

The Reception History of the Ten Plagues  
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Class 1: The Ten Plagues in the Early Jewish Imagination  
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**1. Deuteronomy 28:58-62:**

If you do not diligently observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, fearing this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, then the Lord will overwhelm both you and your offspring with severe and lasting afflictions and grievous and lasting maladies. He will bring back upon you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were in dread, and they shall cling to you. Every other malady and affliction, even though not recorded in the book of this law, the Lord will inflict on you until you are destroyed. Although once you were as numerous as the stars in heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the Lord your God.

**2. Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagogue*, 120–174:**

And concerning the rod and other wonders, he speaks thus in dialogue:

Say, what is this you hold within your hand?

A rod, the chastener of beasts and men.

Now cast it on the ground and move away;

A fearful serpent you in awe shall see.

See, there I cast it down. Be gracious, Lord!

How dreadful, huge! Be merciful to me!

I tremble at the sight, my limbs do shake.

Fear not! Stretch forth your hand and seize its tail;

Again 'twill be...as it once was.

Your hand thrust in your bosom, draw it forth.

'Tis done. It has become as white as snow!

Reach in again, it shall be as it was.

To these things (after certain other matters that he has interposed), he (Polyhistor) adds the following: Ezekiel says these things in similar fashion in the *Exagoge* introducing God, who speaks concerning the sign as follows.

And with this rod these woes you shall effect:

Now, first the river shall flow red and blood, and all the springs, and every stagnant pool.

A host of frogs and lice I'll cast on earth;

Then sprinkle ashes from the furnace round,

And ulcerous sores shall thus burst forth on men.

And swarms of flies shall come and sore afflict

The men of Egypt; then another plague

Shall come, and they shall die whose hearts are hardened.

And I shall make the heavens bitter; hail

And fire shall fall and slay all mortal men,

And cause to perish every crop and beast.

Darkness I'll decree for three whole days,

And locusts send, who shall the residue

Of food consume and every blade of grass.  
Last shall I slay the firstborn of mankind,  
And thus bring down the wanton pride of men.  
Yet Pharaoh shan't be moved by what I say  
Until his firstborn child lies as a corpse;  
Then, moved with fear, he'll send the people forth.

This also say to all the Hebrew race:  
“This month shall be the first month of your years,  
In which I'll lead you to another land  
Which to the Hebrew fathers I did swear.”  
And say to all the people, “In this month,  
On full moon's eve, the Paschal sacrifice  
To God present, and touch the doors with blood,  
Which sign the fearsome angel shall pass by.  
But you, by night, shall eat the roasted flesh;  
Then shall the king drive out the throng in haste.  
But ere you go I'll grant the people favor;  
One woman from another shall receive  
Fine vessels, jewels of silver and of gold  
And clothing, things which one may carry off,  
So as to compensate them for their deeds.  
But when at last you enter your own land,  
Take heed that from the morn on which you fled  
From Egypt and did journey seven days,  
From that same morn, so many days each year  
You eat unleavened bread and serve your God.  
The firstborn of all living things present  
To God, whatever virgins first shall bear  
Of males that open up the mothers' wombs.

### **3. Artapanus, Eusebius, “Praeparatio Evangelica,” 9.27–36**

The king said to perform some sign for him. *Moses threw down the rod which he had and made a serpent. When all were terrified, he seized its tail, took it up and made it a rod again. Proceeding a little he struck the Nile with the rod. The river became flooded and deluged all Egypt. From that time also its “inundation” takes place. The water became stagnant and stank and destroyed the creatures that live in rivers and the people perished from thirst. After these marvels the king said he would release the people after a month, if he would restore the river. Moses again struck the water with his rod and drew in the stream.*

When this had happened, the king summoned the priests who were beyond Memphis and said he would kill them and tear down the temples unless they also could perform some marvels. They then, through some superstitious tricks and charms, *made a serpent and changed the color of the river.*

The king became presumptuous at this event and abused the Jews with every kind of vengeance and punishment. When Moses saw this he performed yet other signs, and, striking the ground with his rod, released some winged creature to afflict the Egyptians. *They all developed sores on their bodies.* Since the physicians were not able to cure the sick, the Jews thus again got a respite.

