

November 12, 2017 - Ex. 8:16 – 9:35 - More plagues descend on Egypt
Torah Reading: Exodus 8:16 – 9:35 - More plagues descend on Egypt
Psalm 47
Haftarah: Isaiah 34:11 – 35:2, 10
1 Samuel 12:7-16

The Third Plague of Lice

Exodus 8:16 - “And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.”

Lice = *kennim* - gnat, gnats, gnat-swarm

Josephus and the Rabbis say it means lice, but the LXX, Philo, Artapanus, Origen, and St. Augustine say mosquito. The Egyptian word for “mosquito” is Khnemms.

Picture a Sahara dust-storm approaching, only to find it is a massive swarm of stinging insects. Mosquitoes come from larvae deposited in stagnant waters, but these were supernaturally produced from the dust.

Spiritually, the plague represents the dust of our own flesh (**Genesis 2:7**) becoming an irritant to us.

Hebrew commentators note that the first nine plagues are divided into three groups: distinct warnings are given of the first two plagues in each group; the third in each is inflicted without any previous notice; namely, the third, lice, the sixth, boils, the ninth, darkness.

Exodus 8:18 - “And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast.”

Rashi - Because a demon has no power over a creature smaller than a barleycorn. — [from Sanh. 67b, Tanchuma, Va'era 14, Exod. Rabbah 10:7]

Geb the earth god

This plague from dust was upon the earth god Geb, father of snakes (who live in the earth) , and he personified fertile earth and barren desert.

Exodus 8:19 - “Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God’: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he listened not to them; as the LORD had said.”

The magicians acknowledge the sovereign God to be on Israel's side; and yet, like the devils who “believe and tremble,” they proceed to fight against him. (**James 2:19**)

The Finger of God

Exodus 31:18 - “When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.”

Luke 11:20 - “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Plague of Flies

Exodus 8:21 - “Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are.”

Exodus 8:22-23 - “And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. And I will put a division between my people and thy people: tomorrow shall this sign be.”

Sever - “I will make a glorious distinction/ token of redemption”
Targum of Jonathan, "I will do wonders or miracles in that day"

The previous plague - Lice - was the last plague to fall on both Egypt and the land of Goshen, where Israel was dwelling. Because of Israel’s own sins, they endured the first three plagues, but now they would be separated and protected.

“Swarms” = *`arob* - the word means 'mixture' and 'incessant or involved motion'

To Rashi and the Rabbis, this plague was not flies, but “a swarm or mixture of noxious creatures” including lions, serpents and birds of prey. (That’s why in the Passover Haggadah, it lists “wild beasts” as one of the plagues).

Philo and the Septuagint both say it refers the dog-fly, a particularly bold biting and blood sucking fly, a plague far worse than mosquitos, according to the ancient authorities.

Psalm 78:45 - “He sent among them swarms of flies which devoured them, And frogs which destroyed them.”

Probably a mixture of flying and crawling insects, including flies, gad-flies, biting sand flies, mosquitos, beetles, possibly spiders and scorpions.

Khepri, the Egyptian god of creation, the movement of the sun, and rebirth, had the head of a scarab beetle or as a man wearing a scarab or dung beetle as a crown. Perhaps the dung-beetle was among the swarms of flies and various insects attacking the Egyptians.

Can beetles “devour” people, or even hurt them at all? Not usually. But there is a

medical condition known as either canthariasis or scarabiiasis, which describes a rare, temporary infestation of a person's gut or face with beetle adults or larvae. A 2008 report in the journal *Indian Pediatrics* described such a case in a four-year-old girl from a village in India. The beetles would enter a human body through the anus while in search of food.

Beel-zebub, lord of the flies

The "prince of the power of the air" has gloried in being Beel-zebub, the lord of the flies.

Ba'al Zəbûl the Canaanite god was "lord of the (heavenly) dwelling" but Israel made a derogatory pun of his name - Ba'al Zebub, lord of the flies (2 Kings 1:2-3). In the *Testament of Solomon*, Beelzebub (not Beelzebub) appears as prince of the demons, synonymous with Lucifer.

Matthew 12:25-28 - "And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?"

The Babylonian Talmud, Vol. 1 of 9: Tract Sabbath - Page 186 - "made themselves Baal-berith for a god"; by Baal-berith is meant the Zebub (fly) idol of Ekron, and every idolater (at that time) made an image of his idol in miniature in order to keep it constantly at hand and to be able at any time to take it out, .."

Besides the pain and discomfort, flies invading their temples would have severely disturbed the cleanliness loving Egyptians and disrupted their religious practices.

Sacrifice

Exodus 8:27-28 - "And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, as he shall command us."

Targum of Jonathan - "for the sheep, which are the idols of the Egyptians, we shall take and offer before the Lord our God."

