarms of flies (“arob”), and gnats throughout their country.”*** Both the etymology of the word and the texts’ descriptions of the details of the plague suggest that the “arob” were huge swarms made up of a mixture of different varieties of stinging, biting flies. The rabbinic scholars who translated the Greek Septuagint in Egypt during the Inter-testamental Period defined the Hebrew with the more precise Greek noun “kunomuion,” that is, the “dog fly,” an unusually aggressive blood sucking, disease spreading insect prevalent in Egypt at that time. This view remains the majority opinion among traditional scholars.

Keil/Delitsch elaborates:

“These insects are described by Philo and many travelers as a very severe scourge. They are much more numerous and annoying than the gnats; and when enraged they fasten themselves upon the human body, especially upon the edges of the eyelids and become a dreadful plague.”
 (Keil/Delitsch, p. 371)

The particularly aggressive nature of this species is reflected in forceful language of the Psalm - ***“He sent swarms of flies that devoured them.”*** (Psalm 78:5) As in the descriptions of the previous plagues, the repetitive phrases of the text emphasize that this infestation of biting flies is a supernatural event of massive proportion: ***“I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies, and even the ground where they are.”*** The land would literally be filled with flies. They would be everywhere and it



“Kephri Scarab God of the Sun”



“Serket - Scorpion Queen of the City of the Dead” - Tomb Mural

would be impossible for the Egyptians to find refuge from them or escape them. The infestation would be so complete that not only would the flies be swarming through the air, filling the homes and palaces of Egypt, but the entire surface of the ground would be covered with a disgusting blanket of crawling, creeping flies - *“even the ground where they (that is, the Egyptians) are.”*

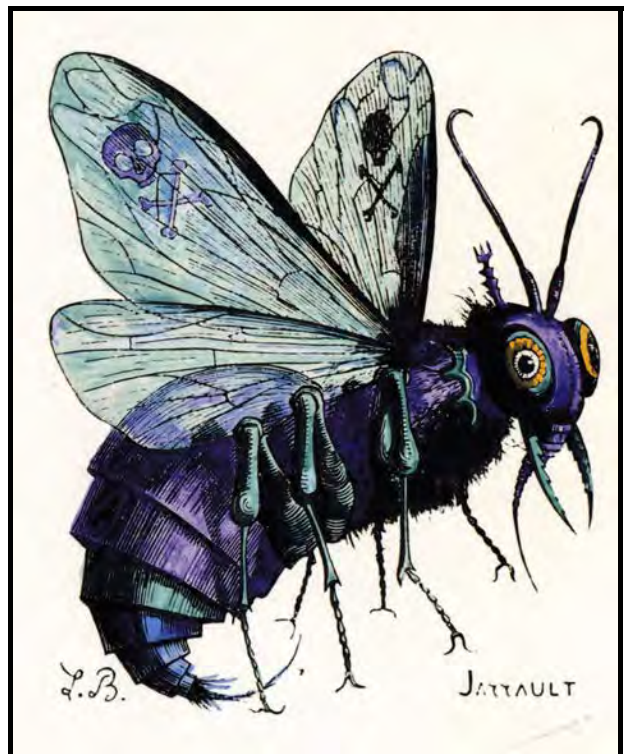
There were a number of insect related deities within the Egyptian pantheon. Most notably, *“Kephri,”* a humanoid figure with the head of a scarab beetle was a powerful and popular sun god. The deadly scorpion was worshiped as *“Serket,”* the Mistress of Heaven and the Guardian of the City of the Dead. Flies, however, had a much less positive image. Within the world-view of the ancient Egyptians, flies were feared and despised as carriers of disease and harbingers of doom and death. The role of flies and their maggot offspring in the malodorous process of rot and decay was no doubt a crucial factor in this negative image, particularly in view of the

Egyptian pre-occupation with the preservation of the bodies of the dead. In his intriguing study *An Egyptian Bestiary*, Philippe Germond cites two prayers which beseeched the gods to protect Pharaoh, and the nation he personified, from the ravages of these ill omened creatures. The first was addressed to the goddess *“Sekmet,”* the fierce lioness who represented the guardian power of her father, the almighty sun god Amun-Re. The prayer begged the goddess to watch over Pharaoh and make him immune from the attacks of the *“evil flies:”* *“O Sekmet, come to the living Image, Pharaoh, the living Falcon! Protect him from this year’s evil flies, do not let them*

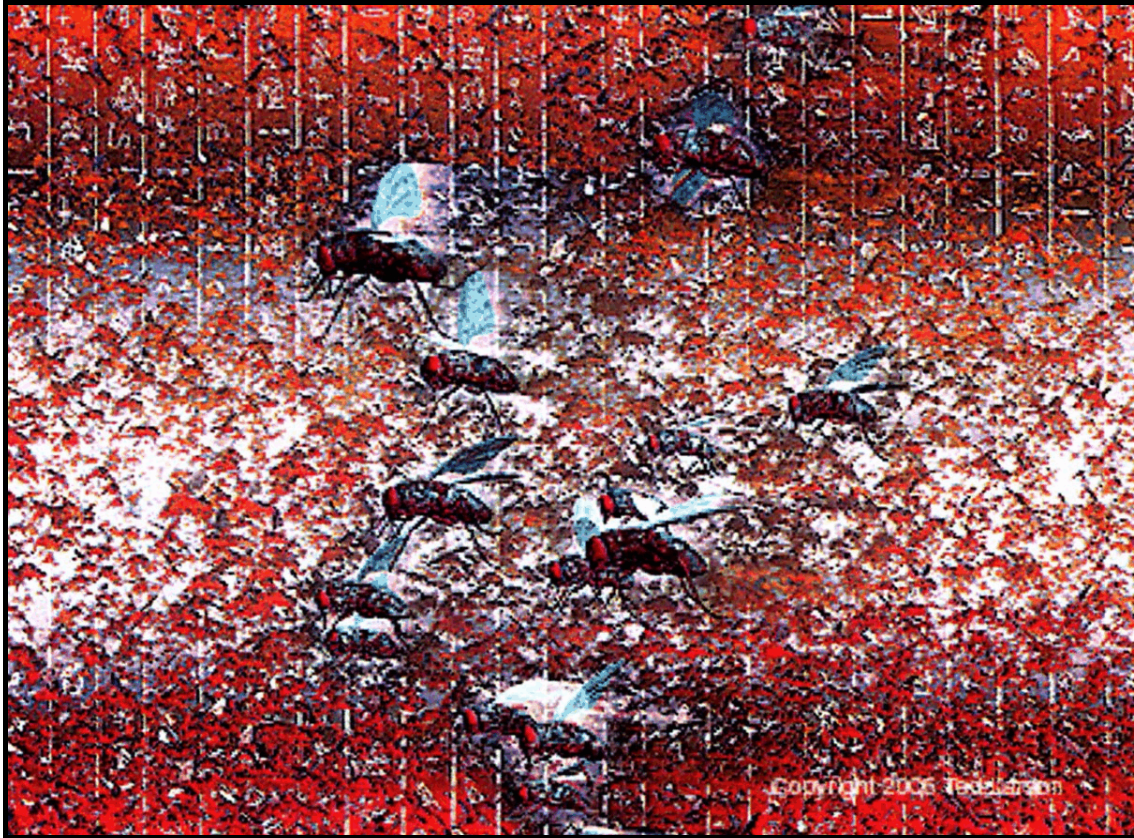
'stick' to him." The second prayer was a magic formula designed to immobilize the flies so that they would be unable to harm the king: "'Fall to the ground, be paralyzed fly! Keep away from Pharaoh for he is the royal Son of Nut.'" (Germond, p. 104) In this context, the inability of the gods to protect Pharaoh and his kingdom from the onslaught of huge swarms of flies would certainly have been viewed as a compelling demonstration of the helplessness of Egypt's idols against the power of the God of Israel. Some scholars also suggest a connection between the appearance of flies in the fourth plague and the widespread popularity of the Canaanite god "Baal" among the people of Egypt. Given the prominent role that Baal would play in the spiritual corruption of the Children of Israel for centuries to come, his humiliation here would have been most appropriate. In his classic study, *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, (1915) Dr. Lewis Spence points out:

"Semitic Asia provided the greatest number of gods borrowed by the Egyptians...The greatest of all is, of course, the Syrian Baal, the terrible god of war, also a personification of those terrors of the desert, the burning heat of the sun and the destroying wind. This god first became known to the Egyptians under the Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1552 B.C.), when they were at war with the Syrians for centuries, and, as they had proved anything but easily vanquished foes, their god must be regarded with due reverence and awe." (Lewis, pp. 276-277)

Among the various titles ascribed to Baal is the designation "Baal-Zebub," by which, according to 2 Kings 1:2, the idol was worshiped in the Philistine city of Ekron. This title means "Lord of the Flies." Jesus would later use the name of this ancient idol as one of the titles of Satan himself: ***"But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that his fellow drives out demons.' Jesus Knew their thoughts and said to them...'And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?'"*** (Matthew 12:24,27)



"Beelzebub" - 19th Century Engraving



“The Plague of Flies” by Ted Larson

“But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen where My people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land. I will make a distinction between My people and your people. This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow.” - However, while the land of the Egyptians would be covered with a loathsome layer of flies *“the land of Goshen where My people live”* would remain completely free of the infestation. God declared *“I will deal differently with the land of Goshen.”* The phrase literally indicates that God would interpose *“a deliverance,”* that is, a protecting shield between the Egyptians and the Israelites. The priest/magicians of Pharaoh’s court had not been able to bring themselves to identify the God of Israel by His proper Name. Their grudging acknowledgment of His power had been couched in the most vague and general terminology (cf. Notes, p. 265 - *“this is a deity’s finger”*). God’s protection of His



“The Guardians of the Temple” by Ferdinand Keller

own people in their land while everyone everywhere else in the land of Egypt was covered with the plague of flies would correct that misunderstanding.

This is the first reference in Exodus to *“the land of Goshen.”* The designation is Semitic in origin, most probably derived from a Hebrew word (*“gush”* - *“clod”*) which refers to a particular type of fertile soil. Previous references to Goshen in the closing chapters of Genesis suggest that the region was in the northeast corner of Nile Delta, the portion of the land of Egypt closest to Canaan. When Joseph invited Jacob to come and live with him in Egypt, he promised him a home *“in the region of Goshen”*

(Genesis 45:10) where he might dwell in comfort, close to the royal capital in which Joseph himself lived as Pharaoh's administrator. Residence in Goshen allowed the Israelites not only proximity but also a degree of separation from the Egyptians so that they might continue to pursue their occupation as shepherds: ***“Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.”*** (Genesis 46:34) Genesis goes on to describe Goshen as ***“the best part of the land.”*** (Genesis 47:6). Nahum Sarna summarizes the available historical evidence in this way:

“Although no source defines the precise geographic location of Goshen, the cumulative effect of various items of evidence is to place in the area of the Wadi Tumeilat, which stretches from the eastern arm of the Nile to the Great Bitter Lake. Egyptian texts confirm the presence of Semites and other Asians in the northeastern part of the country both at the end of the 6th Dynasty (c. 2250 B.C.E.) and about 1700 B.C.E. in the wake of the Hyksos invasion. Exodus 12:38 refers to a “mixed multitude,” that is, foreign tribes, dwelling in the area of Israelite settlement.” (Sarna, p. 42)



“Pharaoh Presenting the Land of Goshen to Jacob and His Sons” by Tissot

The Lord was particularly clear in explaining to Pharaoh the purpose of the protective barrier which He would establish around His people - ***“So that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land. I will make a distinction between My people and your people.”*** The miracle of the deliverance of Israel would unmistakably identify the God by whom the miracle had been performed. At the same time it would compel an arrogant obstinate monarch not only to acknowledge the existence of “*Yahweh*” but also to admit that “*Yahweh*” was capable of demonstrating His power with impunity before all the gods of Egypt within the very heart of the country which the Egyptians considered to be “*the sacred land.*” Pharaoh’s gods could not protect those whom the true God afflicted nor could they afflict those whom He protected.



“Turquoise Fly Amulet - Designed to Protect Its Wearer from Insect Borne Diseases”

“By this plague in which a separation and deliverance was established between the people of God and the Egyptians, Pharaoh was to be taught that the God who sent this plague was not some deity of Egypt, but ‘Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt.’” (Keil/Delitsch, p. 371)

The mighty priesthood of Egypt had been discredited and humbled. The ancient lore (“***their secret arts***”) meticulously gathered in magnificent temples that had stood for a thousand years had been exposed as worthless superstition. The priest/magicians no longer dared to contest the God of Moses. From this time forward Pharaoh does not even call upon them to attempt a response. Now the pantheon of Egypt’s legion of gods and goddesses would itself be revealed as impotent bystanders while the God of Israel worked His will throughout their country. ***“This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow.”*** - The plague was to arrive promptly, without opportunity for preparation or prevarication so that its nature as a genuinely “***miraculous sign***” accomplished by the unique power of God alone might be clearly seen. Moses’ ability to precisely predict the moment that the plague would begin served to authenticate his ministry as a true prophet of God. Delaying coming of the plague until tomorrow, rather than bringing it down upon Egypt immediately, also gave Pharaoh the opportunity to relent

and repent should he have chosen to do so.



*“Napoleon”s Officers Viewing the Ruins of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak”
by M. Georg Clairin*

“And the Lord did this. Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh’s palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.” - In the ancient traditions of Egypt’s royal court, to emphasize the absolute power of the king, when a decree was issued by Pharaoh, his herald would formally declare - *“So let it be written. So let it be done.”* In a similar fashion, the report of the fourth plague begins with the simple formula *“And the Lord did this.”* The events which followed precisely implemented the warning which the Lord had issued to Pharaoh. It was exactly as God had said it would be. Pharaoh’s response to God’s warning is not indicated. The text simply assumes that the warning was disregarded and denied as all of its predecessors had been. *“Dense swarms of flies”* - The Hebrew uses the adjective *“kabad”* - *“heavy”* to describe the immense swarms of flies which descend throughout the land of Egypt.

“It speaks of something oppressive or burdensome, such as a yoke (1 Kings 12:4,11), famine (Genesis 12:10) or mourning (Genesis 50:11). It may also carry with it the idea of massive numbers or an abundance of things (cattle - Exodus 12:38; murrain - Exodus 9:3; and locusts (Exodus 10:14). The Hebrew expression was obviously intended to convey the sense of intensity or severity.” (Davis, p. 115)

The use of this particular term to identify the vast swarms of flies which came down upon the land of Egypt is tragically appropriate for this is the same adjective which has repeatedly been used to describe the condition of Pharaoh’s heart as, over and over again, he had refused to heed the warnings and yield to the obviously overwhelming power of the God of Israel (i.e. Exodus 7:14).

“Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh’s palace, and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.” - Moses had forewarned that the flies would be everywhere throughout the entire country. The detailed language of this verse, reflecting the words of his warning, indicate that his warning was precisely fulfilled.

The catastrophic nature of the plague is indicated by the final phrase ***“throughout the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.”***

The Hebrew verb *“sahat”* means *“to be devastated”* or *“destroyed.”* The flies not only *“devoured”* (Psalm 78:45) men and animals, they also wrecked havoc upon vegetation throughout the country. *“The flies*



***“Within the Palace of Pharaoh”
by Grot. Johann***



“Prayer to the Goddess Isis - Protector of Egypt and Her People” by Alexander Cabanel

not only tortured the men, and disfigured them by the swelling produced by their sting, but also killed the plants on which they deposited their eggs.” (Keil Delitsch, p. 372)
Philo of Alexandria, a renowned Hebrew scholar of the First Century A.D. graphically described the uniquely virulent nature of these flies:

“The first is that which was inflicted by means of that animal which is the boldest in all nature, namely, the dog-fly which those persons who invent names have named with great propriety (for they were wise men); combining the name of the appellation of the most imprudent of all animals, a fly and a dog, the one being the boldest of all terrestrial, and the other the boldest of all flying animals. For they approach and run up fearlessly, and if anyone drives them away, they still resist and renew their attack, so as never to yield until they are sated with blood and flesh. And so the dog-fly, having derived boldness from both of these animals, is a biting treacherous creature, for it shoots in from a distance with a whizzing sound like an arrow, and when it has reached its mark it sticks very closely with great force. But at this time its attack was prompted by

God, so that its treachery and hostility were redoubled, since it not only displayed all of its natural covetousness, but also that eagerness which it derived from the divine providence which sent it forth, and armed it and excited it to acts of valor against the natives.” (Philo, p. 471)

“Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land.’” - Pharaoh’s prompt response is indicative of the urgency of the crisis caused by the onslaught of the flies. The beleaguered king had nowhere else to turn. *“The faltering responses of the magicians, the impotence of the beautifully decorated deities, the tragedies of empty temples made it clear to Pharaoh that his only hope for release from this plague was in the God of Moses and Aaron.”* (Davis, p. 116) In the manner of politics as usual, Pharaoh offered Moses and Aaron a series of four face-saving compromises in an attempt to salvage his own pride and maintain the fiction of his sovereign control. First, he offered them make their pilgrimage while remaining within the land of Egypt - ***“Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land.”*** *“Pharaoh was a shrewd negotiator, and this was one of his cleverest ploys/It seemed like a reasonable compromise; he would permit the Israelites to offer their sacrifices, provided that they stayed in Egypt.”* (Ryken, p. 254)

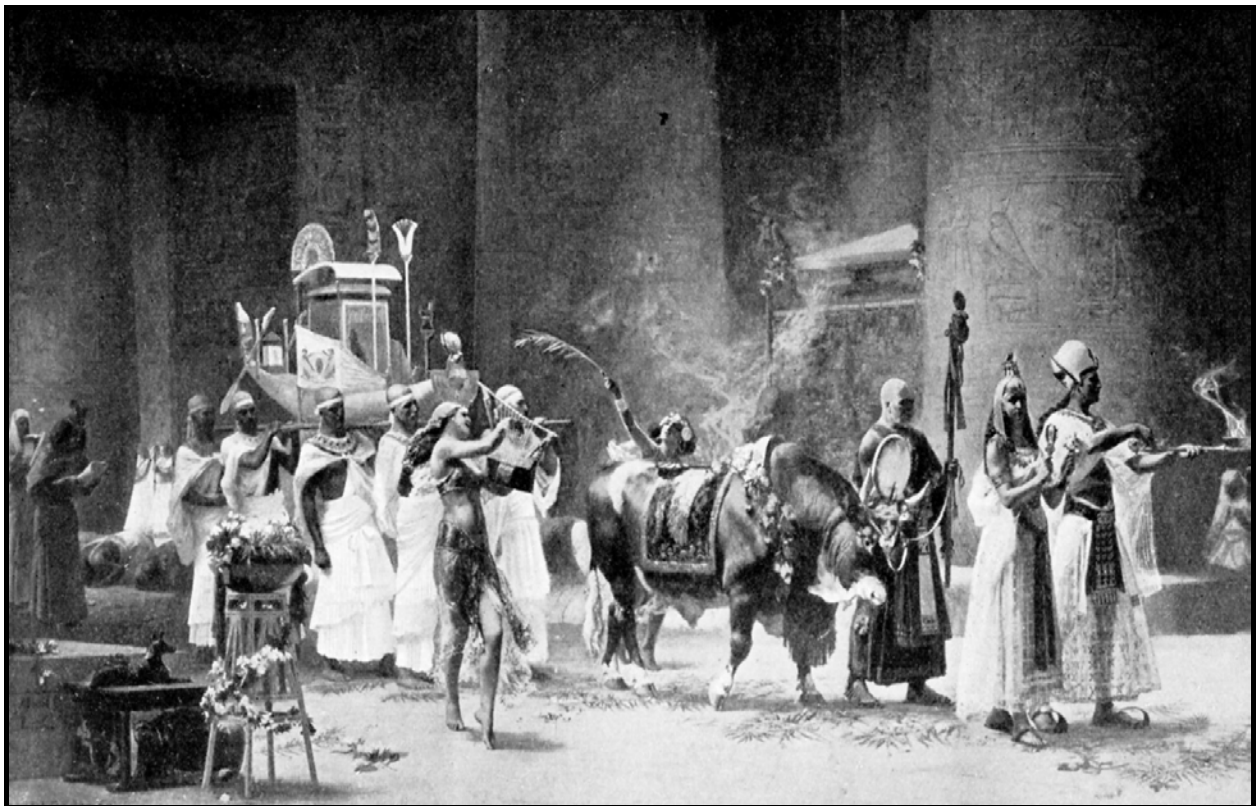
“But Moses said, ‘That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer to the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We must take a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God as He commands us.’” Moses’ reply signals that he too understood the art of negotiation, perhaps a skill learned during his boyhood education in the household of Pharaoh. Rather than an outright rejection of Pharaoh’s



“Tomb Mural of the Ram Headed Figure of Amun-Re Striking Down the Chaos Serpent”

compromise, Moses offered the equally reasonable observation that a journey outside of the country was necessary because the Israelite manner of worship would be abhorrent to the Egyptians since it involved the slaughter of animals which they considered to be sacred to their gods. Their response to such blasphemous sacrifices could well result in widespread violence between the Egyptians and the Israelites. The 1st Century Roman historian Tacitus noted the tension between the religious practices of the Jews and all other nations, particularly the Egyptians:

“Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions. The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred, on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor. They dedicated, in a shrine a statue to that creature whose guidance enabled them to put an end to their wandering and thirst, sacrificing a ram, apparently in derision of Amun. They likewise offer the ox, because the Egyptians worship Apis.” (Larsson, p. 64)



“Pharaoh and His Queen Leading the Annual Procession of the Sacred Apis Bull”

The Hebrew word which Moses uses to describe the Egyptian re-action to Israelite sacrifices (“to abat”) is most emphatic. It refers to that which is hateful or intolerable, and abomination. The same term occurred earlier in Genesis to describe the Egyptian aversion to the occupation of herdsmen (Genesis 46:34). For the Israelites to butcher animals which the Egyptians regarded as the personification of their various deities would have been considered as the most vile blasphemy.

In any case, the basic issue for Moses and the Israelites is not the feasibility of the location or the potential for problems with the local population but the command of the Lord. Their actions must comply with that which the Lord had instructed them. Moses reminded Pharaoh of this fundamental reality in his closing comment - ***“We must take a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as He commands us.”***



***“The Goddess Isis Before Kephri the Insect God”
by Evelyn Paul***

“Pharaoh said, ‘I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the desert, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me.’” - Pharaoh tacitly conceded the validity of Moses’ point about the real possibility of riots and violence if the sacrifices had been conducted within Egypt by abandoning that stipulation. His next proposal was to allow them to journey outside of the country ***“in the desert.”*** But once more, he sought to maintain the illusion of control with the deliberately vague condition that ***“you must not go very far.”*** His additional request - ***“Now pray for me.”*** - is much more indicative of the true state of affairs. Pharaoh was desperate to escape the massive swarms of flies that have enveloped him and his nation. He did not dare to approach the God of Moses directly. Nonetheless, the overwhelming



“Great Pharaoh Destroying the Enemies of Egypt” by Evelyn Paul

nature of the plague and the distinction between Egypt and Goshen made it unmistakably clear that these events had been accomplished by the power of Israel’s God. That God alone had initiated them and He alone could put a stop to them. And so the fearfully afflicted monarch was left with no alternative. No matter how humiliating it was, he had to beg Moses to pray to God on his behalf.

“Moses answered, ‘As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the Lord, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.’” - Moses ignored the king’s stipulation that the people *“must not go very far”* and accepted his permission to go out into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord. The prophet’s response, however, focused on the most

significant part of Pharaoh’s response, that is, his plea for prayer. With the absolute confidence of a divine spokesman who had no doubt whatsoever in God’s power or His willingness to respond to the prayer of His prophet, Moses agreed to pray for Pharaoh and stipulated in advance precisely when the plague of flies would end - *“I will pray to the Lord, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people.”* This serene assurance presented a striking contrast to the helpless inability of the priest/magicians of Egypt. At the same time, Moses added a stern word of warning which must also have galled the pride of the king - *“Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the Lord.”* Moses addressed the issue in the third person, thus not addressing the king directly as he had been up to this point. In this way he wisely avoided a personal attack on the ruler and gave even greater emphasis to the point which had to be made. The verb which he used - *“does not act deceitfully again”* -

refers to a willful and deliberate act of falsehood. *“Pharaoh has been acting the part of the conniver, the schemer, the liar. Moses sees through the false swearing and misrepresentations and he does not countenance such activity.”* (Currid, p. 189) Moses wanted to remind the king that this was not merely another political negotiation in which lying and falsehood were normal and accepted procedure. Pharaoh had to recognize that he was dealing with the holy God Himself and continued dishonesty here would come at a high price both to him and to his people.

“Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord, and the Lord did what Moses asked: the flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people; not a fly remained. But this time also, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.” -

God honored the agreement made by His representative. Everything happened exactly as Moses had said that it would. The flies were gone immediately and completely. The flies did not die, nor did they gradually disappear. They were simply gone, in an instant, by the power of God. *“Not only God’s production of the plagues is miraculous, but their removal as well.”* (Currid, p. 189) This latest miracle should have served to reinforce the warning which Moses had issued to the king, but evidently it did not - ***“But this time***

also, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.”

Once again, as soon as the crisis had subsided, Pharaoh broke his commitment and refused to release the Israelites. The text stresses the fact that this was the king’s own choice, freely made - ***“Pharaoh hardened his heart.”*** Thus, the stage was set again for the acceleration of the cycle of judgement and destruction by which the Lord would vindicate His righteousness through the obstinate pride of Egypt and her king.