Again Moses released *a frog*, through his staff, and in addition to these things, *locusts and lice*. On this account the Egyptians dedicate the rod in every temple, and similarly (they dedicate it) to Isis, since the earth is Isis, and when it was struck with the rod, it released the marvels.

Since the king was still acting foolishly, Moses brought about hail and earthquakes through the night so that those who fled the earthquakes were killed by the hail and those who avoided the hail were destroyed by the earthquakes. All the houses and most of the temples then collapsed.

Finally, *the king released the Jews* since he had encountered such disasters. *But they acquired from the Egyptians* many cups, no small amount of clothing, and abundant other treasure. Having crossed the rivers in Arabia and traversed a substantial area, *they came on the third day to the Red Sea.*

Now the Memphites say that Moses was familiar with the countryside and watched for the ebb tide and he conveyed the multitude across through the dry sea. But the Heliopolitans say that *the king rushed down on them with a great force*, together with the consecrated animals, since the Jews had acquired and were carrying off the property of the Egyptians.

But a divine voice came to Moses to strike the sea with his rod and divide it. When Moses heard, he touched the water with the rod and thus the flowing *water separated and the host went through a dry path.*

#### 4. Pseudo-Philo 10:1–6

Now when the king of the Egyptians died, another king rose up and afflicted all the people of Israel. But they cried out to the LORD, and he heard them. And he sent Moses and freed them from the land of the Egyptians. God also sent upon them ten plagues and struck them down. Now these were the plagues; that is, blood and frogs and all manner of beasts and hail and the death of cattle and locusts and gnats and darkness that could be felt and the death of the firstborn.

And while they were going forth from there and setting out, the heart of the Egyptians was hardened once more, and they continued to pursue them and found them by the Red Sea. And the sons of Israel cried out to their Lord and said to Moses, saying, “Behold now the time of our destruction has come. For the sea is ahead of us, and the throng of enemies is behind us, and we are in the middle. It is for this that God has brought us forth, or are these the covenants that he established with our fathers, saying, “To your seed will I give the land in which you dwell; that now he might do with us whatever is pleasing in his sight?” Then in considering the fearful situation of the moment, the sons of Israel were split in their opinions according to three strategies. For the tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Isaachar and the tribe of Zebulun and the tribe of Simeon said, “Come, let us cast ourselves into the sea. For it is better for us to die in the water than to be killed by our enemies.” But the tribe of Gad and the tribe of Asher and the tribe of Dan and that of Naphtali said, “No, but let us go back with them; and if they are willing to spare our lives, we will serve them.” But the tribe of Levi and the tribe of Judah and that of Joseph and the tribe of Benjamin said, “Not so, but let us take up our weapons and fight with them, and God will be with us.” And Moses cried out to the Lord and said, “Lod God of our fathers, did you unto say to me, “Go and tell the sons of Israel, ‘God has sent me to you,’”? And now behold you have brought your people to the edge of the sea, and the enemy has pursued them; but you, LORD, remember your name.” And God said, “Why have you cried out to me? Lift up your rod and strike the sea, and it will be dried up.”

#### 5. Jubilees 49:

<sup>1</sup> Remember the commandment which the Lord commanded thee concerning the passover, that thou shouldst celebrate it in its season on the fourteenth of the first month, that thou shouldst kill it before it is evening, and that they should eat it by night on the evening of the fifteenth from the time of the setting of the sun. <sup>2</sup> For on this night - the beginning of the festival and the beginning of the joy- ye were eating the passover in Egypt, when all the powers of Mastêmâ had been let loose to slay all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh to the first-born of the captive maid-servant in the mill, and to the cattle. <sup>3</sup> And this is the sign which the Lord gave them: Into every house on the lintels of which they saw the blood of a lamb of the first year, into (that) house they should not enter to slay, but should pass by (it), that all those should be saved that were in the house because the sign of the

blood was on its lintels. <sup>4</sup> And the powers of the Lord did everything according as the Lord commanded them, and they passed by all the children of Israel, and the plague came not upon them to destroy from amongst them any soul either of cattle, or man, or dog.

