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# PLAGUES

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Fact or Fiction

APRIL 14, 2024

Vae-ra (Exodus 6:2–9:35 ) and Bo (Exodus 10:1–13:16)

Then Moses returned to יהוה and said, “O my lord, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people.” Then יהוה said to Moses, “You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall let them go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.” \* \* \* And יהוה said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the marvels that I have put within your power. I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go. \* \* \*

“When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, ‘Produce your marvel,’ you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh.’ It shall turn into a serpent.” So Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh and did just as יהוה had commanded: Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent. Then Pharaoh, for his part, summoned the sages and the sorcerers; and the Egyptian magician-priests, in turn, did the same with their spells: each cast down his rod, and they turned into serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed their rods. Yet Pharaoh’s heart stiffened and he did not heed them, as יהוה had said. And יהוה said to Moses, “Pharaoh is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go.

Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is coming out to the water, and station yourself before him at the edge of the Nile, taking with you the rod that turned into a snake. And say to him, ‘יהוה, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, “Let My people go that they may worship Me in the wilderness.” But you have paid no heed until now. Thus says יהוה, “By this you shall know that I am יהוה.” See, I shall strike the water in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it will be **turned into blood**; and the fish in the Nile will die. The Nile will stink so that the Egyptians will find it impossible to drink the water of the Nile.’” And יהוה said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: Take your rod and hold out your arm over the waters of Egypt—its rivers, its canals, its ponds, all its bodies of water—that they may turn to blood; there shall be blood throughout the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.” \* \* \* The Nile stank so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout the land of Egypt. \* \* \* **And all the Egyptians had to dig round about the Nile for drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the Nile.** When seven days had passed after יהוה struck the Nile, יהוה said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says יהוה: Let My people go that they may worship Me. If you refuse to let them go, then I will plague your whole country with frogs.

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The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up and enter your palace, your bedchamber and your bed, the houses of your courtiers and your people, and your ovens and your kneading bowls. \* \* \*

Then יהוה said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: Hold out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, and it shall turn to **lice** throughout the land of Egypt.” And they did so. Aaron held out his arm with the rod and struck the dust of the earth, and vermin came upon human and beast; all the dust of the earth turned to lice throughout the land of Egypt. The magician-priests did the like with their spells to produce lice, but they could not. The vermin remained upon human and beast; and the magician-priests said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” But Pharaoh’s heart stiffened and he would not heed them, as יהוה had spoken. \*\*\*

For if you do not let My people go, I will let loose **swarms of insects** against you and your courtiers and your people and your houses; the houses of the Egyptians, and the very ground they stand on, shall be filled with swarms of insects. \*\*\*

For if you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them, then the hand of יהוה will strike your livestock in the fields—the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep—with a very severe **pestilence**. But יהוה will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of the Egyptians, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites. יהוה has fixed the time: tomorrow יהוה will do this thing in the land.” And יהוה did so the next day: all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not a beast died. When Pharaoh inquired, he found that not a head of the livestock of Israel had died; yet Pharaoh remained stubborn, and he would not let the people go.

Then יהוה said to Moses and Aaron, “Each of you take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become a fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and cause an inflammation breaking out in **boils** on human and beast throughout the land of Egypt.” So they took soot of the kiln and appeared before Pharaoh; Moses threw it toward the sky, and it caused an inflammation **breaking out in boils on human and beast**.<sup>1</sup> \* \* \*

This time tomorrow I will rain down a very heavy **hail**, such as has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Therefore, order your livestock and everything you have in the open brought under shelter; every human and beast that is found outside, not having been brought indoors, shall perish when the hail comes down upon them!”

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<sup>1</sup> It never says Pharaoh had boils. Why beasts?

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Those among Pharaoh's courtiers who feared יהוה's word brought their slaves and livestock indoors to safety; but those who paid no regard to the word of יהוה left their slaves and livestock in the open. \* \* \* Only in the region of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail. \* \* \*

Then יהוה said to Moses, "Hold out your arm over the land of Egypt for the **locusts**, that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat up all the grasses in the land, whatever the hail has left." So Moses held out his rod over the land of Egypt, and יהוה drove an east wind over the land all that day and all night; and when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. Locusts invaded all the land of Egypt and settled within all the territory of Egypt in a thick mass; never before had there been so many, nor will there ever be so many again. \* \* \*

Then יהוה said to Moses, "Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be **darkness** upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched." Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another, and for three days no one could move about; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings. \* \* \*

And יהוה said to Moses, "I will bring but one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that he shall let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you out of here one and all. **Tell the people to borrow, each man from his neighbor and each woman from hers, objects of silver and gold.**" יהוה disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people. Moreover, Moses himself was much esteemed in the land of Egypt, among Pharaoh's courtiers and among the people.

Moses said, "Thus says יהוה: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians, and **every [male] first-born in the land of Egypt shall die**, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle. And there shall be a loud cry in all the land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again; but not a dog shall snarl at any of the Israelites, at human or beast—in order that you may know that יהוה makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. \* \* \*

They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every [male] first-born in the land of Egypt, both human and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I יהוה. And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.