“Tomb Painting of ‘Maat’ - The Egyptian Goddess of Truth and Justice”



“The Plague on the Livestock: - 19th Century Bible Illustration by Gustav Dore

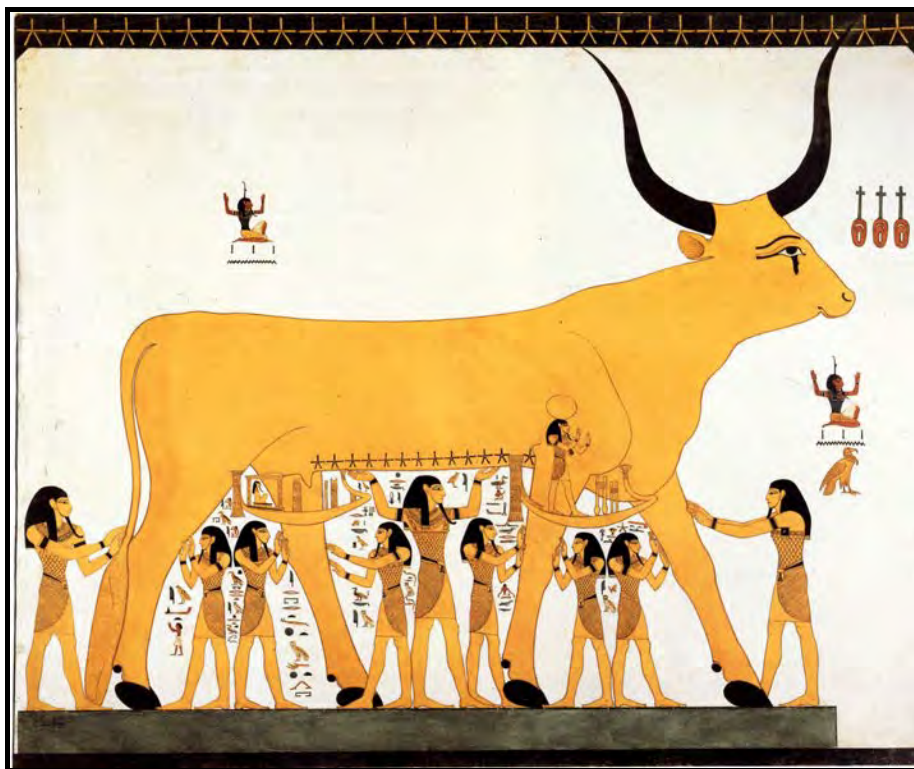
The Plague on Livestock

Exodus 9: 1-7

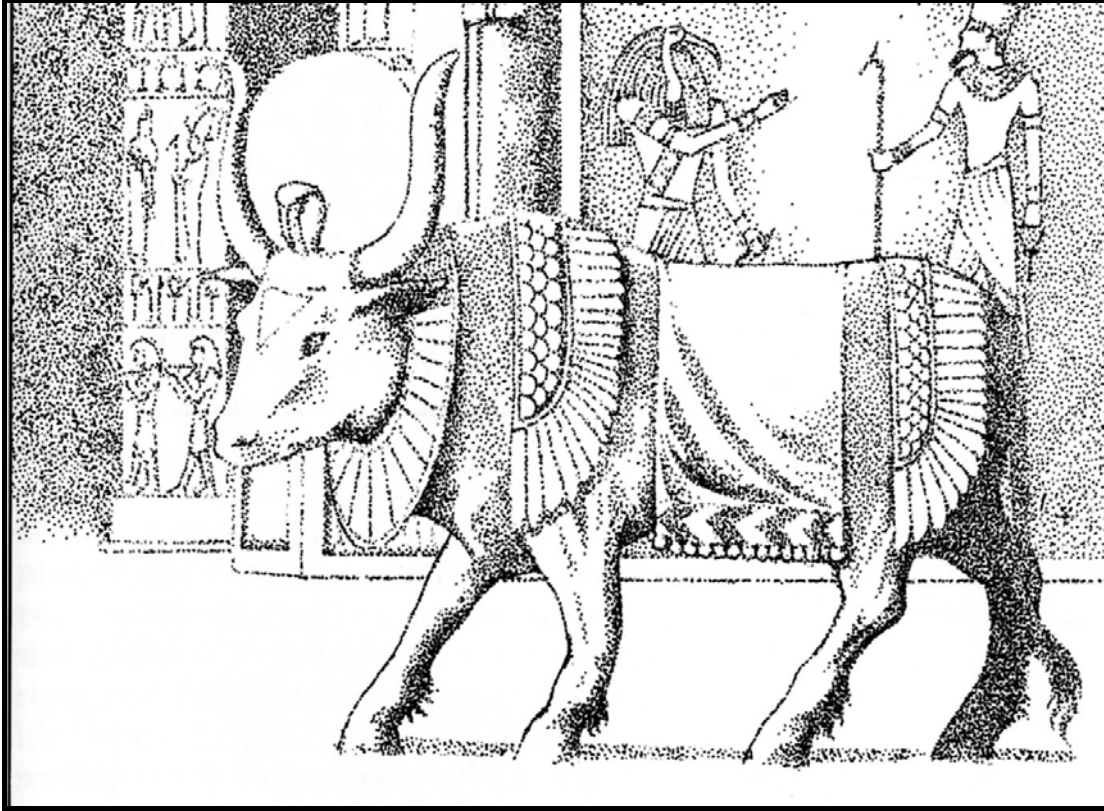
Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says: ‘Let My people go, so that they may worship Me.’ If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back, the hand of the Lord will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field - on your horses and donkeys and camels, and on your cattle and sheep and goats. . But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die.” The Lord set a time and said, “Tomorrow the Lord will do this in the land.” And the next day the Lord did it: all the livestock of the Egyptians died; but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. Pharaoh sent out men to investigate and found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died. Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says...’ - As previously noted (cf. Notes p. 260), the method of the plagues follows a clear pattern which groups them into three clusters of three followed by the culminating judgement of the tenth plague. This fifth plague is the number two in the second triad. Like its predecessor, the plague of frogs (Exodus 8:1-15), it is initiated by a confrontation in the palace of Pharaoh. God sent Moses and Aaron directly to the king - “Go to Pharaoh and say to him...”. The substance of the message remains unchanged - “This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says: ‘Let My people go so that they may worship Me.’” Once again, the Lord’s demand is followed by the warning that there will be most severe consequences if the king fails to comply. In this instance, the threatened plague is a deadly pestilence which will fall upon all of the livestock of Egypt. It is most appropriate logically that this plague should come immediately after the allusion to the allusion to the Egyptians profound reverence for the animals sacred to the cults of their various gods and goddesses. “Allusion to the importance of sacred animals in Egyptian religion is now followed by a visitation that exposes the inherent absurdity of such a notion.” (Sarna, p. 44)

The priest/magicians of Pharaoh had been compelled to acknowledge that the plagues



“Tomb Mural of the Sky Goddess Nut in the Form of a Sacred Cow”



“The Apis Bull Showing Stylized Vulture’s Wings and Blanket on the Bull’s Back and the Sun Disk and Uraeus Between Its Horns” by Clive Barrett

were ***“the finger of God.”*** (Exodus 8:15) Now the Lord threatened that if Pharaoh did not release His people Egypt would experience the full might of ***“the hand of the Lord.”*** The wording of the text suggests the correlation between the offense and the punishment. Pharaoh held the Hebrew slaves in his hand. If he continued to refuse to open his hand and release them - ***“if you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back”*** - ***“you will be punished, measure for measure, and the hand of the Lord will take hold of all that belongs to you.”*** (Cassutto, p. 110) All of the ***“livestock,”*** that is, all of the domesticated animals of Egypt were threatened with destruction: ***“will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field - on your horses and donkeys and camels, and on your cattle and sheep and goats.”***

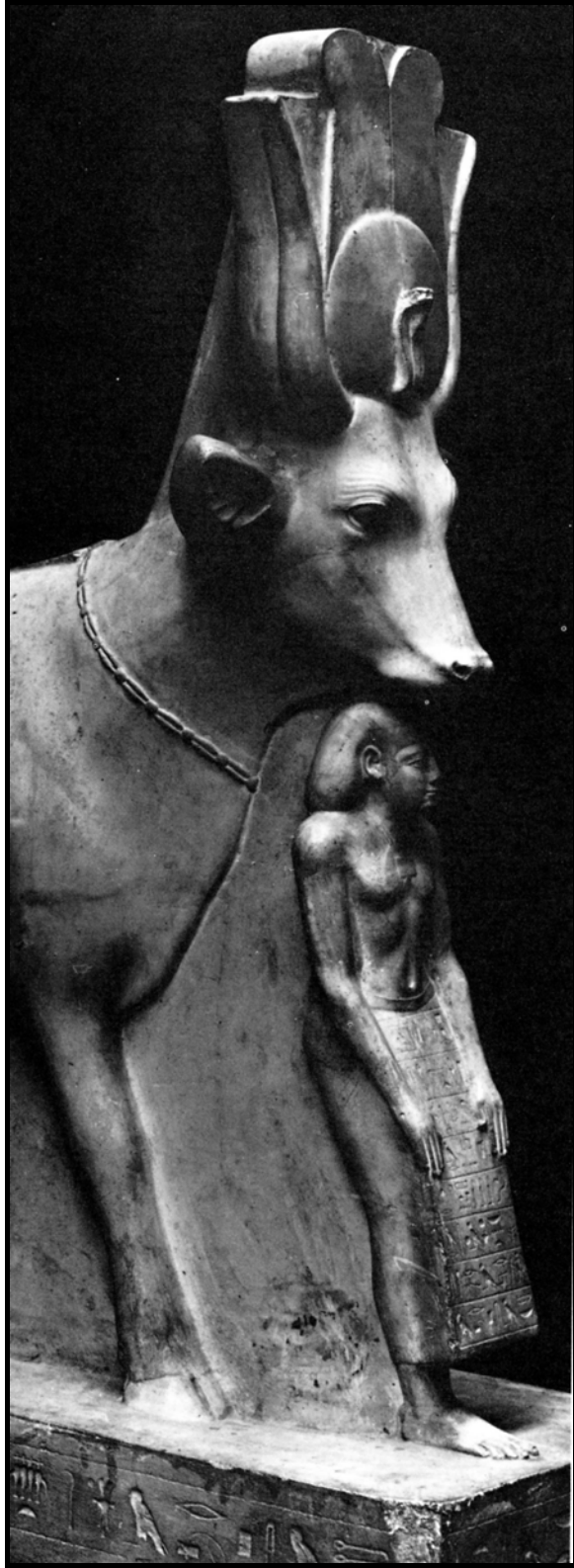
A plague directed at the livestock of Egypt would have effected a significant number of sacred animals with the pantheon of the nation, most notably bulls and heifers. Richard Wilkerson summarized the prominent role of cattle related deities in the mythology of ancient Egypt in this way:

“Egypt’s bovine deities were among the most important of all her gods. They represented both male and female deities, some of which existed from the earliest periods of Egyptian history. Generally speaking, female bovine deities represented the powers of creation and fecundity, and a number of mother and sky goddesses were depicted in bovine form. Male bovine deities could have cosmic associations, but generally represented the power and sexual potency embodied by the bull and were strongly tied to aspects of kingship and monarchial ideology.”
(Wilkerson, p. 170)

“*Apis*” was the most important of all the bull deities of Egypt. He was perceived to be the earthly manifestation of the solar god Ptah. A huge black bull was carefully maintained at the magnificent temple of Apis just south of the great city of Memphis. The bull was provided with a harem of cows and upon his death a successor with identical markings was selected. The Apis cult was closely associated with the royal power and divine authority of Pharaoh. Accordingly, the Apis Bull was typically depicted with the wings of the vulture and the uraeus of the rearing cobra, the



“Limestone Relief of Amun-Re in the Form of a Ram



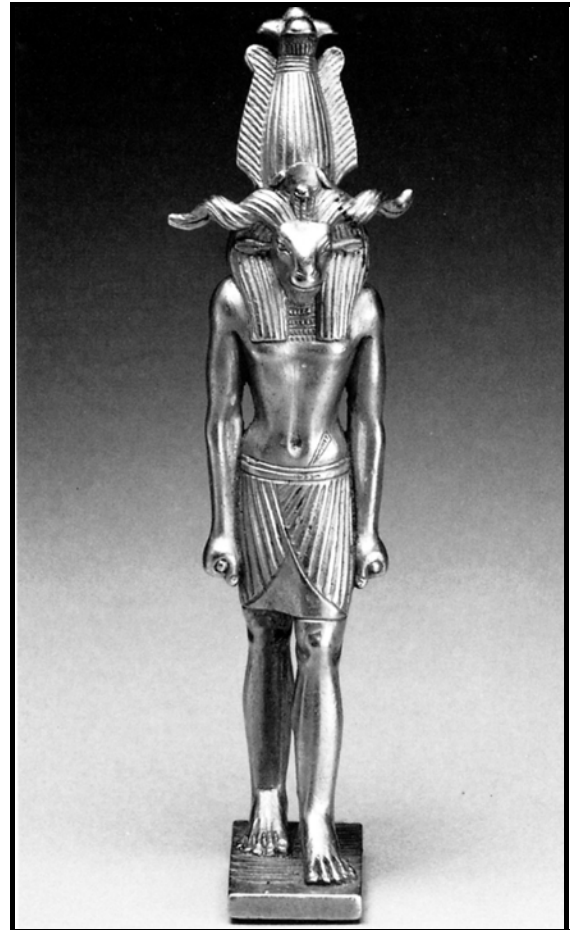
“Hathor as the Guardian of Pharaoh”

symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt which also adorned the royal crown. The Greek historian Herodotus observed that in the normal course of events the death of the Apis bull was cause for greater mourning throughout the land than the death of a king. In this instance, the death of this most revered animal along with all of the other livestock as the result of a plague imposed upon Egypt by the God of Israel would no doubt have been recognized as an assault upon the very foundation of Egyptian society.

Hathor, the mother of Horus, and goddess of the moon, female sexuality and motherhood, was another of the most popular bovine deities of Egypt. Hathor was characteristically depicted either as a cow or as a beautiful woman with the horns of cow. Hathor also protected the king, acting as the royal nurse, symbolically suckling the monarch even as an adult. Statues of Hathor in her bovine form with the figure of Pharaoh standing beneath the shelter of her chin have been discovered throughout Egypt. *“A particularly important aspect of Hathor’s maternal nature is the role she played as the mother of the king, which was often expressed by means of her identity as the nurturing bovine goddess...The Egyptian king was called the ‘Son of Hathor’ perhaps both in this sense and in the sense that Hathor was the mother of the falcon God Horus whose incarnation the reigning king was.”* (Wilkinson, p. 141) The fifth plague was a direct attack on this crucial component

“Sheep and goats” were specifically mentioned as animals threatened by the plague upon the livestock. This was most probably because rams were also frequently associated with important members of the Egyptian family of gods. Like the bull, the ram was viewed as a symbol of potency and power.

“Various fertility gods appeared in the form of rams or had rams as their symbolic animal. The Ba of Osiris was believed to exist within the body of the sacred ram named Banaded, also known as the Ram of Mendes. Later it was replaced by a goat which was referred to by the Greek historian Herodotus. When this animal died there was great mourning, but likewise extensive celebrations followed the priest’s discovery of the new Banaded. Sacred rams were also worshiped at Elephantine and Esna as the god Khnum, and Amun was worshiped in the form of a ram as well.” (Barrett, p. 148)



“Heryshef, a Ram God - Personification of the Spirit of Osiris - the Lord of the Underworld

The Temple of Banebdjet, the sacred Ram, was maintained in the city of Mendes in a manner similar to that of the Apis Bull at Memphis. The Greek Poet Pindar reported *“that the ram was scandalously allowed to have intercourse with women as part of its veneration.”* (Wilkinson, p. 193) The Processional Way at the massive Temple of Re in Karnak was lined with two rows of ram headed sphinxes in honor of Amun-Re, the god of the Sun. As both the sacred animals within the temples and the herds throughout the country perished before the onslaught of this ***“terrible plague on your livestock”*** brought about by the power of the God of Israel, the helpless impotence of the false gods of Egypt would have been most clearly revealed.

The reference to ***“camels”*** in the list of ***“livestock”*** which would be impacted by the plague (and in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis: i.e. Genesis 12:16; 24:10-



“The Ram Sphinxes at Karnack”

11,14;19-20,22, 30-32,44-4661-63) has elicited considerable discussion among Bible scholars. Secular manuscripts - in both Egypt and Mesopotamia - do not begin to refer to camels until significantly later in history. Bible critics had confidently assumed that this was one more evidence of the unreliability of the Biblical texts which, in their view, were nothing more than patchwork composite documents actually composed long after the historical events they purported to describe. More recent documentary and physical evidence, however, has demonstrated that the use of camels was widespread throughout Egypt and the Middle East during this period. *“In light of all this, mention of the camel in Exodus and Genesis can be taken at face value.”* (Sarna, p. 44) For those of us who view the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, this came as no surprise. We had always taken the text at face value, with or without corroboration from secular history.

“But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of

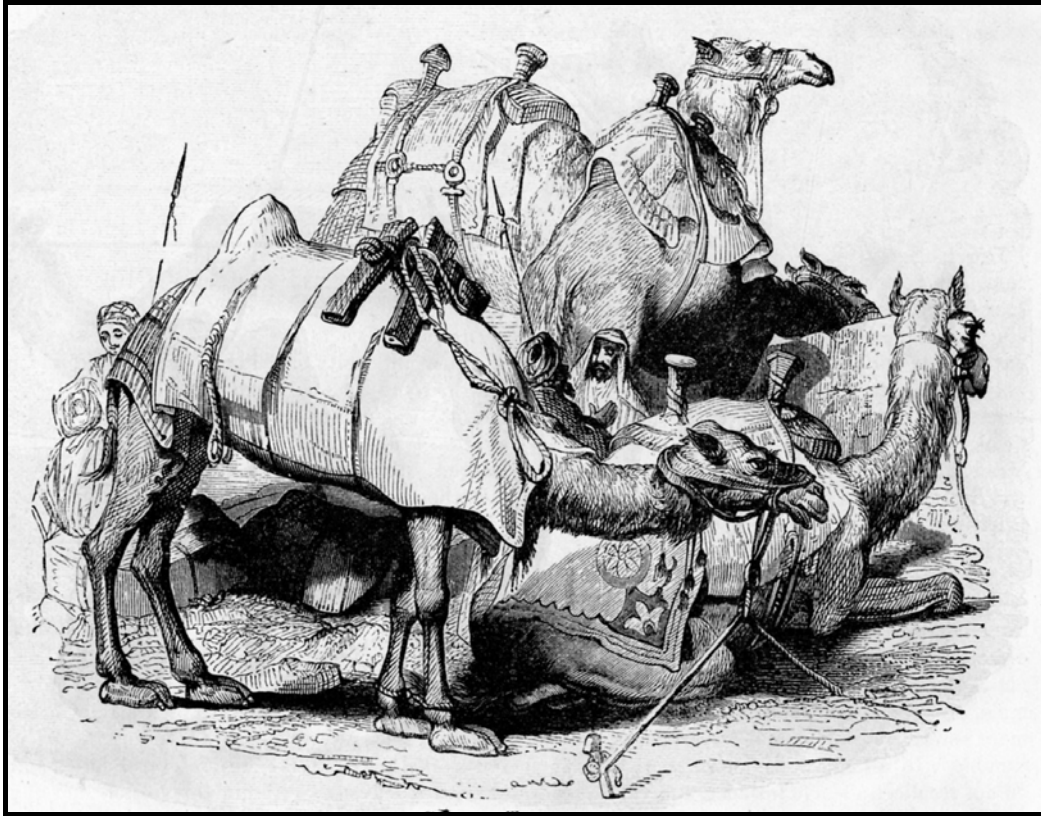
Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die. The Lord set a time and said, ‘Tomorrow the Lord will do this in the land.’” - In the fourth plague God had reinforced the message of His divine power by protecting His own within the land of Goshen while He afflicted the rest of the land of Egypt. That would be the case again as He struck down Egypt’s livestock. While domesticated animals throughout the country were dying in the fifth plague, the flocks and herds of Israel would remain untouched. Once again, the distinction - *“The Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt”* - would serve to identify the source of the miracle and the message that the Children of Israel were to be released from their bondage forthwith. The Hebrew text stresses the miraculous nature of God’s deliverance through the unusual word order of the phrase - literally - *“And it will not die from all the sons of Israel a thing.”* The atypical placement of the word *“dabar”* (*“a thing”*) at the end of the sentence gives it unique prominence. At the same time it provides stark contrast between *“dabar,”* the flourishing flocks of Israel and *“deber”* (*“a plague”*) which was destroying the flocks and herds of Egypt. The source and power of the miracle is further emphasized as God again stipulated in advance the precise time when the plague would occur - *“The Lord set a time and said, ‘Tomorrow the Lord will do this in the land.’”*

“And the next day the Lord did it. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. Pharaoh sent men to investigate and found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died. Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.” - The



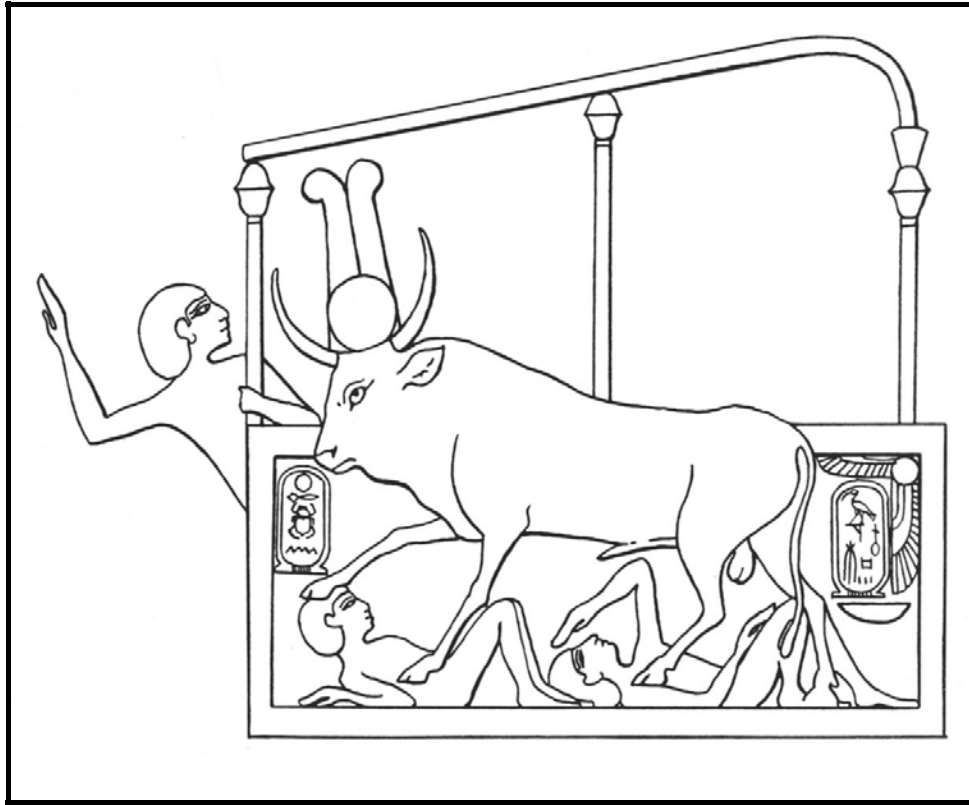
“Hathor, the Mother Goddess With the Horns of a Cow, as the Protectress of Pharaoh and his Queen”

pattern has by this point already become repetitive and deliberately so. Any reasonable man would already have come to recognize that the Word of God is always, exactly fulfilled. Pharaoh's continued resistance to the repeatedly demonstrated power of God was irrational and that is the point of text's repetition - ***“And the next day the Lord did it.”***



“Tethered Camels” 19th Century Engraving

“All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died.” - The plague came down upon the animals of Egypt as God had foretold and they perished in vast numbers. Keil/Delitsch correctly observes: *“In the words ‘all the cattle of the Egyptians died’ is not to be taken in an absolute sense, but according to the popular usage, as denoting such a quantity, that what remained was nothing in comparison.”* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 373) This is further indicated by the subsequent references to the surviving livestock (cf. Exodus 9:19; 10:25; 11:5; 12:12,29). However, while the flocks and herds of Egypt were devastated, the livestock of Goshen was not only spared the impact of the plague, but even protected from the normal attrition which would have occurred during this period - ***“but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died.”***



Palace Relief of Pharaoh in the Form of the Apis Bull Trampling the Enemies of the Realm

“Pharaoh sent men to investigate and found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died. Yet, his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.” - The profound significance of the distinction between the animals of Egypt and those in Goshen was indicated by the fact that Pharaoh actually sent out investigators to verify that what Moses had foretold had taken place. But despite the fact ***“that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died”*** he remained adamant in his refusal - ***“His heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.”*** The fifth plague was the most unmistakably direct attack thus far upon the leading God’s of Egypt, those divine beings who were relied upon to guarantee safety and well-being of the realm. The personifications of Apis, Hathor, and mighty Re himself had been struck down, but still he would not yield. Phillip Ryken offers this graphic description of the impact of the plague upon the religious consciousness of the Egyptian people:

“Since livestock were such an integral part of their religion, the Egyptians were devastated by God’s plague upon their livestock. Cattle lay dying on every farm and at every temple. Farmers anxiously

watched their cattle get sick and grow weak. To their shame, priests saw their holy cows stagger around their sacred pens until they fell down dead. God was proving Himself to the Egyptians on their own terms, exposing the cult of the cow as a false religion. Thus the fifth plague followed the pattern: When Pharaoh refused to meet God's demand, God sent a miraculous plague that demonstrated His power over Egypt's gods." (Ryken, p. 263)



“Amun-Re, the Royal Ram, Safeguarding the Land of Egypt” - Papyrus Drawing

A Middle Kingdom Papyrus drawing of Amun-Re, the Sun God and Father of all the gods of Egypt, in the form of a ram, effectively illustrates the significance of these animals in the Egyptian world view. Re is depicted as a great ram with massive curling horns upon which are the three crowns of royal power and the rearing uraeus of the pharaoh. The ram is striding confidently forward under the shelter of the wings of god Wadjet, the Cobra/Vulture which combined the symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt and threatened to strike down all of the enemies of the realm. The figure of Mayet, the spirit of world order and things as the gods designed them to be is seated in front of the ram, holding in its hands the Ankh, the emblem of life. The serene confidence of Egypt was founded upon the guarantee that their sacred nation would last forever because of the blessing and protection of their mighty gods.

The plagues revealed that confidence to be nothing more than an illusion.



“The Plague of Boils” by Ted Larson

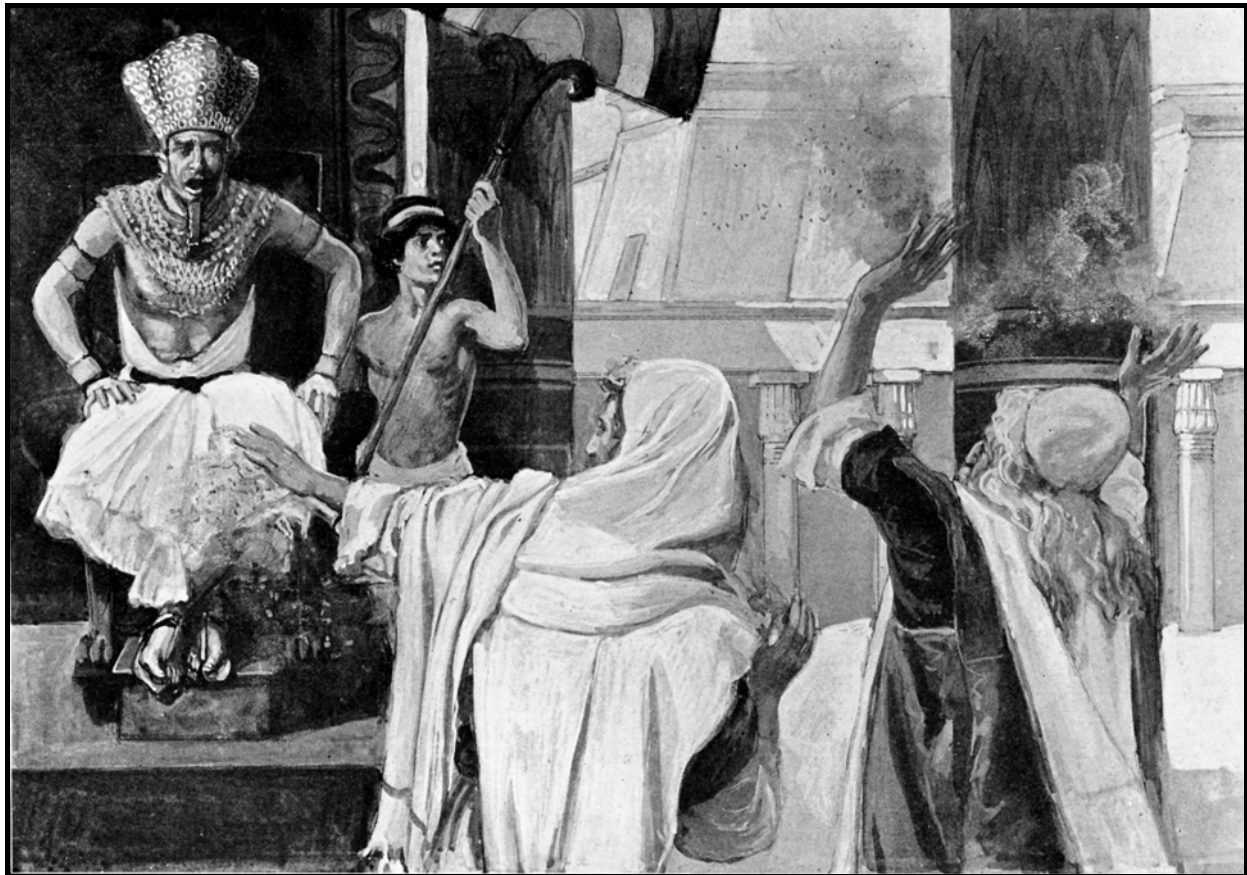
The Plague of Boils

Exodus 9:8-12

Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land.” So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air and festering boils broke out on men and animals. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and all the Egyptians. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said to Moses.

“Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron...” - Like the plague of gnats, its counterpart in the preceding triad, the sixth plague comes without warning. Moses

and Aaron were instructed to *“Take handfuls of soot from a furnace.”* Although the Hebrew does not specifically identify the type of furnace, most commentators assume that the furnace in question was one of the kilns used by the Hebrew slaves to fire the bricks which they were forced to prepare for Pharaoh’s building projects. The soot from such a brick kiln would certainly have been a most appropriate agent through which to inflict the plague of boils upon the people of Egypt. *“Hence, it was in accord with poetic justice that the soot which had been created, as it were, by the sweat of the enslaved people should inflict punishment on the bodies of the enslavers.”*



“The Plague of Boils” by J. James Tissot

(Cassutto, p. 113) Keil/Delitsch notes the consistent pattern thus far among the plagues, using that which had been a source of blessing to the Egyptians, and was accordingly worshiped by them, as the natural agent which God inflicted His plagues upon them.

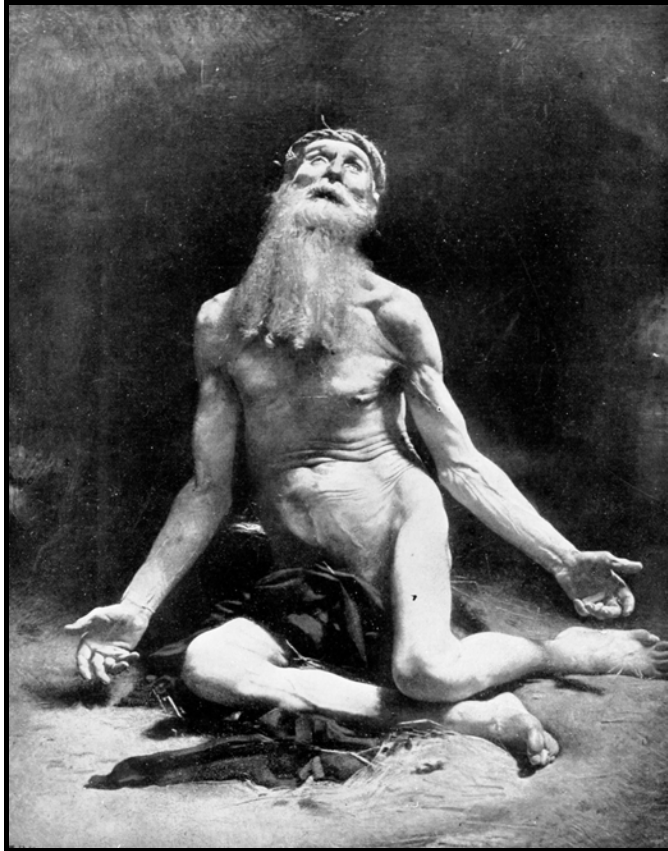
“The ashes or soot of the smelting furnace or lime kiln bore, no doubt,

the same relation to the plague arising therefrom, as the waters of the Nile and the dust of the ground to the three plagues which proceeded from them. As Pharaoh and his people owed their prosperity, wealth, and abundance of earthly goods to the fertilizing waters of the Nile and the fruitful soil, so it was from the lime kilns, so to speak, that those splendid cities and pyramids proceeded, by which the early Pharaohs endeavored to immortalize the power and glory of their reigns. And whilst in the first three plagues the natural sources of the land were changed by Jehovah through His servants Moses and Aaron, into sources of evil, the sixth plague proved to the proud king that Jehovah also possessed the power to bring ruin upon him from the workshops of those splendid edifices, for the erection of which he had made use of the strength of the Israelites, and oppressed them so grievously with burdensome toil.” (Keil/Delitsch, p. 374)

The soot from the furnace was to be taken into the presence of the king and hurled upward into the air so that the source of the ensuing plague of boils might be clear to all - ***“have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh.”*** Both Moses and



“The Plague of Boils” by J. Steeple Davis



“The Suffering of Job” by Leon Bonnat

people of Egypt themselves.

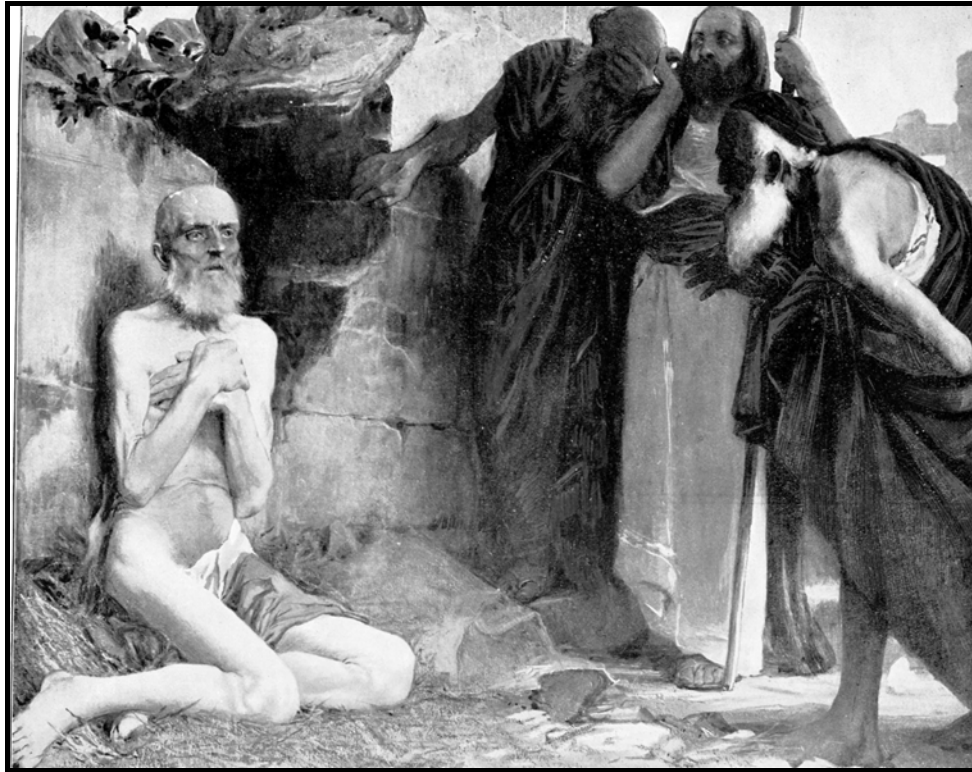
“Things were starting to get personal. The first five plagues had been a real bother. The Egyptians had seen rivers of blood and had lost herds of livestock. Pharaoh himself had seen frogs jump in and out of his bed and had tried to shoo flies away from his royal person. But nothing drove them all crazy like this plague. The Egyptians were covered with painful open sores from head to toe. This showed that the God of Israel had power over their bodies, and it should have warned them that their very lives were in danger.” (Ryken, p. 271)

The precise nature of the affliction has been the subject of ongoing debate. Some have argued to terminal diseases like leprosy or small pox while others have contended that since the text does not refer to widespread loss of life, something less lethal must have been intended. The Hebrew noun “*shechin*” (“*fester*ing”) occurs twelve times in the Old Testament in reference to a variety of painful skin ailments.

Aaron had been instructed to take up two handfuls of ashes, perhaps in order to arrive at a total of four - signifying the four points of the compass and the spread of the contamination throughout the entire country. But only Moses is to toss the ashes which had been gathered into the air before the king.

“It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land.” -

Moses was commanded to cast the soot up into the air before the king at which time it would become “*fine dust*” and spread across the land - “*over the whole land of Egypt.*” The sixth plague represents an intensification of the plagues in that this is the first to directly impact the



“Job and His Friends” by Lavergne

The word is derived from a stem which means “*to burn*” or “*to be hot,*” thus reinforcing the appropriateness of ashes as the agent of contamination. The term stresses the burning irritation and itch caused by the infection. Deuteronomy 28:27 used the same language to describe the unique virulence of this affliction. God threatened Israel: “*The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured.*” The word also occurs in Job 2:7-8 to describe the misery of the patriarch:

“So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.”

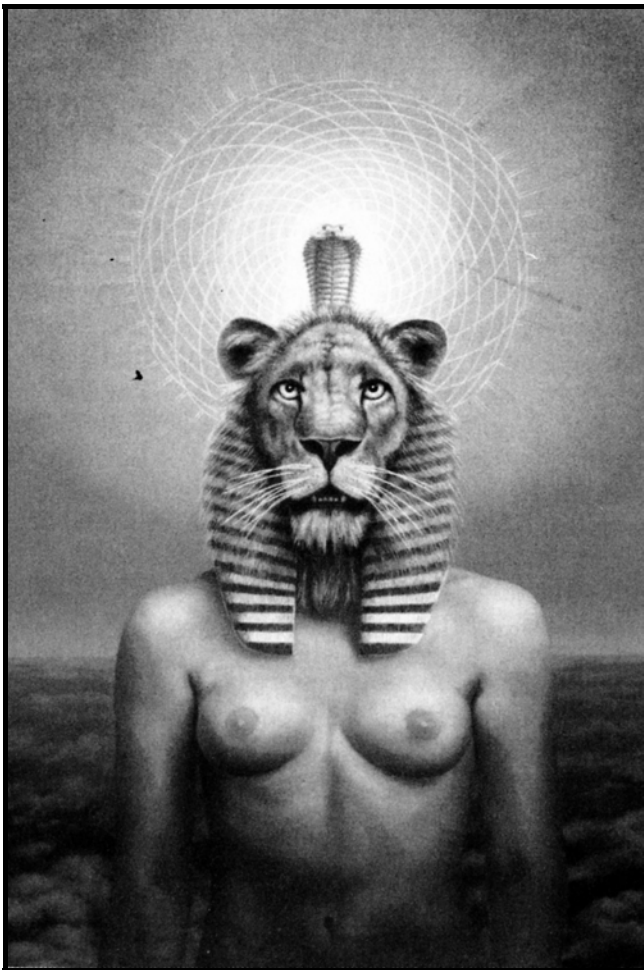
In Leviticus 13, the same terminology has traditionally been understood as a reference to leprosy (cf. 2 Kings 20:1-7). The text adds the gruesome phrase “*boils will break out*” (literally “*bulges blossoming*”) drawn from a root which means “*to bubble up*” or “*to bulge.*” It would appear that in this instance the people of Egypt were afflicted with a particularly virulent form of skin anthrax which infected both men and animals.

The symptoms of this disease were excruciating pain and a debilitating deterioration of the skin's surface which made movement difficult if not impossible. Dr. Greta Hort describes the symptoms of the painful malady in this way:

“It takes the form first of a big swelling of the affected part of the skin; after two or three days there appears a small blueish red with a central depression in the middle of the swelling; this depression dries up and new boils shoot up; the tissue then swells into blains as if burnt, and finally peels off.” (Ryken, p. 270)

“So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air and festering boils broke out on men and animals.” - As in each preceding instance, God's prophets follow His instructions meticulously and the ensuing events

precisely reflect that which God had foretold. In order to reinforce that point, the language of Verse 10 simply reiterates that of Verse 9.



“The Goddess Sekhmet Beneath the Sun Disk and the Uraeas by Diane Vandenberg

The Sixth Plague was directed at the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet, the mighty lioness who was at the same time the goddess of pestilence and war and the patron of medicine and healing. The joining of such apparent opposites was typical of Egyptian religion. Dr. Richard Wilkerson explains the strange combination in this way: *“Sekhmet was the most important of Egypt's leonine deities. As with many Egyptian goddesses, she had two distinct aspects to her personality - on the one hand a dangerous and destructive aspect, and on the other a protective and healing aspect.”* (Wilkerson, p. 181) Sekhmet was the daughter of the Amun-Re and through her Amun-Re destroyed his enemies and all who dared to oppose him. Disease and plague were often called

referred to as the “messengers” or “slaughterers of Sekhmet”. Sekhmet was typically depicted as a beautiful woman with the head of a lioness, wearing a dress stained red with the blood of her foes. The goddess was recognized as the defender of Pharaoh, the deity who gave life to the king and roared into battle at his side. Pharaoh Amenhotep III erected 300 magnificent granite statues of Sekhmet within the temple complex at Karnak in appreciation for the victories which she had granted him. Sekhmet’s destructive power was derived from her father, the fiery Sun God Amun-Re. She was commonly called “Nesert” which means “Lady of the Flame.” Accordingly, the pestilence of the sixth plague which caused burning sores to break out all over the body would most certainly have been perceived by the people of Egypt as a direct affront to the power and dignity of Sekhmet.

However, at the same time, the goddess of war who used disease and death as her servants was also hailed as “Sekhmet, the Mistress of Life.”



“Granite Statue of Sekhmet”

“The goddess also had the power to ward off pestilence and she could function as a healing deity...The priests of Sekhmet...also appear to have played an important role in the magical aspects of medicine in later times, reciting prayers and spells over the sick along with the physical ministrations of the physicians. The formal rite of ‘Appeasing Sekhmet’ was also combined by her priests to combat epidemics.” (Wilkerson, p. 182)

In time, the priests of Sekhmet became the physicians of Egypt, especially for Pharaoh and his family within the royal court. In this sense, the inability of the goddess to protect her most favored son and his people would also have been seen as a disclosure



“A Golden Statuette of the Goddess Sekhmet with the Sun Disk of Amun-Re Over Her Head”

of the helplessness of Sekhmet, the goddess whose very name meant *“the Mightiest”* or *“She Who is Most Powerful.”*

“The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and all the Egyptians.” - The nature of this plague as a direct attack upon the goddess Sekhmet is emphasized by the reference to the plague’s impact upon the priest/magicians who were the representatives of the goddess. The fact that the burning boils which the God of Israel inflicted upon Egypt, had rendered these healers incapable of even standing before Pharaoh, much less exercising the alleged power of their gods to defend the kingdom from this plague, was a bitterly ironic demonstration of their helplessness. They laid in their great temples, helplessly bewailing the pain for which they had no antidote. This is the fifth and final time that these priests will be mentioned in the plague accounts. Pharaoh will not bother to call upon them again and they are dismissed to the utter irrelevance which they deserved.

“But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.” - With his goddess and his priesthood in abject disgrace, his people in torment, and his own body wracked with agonizing pain, Pharaoh still refused to yield. The self-reinforcing pattern of sin which had chosen had progressed beyond the point of no return.



“A Priest Within the Temple of Sekhmet/Hathor” - 19th Century Engraving



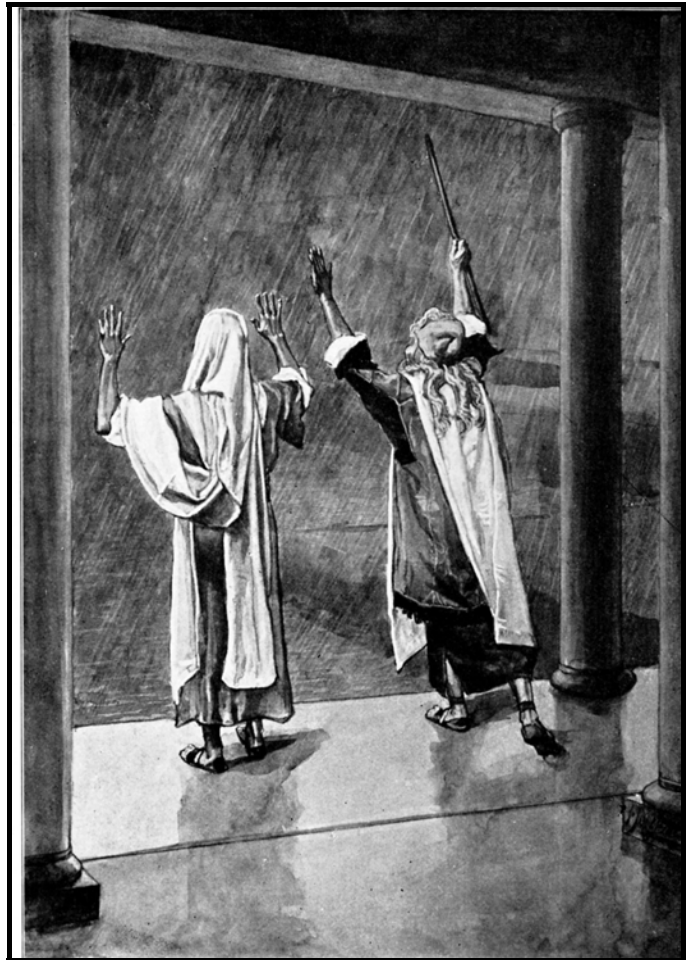
“The Plague of Hail” by J. M. W. Turner

The Plague of Hail

Exodus 9:13-35

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let My people go so that they may worship Me, or this time I will send the full force of My plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you My power and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth. You still set yourself against My people and will not let them go. Therefore, at this time tomorrow, I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now. Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.’” Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the

Lord hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. But those who ignored the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the field. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt - on men and animals and everything growing in the fields of Egypt." When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were. Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. "This time I have sinned," he said to them. "The Lord is in the right and I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to the Lord for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go. You don't have to stay any longer." Moses replied, "When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God." (The flax and barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom. The wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed because they ripen later.) Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the Lord; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: he and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had said through Moses.



"The Plague of Hail" by J. James Tissot



“The Plague of Hail” by Ted Larson

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Get up early in the morning...’” - The seventh plague marks the beginning of the third and final triad of plagues. As with both of its counterparts, the first and the fourth plagues, Moses was instructed to **“Get up early in the morning”** to announce the impending judgement to Pharaoh (cf. Exodus 7:15; 8:20). The special significance of this plague as a crucial turning point in the series of plagues is underscored by the extraordinary length of the warning given to Pharaoh and the more detailed description of the plague itself. *“The escalation in terror and ruin sets the stage for the climactic catastrophe.”* (Sarna, p. 45) The text most appropriately uses the phrase *“stand before Pharaoh”* (NIV- **“confront Pharaoh”**) to describe Moses’ appearance before the king. These are the same words which had been used in the preceding episode to report the priest/magicians inability to appear before their king - **“The magicians could not stand before Moses...”** (Exodus 9:11) *“The magicians could not stand before Moses, but Moses was able to stand with proud bearing before the king, and not merely to reiterate his demand in the Lord’s name...but to threaten him with even worse consequences than before.”* (Cassutto, p. 115)

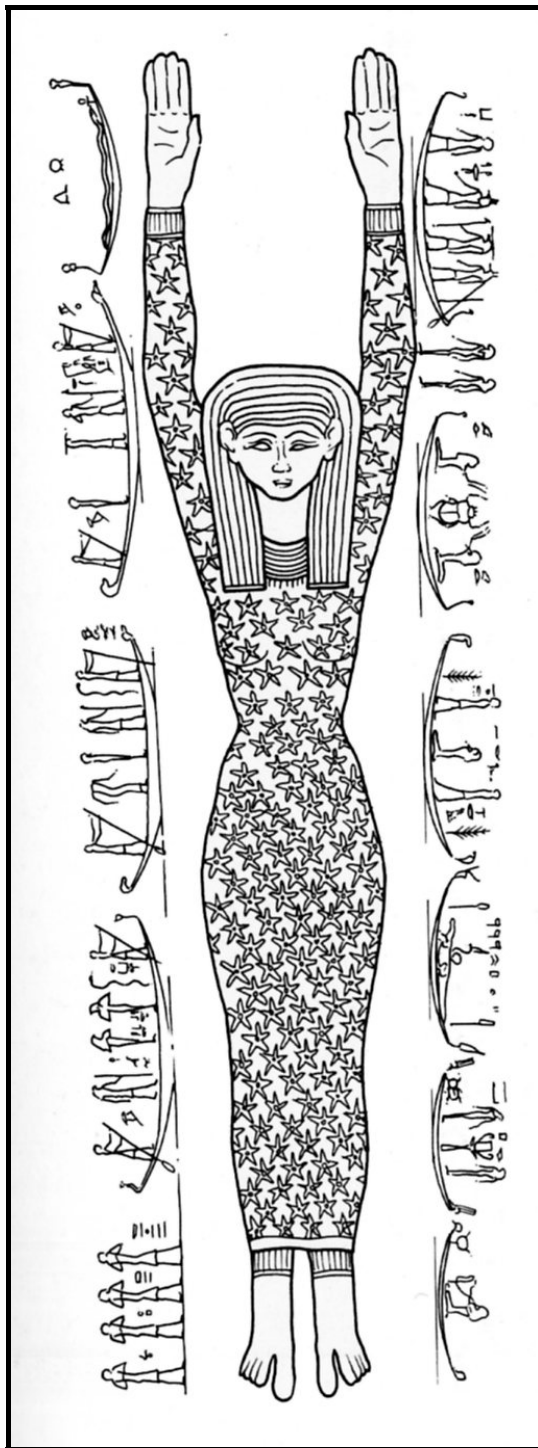
“This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says, ‘Let My people go, so that they may worship Me.’” - God’s demand is set before the king once again in simple straightforward language. The God of the covenant (*‘the Lord, the God of the Hebrews’*) is acting on behalf of His own covenant people (*“My people”*).

“Or this time I will send the full force of My plagues against you and against your officials and against your people...” - The text places particular emphasis upon the unique severity of this plague. The Hebrew word which introduces the phrase is an emphatic adverb which literally means *“indeed.”* It indicates the absolute certainty of the declaration which follows. As Pharaoh should have learned by now, there is no possibility that God’s warnings will not come true. The verb which God uses to describe His imposition of the plague - *“I will send”* - is the same verb which had been used in the preceding phrase in which God had demanded *“Let My people go”* -



*“The Plague of Hail” - 17th Century Luther Bible Engraving
“The hail from on high, must those who would not heed the advice,
And remained out in the fields, strike down to the earth and the ground.”
Woe to those to whom the Word and Warning of God are a fable.
Those who do not accept that counsel cannot be helped!”*

literally, “*send out My people.*” Because Pharaoh refused to “*send out*” the Hebrews, God will “*send out*” these plagues upon the entire nation of Egypt. The



*“Nut - The Goddess of the Sky -
Outstretched Over the Lid of a Royal
Casket”*

comprehensive impact of the plagues is stressed by the threefold repetition - “*against you and against your officials and against your people.*” This was certainly an individual confrontation between God and Pharaoh. The text literally says “*I will send all My plagues upon your heart.*” However, as the ruler of Egypt, the consequences of his stubborn defiance did not only impact him, but reached out to include everyone who lived within his country, from the highest to the lowest. The word “*plagues*” which occurs in this phrase is derived from a Hebrew verb which means “*to strike*” or “*to smite.*” Each of the plagues, with steadily increasing intensity, was a devastating blow struck by God. The warning prior to the seventh plague reiterated the purpose of all of the plagues - “*so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.*” (cf. Exodus 6:7; 7:5,17) The language again recalls Pharaoh’s arrogant dismissal of Moses and Aaron the first time that they appeared before him: “*Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.*” (Exodus 5:2) At the same time the terminology suggests the futility of polytheism, the error that the divine could be subdivided into a host of different gods and goddesses. The plagues were designed to demonstrate and vindicate the unique authority and righteousness of the one true God before Egypt and all the nations of the earth. The impotence of all of the many gods and goddesses of Egypt was being unmistakably



“Jeweled Golden Breastplate from the Tomb of Tutankhamun Depicted Nut, the Sky Goddess as the Protectress of Pharaoh and the Land of Egypt”

demonstrated as in one plague after another the superiority of the one God was revealed in their respective areas of influence and authority. By the end of all the plagues the conclusion that there was, in fact, only one God and that all the deities of polytheism were false would be absolutely inescapable. *“The reason for the attack is stated. It is so that Pharaoh (and the Egyptians) might ‘know’ that Yahweh stands alone as the sovereign of the universe.”* (Currid, p. 201)

The Lord clearly forewarned Pharaoh that the scope and the intensity of the plagues was about to dramatically escalate - *“I will send the full force of My plagues.”* As devastating as the prior judgements had been, they would pale into insignificance in comparison to the judgements which were now impending over the land of Egypt. *“For by now I could have stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you My power and that My name might be*

proclaimed in all the earth.” - Pharaoh was reminded that his survival to date was not the result of any power or merit of his own but simply because of the forbearance of God as He pursued His own greater goals and purposes. God could have chosen to destroy the king and his people at any point in this process. He had the power to do so and would have been completely justified in doing so. It should have humbled the king to realize that he was nothing more than an object lesson in God’s demonstration of His unique power before humanity.

“This verse proves that God was the one who put Pharaoh on his throne and allowed him to stay there. He did this for the specific purpose of showing Pharaoh His power. But this was not simply for Pharaoh’s benefit. The plagues had global implications. God wanted to be worshiped around the world. And what better way to make that happen than to send the Egyptians plague after plague and by doing so to save His people?” (Ryken, p. 281)



“The Plague of Hail” by John Martin



“Papyrus Illustration of the Creation of the World as the Copulation of Geb the God of the Earth With Nut the Goddess of the Sky”

The didactic impact of the plagues was exactly what God intended it to be, both to the Israelites and to the heathen nations around them. To Israel, God’s judgements upon the Egyptians demonstrated the intensity of the Lord’s commitment to them and His ability to guard and protect them. Moses would later urge his people to always remember that: ***“We were slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders - great and terrible - upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household.”*** (Deuteronomy 6:21-22) In Psalm 78, Asaph, the Psalmist, recounted that which God has done for His people: ***“They did not remember His power - the day He redeemed them from the oppressor, the day He displayed His miraculous signs in Egypt, His wonders in the region of Zoan...He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamore figs with sleet.”*** (Psalm 78: 42-43, 45) The Song of Moses celebrated the effect that these miracles would have upon the enemies of Israel:

***“The nations will hear and tremble;
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.
The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,
the people of Canaan will melt away;
terror and dread will fall upon them.
By the power of Your arm they will be as still as stone -
until Your people pass by, O Lord, until the people You bought pass by.”***
(Exodus 15:14-16)

Subsequent events would prove that to be the case. The Gibeonites, desperately sought to avoid war with Israel for fear of the power of Israel's God, explaining: ***"We have heard reports of Him; all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan - Sihon, the king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtraoth."*** (Joshua 9:9) Generations later, in the days of Samuel, the story of God's judgements upon Egypt still struck fear into the hearts of Israel's enemies. When the Israelite army carried the Ark into battle the Philistines lamented:



"The Loss of the Ark of the Covenant to the Philistines" by 17th Century Bible Engraving by Gerhardt Hoyt

"A God has come into the camp," they said. 'We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.'" (1 Samuel 4:7-8)

"You still set yourself up against My people and will not let them go. Therefore, at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded til now." - The Lord notes Pharaoh's stubborn arrogance with amazement. Despite all of the wonders which he had already seen, miracles which would surely have convinced and humbled any reasonable man - ***"You still set yourself up against My people and will not let them go."*** The Hebrew verb used to describe the action of Pharaoh means *"to exalt one's self"* or *"to assume a position higher than you are actually entitled to."* Pharaoh had pitted himself against God



“The Plague of Hail” - 19th Century German Bible Engraving

thereby exalting himself to the status of a god. *“This verb goes right to the heart of the matter. Pharaoh is playing the deity, he is exalting himself against the Holy One of Israel.”* (Currid, p. 203)

The Lord indicated in advance not only the nature of the plague - *“I will send the worst hail storm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded til now”* - but also the specific time at which it would begin - *“at this time tomorrow.”* These warnings not only certified that God was Himself the source of these miraculous events but also provided the Egyptians with the opportunity to protect themselves and the livestock that had survived the earlier plague from the destruction which would be caused by the hailstorm. The Lord stressed the particularly severe nature of this storm. Hail was unusual in Egypt in any case but this would be no ordinary hail storm. These would be a storm the like of which had never been experienced in Egypt before. The phrase *“from the day it was founded until now”* is a characteristic



“The Sky Goddess Nut - Painted on the Inside of a Casket Lid as the Guardian of the World”

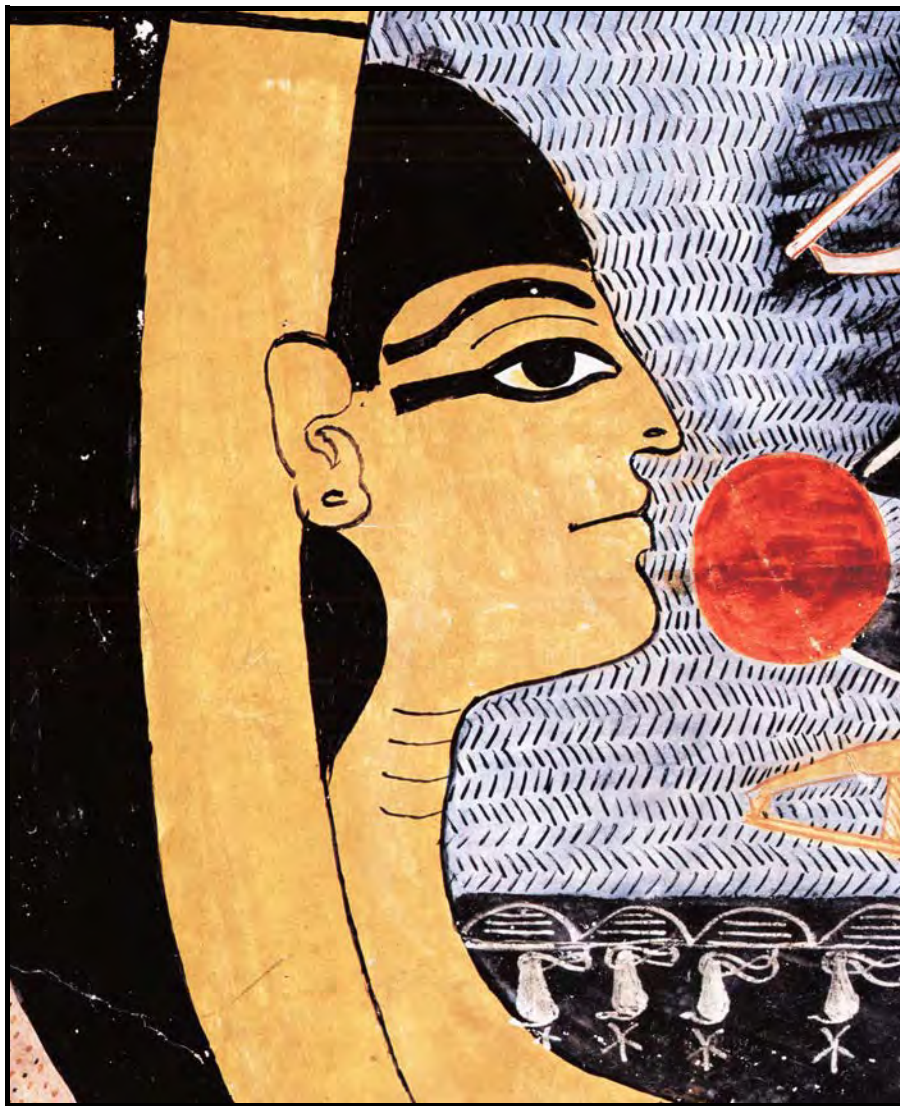
Egyptian expression. It served to point out both the antiquity of this ancient civilization and the uniqueness of the event.

“Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field and they will die.” - In a remarkable demonstration of divine forbearance, God specifically instructed Pharaoh to bring the livestock in from the fields and order his people to seek shelter for themselves so that they might be spared from the devastation and death which would be caused by the hail. The *“Mishnah”* observes:

“But God’s loving kindness is so great that even in His wrath He has mercy upon the wicked, and as His chief object was not to injure men and beasts, but to damage the vegetation in the fields of the Egyptians, He bade Moses to admonish Pharaoh to send and hasten in his cattle and all that he had in the field. But the warning fell on heedless ears. Job was the only one to take it to heart, while Pharaoh and his people regarded not the Word of the Lord. Therefore, the Lord let the hail smite both man and beast, instead of confining it to the herbs and trees of the field, as He had intended from the first.”
(Ginzberg, II, p. 356)

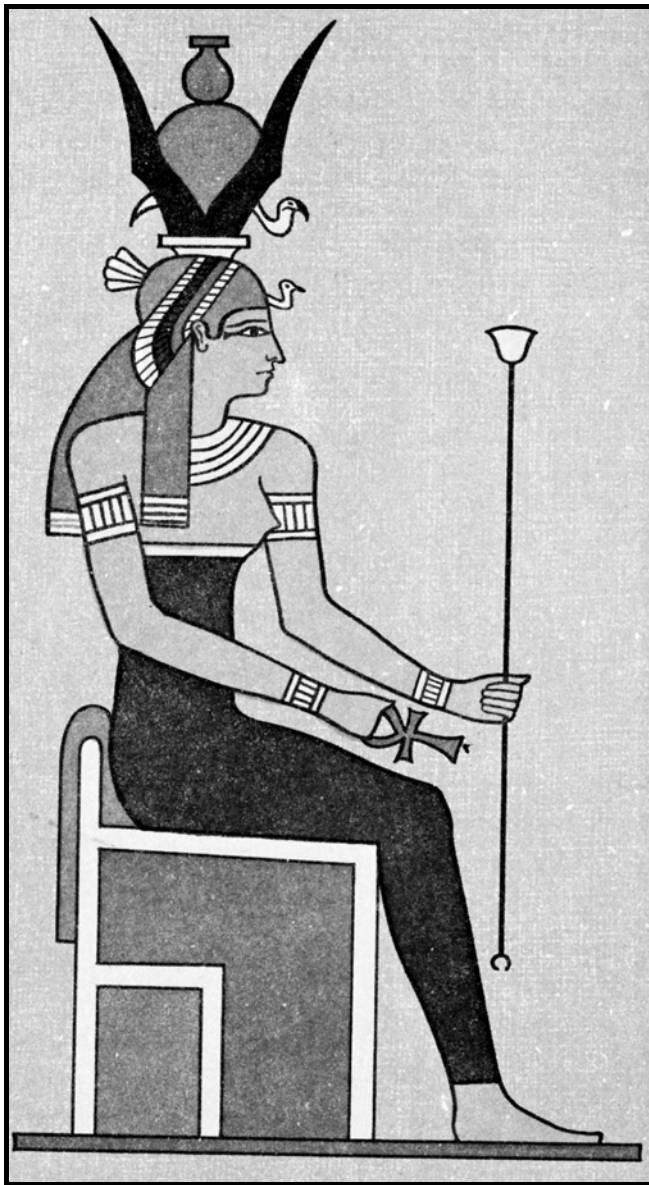
“Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. But those who ignored the word of the Lord left their

slaves and livestock in the field.” - This warning, however, confronted Pharaoh and his officials with a painful dilemma. To heed the warning would have been an acknowledgment of the power of God and an admission of their lack of confidence in their own gods to save and protect them. Therefore, it would seem that the king himself, and the majority of his officials did nothing to protect themselves or their flocks and herds from the impending hail storm. However, the text notes that a minority of the Egyptian leadership (*“those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord”*) did take action, based upon Moses’ warning. This, no doubt, created a great deal of dissension and resentment among the Egyptians themselves.



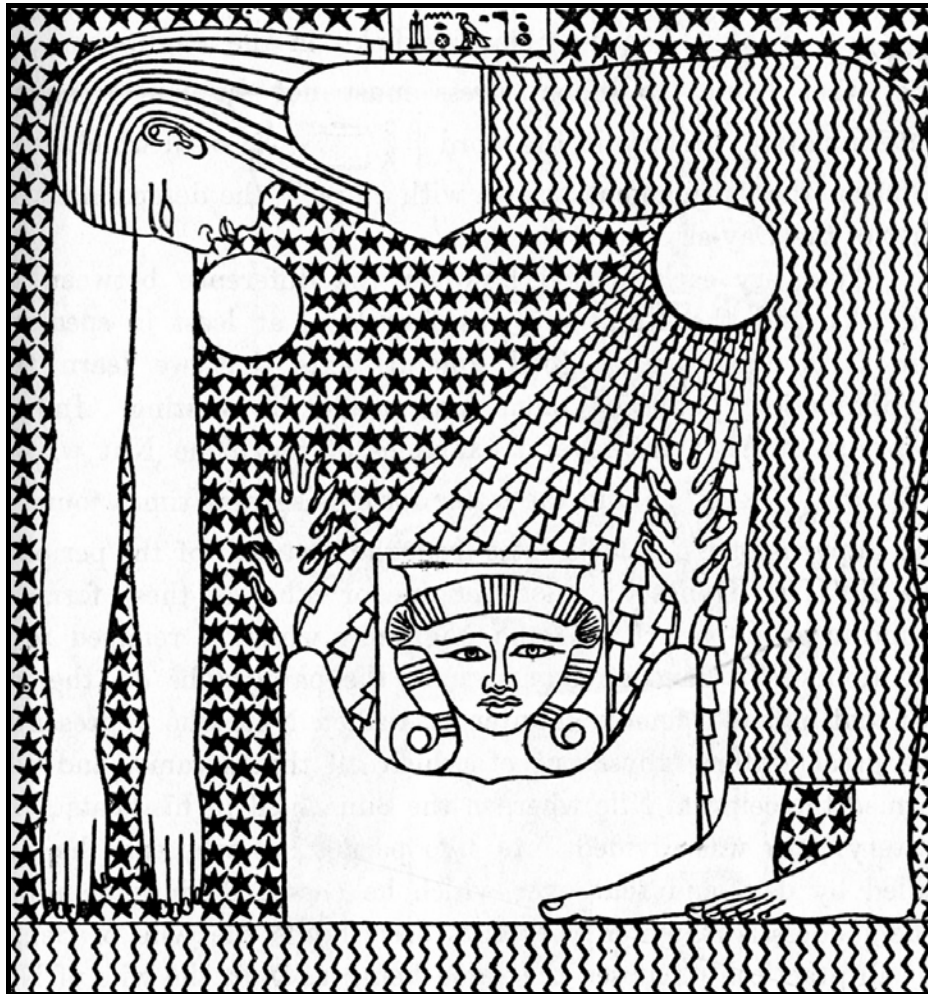
“The Goddess Nut Swallowing the Sun” - Mural From the Tomb of Pharaoh Ramesses VI

The hail storm plague would have been perceived by the Egyptians as an attack upon the realm of Nut, the goddess of the heavens and the sky. Nut was the benevolent protectress who controlled the weather. Her laughter was the thunder and her tears were the rain. She enabled the crops to flourish and the plants to grow. Nut was typically depicted as a beautiful woman whose body arched over that of her male counterpart, Geb, the god of the earth. The goddess was covered with the stars and the constellations of the heavens. Nut was believed to be the guardian who shielded the earth from the encircling waters of chaos. She maintained the orderly sequence



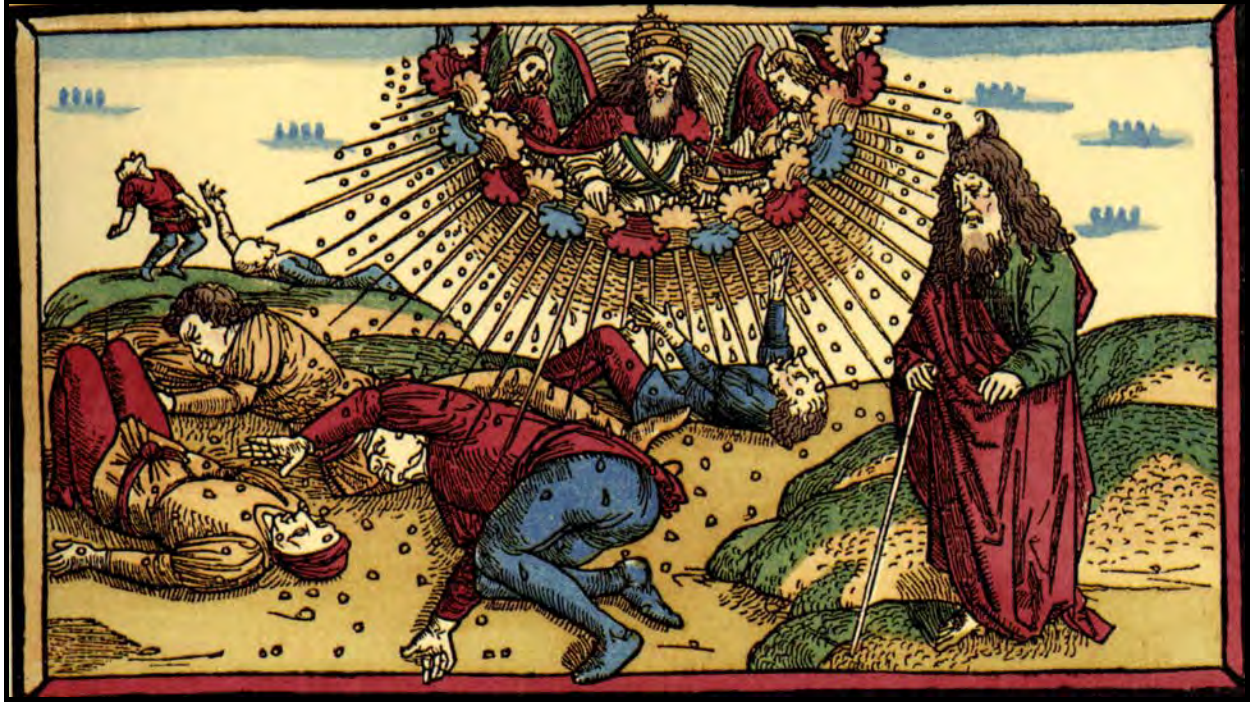
“The Sky Goddess Nut” by Wallis Budge

of day and night, and each of the seasons of the year in their turn. After the sun had completed its daily journey through the sky, it was swallowed up by the goddess at dusk. The sun would then pass through her body during the hours of darkness. At the dawn of each new day, Nut would give birth to the sun again so that its life-giving light might warm and nourish the earth. Since she watched over the rising and setting of the sun, Nut came to be associated with resurrection from death and was often painted on the inside of casket lids outstretched to shelter the bodies of the dead and lead their spirits into the afterlife. This popular goddess was acknowledged as the deity who maintained the delicate balance of nature and sheltered the earth and its atmosphere with her own body so that life on earth might flourish. As the chaos of this catastrophic storm descended upon the land of Egypt, no doubt the people cried out terror to their beloved Nut for deliverance. But this false goddess could neither hear nor answer their prayers.



“Tomb Relief of Nut Giving Birth to the Life Giving Sun”

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt - on men and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt.’ When Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground.” - At the appointed time, having given those Egyptians who were willing the heed the Word of the Lord time to seek shelter, God instructed Moses to call down the deadly hailstorm upon the land of Egypt. The fact that Moses was instructed to *“stretch out your hand toward the sky”* - rather than the staff of power which might ordinarily have been expected - may be an allusion to the typical posture of the goddess Nut with her hands outstretched toward the horizon to enclose the sky in her protective embrace. The comprehensive character of the downpour of hail *“all over Egypt”* is reinforced by the threefold repetition - *“on men and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt.”* Nothing was to be spared from the destructive onslaught of the hail. The fury of the storm is also described in a triple series of phrases - *“The Lord sent*



“The Plague of Hail” from the Lübeck Edition of Luther’s Bible , 1494

thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground.” The Hebrew text graphically speaks of the thunder as the voices of God - *“and the Lord gave voices and hail.”* The imagery of thunder as the voice of God is common in both the Old and the New Testaments. So, for example, David uses the same language to describe the awesome majesty of God in Psalm 39:

*“The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the Lord of Glory thunders,
the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic.
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;
the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon...
The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning.
The voice of the Lord shakes the desert; the Lord shakes the desert of Kadesh.
The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forest bare,
and in His Temple all cry, ‘Glory!’”* (Psalm 39: 3-5,7-9)

Psalm 18 also describes the glorious coming of God using the imagery of a horrible hail storm with thunder and lightning:

*“He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under His feet.
He mounted the cherubim and flew; He soared on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness His covering, His canopy around Him -
the dark rain clouds of the sky.
Out of the brightness of His presence clouds advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.
The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.
He shot His arrows and scattered His enemies,
great bolts of lightning and routed them.”* (Psalm 18:9-14)

The apocalyptic symbolism of John's vision of the Seven Bowls of God's Wrath, clearly drawing from the plagues of Exodus, presents the final judgement of God as a devastating cosmic hailstorm:

“Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake...From the sky, huge hailstones of about one hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.” (Revelation 16:18,21)



“The Vision of the Seven Bowls” - Luther Bible Woodcut

This tempest was no ordinary hailstorm. In addition to the thunder of God and the hail itself, the text notes - **“and lightning flashed down to the ground.”** The Hebrew phrase reads - *“and fire ran down to the earth.”* The original parallels the phrasing of Psalm 18:13 which literally reads - *“The Lord also thundered in the heavens and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire.”* The Septuagint inter-testamental Greek translation of the Hebrew text expanded the phrase to read - *“there was hail and fire burned in the hail and the hail was very great.”* This rendering reflects the rabbinic tradition that the hail of this miraculous storm actually burned with fire in addition to the thunder and lightning. The Mishna explains:

“As a rule, fire and water are elements at war with each other, but in the hailstones that smote the land of Egypt they were reconciled. A fire rested in the hailstones as a burning wick swims in the oil of a lamp; the surrounding fluid cannot extinguish the flame. The Egyptians were smitten either by the hail or by the fire. In the one case as the other their flesh was seared, and the bodies of many who were slain by the hail were consumed by the fire.” (Ginzberg, p. 356)



“Ezekiel’s Vision of the Whirlwind” by P.F. Poole



“The Plague of Hail” - Luther Bible Woodcut, 1485

The majority of textual scholars view the Septuagint’s version as a paraphrase of the somewhat awkward Hebrew of the original text’s description of the unique intensity of the storm’s lightning. That description is continued and developed in the following sentence - **“So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth.”** Once more, the Hebrew is more graphic than its English counterpart, literally - *“hail, and fire taking hold of itself.”* Ezekiel used the same phrase to describe the immense storm which accompanied and announced the appearance of God: **“I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north - an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light.”** (Ezekiel 1:4) Umberto Cassuto explains the idiom as the result of the haphazard, zigzag pattern of extremely intense lightning: *“The fire of the lightning is termed ‘taking hold of itself’ because it does not travel in a direct line, but in a zigzag fashion, as though it took hold of itself, every now and again, to turn back or to turn aside.”* (Cassuto, p. 119)



“The Pyramids at Giza”

“It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields - both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.” - With bitter mockery, the text uses the very language utilized by boastful Pharaoh’s to proclaim the unique antiquity of their ancient land - *“It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.”* Thus, for instance, Pharaoh Thutmose III bragged that during his reign so many monuments and temples had been built that there were *“more than all the things that were in the country since it was founded.”* (Ryken, p. 285) The precise timing of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom remains hidden in the mists of antiquity. Most scholars agree that kingdom originated prior to 3100 B.C. which would certainly qualify Egypt as the most ancient realm in the Near East. That would mean that the Egyptian nation had already existed for almost 1,800 years by the time of the Exodus. John Currid does not exaggerate when he observes: *“To say that this hail was the most severe in all the*

history of Egypt is a grand claim indeed!” (Currid, p. 206)

The scope of the catastrophe was almost beyond belief. It surpassed all that had come before and did, indeed, as God had forewarned, represent **“the full force of My plagues against you and against your officials and against your people.”** (Vs. 14) The description of the results which the hailstorm plague produced indicated that the damage was nationwide - **“throughout Egypt.”** The Hebrew text stresses the totality of the devastation through a series of parallel phrases in Verse 25 which describe three mighty hammer blows of God’s judgement which came crashing down upon Egypt: **“everything in the fields...everything growing in the fields....every tree.”** All living creatures who had not taken shelter - **“everything in the fields - both men and animals”** were killed by the deadly combination of thunder, lightning and hail. The livestock which had already been decimated by the fifth plague was struck again. This is the first of the plagues which inflicted significant loss of human life upon the Egyptian population and thus represents a major escalation in the severity of God’s judgement upon the land. The text places particular emphasis on the destruction of growing things, the crops in the field and the trees - **“it beat down everything growing in the field and stripped every tree.”** The onslaught of the hail was so severe that branches and foliage were actually stripped from the trees and the crops



“And there came hail and fire mixed with blood.” (Revelation 8:7)

in the field were beaten down into the ground. The language recalls the Psalmist's announcement of the glorious coming of God: ***"The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert; the Lord shakes the desert of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forest bare. And in His temple all cry, 'Glory!'"*** (Psalm 39:7-9)



"The only place it did not hail was in the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived."

In the midst of the devastation which covered all the land of Egypt, Goshen, where the Israelites lived, remained tranquil and safe - ***"The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen where the Israelites were."*** Cassutto notes that this is the seventh occurrence of the Hebrew word "eretz" ("land") in the account of the plague of hail. He suggests that this significant seven is intended to recall the Sabbath rest on the seventh day of creation:

"Although the hail brought disaster on the land of Egypt, yet one region remained tranquil and secure...In the seventh reference to 'eretz' mention is made of 'the land of Goshen', enjoying quiet and security, a

picture that recalls the Seventh Day, the day of rest, which comes after the six days of hard work imposed on mankind.” (Cassutto, p. 120)



“This Time I Have Sinned!” By J. James Tissot

*“Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. ‘This time I have sinned,’ he said to them. ‘The Lord is in the right and I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to the Lord, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go. You don’t have to stay any longer.’” - As the destructive storm continued to sweep across the land of Egypt, Pharaoh urgently “**summoned Moses and Aaron**” into his presence. While the thunder of God’s wrath continued to rumble in the background, for the first time the god/king was prepared to offer a carefully qualified acknowledgment of wrongdoing. Given the evasive, legalistic terminology which Pharaoh utilized and his subsequent actions, the English translation “**I have sinned**” is almost certainly an overstatement of the beleaguered monarch’s intended meaning. “*In this context, it is probably too much to have Pharaoh confessing sin...Pharaoh is admitting to a mistake, and even unfairness, but he must not be thought to be coming to abject**

*repentance and pious belief...his remorse is short-lived and is no more than another ruse to get relief.” (Durham, p. 129) John Currid does not exaggerate the man’s duplicity when he contends: “It would be a mistake to conclude that Pharaoh has seen the light and that he exhibits a repentant heart. He may be weakening but he still plays the snake - lying, manipulating and twisting.” (Currid, p. 207) The term “sinned” must be understood in its more general sense as making a mistake or committing an error in judgement rather than the tradition admission of moral responsibility. A broader understanding of the verb is also supported by Pharaoh’s careful restriction - “**This time I have sinned.**” He limited his admission to this particular instance while specifically rejecting wrongdoing in defying God’s demands during any of the six previously plagues. This is the devious language of a liar whose only goal is to escape from the predicament in which he is trapped at the moment. “He remains arrogant, and declines to acknowledge his earlier and primary sins; hence he adds ‘this time’ as though he had no other sin on his conscience except his refusal on this occasion.” (Cassutto, p. 120) It is sadly ironic to note that Pharaoh’s language unwittingly mirrored the wording of God’s previous warning about the*



“Colossal Monuments to Pharaoh Memnon” by David Roberts

special nature of this plague: ***“This time I will send the full force of My plagues against you.”*** (Vs. 14) He continued his plea in the legalistic terminology of the courtroom, as if this were nothing more than a technical dispute between plaintiff and defendant - ***“The Lord is in the right and I and my people are in the wrong.”*** This legality language not morality language. Pharaoh was merely acknowledging the legal justification for the Lord’s demand and thereby conceding the point in question. At the same time, the wily King was careful to avoid placing all of the blame on his own shoulders by including ***“my people”*** in his acknowledgment of wrong-doing, although Egypt was hardly a participatory democracy in which the people played any role in the determination of national policy.

The King inadvertently revealed his continued arrogance when he instructed Moses - ***“Pray to the Lord for we have had enough thunder and hail.”*** Basically he was saying, ***“There is no need for your God to continue this demonstration. I have heard enough. I am prepared to give him what he wants.”*** This proud fool still imagined himself to be in control of the situation. In the Hebrew text ***“thunder”*** literally reads ***“the voices of god,”*** using the generic term ***“el”*** rather than the specific title ***“Yahweh.”*** The nuances of this terminology constitute deliberate slights and jabs from a subdued but



“Temple Relief of Pharaoh Ramesses II Embraced by His Protector, the God Horus”

still defiant opponent. *“He regards it generally as a divine phenomenon, but not as a specific act of YHWH, the God of Israel.”* (Cassutto, p. 120) As in any legal negotiation, it is always critically important to read the fine print!

The most significant concession in this cleverly crafted statement is the willingness of Pharaoh to allow the release of the Israelites without limitation or restriction - *“I will let you go. You don’t have to stay any longer.”* The fact that the King is willing

to issue this blanket release, even if it is nothing more than a ruse to end the hailstorm, signified the desperation of Egypt’s predicament.