<sup>5</sup> And the plague was very grievous in Egypt, and there was no house in Egypt where there was not one dead, and weeping and lamentation. <sup>6</sup> And all Israel was eating the flesh of the paschal lamb, and drinking the wine, and was lauding, and blessing, and giving thanks to the Lord God of their fathers, and was ready to go forth from under the yoke of Egypt, and from the evil bondage.

....

<sup>22</sup> And do thou, Moses, command the children of Israel to observe the ordinances of the passover, as it was commanded unto thee; declare thou unto them every year and the day of its days, and the festival of unleavened bread, that they should eat unleavened bread seven days, (and) that they should observe its festival, and that they bring an oblation every day during those seven days of joy before the Lord on the altar of your God. <sup>23</sup> For ye celebrated this festival with haste when ye went forth from Egypt till ye entered into the wilderness of Shur; for on the shore of the sea ye completed it.

## 6. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 2:290-313:

**Antiq. 2:290** (2.13.4) but Moses did not let his courage sink for the king's threatenings; nor did he abate of his zeal on account of the Hebrews' complaints; but he supported himself and set his soul resolutely against them both, and used his own utmost diligence to procure liberty to his countrymen. (2.13.4) So he went to the king, and persuaded him to let the Hebrews to Mount Sinai, and there to sacrifice to God, because God had enjoined them so to do. He persuaded him also not to counterwork the designs of God, but to esteem his favor above all things, and to permit them to depart, lest, before he be aware, he lay an obstruction in the way of the divine commands, and so occasion his own suffering such punishments as it was probable anyone that counterworked the divine commands should undergo, (2.13.4) since the severest afflictions arise from every object to those that provoke the divine wrath against them; for such as these have neither the earth nor the air for their friends; nor are the fruits of the womb according to nature, but everything is unfriendly and adverse towards them. He said further, that the Egyptians should know this by sad experience; and that besides, the Hebrew people should go out of their country without their consent.

**Antiq. 2:293** (2.14.1) But when the king despised the words of Moses, and had no regard at all to them, grievous plagues seized the Egyptians; every one of which I will describe, both because no such plagues did ever happen to any other nation as the Egyptians now felt,—and because I would demonstrate that Moses did not fail in any one thing that he foretold them; and because it is for the good of mankind, that they may learn this caution:—Not to do anything that may displease God, lest he be provoked to wrath, and avenge their iniquities upon them. (2.14.1) For the Egyptian river ran with bloody water at the command of God, insomuch that it could not be drunk, and they had no other spring of water neither; for the water was not only of the color of blood, but it brought upon those that ventured to drink of it, great pains and bitter torment. (2.14.1) Such was the river to the Egyptians; but it was sweet and fit for drinking to the Hebrews, and no way different from what it naturally used to be. As the king therefore knew not what to do in these surprising circumstances, and was in fear for the Egyptians, he gave the Hebrews leave to go away; but when the plague ceased, he changed his mind again, and would not suffer them to go.

**Antiq. 2:296** (2.14.2) But when God saw that he was ungrateful, and upon the ceasing of this calamity would not grow wiser, he sent another plague upon the Egyptians:—An innumerable multitude of frogs consumed the fruit of the ground; the river was also full of them, insomuch that those who drew water had it spoiled by the blood of these animals, as they died in, and were destroyed by, the water; (2.14.2) and the country was full of filthy slime, as they were born and as they died: they also spoiled their vessels in their houses, which they used, and were found among what they eat and what they drank, and came in great

numbers upon their beds. There was also an ungrateful smell, and a stink arose from them, as they were born, and as they died therein. (2.14.2) Now, when the Egyptians were under the oppression of these miseries, the king ordered Moses to take the Hebrews with him, and be gone. Upon which the whole multitude of the frogs vanished away; and both the land and the river returned to their former natures. (2.14.2) But as soon as Pharaoh saw the land freed from this plague, he forgot the cause of it, and retained the Hebrews; and, as though he had a mind to try the nature of more such judgments, he would not yet suffer Moses and his people to depart, having granted that liberty rather out of fear than out of any good consideration...