The sacrificial animals of the Hebrews—sheep, goats, and cattle—were all of them sacred animals, either to the Egyptians generally, or to the inhabitants of certain districts. A Theban could not endure the sacrifice of a sheep, nor a Mendesian that of a goat (Herod. ii. 42). White cows and heifers—perhaps cows and heifers generally—were sacred to Isis-Athor. Any bull-calf might be an Apis; and it could not be known whether he was Apis or not till the priests had examined him (Herod. iii. 28). On one occasion a Roman ambassador, who had accidentally killed a cat, was torn to pieces by the populace (Diod. Sic. i. 83). On another, war broke out between the Oxyrinchites and the Cynopolites, because the latter had eaten one of the fish considered sacred by the former (Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* § 44). - *quoted in Ellicott's Commentary*

“We will go three days' journey into the wilderness” - three days is the full distance of separation from the world, i.e. from the Cross to the resurrection.

The Plague of Murrain on Cattle

Exodus 9:3 - “Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain.”

Sacred Cattle

Cattle represented several of the Egyptian gods. Hathor is commonly depicted as a cow goddess with horns, and she personified the principles of joy, feminine love, and motherhood. Hathor is at times the mother, daughter and wife of Ra.

Apis, a bull god, was worshipped as the son of Hathor. “Strong bull of his mother Hathor” was a common title for Egyptian gods and male kings. Apis was the herald of Ptah, the chief deity in the area around Memphis. The calf that exhibited particularly symbolic markings was selected from the herd, brought to a temple, given a harem of cows, and worshipped as an aspect of Ptah. The Apis bull was used as an oracle, his movements being interpreted as prophecies. His breath was believed to cure disease and his presence to bless those around with strength.

Now these sacred cattle, along with all the others, were dropping dead from a mysterious disease.

Ashes Become Blains and Boils

Exodus 9:8-9 - “And the LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt.”

Exodus 9:10 - “And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast.”

One opinion (found in Bullinger's Companion Bible) is that the furnace was really an altar where human sacrifices were offered to avert the plagues. We do know that human sacrifice was resorted to by the king of Moab later (**2 Kings 3:26-27**) and the early Egyptian dynasties regularly sacrificed the pharaoh's retainers at his death, to accompany him to the afterlife.

But the Hebrew word is *kibshan* = kiln (pottery or lime), smelting forge, furnace. Furnaces in Egypt were either for the melting of metal, the preparing of lime, or the baking of bricks (the making of which was the Israelite slaves' burden).

Pharaoh is all about human effort. “Ye are idle” he scolds the Israelite slaves. “Get ye to your burdens.”

Ashes were the product of Egyptian effort. The murrain and the blains both show that even man’s effort and works - raising vast herds of cattle, constructing impressive buildings - will be judged. The labor and possessions of man are not accepted by God, are worthless and will be burned up at the last day.

Even for believers, unless our works are built on the foundation of Christ and of eternal significance, they will be burned up. (**1 Corinthians 3:13**)

The plagues that touch the flesh remind us of Job’s plight, as Satan suggests to God “put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.” (**Job 2:5**)

These plagues reveals our real spiritual condition before God:

Isaiah 1:6 - “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.”

The furnace represents Egypt itself as a refining experience for Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:20 - “But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.”

1 Kings 8:51 - “For they are Your people and Your inheritance; You brought them out of Egypt, out of the middle of an iron furnace.”

Interestingly, the same metaphor is also used for the coming of Messiah:

Malachi 3:2 - “For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.”

The Plague of Hail

For this meeting with Pharaoh, Moses (and Aaron? He doesn’t seem to be there) arrive before Pharaoh leaves the palace. We see only Moses now with the rod.

We are reminded that God is hardening Pharaoh’s heart for a reason:

Exodus 9:16 - “And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.” (compare **Romans 9**)

Exodus 9:18 - “Behold, to morrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now.”

He even warns the Egyptians to bring their cattle in to shelter.

Exodus 9:19-21 - “Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die. He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: And he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field.”

The plague was actually rain, hail, and fire mingled with the hail, and mighty thunderings, and fire ran along upon the ground.

Pharaoh’s Confession

Exodus 9:27 - “And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.”

The Rabbis explain that God’s mercy and concern for the Egyptians to get themselves and their cattle to shelter moved Pharaoh to say he had sinned.

“So that I might show you my power’ - to move you to repent. As it is written: ‘For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth’ (Ezekiel 18:32). ‘Send therefore now and gather thy cattle,’ to enable the servants who tend the cattle to get away, as our Sages have declared: ‘Beloved is man who was created in His image.’ (Avot, 3,14)

But Pharaoh’s momentary enlightenment did not last.

Exodus 9:34 - “And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.”

Hail is spoken of elsewhere as used for judgment by God against lies, to expose our false coverings and deceit.

Isaiah 28:2 - “Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand.”

Isaiah 28:17-18 - “Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.”