*“Fiery Hail in John’s Vision of the Seven Trumpets” - Revelation 8 - Luther Bible
Woodcut by Hans Burgmair, 1522*

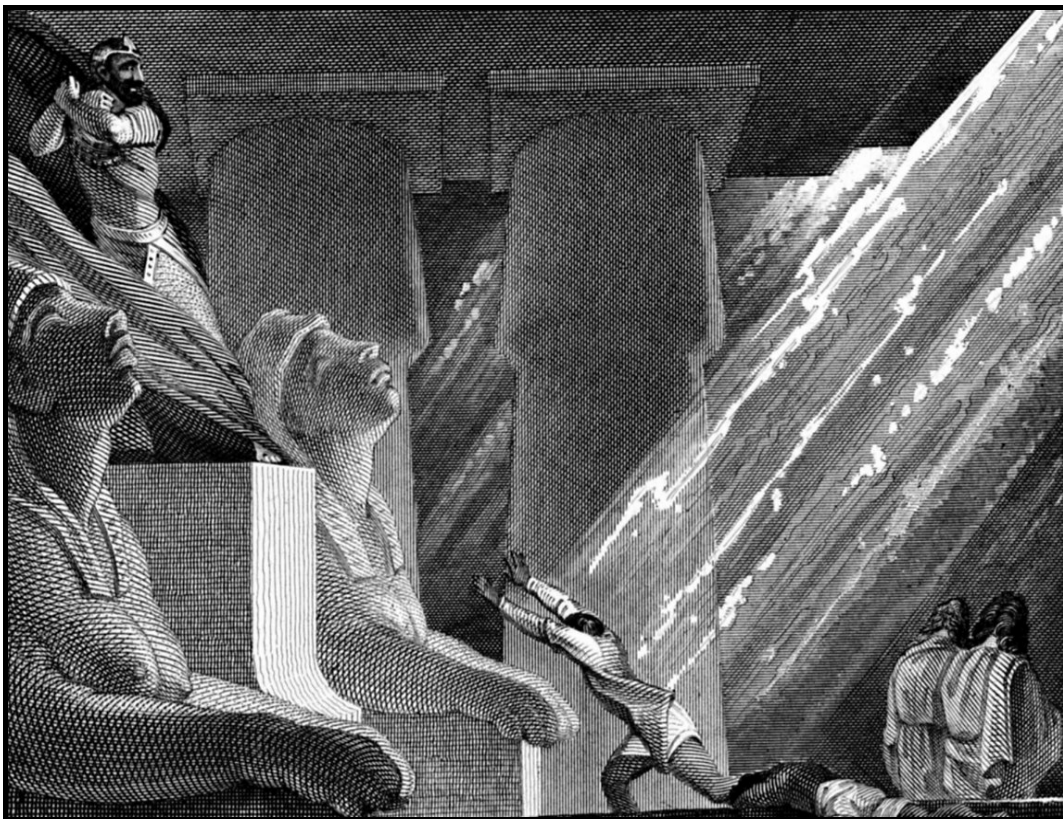
“Moses replied, ‘When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s. But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God.’” - Moses replied with the serene assurance of a prophet who had no doubt whatsoever that the Lord was in complete control of the situation. He did not dicker or dawdle. He did not demean himself or the Lord whom he represented by descending to the level upon which Pharaoh was attempting to conduct what he perceived to be a negotiation between peers. Moses simply announced the method by which he would bring about the cessation of the hailstorm which was destroying the land

of Egypt. *“I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord”* indicates the characteristic prayer posture of the Old Testament, looking up toward heaven with outstretched arms. This position emphasized the suppliant status of the petitioner and acknowledged God as the object of prayer and the Giver of every good and perfect gift. As in previous instances, Moses specified the time at which the storm would end so that again there might be no doubt the both the storm and its departure were the

miraculous work of the Lord - ***“The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail so that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s.”***

The phrase - ***“the earth is the Lord’s”*** - is not merely an assertion of the superiority of the God of Israel over the gods and goddesses of Egypt. It is a rejection of the entire concept of polytheism and a declaration of the absolute supremacy of the one God as the Source and Creator of all that exists. The language here is very similar to that of Psalm 24:1 - ***“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it, for He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.”***

At the same time, Moses clearly indicated that he had not been deceived by the trickery and the falsehood of this devious man. He recognized that Pharaoh and his officials ***“still do not fear God.”*** Nonetheless God would end the plague, not because of wily Pharaoh’s skill as a negotiator, but because ending this plague suited His divine purpose for Egypt and the world - ***“so that you may know that all the earth is the Lord’s.”***



“The Plague of Hail” - 18th Century Bible Engraving by Boydell



“The Grain Harvest” - Theban Tomb Mural

(The flax and the barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom, The wheat and the spelt, however, were not destroyed because they ripen later.) - This parenthetical observation enables to date the seventh plague to late in January or early in February. This would indicate that there were at least eight weeks between the seventh and the tenth plagues (along with the Feast of the Passover; cf. Exodus 13:4). Within the Egyptian growing cycle the crops which were mature in the field at that time, and therefore most vulnerable to the damage caused by the raging storm were barley and flax. Barley was an important food crop, used to produce the cheap bread which was the diet staple of slaves and the poor. Flax, on the other hand, was cultivated throughout the land as the source of the linen cloth worn by Egyptians of every class and status. The text explains that these crops were devastated because at the time of the hailstorm - **“the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom”** - that is to say, the grains of barley had already formed on the stalk and buds had formed in the flax fields. **“Wheat”** and **“spelt,”** two other important food grains, were spared severe damage in this plague because they would not ripen for

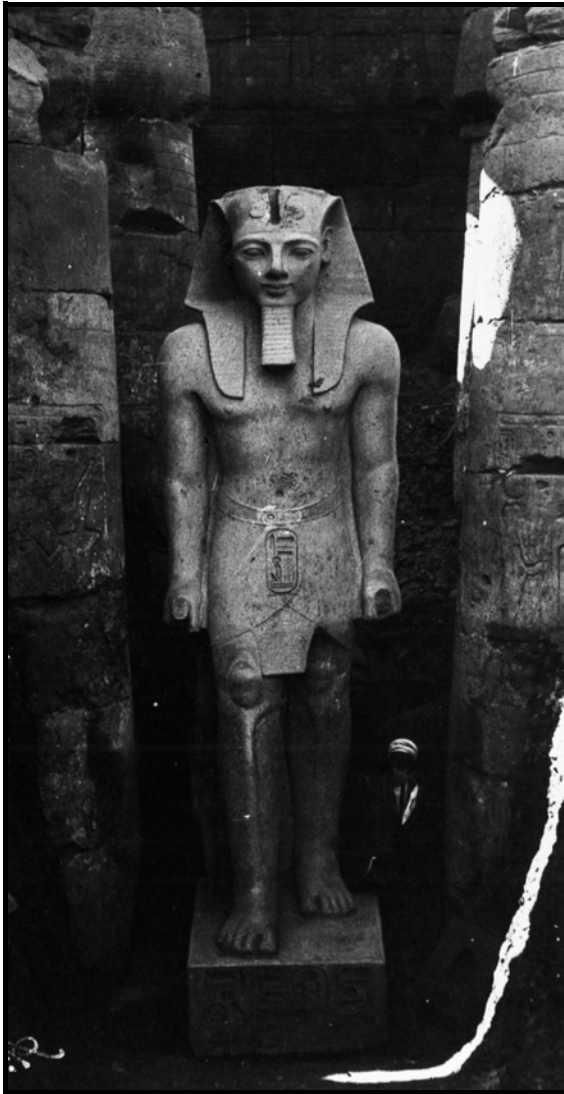
another month. The task of their destruction will be reserved for the locusts yet to come. The accuracy of this brief observation indicates the eye witness familiarity of the author with conditions in ancient Egypt and serves to help authenticate the historical reliability of the Biblical text. The lame efforts of Bible critics, who dismiss the Book Exodus as a composite production assembled many centuries later by a variety of editors and redactors, to evade the “*on the scene*” accuracy of this verse are almost laughable. So one liberal commentator speculates that the Israelite editor could have been somewhat familiar with Egyptian growing seasons because of trade between Egypt and Canaan: “*The Elohist’s expertise in these affairs is less surprising than it might seem. One assumes that from time immemorial, in lean years Asiatics purchased Egyptian grain. During the late Bronze Age Egypt supplied Canaan and Anatolia with food.*” (Propp, p. 335)



“The Threshing Floor” Detail from a Theban Tomb Mural

“Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the Lord; the thunder and the hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land.” - The language of the verse parallels that of Moses’ commitment to

Pharaoh in Verse 29. The prophet kept his commitment. He did exactly what he had said he would do. He prayed to the Lord and the plague of hail promptly ended. The contrast between the faithful honesty of Moses and the faithless duplicity of Pharaoh is unmistakably clear.



“Ramesses II in the Temple at Luxor”

“When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again; He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had said through Moses.” - While Moses had done exactly what he said he would do, Pharaoh promptly broke his commitment. As soon as relief from the immediate crisis had been granted - *“When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped...”* - the now familiar pattern reasserted itself - *“he sinned again.”* The Hebrew text more accurately reads *“he continued to sin.”* Ironically, the text uses the same word which the King himself had previously used - *“This time I have sinned”* (Vs. 27) but without the legalistic restrictions and qualifications which Pharaoh had applied. His repentance had never been anything more than a pretense to escape the dreadful consequences of the hailstorm. In this instance the officials of Pharaoh’s court are also included in the hardening of the heart (*“he and his officials hardened their hearts”*) indicating that the King still

enjoyed the support of his leaders in the self-destructive course he had chosen for their country. The language reflects Moses’ previous assertion that *“You and your officials still do not fear God.”* God had foreseen and foretold this continued resistance, all of which was part of His plan to vindicate His justice before the world.



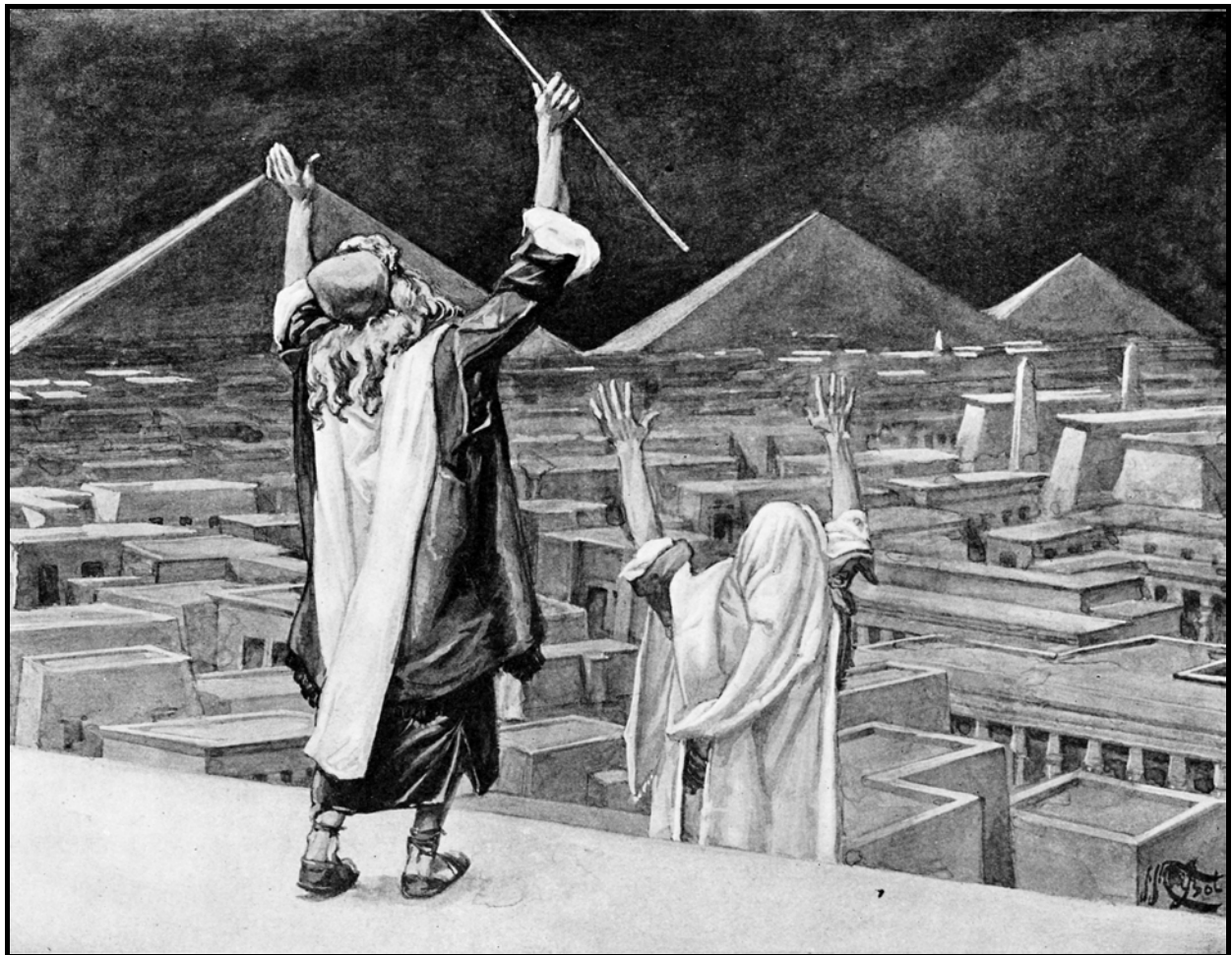
“The Plague of Locusts” - 19th Century German Bible Engraving

The Plague of Locusts

Exodus 10:1-20

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of Mine among them that you may tell your children and your grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord.” So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him; “This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go so that they may worship Me. If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the

Egyptians - something neither your fathers or your fore-fathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land til now.” Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s officials said to him, “How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?” Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. “Go, worship the Lord your God,” he said. “But just who will be going?” Moses answered, “We will go with out young and old, with our sons and daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to the Lord.” Pharaoh said, “The Lord be with you - if I let you go along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil. No! Have only the men go; and worship the Lord, since that’s what you’ve been asking for.” Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh’s presence. And the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over Egypt so that the locusts will swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the fields, everything left by the hail.” So Moses stretched out his staff



“The Plague of Locusts” by J. James Tissot

over Egypt, and the Lord made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts; they invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. They covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the hail - everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said. "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now forgive my sin once more and pray to the Lord your God to take this deadly plague away from me." Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. And the Lord changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea. Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.



"The Plague of Locusts" - 15th Century Luther Bible Woodcut

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them, that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, and the you may know that I am the Lord.'" - The introduction to the eighth plague is unusually lengthy, perhaps to signal again the escalating intensity of the plagues as the pattern

draws to its awful culmination. At the outset of this plague God renewed His explanation to Moses of His purpose in punishing the prideful stubbornness of Pharaoh by reinforcing and extending that stubbornness well beyond any rational limit - ***“I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials.”*** God’s hardening of the hearts of Egypt’s leadership was, in the first instance, just judgement upon sinful men in a dramatic manner that would demonstrate and vindicate the perfect righteousness of God before Egypt and all the nations of the earth. The plagues inflicted upon mighty Egypt were designed as a warning to all of mankind that no one can spurn the Word of God and indulge in immorality or brutality with impunity. In His own way at His own time God will judge the nations justly. God chose to make an example of Egypt as a warning to all the rest. This truth is forcefully conveyed in Verse 2’s description of God’s judgement upon Egypt - ***“how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians.”*** The Hebrew verb is particularly forceful. It conveys a connotation of mockery and disdain. One of the standard Hebrew grammar texts aptly translates the

phrase - *“how I made a toy of Egypt.”* (Currid, p. 214) Any nation that dares to trifle with almighty God places itself in deadly peril.



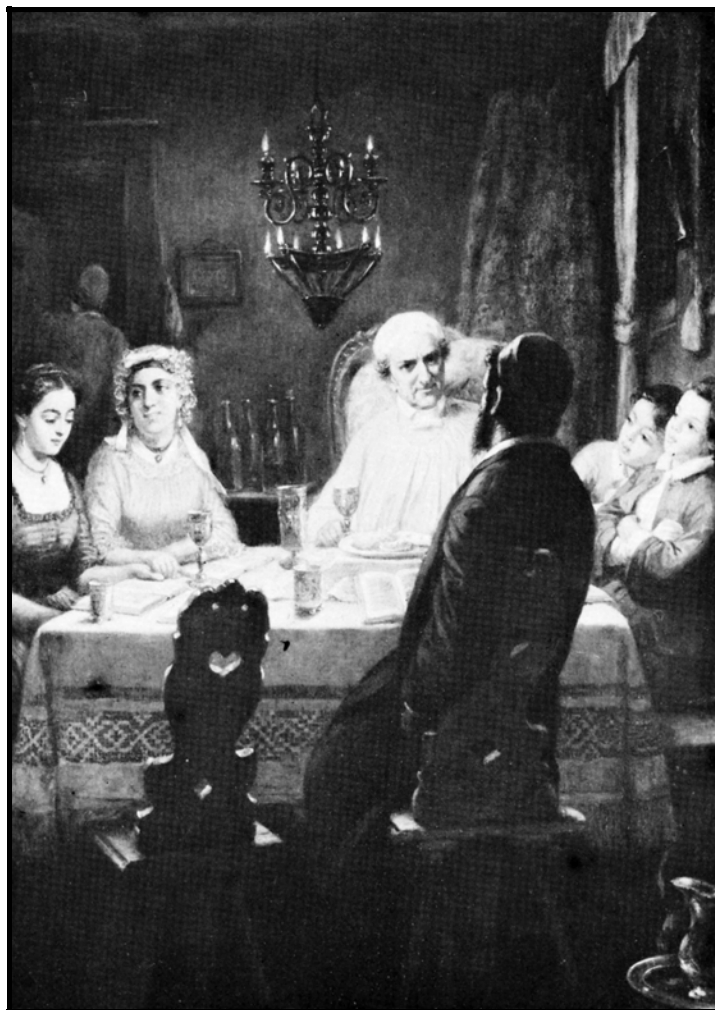
“The Plague of Frogs” from a Medieval Passover Haggadah

At this point, however, God explained to Moses that in addition to their punitive function, the plagues would also serve a most important educational purpose for the Children of Israel - ***“That you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them and that you may know that I am the Lord.”*** This series of miraculous wonders and the deliverance which would result from was to be a decisive

demonstration of the nature of God and of His loving commitment to His people. This narration would become the core of the annual celebration of the Feast of the Passover (cf. Exodus 13:1-16). The youngest child present at the Passover Meal asks; *“Why is this night different from all other nights?”* The response to that question is the *“maggid”* or the *“telling”* of the story of that which God did to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt. Thus has the Lord’s intent been accomplished for thousands of years among the Children of Israel. *“The events are to be indelibly marked upon the collective memory of the people of Israel and thus become a permanent part of the lore that is transmitted from generation to generation. The constant instruction of the young concerning God’s mighty deeds is the medium of such transmission.”*

(Sarna, p. 48) In Deuteronomy 6

Moses instructed the families of Israel to continue this education of youth throughout all of the generations to come:



“Why Is This Night Different From All Other Nights?” 18th Century European Passover

“In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God had commanded you?’ tell him; ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders - great and terrible - upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But He brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that He promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all of these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept

alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.” (Deuteronomy 6:20-25)

“So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews says...’ - That which must by now have become a painfully familiar pattern recurred as the introduction to the eighth plague. Moses and Aaron appeared before the King and presented the standard formula in which God demanded the release of His people. The Lord noted and emphasized Pharaoh’s ongoing obstinate resistance to His demands: *“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?”* Pharaoh’s core problem is pride. He has refused to humble himself before God, that is to say, he continued to refuse to acknowledge the Lord as the one God of the universe and to bow before His Word in appropriate obedience. The verb which occurs in this phrase - *“you refuse to humble yourself”* - is the same word which had appeared previously in Exodus 1:11-12 to describe Pharaoh efforts to *“oppress”* the Children of Israel by enslaving them and subjecting them to hard labor.



“The Plague of Locusts” by Barry Moser



“The Temple of Isis on the Nile Island of Philae by Roberts

“Poetic justice is at work here; Pharaoh’s actions now come back to haunt him.” (Currid, p. 214) The manner of the rhetorical question - **“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?”** stressed the incredibly unreasonable nature of Pharaoh’s stubborn resistance in the face of the seven plagues which had already struck the land of Egypt, thereby anticipating the outbreak of opposition from his officials which will also occur in conjunction with this plague. Pharaoh’s resistance has exceeded the boundaries of logic and reason. It can only be understood in the context of God’s judgement upon the monarch’s prideful sin.

“If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians - something neither your fathers nor your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.’ Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh.” - Egypt’s agricultural economy had already been devastated by the plague of hail - **“what little you have left after the hail.”** The flax and barley harvests had been wiped out. With the eighth plague, the Lord threatened to destroy the wheat and spelt harvests which had not yet ripened when the hail fell and which were essential for the survival of the



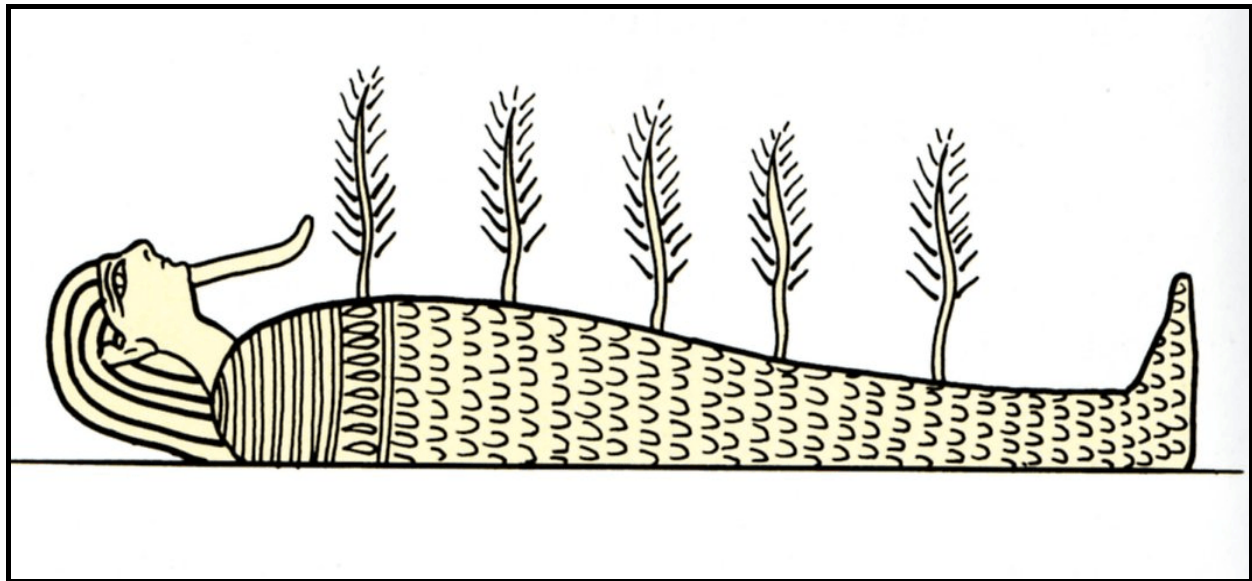
*Tomb Mural Depicted Pharaoh Horemheb
Worshipping Osiris*

people through the coming year.

The plague of locusts constituted an assault upon two of the most powerful and revered deities within the Egyptian pantheon, Osiris and his sister/wife Isis. While the hailstorm had destroyed everything that was not sheltered, including men and livestock, this plague was specifically directed at the ripening crops in the field. In the mythology of ancient Egypt Osiris and Isis were among the children of Geb and Nut, the god of earth and the goddess of heaven. Their compelling passion for one another was believed to have already begun in the womb of their mother. Isis remained faithful to her brother/husband even after he had been murdered by his wicked brother Set, the god of chaos and the desert wilderness. She traveled throughout the world gathering the dismembered pieces of his husband's body and eventually reassembled them in the form of a mummy so that Osiris could be revived to reign as the Lord

of the Underworld. The legend of Osiris and Isis was a core component in the belief system of the Egyptians. *“Osiris was unquestionably one of the most important deities or ancient Egypt, figuring prominently in both monarchical ideology and popular religion as the god of death, resurrection and fertility.”* (Wilkerson, p. 118) The god was characteristically depicted as a crowned human figure signifying his role as the divine king. He wrapped in the white cloths of a mummy to indicate his identity as the Lord of the Underworld. Osiris was acknowledged as the founder of the Egyptian kingdom. He was the god of the *“black land,”* that is the fertile soil of the Nile valley, who taught the Egyptians the science of agriculture and who caused

the seeds of grain to sprout and grow in their fields. The Egyptians perceived the story of Osiris' death and resurrection to be a parable of the seed which is buried in the fertile soil and which then germinates and sprouts to new life in the stalks of grain which become the harvest. The crucial role of Osiris in the annual cycle of planting and harvest was indicated in his manifestation as Neper, the god of grain who provided and protected the food supply for the people of Egypt.



“Coffin Painting of Plants Sprouting from the Mummy of Osiris”

Isis was the most important goddess of ancient Egypt. Because of her role as the faithful wife of Osiris and the mother of their son Horus, Isis was widely admired and emulated by Egyptian women. At the same time, Isis was viewed as a goddess of fertility, who brought about the vital annual inundation of the Nile which enriched the fields and enabled the crops to grow. The ancients noted that the floods followed the appearance of Sosthis, the dog star, in the night sky. They concluded that the star was the heavenly sign of Isis. In her recent study *The Great Goddess of Egypt*, Dr. Barbara Lesko offered this helpful summary of the connection in the Egyptian mind between the myth of Isis and Osiris and the cycle of planting and harvest:

“Their stories concerned the living, those who sowed and reaped with their eyes on the stars and the Nile flood. Thus the story of the dead king who died and was revived before burial was linked to the god of vegetation: his death could be seen everywhere in the wilting and dying off of the fields in the hottest months of late spring and early summer.

If Osiris was an ancient vegetation god, his resurrection was apparent in the annual inundation, caused by the widow, who shed many tears over her loss. Isis became synonymous with fertility and plenty, the increase of the herds and the bounty of the harvest...Without its life-giving water, without Osiris, the deified flood and its fertile silt, there would be no habitable, cultivated land, no life possible at all... Osiris and justice, life itself must triumph, and this Isis would insure. She is the female principle, the female role in the act of reviving life, sustaining life and defying death. If Osiris is the deified flood waters, Isis is the star that calls forth the inundation.” (Lesko, pp.159-160)



***“Isis/Sothis - Goddess of the Nile Flood”
by Clive Barrett***

The bond between Isis and the grain harvest was most clearly expressed in her manifestation as Renenutet the guardian of the harvest. In this role, Isis was depicted as a beautiful woman with head of a cobra who would protect the grain both in the fields and in the granaries against the deprivation of every sort of vermin, rats, mice, insects and birds. Locusts, are mentioned specifically among the vermin from which Isis/Renenutet was to guard the grain. For this reason, ancient Egyptian granaries characteristically included a shrine to Isis/Renenutet, asking her to watch over the harvest stored within. She was the patron deity of agricultural workers and her great festivals were celebrated each year early in the summer season when the crops began to ripen in the fields. The critical importance of Isis as protectress is illustrated by the fact that the goddess is frequently represented in Egyptian art with broadly

outstretched wings as she soared through the heavens watching over her beloved land. Osiris and Isis eventually became the two foremost deities of Egypt, absorbing the identities and responsibilities of many of the other gods and goddesses into themselves. Osiris came to be worshiped as *“the King of all the Gods,”* eclipsing even the prominence of Amun-Re, the sun god who was technically ruler of all things. Isis, *“great of magic,”* became the omnipresent mother goddess of Egypt with shrines built in her honor within every temple throughout the land. In Greco-Roman times, the cult of Isis spread throughout the Mediterranean world and persisted long after the introduction of Christianity. The descent of the Plague of Locusts upon the grain fields and growing trees of Egypt was perfectly designed to demonstrate the helpless impotence of Osiris and Isis beyond any shadow of a doubt.

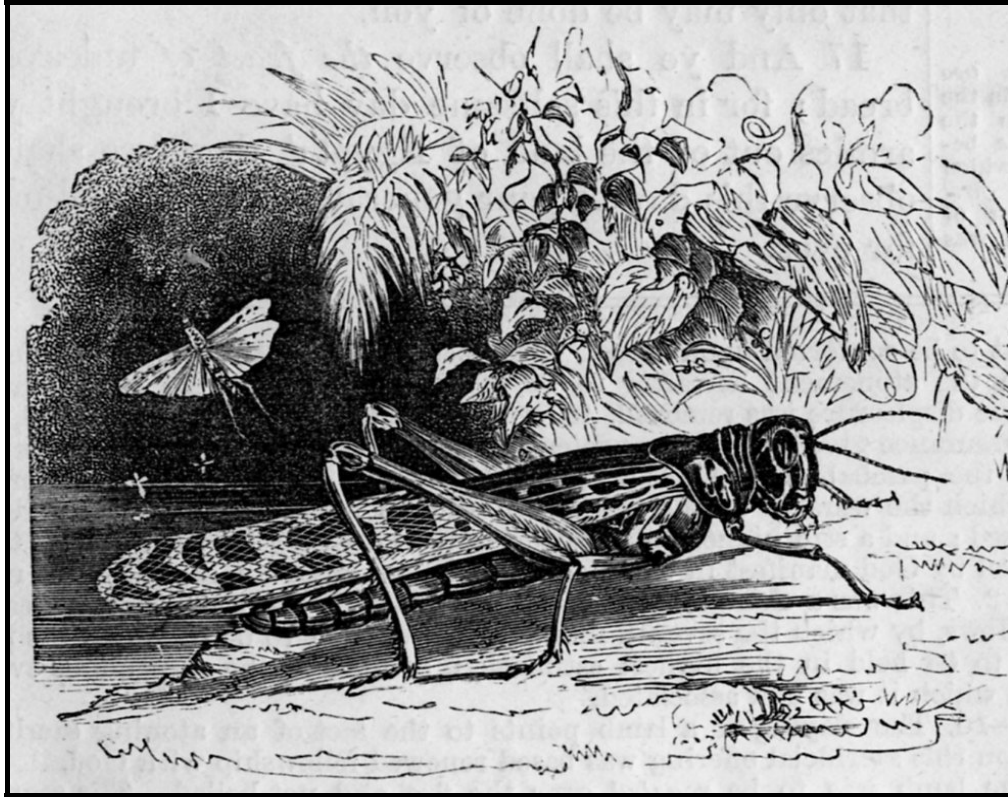


*“Isis Returning the Body of Her Brother/
Husband Osiris to Egypt” by Clive Barrett*

The agency by which God had chosen to accomplish the destruction of Egypt’s grain harvest was a miraculously massive swarm of locusts. Destructive swarms of migrating locusts were not (and are not) unknown in North Africa. A area of one square mile can contain up to 200 million of these voracious insects which in a single night can devour as much as four hundred thousand tons of vegetation. In the modern era swarms covering more than 400 square miles have been recorded. John Davis notes the terrifying capacities of locusts:

“Flying locusts have been regarded as marvels of stamina. They are able to flap their wings non-stop for seventeen hours, and may be able to fly at a cruising air speed of ten to twelve miles an hour for twenty hours or more. When the young hoppers become winged adults, the

bands become swarms with increased mobility, and an average density of about 130,000,000 per square mile. Depending on wind condition, collective movement ranges from a few miles to more than sixty miles in one day.” (Davis, pp. 129-130)



“The Locust” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

The almost unimaginable and destructiveness of natural locust swarms notwithstanding, Moses goes to great lengths to emphasize that there will be nothing natural about this plague of locust. The swarms which would descend upon the land of Egypt at God’s command would far surpass anything that Egypt or mankind had ever experienced before. This would not be a local but a national phenomenon as the hungry insects simultaneously blanketed the country from one end to the other:

“They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. They will fill your houses and those of your officials and all the Egyptians - something neither your fathers

or your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.”



