

## From Darkness to Darkness: The 9th Plague

By: Rabbi Jeremy Fine

Then the LORD 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 get up from where he was; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings.

Pharaoh then summoned Moses and said, “Go, worship the LORD! Only your flocks and your herds shall be left behind; even your children may go with you.”

But Moses said, “You yourself must provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to the LORD our God;

our own livestock, too, shall go along with us—not a hoof shall remain behind: for we must select from it for the worship of the LORD our God; and we shall not know with what we are to worship the LORD until we arrive there.”

But the LORD stiffened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not agree to let them go.

Pharaoh said to him, “Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die.”

And Moses replied, “You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again!”

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נִטֵּה יָדְךָ  
עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
וַיַּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ:

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי  
חֹשֶׁךְ־אֲפֹלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת  
יָמִים:

לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו וְלֹא־קָמוּ אִישׁ  
מִתַּחַת־יָדוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְלֹכְל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם:

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לְכוּ עִבְדוּ  
אֶת־ה' רק צאנכם ובקרכם יצג  
גַּם־טַפְּכֶם יֵלֶךְ עִמָּכֶם:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה גַּם־אֶתָּה תִתֵּן בִּידְנוּ זְבָחִים  
וְעֹלוֹת וְעֲשִׂינוּ לָהּ אֱלֹקֵינוּ:

וְגַם־מִקְנֵנוּ יֵלֶךְ עִמָּנוּ לֹא תִשָּׂא רַפְסָה  
כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ נִקַּח לְעַבְד אֶת־ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ  
וְאִנְחָנוּ לֹא־נִדַּע מִה־נִּעְבַּד אֶת־ה'  
עַד־בָּאוּ שָׁמָּה:

וַיַּחֲזֵק ה' אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא אָבָה  
לְשַׁלְּחָם:

וַיֹּאמֶר־לוֹ פַּרְעֹה לָךְ מַעְלֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לָךְ  
אֶל־תִּסַּף רְאוֹת פָּנַי כִּי בַיּוֹם רִאִתְךָ פָּנַי  
תָּמוּת:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן דַּבַּרְתָּ לֹא־אֶסְף עוֹד  
רְאוֹת פָּנַי:

## Order #1

Once again the third in the series arrives without prior warning. For three dates the land is engulfed in darkness, a spell corresponding to the three-day journey for worship that Pharaoh had repeatedly refused to grant the Israelites. - *JPS Commentary*

**d'tz'ch, a'd'sh, b'a'ch'v**

Blood, Frogs, Lice

Beasts, Plague, Boils

Hail, Locusts, Darkness

*Slaying the First Born*

Blood, frogs, lice were to accomplish this purpose by demonstrating the power of God over water and land. Beasts, plague, and boils by demonstrating power of God over the inhabitants who lived upon the land. Hail, locusts, and darkness by demonstrating the power of God over the atmosphere that surrounded both the land and the people who lived in it. - *Hirsch*

### Questions:

- 1) Why is the order of the plagues important?
- 2) How does the 9th plague play a role in the importance of the plagues?

## Order #2

Each of these three groups of plagues was intended to cure the Egyptians of the delusion that they had the right to inflict alienhood, slavery, and affliction upon the Israelites. - *Hirsch*

**Alienhood:** Blood, Beasts, Hail

**Slavery:** Frogs, Plague, Locusts

**Afflictions:** Lice, Boils, Darkness

*Slaying the First Born*

Darkness is the final plague in the [affliction] group. The “alienhood” [lice] and “slavery” [boils] plagues in this third and final group had the most powerful impact of all in that the hail and the locusts threatened to destroy the entire land of Egypt as well as all the personal wealth of its citizens. In a similar manner the third and final plague in the “affliction” group was the most all-encompassing in the group in that it seized the whole individual in its grip, cutting him off from all his fellow men and from all his possessions so that he could move neither his hands nor his feet to obtain the necessities of life. - *Hirsch*

### Questions:

1) Which order feels closer to the intention of the plagues?

2) In both scenarios what role does the 9th plague play?

### Summing Up the 9th Plague

A) Rather, Moses was strengthening his threat: The hand of God will be so heavy upon Pharaoh that he would be willing to send offerings of all his possessions as redemption for his soul. - *Baal HaTurim*

B) **Do not...Any more.** This verse appears twice in the Torah: (i) here, “Do not see my face any more;” and (ii) [in God’s refusal to grant Moses’ request that he be permitted to live long enough to lead the Israelites into the Land of Israel,] “Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter (Deut. 3:26).” - *Baal HaTurim*

#### \*Teacher Notes:

- 1) God’s intent to end the plagues with the 9th plague
- 2) Bookends the experience of exiting Egypt and getting to Israel.
- 3) It is the climax of the story twice.