**Antiq. 2:300** (2.14.3) Accordingly God punished his falseness with another plague, added to the former; for there arose out of the bodies of the Egyptians an innumerable quantity of lice, by which, wicked as they were, they miserably perished, as not able to destroy this sort of vermin either with washes or with ointments. (2.14.3) At which terrible judgment the king of Egypt was in disorder, upon the fear into which he reasoned himself, lest his people should be destroyed, and that the manner of this death was also reproachful, so that he was forced in part to recover himself from his wicked temper to a sounder mind, (2.14.3) for he gave leave for the Hebrews themselves to depart. But when the plague thereupon ceased, he thought it proper to require that they should leave their children and wives behind them, as pledges of their return; whereby he provoked God to be more vehemently angry at him, as if he thought to impose on his providence, and as if it were only Moses, and not God, who punished the Egyptians for the sake of the Hebrews; (2.14.3) for he filled that country full of various sorts of pestilential creatures, with their various properties, such indeed, as had never come into the sight of men before, by whose means the men perished themselves, and the land was destitute of husbandmen for its cultivation; but if anything escaped destruction from them, it was killed by a distemper which the men underwent also.

**Antiq. 2:304** (2.14.4) But when Pharaoh did not even then yield to the will of God, but, while he gave leave to the husbands to take their wives with them, yet insisted that the children should be left behind, God presently resolved to punish his wickedness with several sorts of calamities, and those worse than the foregoing, which yet had so generally afflicted them; for their bodies had terrible boils, breaking forth with blains, while they were already inwardly consumed; and a great part of the Egyptians perished in this manner. (2.14.4) But when the king was not brought to reason by this plague, hail was sent down from heaven; and such hail it was, as the climate of Egypt had never suffered before, nor was it like to that which falls in other climates in winter-time,<sup>2</sup> but was larger than that which falls in the middle of spring to those that dwell in the northern and northwestern regions. This hail broke down their boughs laden with fruit. (2.14.4) After this a tribe of locusts consumed the seed which was not hurt by the hail; so that to the Egyptians all hopes of the future fruits of the ground were entirely lost.

**Antiq. 2:307** (2.14.5) One would think the forementioned calamities might have been sufficient for one that was only foolish, without wickedness, to make him wise, and to make him sensible what was for his advantage. But Pharaoh, led not so much by his folly as by his wickedness, even when he saw the cause of his miseries, he still contested with God, and willfully deserted the cause of virtue; so he bid Moses take the Hebrews away, with their wives and children, but to leave their cattle behind, since their own cattle were destroyed. (2.14.5) But when Moses said that what he desired was unjust, since they were obliged to offer sacrifices to God of those cattle; and the time being prolonged on this account, a thick darkness, without the least light, spread itself over the Egyptians, whereby their sight being obstructed, and their breathing hindered by the thickness of the air, they died miserably, and under a terror lest they should be swallowed up by the dark cloud. (2.14.5) Besides this, when the darkness, after three days and as many nights, was dissipated, and when Pharaoh did not still repent and let the Hebrews go, Moses came to him and said, "How long wilt thou be disobedient to the command of God? for he enjoins thee to let the Hebrews go; nor is there any other way of being freed from the calamities you are under, unless you do so." (2.14.5) But the king was angry at what he said, and threatened to cut off his head if he came any more to trouble him about these matters. Hereupon Moses said he would not speak to him any more about them, for that he himself, together with the principal

men among the Egyptians, should desire the Hebrews to go away. So when Moses had said this, he went his way.