“The Prophet Joel” - 19th Century German Bible Engraving

The devastating impact of this plague was such that swarms of locusts became a standard image for the consuming judgement of God. In language clearly reminiscent of Exodus, the prophet Joel foretold the coming of the great Day of the Lord as the invasion of a vast swarm of devouring locusts:

“Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this every happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? Tell it to your children and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left, the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten...Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm

on My holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains, a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in the ages to come. Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the Garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste - nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses, they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors. They scale walls like soldiers. They march all in a line, not swerving from their course. They do not jostle each other; Each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows. Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord thunders at the head of His army; His forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey His command...I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten - the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm - My great army that I sent among you.” (Joel 1:1-4; 2:1-11,25)

St. John the revelator utilized the same imagery in his vision of the seven trumpets. In Revelation Chapter 9, the Abyss is opened and out of the smoke from the Abyss a swarm of locusts poured forth to terrorize the earth:

“And out of the smoke, locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man...The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair and their teeth were like lion’s teeth. They had breastplates like breast plates of

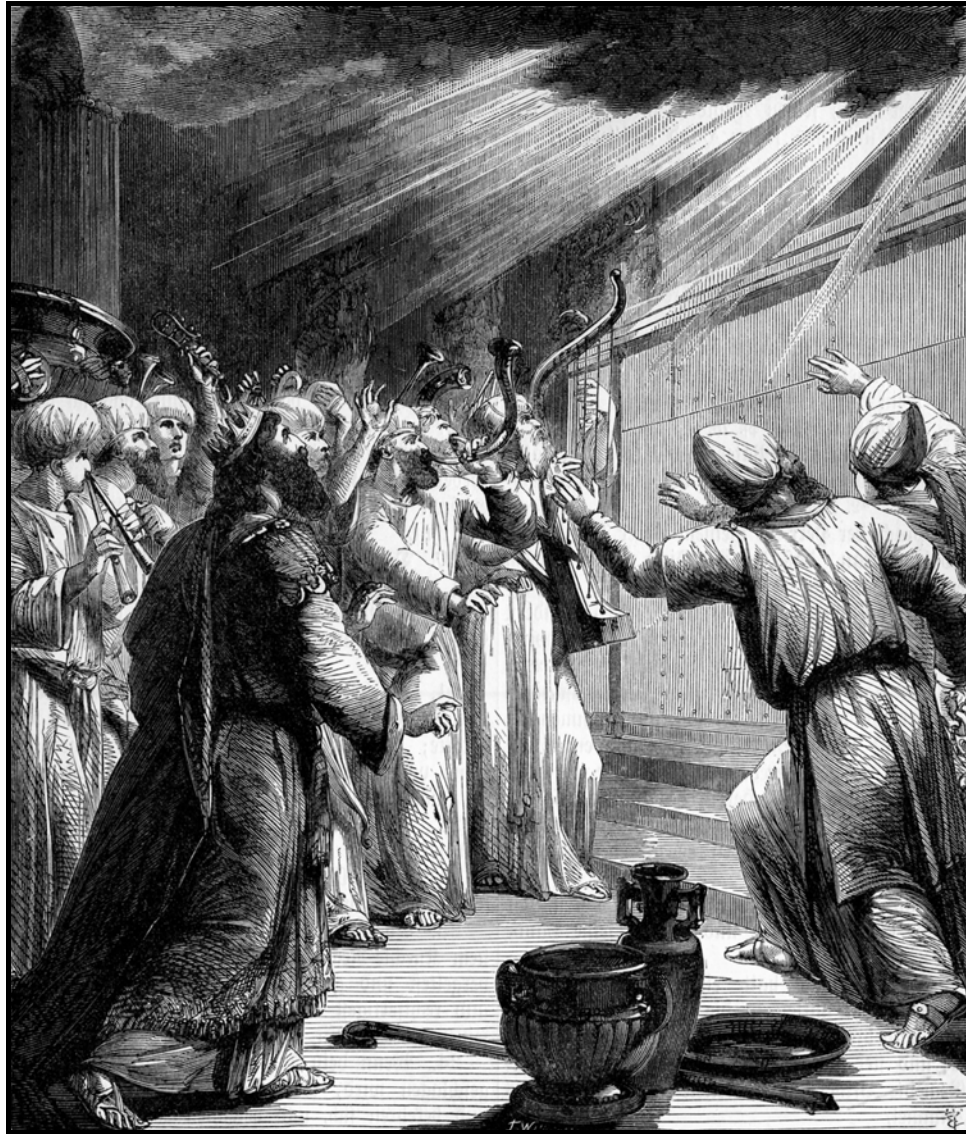
iron and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the Angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek Apoyllon.” (Revelation 9:3-11)



“The Locusts from the Abyss” - 15th Century Bible Illumination

Moses and Aaron did not wait for a re-action from Pharaoh. Based on their past experience and the forewarning of God about the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, it was already clear what that re-action would be. Having faithfully delivered their message from the Lord, they simply turned and left the presence of the king - ***“Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh.”***

The same theme of locusts as evidence of God’s judgement can be seen in Moses’ warnings to the Children of Israel in Deuteronomy. Among the curses which are



“The Glory of the Lord Enters the Sanctuary at the Dedication of Solomon’s Temple” - 19th Century German Bible Engraving

threatened for disobedience are included: *“You will sow much seed in the field, but you will harvest little, because the locusts will devour it...Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land.”* (Deuteronomy 28:38,42) At the dedication of Solomon’s Temple, the Lord promised His people:

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among My people, if you My people, who are called by My Name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I

hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:13-14; cf. 1 Kings 8:37)



“The Plague of Locusts” 17th Century Luther Bible Woodcut

“The locust host devoured whatever was left over, which left Pharaoh stuck in the same old problem. God often sends plague after plague in the course of these times, but the heart which has been hardened still will not yield.”

“Pharaoh’s officials said to him, ‘How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?’” - For the first time, open dissension broke out among the officials within the king’s court. In this most absolute monarchy, where the Pharaoh was regarded as the personal representative of the gods, such dissension would have been without precedent. The fact that these courtiers felt compelled to oppose the will of their lord signaled the desperation of Egypt’s plight. The officials began discretely by attributing the problem to Moses - *“How long will this man be a snare to us?”* The language suggests that Moses has acted in a devious and deceitful manner with the intent to entrap and destroy Egypt. The Hebrew noun *“moqes”* refers to the



“Colossal Statues of Pharaoh Ramesses II at Abu Simbel” - 19th Century Engraving

concealed trap of a hunter, which inextricably holds their prey which stumbles into it. However, as their plea for the release of the Israelites continued, it became clear that even these Egyptians recognized that it was their own king’s stubbornness that was the real problem. Their words constitute an expression of *“incredulous insolence,”* (Propp, p. 337) that is, they simply cannot comprehend why their king would continue to resist the Lord’s demand in the face of His repeated demonstrations of overwhelming power. The question **“Do you not realize that Egypt is ruined?”** Is more forceful in the original which reads *“Don’t you yet know that Egypt is dying?”* They recognize what has already happened to their country and are terrified of what could happen next if Pharaoh continued to defy the Lord. They cannot imagine why any rational man would be willing to take that risk in the face of the awesome power which the kingdom had already experienced. The Biblical reader, of course, recognizes the hand of God at work here in His judgement hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. In Exodus 9:30 Moses had noted - **“But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God.”** Evidently, at this point, at least Pharaoh’s officials had learned to fear the Lord and their fear of God’s wrath had overcome their reluctance to oppose and criticize their divine King.

“Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. ‘Go, worship the Lord your God,’ he said. ‘But just who will be going?’ Moses answered, ‘We will go with our young and our old, with our sons and our daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to the Lord.’ Pharaoh said, ‘The Lord be with you - if I let you go along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil. No! Have only the men go; and worship the Lord, since that’s what you have been asking for.’ Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh’s presence.” - Pharaoh was constrained to alter his position because of the outbreak of opposition within his own court. The monarch summoned Moses and Aaron back into his presence. The toll taken by the previous plagues and the dissension among his own people had compelled the king to open serious negotiations with the Israelite leaders. *“Previously, he had lightly released and lightly recanted. Here he finally begins to bargain in earnest - although after so many miracles, to haggle now suggests detachment from reality.”* (Propp, p.337) Somehow, despite all that had taken place, the King still imagined himself to be in control of the situation. ***“Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh.”***

The verb in this sentence carries a connotation of coercion and physical force. Moses and Aaron were not requested to return. Pharaoh sent out his soldiers and dragged



“Osiris and Isis - Guardians of the Land of Egypt” by Wallace Budge



***“Osiris, the Lord of Growing Things”
Wall Relief from the Tomb of Queen Nefertari***

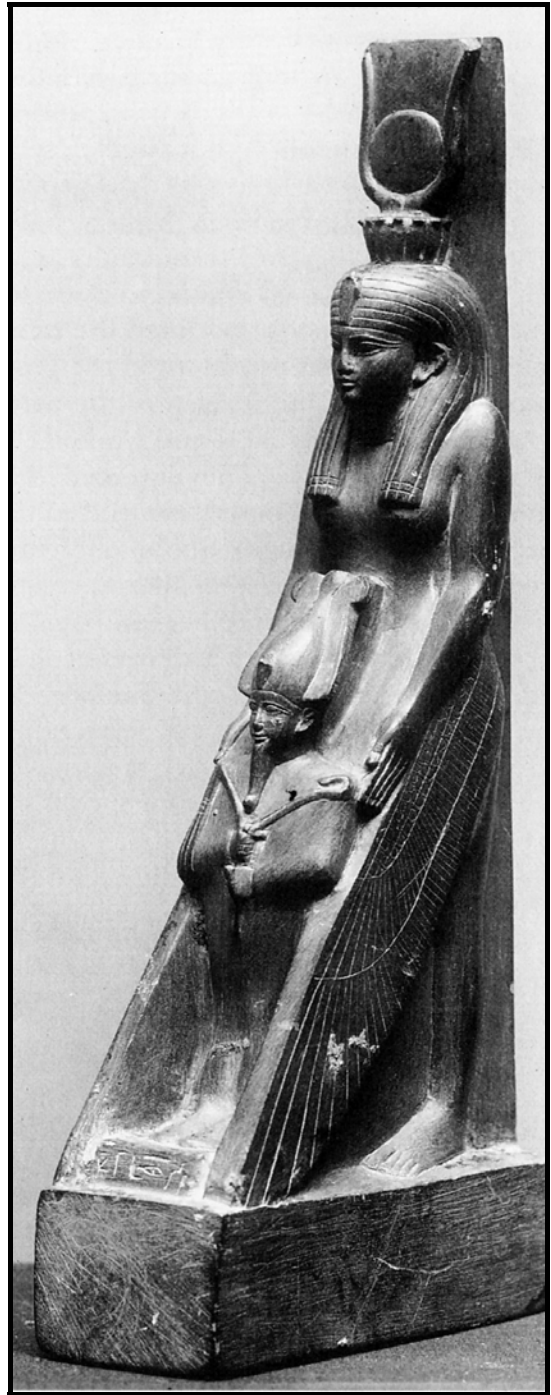
them back to the palace in a deliberate attempt to intimidate them. When the two stood before him again, the king issued a command - ***“Go, worship the Lord your God”*** as if he, the mighty monarch, was condescending to grant their request because he had grown weary of dealing with this insignificant problem. Pharaoh added a sly question to his permission - ***“But just who will be going?”*** The pointed nature of the question was signaled by the repetition of the pronoun in the original text, literally - ***“But who and who will be going?”*** The question was actually a stipulation which limited his consent and attempted, once again, to assert his control of the situation. In effect, the King was saying, ***“I’m in charge here and I will decide who goes and who doesn’t go!”*** Moses responded in a completely unambiguous fashion: ***“We will go with our young and our old, with our sons and daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to the Lord.”*** Moses’ reply was a categorical rejection of Pharaoh’s attempt to maintain control. In effect, the prophet was saying, ***“You are not in charge here. We will obey the command of God without restriction or limitation from you!”*** There is no

effort to deceive or dissemble here. Moses spoke the plain truth and nothing but the truth. Everyone will go, without exception. The inclusive nature of the participants is given special emphasis by the double contrast - ***“with our young and our old, with***

our sons and our daughters.” No one among the Israelites would be excluded from the exodus. At the same time Moses added that not only would all of the Israelites go, they would take all of their possessions along with them - ***“with our flocks and our herds.”*** These bold words should have been a warning to Pharaoh that the longer he continued to oppose the will of God, the greater the cost to Egypt would be. What had begun as a request for a brief pilgrimage into the wilderness was escalating toward a total, permanent departure.

Pharaoh’s responded with harsh words and bitter irony, perhaps fueled by the fearful realization that events were rapidly spinning out of his control. ***“The Lord be with you - if I let you go along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil. No! Have only the men go and worship the Lord, since that’s what you’ve been asking for.”***

The translation muddles the mockery of the angry King’s retort. Pharaoh was declaring that he would never consent to the release of all of the Israelites as Moses had demanded. To accurately convey the sense of his biting sarcasm we might paraphrase - ***“You will need an almighty God on your side if you think that you are ever going to get me to let you go along with your women and children!”*** The King was so bold as to blaspheme the sacred name of God as he sputters out his rage. He sarcastically used two forms of the verb ***“to be”*** - literally - ***“I AM will be”*** as he contemptuously rejected the power and authority of the God of Moses. The sad irony of sin and its consequences was the his angry words were completely correct. In the end, Pharaoh did release them all because the almighty God had brought about the deliverance of every one of His people from



Granite Statue of Isis and Osiris

bondage.

“Clearly you are bent on evil.” - In the Hebrew text this phrase reads - *“Evil is before your faces.”* The NIV’s translation is linguistically possible - understanding the phrase as an accusation of duplicity on the part of Moses and Aaron whose actual



“Marble Statue of Isis, Goddess of Fertility and Growth with the Horns of the Apis Bull”

intent is to take the Israelites out of Egypt permanently beneath the pretense of a three day pilgrimage. However, given the later clarification of Exodus 32:12 - **“Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that He brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?’”** - it is most probable that the phrase is a derisive warning that any plan to take all of these people, men, women, and children, out into the wilderness was a blueprint for catastrophe. The words might better be translated - *“You are on the brink of a disaster.”* Pharaoh’s tirade concluded with a most definite rejection of Moses’s demand that all of the Israelites be allowed to depart - **“No! Have only the men go and worship the Lord, since that’s what you’ve been asking for.”** The King is clearly outraged by the audacity of Moses and Aaron.

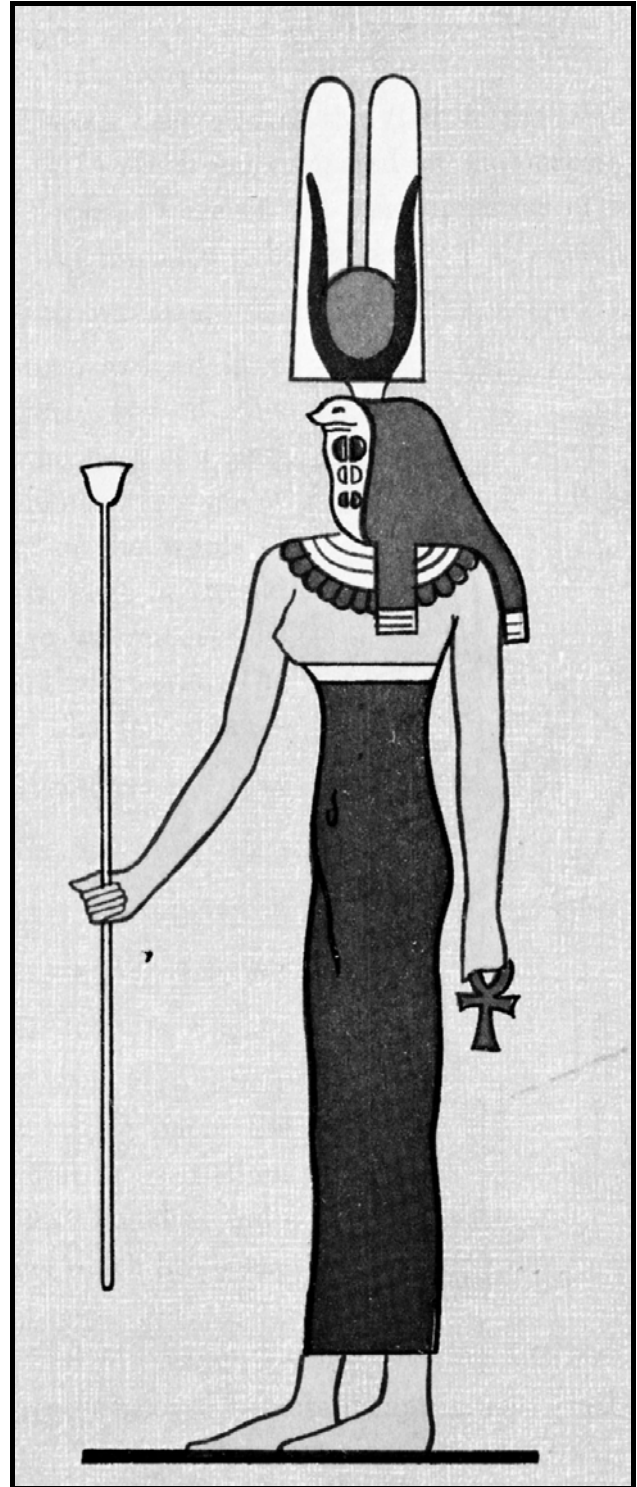
William Propp points out that his language *“is jerky, disjointed and difficult to translate.”* He speculates that this may be indicative of the

speaker’s state of mind: *“May we imagine the once cool monarch sputtering in frustration?”* (Propp, p. 337) Evidently the King’s assumption was that if the Israelites genuinely intended nothing more than a religious pilgrimage (**“that’s what you’ve been asking for”**) it would not be necessary or appropriate for the women and children to accompany the men. The monarch’s obvious intent was to hold the

women and children hostage as a guarantee of the men's return to their duties in Egypt.

“Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh’s presence.” - Having delivered what he considered to be his final ultimatum, Pharaoh abruptly terminated the negotiations. The same authoritarian compulsion which had characterized the entire process continued as the Israelite leaders were physical expelled from the presence of the King.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over Egypt so that the locusts will swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the fields, everything left by the hail.’” So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the Lord made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts; they invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. They covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the hail - everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt.” - For the eighth time, the plague of God’s judgement descended upon the land of Egypt. The nature and scope of the plague corresponded precisely to the warning which had been



“The Cobra Headed Goddess Isis/Renenutet - Guardian of the Grain Harvest Against Locusts and Other Vermin” by Wallace Budge



“The Plague of Locusts” Luther Bible Woodcut

presented to Pharaoh. As Moses lifted up his hand holding the staff of power over the land of Egypt, a great wind began to blow from the eastern desert. The Hebrew term is *“kadim,”* that is, the blistering hot, dusty, dry wind of the desert, often referred to today with the Arabic word *“sirocco.”* This desert wind is frequently associated in Scripture with disease, death and the judgement of God. So the prophet Isaiah foretold God’s judgement upon the oppressors of Israel: *“By warfare and exile you contend with her - with His fierce blast, He drives her out, as one the day the east wind blows.”* Jeremiah utilized the same imagery in his description of God’s punishment for His own wayward people: *“Their land will be laid waste, an object of lasting scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will shake their heads. Like a wind from the east, I will scatter them before their enemies. I will show them My back and not My face in their day of disaster.”* (Jeremiah 18:16-17) Ezekiel also spoke of the destructive power of the desert wind from the east in his allegory of the

eagles and the vine: ***“Even if it is transplanted will it thrive? Will it not wither completely when the east wind strikes it - wither away in the plot where it grew?”*** (Ezekiel 17:10) A few chapters later, the prophet lamented the downfall of his nation with these poignant words:

“But it was uprooted in fury and thrown to the ground. The east wind made it shrivel, it was stripped of its fruit; its strong branches withered and fire consumed them. Now it is planted in the desert, in a dry and thirsty land. Fire spread from one of its main branches and consumed its fruit. No strong branch is left on it fit for a ruler’s scepter.” (Ezekiel 19:12-13; cf. 27:26 42:16)

Hosea prophesied the destruction of apostate Israel with the same colorful imagery: ***“An east wind from the Lord will come, blowing in from the desert; his spring will fail and his well dry up. His storehouse will be plundered of all its treasures.”*** (Hosea 13:15) The desert wind from the east was the ill-omened agent of God’s judgement.

The great wind blew ***“all that day and all that night”*** thereby indicating the vast distances from which the Lord gathered the massive horde of locusts which He would send down upon the land of Egypt. ***“By morning the wind had brought the locusts”*** - the coming of the locusts swarms is a supernatural event, well beyond the normal pattern of cause and effect. The locusts appeared in unimaginable numbers, suddenly, without warning. Like the subsequent Biblical instances of locust plagues sent by



***“The Locusts from the Abyss”
Luther Bible Woodcut***

God (cf. Joel 1&2; Revelation 9:1-9), the text describes the locusts in military terms as if they were an organized army carrying out a systematic military campaign - ***“They invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in very great numbers.”*** The phrase ***“in very great numbers”*** literally reads ***“very heavy,”*** reflecting the same language used in reference to the preceding plague of hail (cf. Exodus 9:18,24) and the condition of Pharaoh’s heart throughout the plague



“The Locusts from the Abyss” - 16th Century Dutch Bible Engraving

narratives, thus reminding us once again that the plagues visited upon the land of Egypt are the judgement of God upon the stubborn defiance of the King.

“Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. They covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured everything that was

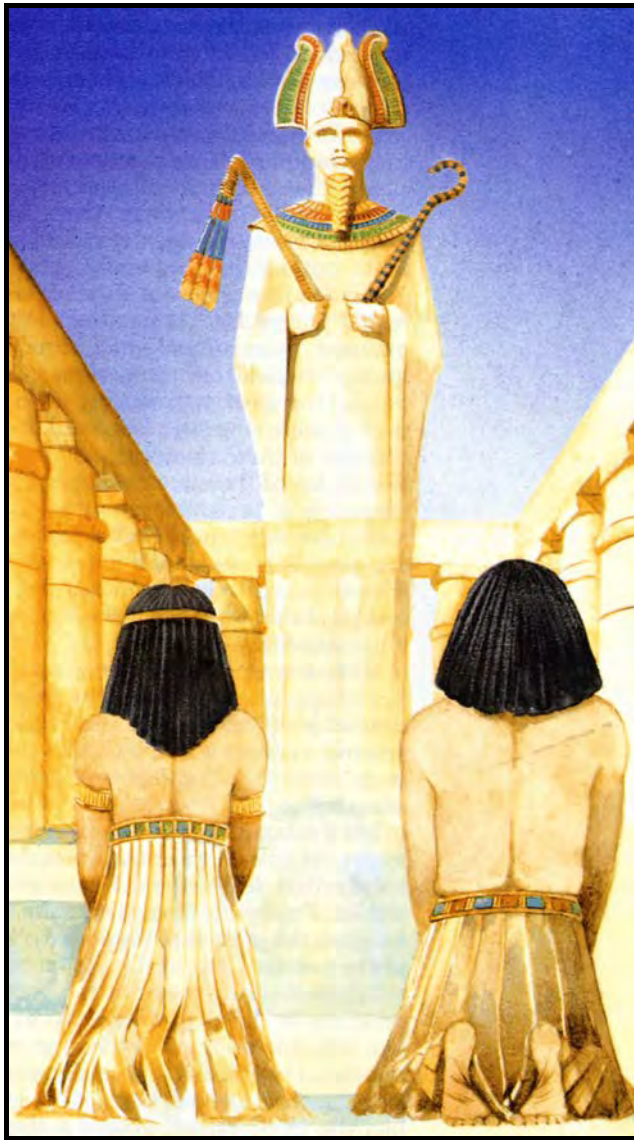


“The Plague of Locusts” - Illumination from a 15th Century Haggadah

growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt.” - The unique magnitude of the plague is described in language similar to that of the warning issued by Moses (cf. vss. 5-6). Many would prefer to dismiss this description as “*epic exaggeration*” rather than to recognize it as an accurate description of actual events. There is no basis whatsoever in the text to suggest anything other than straightforward history in these words. Both Exodus and the other Biblical references to the locust plague insist that this was an infestation of unique magnitude in the entire history of humanity. Nothing comparable to it had ever happened before, nor would anything surpass it in the future. The awesome reality of that which God inflicted upon Egypt has remained proverbial to this day and becomes all the more impressive when we consider the scope of natural locust infestations in modern times:

*“There have also been many locust plagues throughout history. In the 1920's and 30s locusts swept across Africa and wiped out five million square miles, an area almost double the size of the United States. In 1988, **The Chicago Tribune** reported: ‘Billions of locusts are moving across North Africa in the worst plague since 1954, blotting out the sun and settling on the land like a black ravenous carpet to strip it clean of*

vegetation.’ Then, in 2001, an article in **The Times** in London stated; ‘Plagues of locusts are devastating crops from Central Asia to the American Midwest, sending farmers to the Book of Exodus for salvation. Not since the Egyptians incurred the wrath of God have so many locusts had their day. A billion strong army is on the move, stretching far beyond the more normal swarming grounds of Africa and the Middle East.’ **The Times** went on to report that in places the density of the infestation reached 10,000 insects per ten square feet.” (Ryken, p. 299)



“Osiris - Lord of the Black Land”

Osiris as the “*Lord of the Black Land*,” that is, the fertile fields in the narrow valley of the Nile. Those fields were recovered each year with a new layer of nutrient rich black soil during the inundation by the river, provided by the tears of Isis. To express their faith in Osiris and the god of fertile black soil and the grain which sprouted from it each year at the beginning of the fourth month, the time of sowing, Egyptian farmers would fashion clay figures of Osiris, filled with black soil from their fields. Seeds of the grain they were planting would be pressed into the soil as an offering to the God who made their fields prosper and grow. In a short time, the seeds germinated and miniature grain fields would appear, in the form of the great god Osiris who promised his followers an abundant harvest. Historian Barbara Watterson notes that these “*Corn Osiris*” figures took on profound significance in Egyptian religion as a symbol of the resurrection:



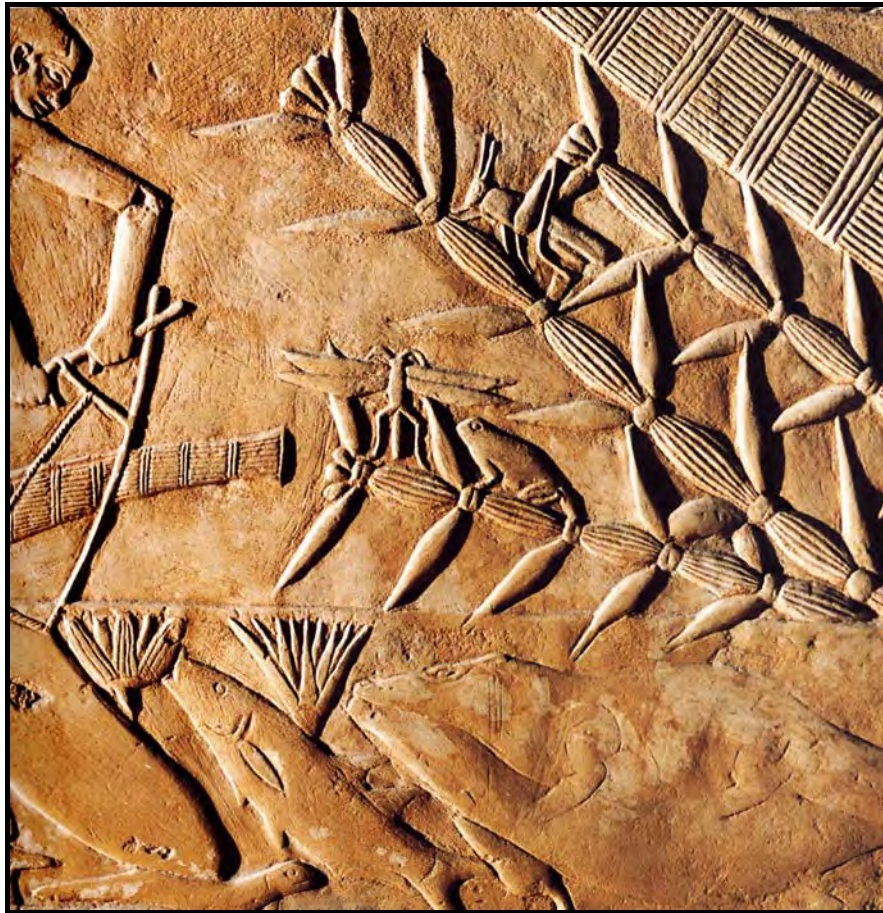
“Pharaoh Leading the Annual Procession of the Golden Barque of Amun Re and the Apis Bull to Insure the Fertility of the Fields and the Abundance of the Harvest” - 19th Century Engraving

“These ‘corn Osiris’ figures were symbols of rebirth and regeneration. Just as, every year, the soil of Egypt died under the blistering summer sun, only to be reborn after the inundation had made it fertile again, so Osiris was regarded as the god of resurrection. ‘Corn Osiris’ figures were placed in Egyptian tombs as symbols of the resurrection that the tomb owner hoped for. Perhaps the most famous ‘corn Osiris’ belonged to Tutankhamun. In the store chamber that leads off the burial chamber of his tomb was found a hollow wooden figure, about a meter long, shaped to look like Osiris and lined with linen. It had been filled with Nile silt and planted with corn seed, which had been kept moist until the grain germinated. The figure was wrapped in linen and housed in a large wooden box.” (Watterson, p. 75)

In this context, when Exodus 10 reports that the locust swarms **“covered all the ground until it was black,”** the language may very well be an allusion to the failure of Osiris, *“the Lord of the Black Land”* to fulfill his obligation to protect the fields of

his people and the inability of Isis, his sister/wife, to protect the growing grain and the harvest.

The catastrophic results of the locust invasion are set forth with grim simplicity - ***“Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt.”*** The consequence of the denuding of the fields and the destruction of the fruit trees would have been felt immediately throughout the land in starvation, famine and widespread civil unrest. Pharaoh did not exaggerate when he referred to the coming of the locust swarms as ***“this deadly plague.”*** (vs. 17)



“Wall Relief Depicting a Locust Within the Marsh”

“Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now forgive my sin once more and pray to the Lord your God to take this deadly plague away from me.’” - Without specifying the duration of the infestation, the text notes that in this instance Pharaoh acted with unusual haste - ***“Pharaoh quickly summoned...”***. His urgency indicated a belated

recognition of the desperate straights into which the destruction of the grain harvest had plunged Egypt. Perhaps, even at this late hour, he still hoped to save some of the grain from the ravenous insect hordes. The haughty rage which had characterized his attitude before the arrival of the locusts is now absent. Like the grain in his fields and the fruit in his orchards it had disappeared beneath the locust plague. The King's confession is more general in this instance, without many of the qualifications and stipulations which had limited his previous acknowledgment of guilt (cf. Exodus 9:27-28). For the first time, he admitted to his adversaries that he had ***“sinned against the Lord your God and against you.”*** At least in an indirect manner he acknowledged his past offenses when he requested - ***“Now forgive my sin once more...”*** at the time, thereby, implying that he would not again renege upon his word. Moses did not dignify this charade with a response. *“Moses and Aaron, having been recalled by Pharaoh, make no response to his plea. Their cold silence must have been especially humiliating to Pharaoh, since he had summarily dismissed them only a short time before.”* (Sarna, p. 50)



“Tomb Painting of a Locust on a Papyrus Stalk”

“Moses then left Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. And the Lord changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea. Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not let the Israelites go.” - In answer to Moses’ prayer God changed the desert wind which had carried the locusts into Egypt into ***“a very strong west wind”*** (literally - *“a sea wind”* - the traditional idiom of inhabitants of Canaan for whom the Great Sea was to

the west). That ***“very strong”*** wind lifted the vast swarms into the air and carried them off into the ***“Red Sea”*** (literally - *“the Sea of Reeds”*) to the east of the Nile Valley. The destruction of the army of locusts in the waters of the Red Sea is a precursor of the impending destruction of the host of Pharaoh in the same ill-fated body of water. The power of the Lord was perfectly efficacious - ***“Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt.”*** Nonetheless, as in every previous instance, the instant the pain of the plague was removed, Pharaoh reneged on his word again for ***“the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.”***

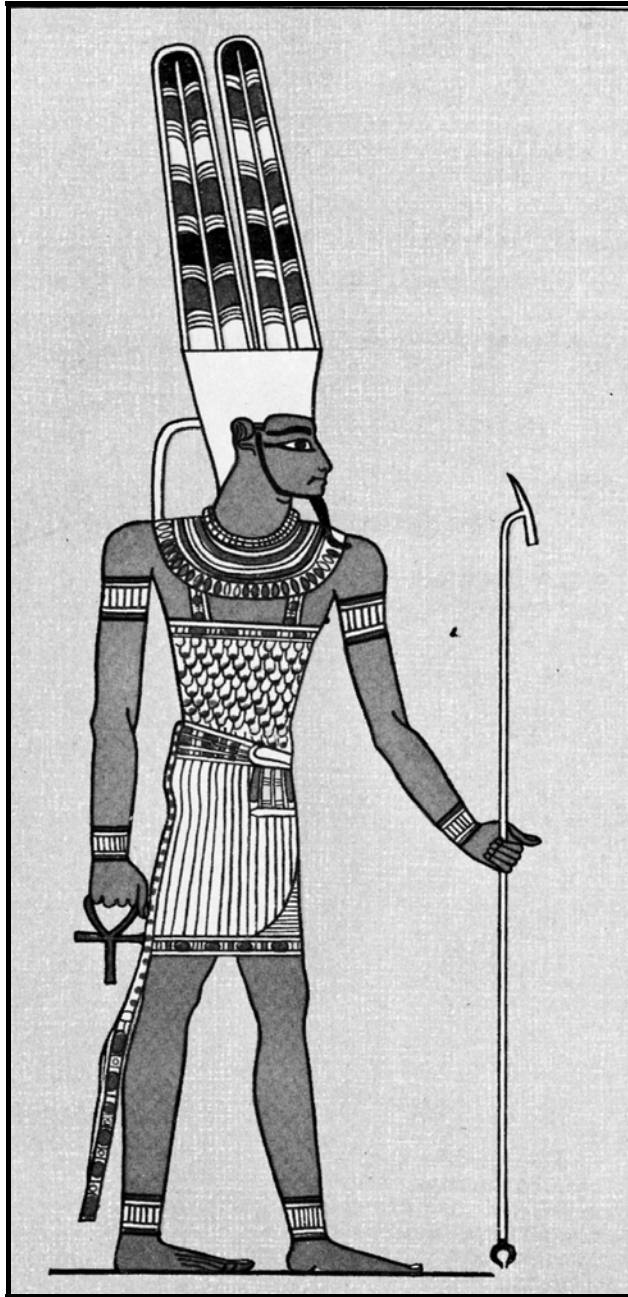


"The Plague of Darkness" by Ted Larson

The Plague of Darkness

Exodus 10:21-29

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt - darkness that can be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the Lord and even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind." But Moses said, "You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the Lord our God. Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshipping the Lord our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the Lord." But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart



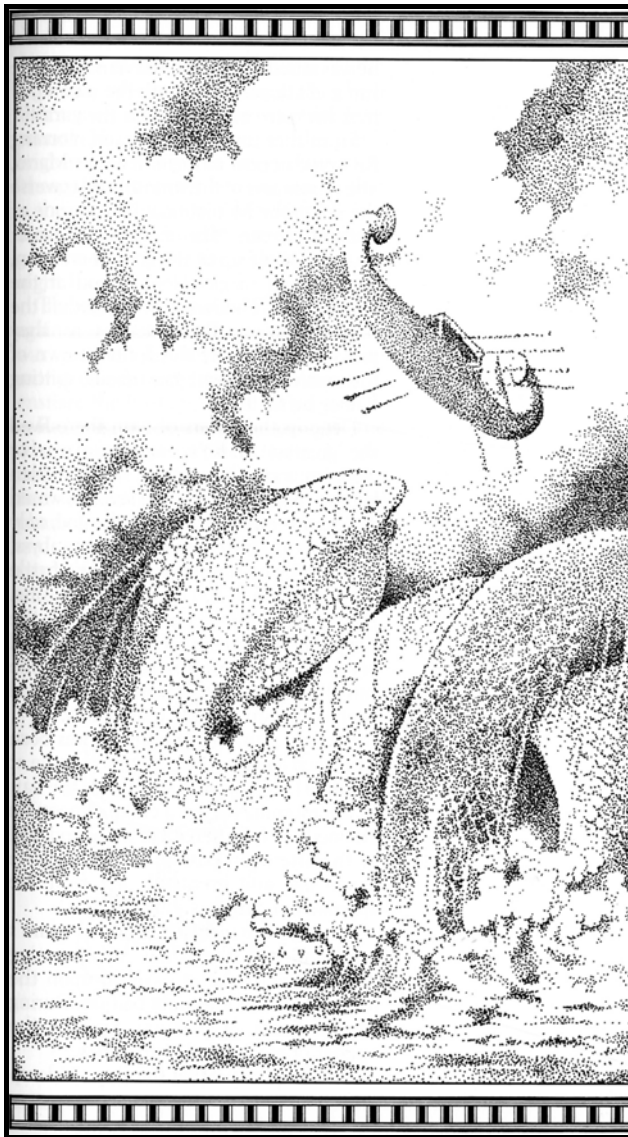
*“Amun-Re - The King of the Gods”
by Wallace Budge*

and he was not willing to let them go. Pharaoh said to Moses, “Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die.” “Just as you say,” Moses replied. “I will never appear before you again.”

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt - darkness that can be felt.’” - Like its counterparts, the third plague (Gnats - Exodus 8:16-19) and the sixth plague (Boils - Exodus 9:8-12), the final plague in the last cluster of three comes without warning. Although it did not involve the threat of physical destruction or death, as had a number of its predecessors, the plague of darkness did constitute a significant escalation in severity and was thus a most appropriate culmination to the nine plagues which came before God’s dreadful judgement in the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn. That is true because the plague of darkness represented a frontal assault upon the power and authority of Egypt’s supreme god, Amun-Re, the god of the sun.

Amun-Re was the father of all of the other deities of Egypt. He was the self-existent Creator from who all of the other gods and goddesses were derived. The priests of Amun praised him as the self-engendered originator of the universe who *“had not father or mother but shaped his own egg, mingled his seed with his body to make his egg come into being and took the form of Tanen (the earth god) to give birth to the gods.”* (Watterson, p. 141)

The name “Amun” means “*that which is concealed*” or “*invisible*” and his power was often compared to the wind which cannot be seen. Amun-Re was also recognized as “*the eldest of the gods of the eastern sky,*” associating the great god with the rising of the sun as the primary manifestation of his power. He was the god who had enthroned the pharaoh, who protected the king in battle and who destroyed all those who dared to resist the might of the Egypt’s monarch who ruled in his place among men. As the god of the sun, Amun-Re was the Lord of Time and the Defender of Order against the demons of chaos. His followers believed that he traveled through the heavens each day in a golden barque traveling from the east to the west and that



“The Golden Vessel of Amun-Re Sailing Through the Heavens Above Apep the Demon Serpent” by Clive Barrett

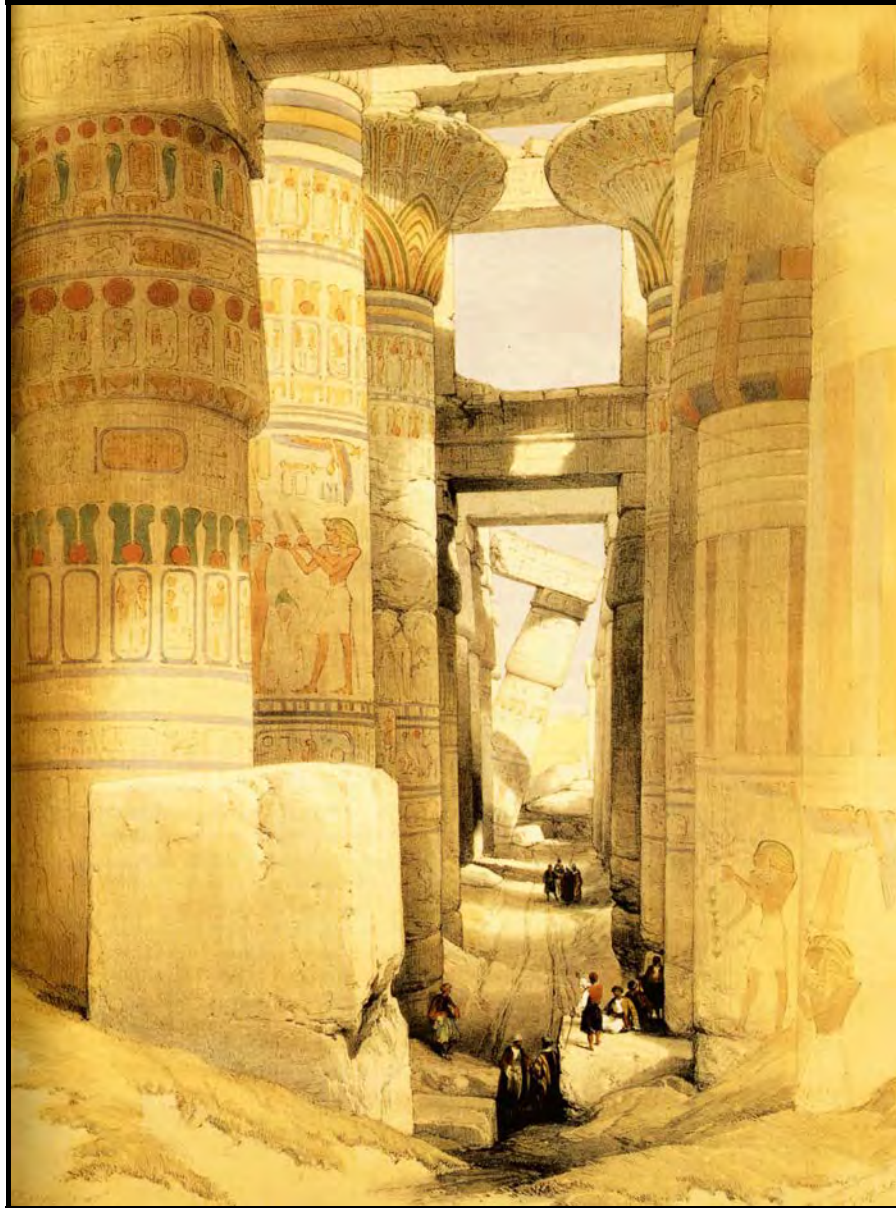
through the hours of the night his golden vessel passed through the underworld which lay beneath the earth’s surface. The sky goddess, Nut, gave birth to the sun each morning, and swallowed it again at sunset in the evening, so that the orderly pattern of days, weeks, months and years might continue in accordance with the divine will of Amun-Re. The destructive forces of chaos, personified by the demon serpent, Apep, were only held at bay by the power of Re. Within the context of this world view, a plague of darkness would have had a devastating psychological effect. Nahum Sarna summarizes: “*The blotting out of the light of the sun for three days would have carried a powerful symbolic message for the Egyptians, for the sun was their supreme god, and its worship was pervasive in the official palace ritual. The sun’s diurnal rising was perceived to be a triumph over the demon Apep, the embodiment of darkness, who struggled daily to vanquish him. The plague of darkness, therefore, would have had a devastating psychological impact. The impotence of the Egyptian’s supreme god is exposed, thus foreboding imminent doom.*” (Sarna, p. 51)



“The Ruins of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak” - 19th Century Engraving

The Greek historian Herodotus once marveled that the Egyptians were “*the most religious people in the world.*” Although Herodotus was notorious for exaggeration, in this instance his observation may have been very close to the truth. By the end of the reign of Ramesses III, the temples of Egypt owned in excess of one third of the country’s cultivatable land and employed more than one fifth of the total population. Over seventy-five per cent of that wealth was directly controlled by the temple of Amun-Re. Thus, the priesthood of Amun-Re enjoyed immense political and economic power within Egyptian society. The High Priest of Re at Thebes was typically a member of the Pharaoh’s immediate family. By the twentieth dynasty it had become customary for a daughter of the reigning Pharaoh to be consecrated as the Virgin Bride of Re who reigned as High Priestess within her own magnificent temple. The main temple of Amun-Re at Karnak was considered among the wonders of the ancient world and remains among the largest religious structures ever constructed by man. The great columns of the Hypstyle Hall are over 78 feet tall. During the reign of Ramesses III as staff of 80,000 priests and servants carried on the work of the temple. Barbara Watterson offers this description of the Karnak Temple:

“Karnak Temple does not consist of a single shrine: it is, instead, a vast complex of religious buildings in which twenty major shrines have been identified. The sacred enclosure covers an area of some 1 1/4 square kilometers, in comparison to which the main temple in its final phase measured at least 1 1/2 kilometers long. Karnak Temple, which

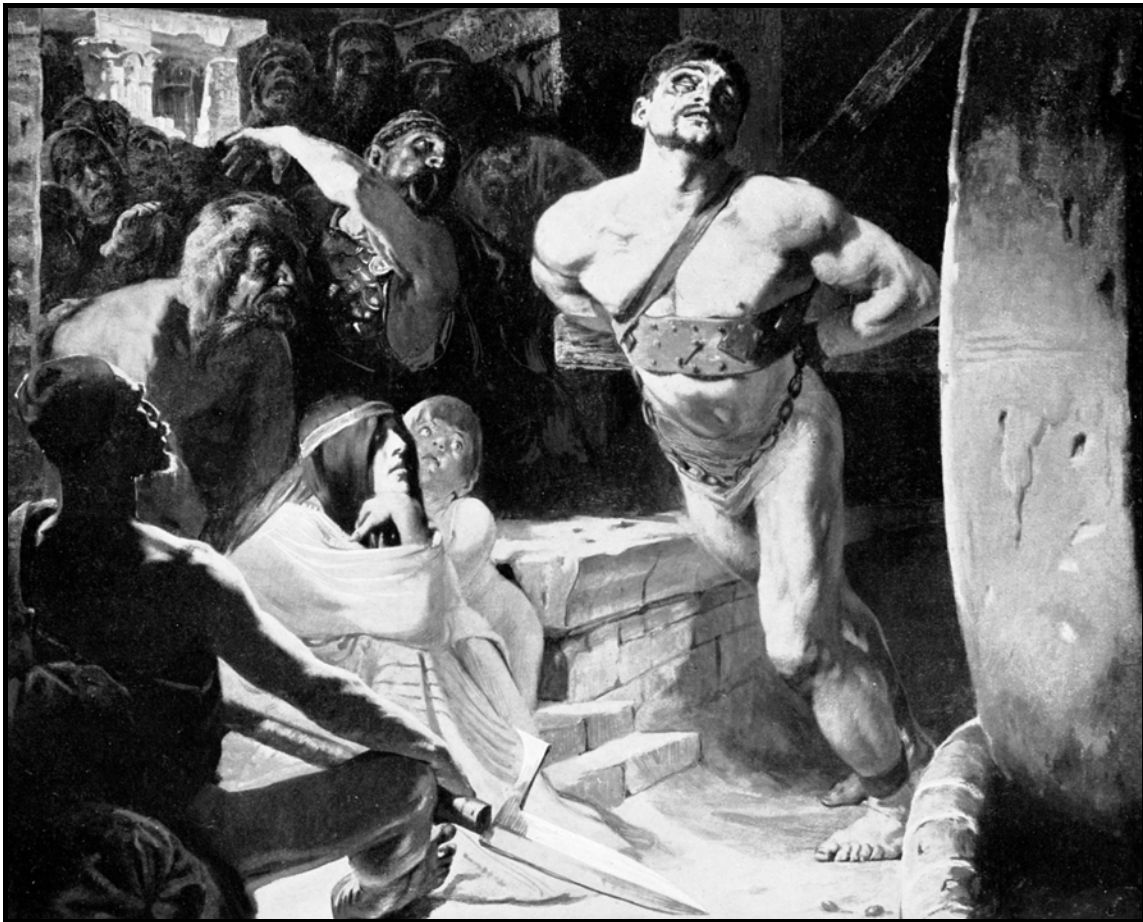


“19th Century Engraving of the Main Hall of the Karnak Temple”

Champollion called ‘a gigantic wonder,’ was for more than 2,000 years built, rebuilt, enlarged and embellished by numerous rulers of Egypt.”
(Watterson, p. 142)

“So that darkness will spread over Egypt - darkness that can be felt.” - Once again, the text places particular emphasis on the supernatural severity of the plague. This was to be no ordinary darkness, the mere absence of light. This was to be a darkness so profoundly deep that it would be palpable - **“darkness that can be felt.”** The verb

“felt” occurs in this form in only one other Old Testament text. In Judges 16:26, blind Sampson, whose eyes had been put out by the Philistines, asked the boy who was his keeper to place him next to the column in the Temple of Dagon so that he might be able to **“feel”** the pillars which supported the roof. This was the hopeless, helpless blackness of the pit hell so thick that you could reach out and touch it. This darkness drove the Egyptians to despair. *“When Yahweh wills it, the sun is darkened, and Amun-Re is hidden and unable to shine upon his worshipers. During the ninth plague Amun-Re does not rise and does not give life; his realm is only death, judgement and hopelessness.”* (Currid, p. 225)



“Blind Sampson at the Mercy of the Philistines” by M. Mitrecy

“So Moses stretched out his hand to the sky and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.” - The Hebrew text literally repeats the term darkness (NIV - **“total darkness”** - Hebrew - **“dark darkness”**) as a way to stress the profound nature of this supernatural event. God



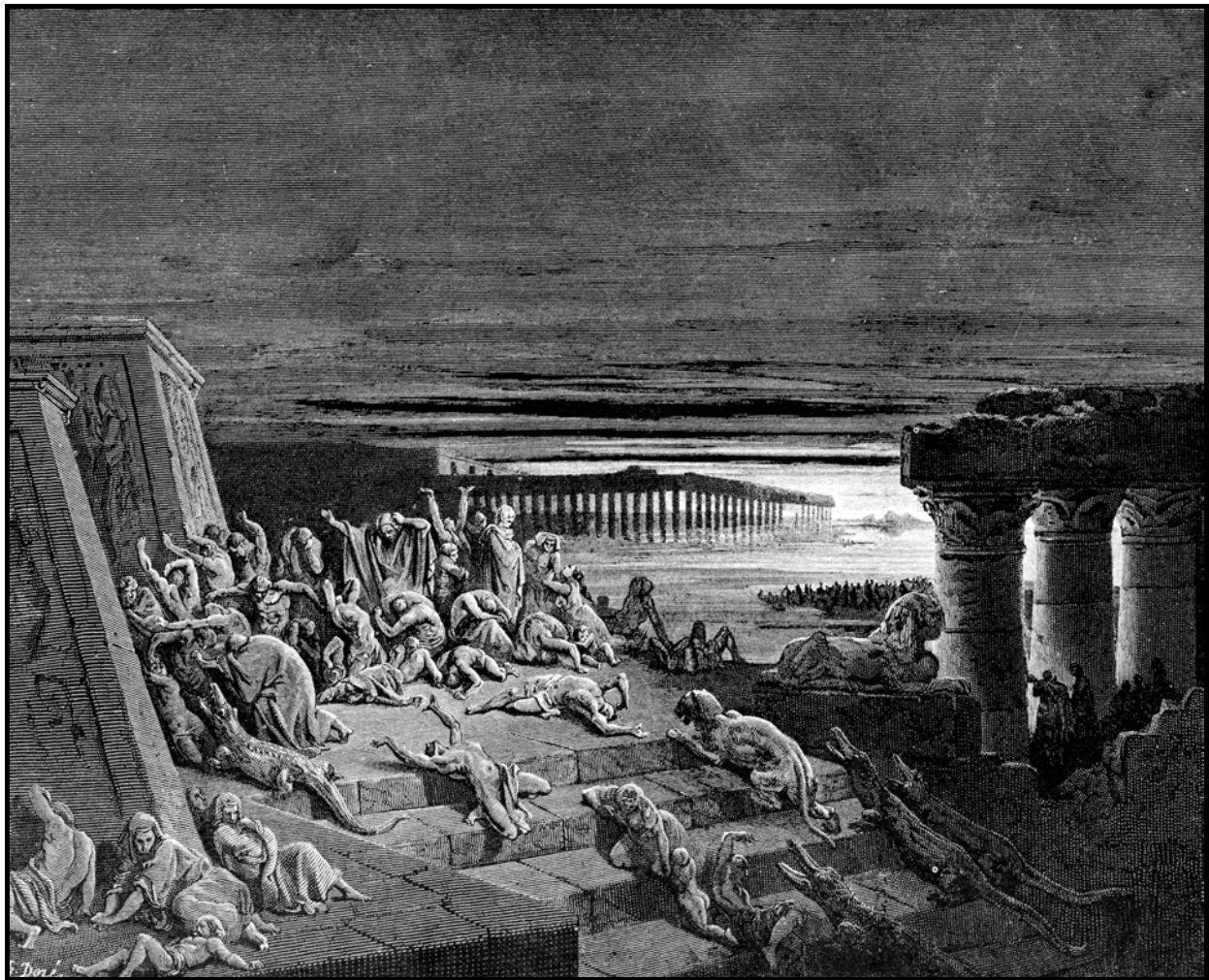
“Pharaoh Thutmose III Making an Offering to Amun-Re”

plunged the entire land of Egypt into a darkness which no lamp could dispel, isolating and immobilizing everyone in the country - ***“No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days.”*** The origin of this darkness as a judgement of God upon stubborn Pharaoh and his nation was further emphasized by the fact that the light of the sun continued to shine brightly in the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived: ***“Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.”*** The specific duration of the plague is given to reinforce the awesome character of the darkness - ***“And total darkness covered all the land of Egypt for three days.”*** The accurate prediction of a momentary eclipse would have been impressive enough, but this was to be no momentary eclipse. Egypt was completely deprived of light for three days so that the utter and absolute helplessness of their supreme sun god might be unmistakably revealed. The power of Amun-Re, in which they had placed their trust and upon which the security and the future of their nation rested, was nothing more than a lie. In his masterful depiction of the scene, 19th Century Bible illustrator Gustav Dore

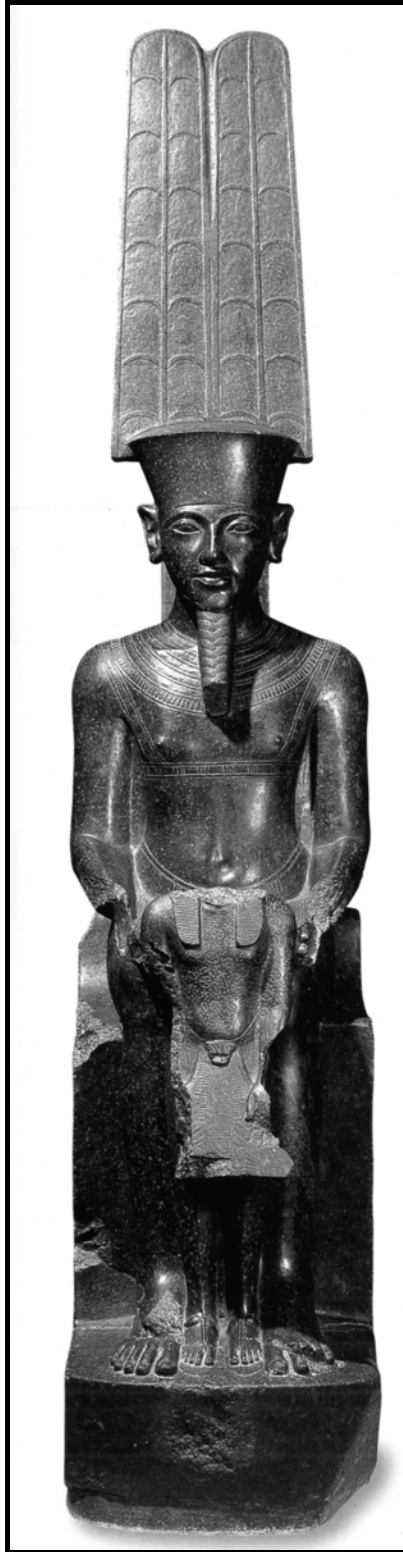
indicated the profound significance of the plague of darkness as he showed the Egyptian cowering helplessly within the Temple of Re at Karnak, futilely pleading with their sun god to restore the light while the night stalkers, predators who hunt beneath the cover of darkness crept in to wreak havoc among them.

“Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, ‘Go, worship the Lord, even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind.’”

- Confronted by the collapse by the religious world-view upon which his kingdom had been founded, Pharaoh called Moses back into his presence and yielded the point which in their last meeting had been absolutely non-negotiable: ***“Go, worship the Lord, even your women and children may go with you.”*** But even in the midst of the stifling darkness which had terrified him and his nation the stubborn King tried to salvage something of his pride. He still refused to unconditionally release the



“The Plague of Darkness” by Gustav Dore

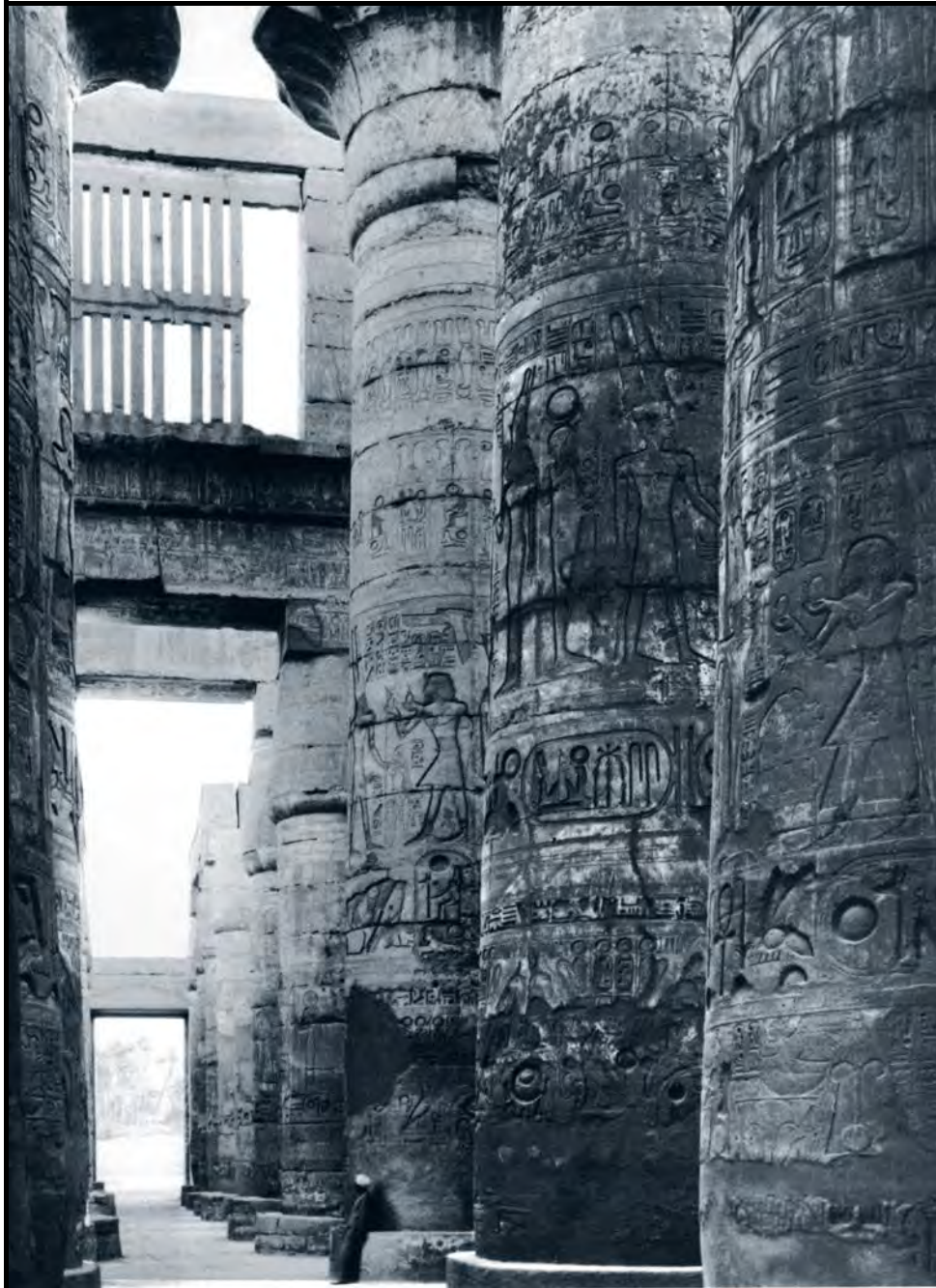


***“Granite Statue of Amun-Re
as the Guardian of the
Pharaoh Tutankhamun”***

Israelites: ***“only leave your flocks and herds behind.”*** The Jewish historian Josephus suggested that this demand was prompted by desperation. The Egyptians needed the flocks and herds of Israel to survive because almost all of their own livestock had been destroyed by the plague and the hail. While this may have been true, it is more likely that Pharaoh was still attempting to make it impossible for the Israelites to travel too far away and to guarantee that they would have to return to Egypt. Despite all that has taken place, Pharaoh continued to believe that he was in a position to bargain with God and force concessions from Him.

“But Moses said, ‘You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the Lord our God. Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We will have to use some of them in worshiping the Lord our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use in worshiping the Lord.’” - Moses’ response is direct and assertive. He minces no words, and, in fact, bluntly issues commands to the King of Egypt. The text literally reads - *“Indeed you, you will give sacrifices and burnt offerings...”*. The deliberate repetition of the personal pronoun *“you”* in the Hebrew text is intended to most clearly emphasize the personal nature of this command. Not only will the Hebrews be allowed to leave Egypt with all of their own flocks and herds, but Pharaoh himself would provide them with the animals necessary for the sacrifices which they were to make to ***“the Lord our God”***! Umberto Cassuto paraphrases Moses’ bold demand in this way: *“You spoke as though you were making an important concession to us; let me tell you then that not only is it no concession on your part to let our children go, but it is our right and not a matter for discussion; and not only do I not acquiesce to your reservation regarding our flocks and herds, but*

I go further and declare that in the end you will give more than you now refuse to concede. You must also let us have of your own sheep and oxen to slaughter as sacrifices and burnt offerings that we may make them oblations to the Lord our God.” (Cassutto, p. 130)



“19th Century Tour Guides in the North Gallery of the Hypostyle Hall in the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak”

Moses did not dignify Pharaoh's implicit desire for a guarantee of Israel's return to Egypt with a response. Instead, he simply reasserted that all of Israel's flocks and herds would accompany them on their journey in the most forceful language possible: ***"Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind."*** Pharaoh's devious design to separate the Israelites from their animals was not only an insult to the nation, it was completely impractical - ***"We have to use some of them in worshipping the Lord our God, and until we get there we will not know what to use to worship the Lord."*** Moses' comment is not, as some have suggested, a disingenuous attempt to conceal the fact that Israel has no intention of returning to Egypt. Such dishonesty would be inconsistent with the role of Moses as a spokesman for God. The point which he made is in fact accurate. The sacrificial system had not yet been established and the details of that system, including the animals required for the various offerings were yet to be specified.



"Moses and Aaron Expelled from the Presence of Pharaoh" by J. James Tissot

"But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. Pharaoh said to Moses, 'Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die!' 'Just as you say,' Moses replied, 'I will never appear before you again.'" - God's judgement of obduration - punishing Pharaoh's sin by confirming him in that sin - continued to be at work: "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go."

Pharaoh had obviously been infuriated by Moses' refusal to bow to his demands and the defiant manner in which that refusal had been expressed. Both sides recognized that the time for negotiation and discussion had passed. This confrontation was about to be concluded. Pharaoh, evidently still operating under the illusion that he was in a position to intimidate God's representatives and terminate their negotiations, threatened Moses and Aaron with immediate death if they dared to appear before him again - ***“Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die!”***. Evidently he had already forgotten how after each of his previous dismissals of these men he had been forced to plead for their help in removing the plagues which God had inflicted upon him.



“Yet All the Israelites Had Light” by Ted Larson

“Just as you say,” Moses replied. ‘I will never appear before you again.’ Moses responded in a manner which indicated that the King's angry words had utterly failed to intimidate him. In fact, Pharaoh had spoken the truth, although not in the sense he had intended. This conversation was over but not because his royal highness had chosen to end it. God's patience was at an end. The tenth and last plague was now at hand. This would indeed be the last meeting between the two of them. But even now, at this last hour, Pharaoh was to be given one final warning.



“The Death of the Firstborn” by Rudolf Schüfer

The Announcement of the Tenth Plague

Exodus 11:1-10

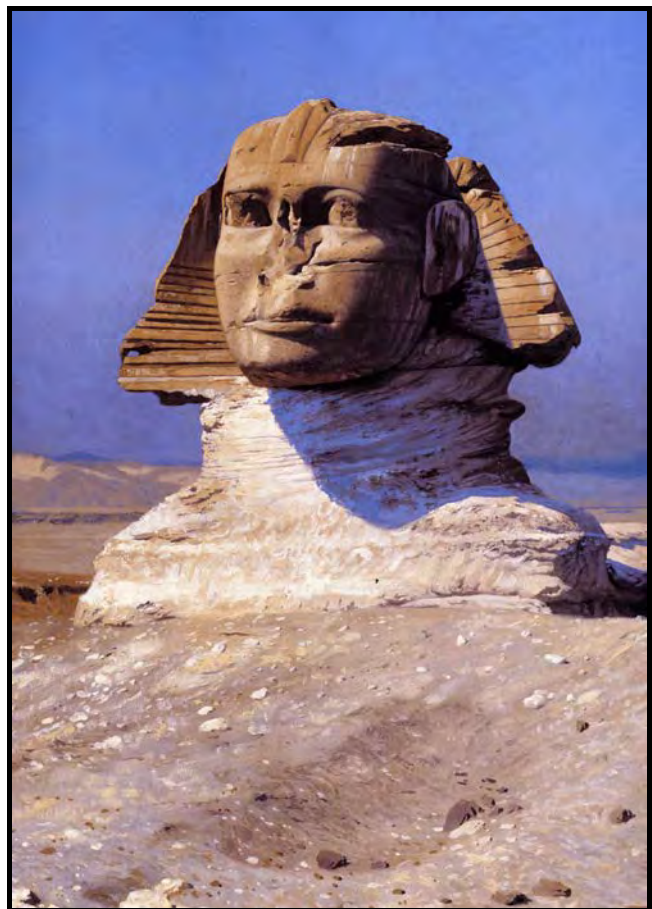
Now the Lord had said to Moses, “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely. Tell the people that men and women alike are to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold.” (The Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh’s officials and by the people.) So Moses said, “This is what the Lord says: ‘About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt - worse than there has every been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.’ Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will leave.” Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you - so that My wonders may be multiplied in Egypt.” Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.

“Now the Lord said to Moses...” - God spoke to Moses even as he stood before the angry King, providing specific instruction as to how this final decisive interview was to be concluded. At the outset of the process God had forewarned His prophet that Pharaoh would persistently refuse to release the Hebrews despite repeated demonstrations of God’s power over the gods and goddesses of Egypt. Moses had been assured that all of was part of God’s plan in demonstrating His divine power and vindicating His perfect righteousness:

“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay My hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgement I will bring out My divisions, My people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.” (Exodus 7:3-5)

Now God informed Moses that the time had finally come for the mighty act of judgement which would humble Egypt’s arrogant King and compel him not only to release the Israelites but to plead for their immediate from his country: ***“I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely.”*** This plague will be decisive. It will be the last of the plagues - ***“I will bring one more plague.”***

The language with which the Lord described the tenth plague was emphatically personal - ***“I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt...About midnight I will go throughout Egypt.”*** - to clearly remind the reader that all of the plagues were judgements rendered by the



“The Sphinx” by Jean Leon Gerome

sovereign Lord of the Universe. That point is reinforced by the term **“plague”** (Hebrew - *“nega”*) itself, which occurs for the first time here in Exodus 11:1. *“In this form ‘plague’ is used almost exclusively to a physical blow given by an overlord to a subject.”* (Currid, p. 232) The application of this particular term to the judgements



“God’s Promise to Abraham” by Rudolf Schäfer

which God had inflicted upon Pharaoh and his country was an unambiguous assertion of God’s absolute sovereignty over Egypt and every nation. Pharaoh had condescendingly insisted on referring to God as the God of the Hebrews or the God of Moses. By specifically describing His judgements as punishments inflicted by a master upon his subjects, God was rejecting any such limitation of His lordship. God is not merely the Master of one nation, but of every nation.

“Tell the people that men and women alike are to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold. The Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people.” - This instruction parallels God’s prior words to Moses at the burning bush. The Lord had promised Moses that Israel would not only be delivered from bondage in

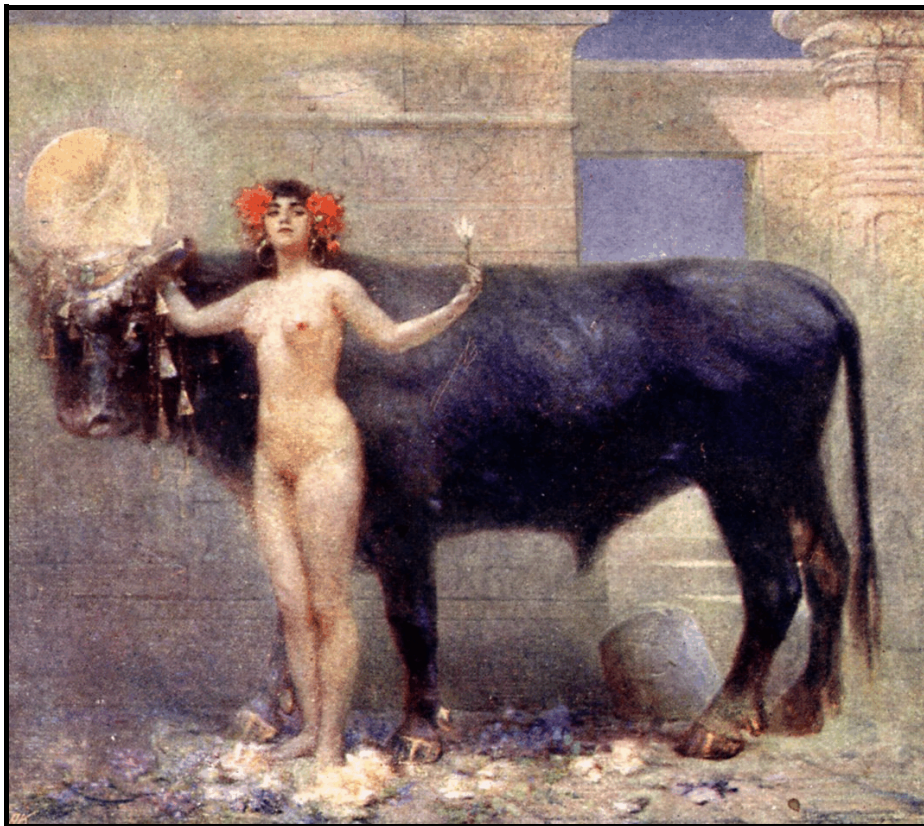
Egypt, but would go forth from the bondage laden with the riches of that ancient land, riches which would be heaped upon them by the Egyptians themselves:

“And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.” (Exodus 3:21-22)

That promise to Moses had been the retelling of the promise which God had made to Abraham centuries earlier: ***“But I will plunder the nation which they serve as slaves and afterwards they will come out with great possessions.”*** (Genesis 15:14)

“And Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh’s officials and by the people.” - In this instance, the additional detail that the renown in which Moses came to be held by the Egyptians, no doubt as the result of the great miracles he had performed among them, perhaps along with their acquaintance with him from his years in the household of Pharaoh’s own daughter, would also be a significant fact in their willingness to bestow their wealth upon the Children of Israel.

“So Moses said, “This is what the Lord says: ‘About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh,



“An Egyptian Priestess with the Apis Bull and Lotus Blossoms - Symbols of the Virility and Fertility with Which the Gods Blessed Egypt”



“The Death of the Firstborn” by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema

who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well.” - The words of Moses to Pharaoh, which had been interrupted after 10:29 with the parenthetical aside of 11:1-3, now resume. The dire warning of the disaster about to occur is presented as a direct revelation from God Himself - ***“This is what the Lord says...”*** Again, the plague itself is described by God speaking in the first person, to stress the nature of these events as expressions of God’s personal judgement upon Egypt and her ruler. The time of the plague is specified as ***“about midnight”*** - literally - ***“at the night’s dividing.”*** The Angel of Death was to come upon the land of Egypt in the darkest hour of the night, associated throughout human culture with superstitious fear and misfortune. In the mythology of the Egyptians this was the time when the forces of evil were strongest and the demons of the underworld rose up through the darkness to snatch away the souls of the weak, particularly the very young and the very old. The timing of this last dreadful plague could not have been more intimidating or appropriate. ***“I will go throughout the land of Egypt.”*** The language of the text continues in the first person thereby re-emphasizing the nature of the plague as a direct confrontation between the

true God and the idols of Egypt personified by the Pharaoh. The verb ***“I will go”*** carries the connotation of royal power, a king coming forth in majesty and might to do battle against His enemies. The impact of this divine visitation will be universal - ***“throughout the land of Egypt.”*** No segment, province, or region of the nation - from the southernmost districts above the cataracts to the lush outlets of the delta at the Great Sea - would be spared in this awesome, awful demonstration of righteous judgement of God. The scope of the plague is described in similarly comprehensive language - ***“Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well.”*** - From the highest in the magnificent palace of Pharaoh to the lowest in the wretched hovel of the slave, every firstborn son would be struck down. There would be no exceptions or exemptions. The specific designation of Pharaoh’s heir as the foremost victim of the plague serves to reiterate the nature of this grim event as a direct assault on the royal house and the divine pretensions of Egypt’s god/king. The reference to crown prince ***“who sits on the throne”*** further alludes to the legitimacy of the monarchy. Cassutto observes that the identification of ***“the slave girl, who is at her hand mill”*** is a common idiom in Egyptian usage for ***“the poorest of the poor.”*** From the top to the bottom of Egyptian society - from the crown prince on the royal throne to the lowliest slave at her hand



“From the Firstborn Son of Pharaoh Who Sits on the Throne” by Arnold Friberg



“The Annual Procession of the Apis Bull to Insure the Fertility of the Fields”

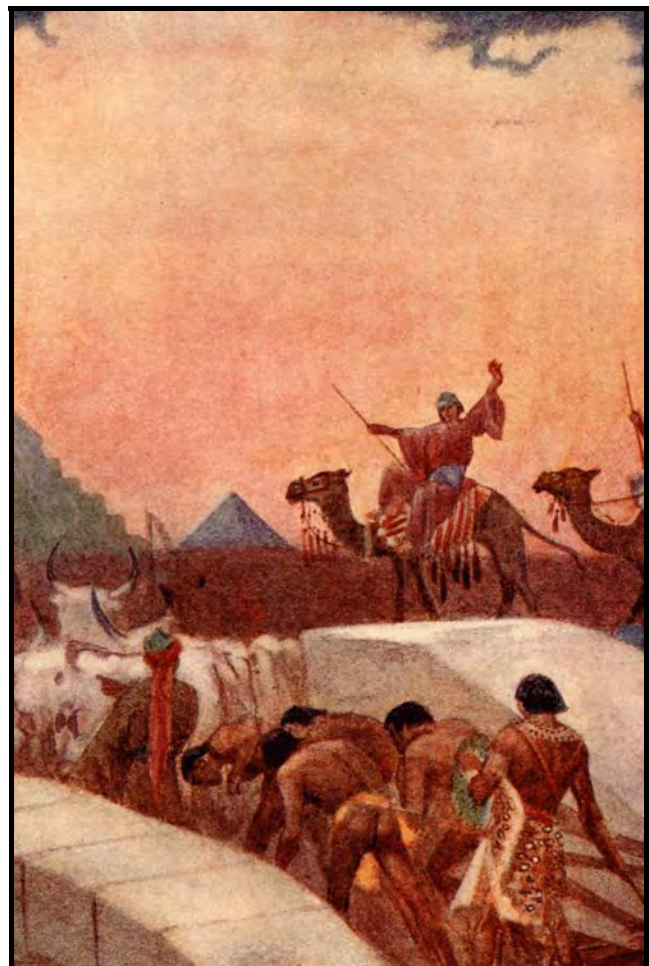
mill - all of Egypt’s firstborn sons were to perish. The icy hand of death would also reach out to clutch **“all the firstborn of the cattle as well.”** The Egyptians worshiped the Apis bulls and the cow goddess Hathor as the personifications of the virility and the fertility of the land. These sacred animals would also fall prey to the plague upon the firstborn.

As has been the case throughout the plagues, so also in this instance, the punishment inflicted upon the land of Egypt fits the crimes of which they are guilty. Egypt had brutally oppressed and enslaved the Children of Israel, who God collectively referred to as **“My firstborn son.”** Therefore, the firstborn sons of Egypt must die. This perspective had been clearly established in God’s explanation of the mission to Moses at the burning bush: **“Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is My firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let My son go so that he may worship Me.’ But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.”** (Exodus 4:22-23) In the perfect justice of God, the penalty must be an absolutely appropriate response to the crime which has been committed.

“There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt - worse than there has ever been or

will ever be again.” - The impact of the catastrophe will be such that **“there will be a loud wailing throughout Egypt.”** As the plague would afflict the entire country so also the response to the catastrophe would be heard throughout all of Egypt. With bitter irony, the text uses exactly the same word to describe the Egyptians’ cry of despair (Hebrew - *“tse’akah”*) which had previously been used to describe the Israelites’ outcry to God for deliverance from the bondage which had been inflicted upon them by the Egyptians - **“And now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.”** (Exodus 3:9) Now, by the power of God, the tables would be turned. The outcry of the oppressors would take the place of the lament of the oppressed. Like the plague which would cause it, the wail of terror and despair which would arise from the people of Egypt, would be unique, in a category of its own - **“worse than there has ever been or will ever be again.”** The same kind of language had been used earlier to describe the plagues of hail and locusts - **“the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt from the day it was founded until now”** (9:18) **“something neither your father or your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land until now.”** (10:6). These plagues are unmistakable demonstration’s of God’s supernatural power. They far transcend anything that has ever been produced within the world of nature.

“But among the Israelites, not a dog will bark at any man or any animal. Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.” - While the firstborn of Egypt are struck down and an outcry of anguish and terror fills the land, there will be peace and security for the Children of Israel in Goshen. The stark contrast between the calm serenity of Israel and the panic stricken devastation of Egypt also highlights the nature of these events as supernatural



“I Have Heard Their Outcry Because of Their Oppressors” by Evelyn Paul

demonstrations of the absolute power of God. The Children of Israel in Goshen will not face the slightest threat. The miraculous nature of their security is indicated by the colorful Hebrew phrase **“not a dog will bark at any man or any animal.”** The Hebrew text literally reads - *“not a dog will sharpen his tongue.”* The NIV captures the sense of the original in its paraphrase. Dr. Propp notes: *“To ‘sharpen the tongue’ probably means to extend it in hostile utterance - here to bark threateningly. The Bible elsewhere compares a malicious tongue to a weapon (Jer. 18:18), a sharp sword (Ps. 57:5; 64:4; Prov. 12:18) or a bow and arrows ((Jer. 9:2,7).”* (Propp, p 344) The same idiom occurs in Psalm 140:2-4 - **“Keep me from the men of violence who have conceived evil things in the heart... they have sharpened their tongue like a snake.”** and in Isaiah 57:4 - **“Whom are you mocking? At whom do you sneer and stick out your tongue? Are you not a brood of rebels, the offspring of liars?”** The difference between the serenity of the Hebrew slaves in Goshen and the devastation of their masters throughout Egypt will be decisive proof **“that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.”** *“Among the Egyptians is an unparalleled wail of anguish; among the Israelites, silence. All this to the end that the Egyptians may know the power of Jahweh and where His favor rests.”* (Durham, p. 149)



“The Majesty of the Great King” - 19th Century Engraving of Pharaoh Rameses II in Procession in His Capital City

“All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all your people who follow you!’ After that I will leave. Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.” - In his arrogance and rage, Pharaoh had permanently banished Moses from his royal presence. As he left the throne room, Moses warned the king that in the aftermath of the final plague the very court officials who now stood by his side as the instruments of Pharaoh’s power would fall down on their knees before Moses and plead with him to take the children of Israel out of Egypt. The Hebrew text literally says *“will come down to me”* thus indicating that since Moses had been banned from the palace of Pharaoh, the ministers of the court would scurry down to Goshen to present themselves before Moses. The irony could not have been more bitter. Moses would not return to the house of Pharaoh. Instead the representatives of Pharaoh would be compelled to humiliate themselves by going to the house of Moses, the Hebrew slave, to plead for the deliverance of their country. Cassutto paraphrases the prophet’s sarcastic warning in this way: *“I shall have*



“The Mass Burial of Egypt’s Firstborn” by Erastus Field

no need to see your face again in order to present my request to you; it is you Egyptians who will present your request to me. It is not I who will come to prostrate myself before you; they shall come and prostrate themselves to me.” (Cassutto, p. 133)

Pharaoh does not deign to reply to this incredible prediction. The text is careful to note that Moses does not leave the royal presence as a banished slave - *“Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.”* The Hebrew actually says - *“with an angry nose.”* The Hebrew idiom refers to the flaring nostrils of one who is furiously angry, perhaps even to the image of a nose breathing fire and/or smoke. So the Psalmist depicts the anger of the Lord: ***“They trembled because He was angry. Smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it.”*** (Psalm 18: 7-8) Moses had not been the least bit intimidated by Pharaoh’s angry threats, Instead, trembling with rage, he stalks out of the presence of this prideful fool who has defied the Lord and brought God’s terrible judgement upon himself and his people. *“The narrator gives the impression of an angry Moses stalking out, leaving an awed Pharaoh in stunned silence.”* (Durham, p. 149) The scene presents a most appropriate and ominous conclusion to Moses’ negotiations with the King of Egypt.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you - so that My wonders may be multiplied in Egypt.’ Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.” - The segment comes to an end with a reminder of the fact that the purpose and plan of God is unfolding exactly as the Lord had predicted from the beginning. The language here is a virtual repetition of that which God had forewarned Moses as the series of plagues began:

“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and though I multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay My hand upon Egypt and with mighty acts of judgement I will bring out My divisions, My people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.” (Exodus 7:3-5)

Pharaoh’s obstinate resistance would now result in the dreadful judgement of God. The judicial hardening of the monarch’s heart had served to multiply God’s signs and wonders and display the righteousness of almighty God before all of humanity.