**Antiq. 2:311** (2.14.6) But when God had signified, that with one more plague he would compel the Egyptians to let the Hebrews go, he commanded Moses to tell the people that they should have a sacrifice ready, and that they should prepare themselves on the tenth day of the month Xanthicus, against the fourteenth (which month is called by the Egyptians Pharmuth, and Nisan by the Hebrews; but the Macedonians call it Xanthicus) and that he should carry away the Hebrews with all they had. (2.14.6) Accordingly, he having got the Hebrews ready for their departure, and having sorted the people into tribes, he kept them together in one place; but when the fourteenth day was come, and all were ready to depart, they offered the sacrifice, and purified their houses with the blood, using bunches of hyssop for that purpose; and when they had supped, they burnt the remainder of the flesh, as just ready to depart. (2.14.6) Whence it is that we do still offer this sacrifice in like manner to this day, and call this festival Pascha, which signifies the feast of the passover; because on that day God passed us over, and sent the plague upon the Egyptians; for the destruction of the firstborn came upon the Egyptians that night, so that many of the Egyptians who lived near the king's palace, persuaded Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go.

## 7. Philo of Alexandria, De Vita Moses, 1:94-148:

**Moses 1:94** So now the marvellous sight thus exhibited to them wrought a fear in the soul of every one of these wicked and malicious men, so that they no longer fancied that what was done was the trick or artifice of men, devised merely for deceit; but they saw that it was a more divine power which was the cause of these things, to which all things are easy. But when by the evident might of what was done they were compelled to confess this, they still were not the less audacious, clinging to their original inhumanity and impiety as to some inalienable virtue, and not pitying those who were unjustly enslaved, nor doing any such things as they were commanded by the word of God. And though God himself had declared his will to them by demonstrations clearer than any verbal commands, namely, by signs and wonders, still they required a yet more severe impression to be made upon them, and it was necessary for him to rise up against them with still greater power; and accordingly, those foolish men, whom reason and command could not influence, are corrected by a series of afflictions: and ten punishments were inflicted on the land; so that the number of the chastisements might be complete which was inflicted upon those who had completed their sins; and the punishment far transcended all ordinary visitations. For the elements of the universe, earth, water, air, and fire, of which the world was made, were all by the command of God, brought into a state of hostility against them, so that the country of those impious men was destroyed, in order to exhibit the height of the authority which God wielded, who had also fashioned those same elements at the creation of the universe, so as to secure its safety, and who could change them all whenever he pleased, to effect the destruction of impious men.

**Moses 1:97** And he divided his punishments, entrusting three, those which proceeded from those elements which are composed of more solid parts, namely, earth and water, from which all the corporeal distinctive realities are perfected, to the brother of Moses. An equal number, those which proceeded from the elements which are the most prolific of life, namely, air and fire, he committed to Moses himself alone. One, the seventh, he entrusted to both in common; the other three, to make up the whole number of ten, he reserved for himself. And first of all he began to bring on the plagues derived from water; for as the Egyptians used to honour the water in an especial degree, thinking that it was the first principle of the creation of the universe, he thought it fitting to summon that first to the affliction and correction of those who thus honoured it. What then happened no long time after the events I have already mentioned? The brother of Moses, by the divine command, smote with his rod upon the river, and immediately, throughout its whole course, from Ethiopia down to the sea, it is changed into blood and simultaneously with its change, all the lakes, and ditches, and fountains, and wells, and spring, and every particle of water in all Egypt, was changed into blood,

so that, for want of drink, they digged round about the banks of the river, but the streams that came up were like veins of the body in a hemorrhage, and spirted up channels of blood like springs, no transparent water being seen anywhere. And all the different kinds of fish died, inasmuch as all the vivifying power of the river was changed to a destructive power, so that everything was everywhere filled with foetid odours, from such vast number of bodies putrifying all together. Moreover, a great number of men perished from thirst, and their bodies lay in heaps in the roads, since their relations had not strength to convey those who had died to the tombs; for this evil lasted seven days, until the Egyptians entreated Moses, and Moses entreated God, to show pity on those who were thus perishing. And God, being merciful in his nature, changed the blood back again to wholesome water, restoring to the river its pristine clear and vivifying streams.

**Moses 1:102** But again, after a brief respite, the Egyptians returned to the same cruelty and carelessness as before, as if either justice had been utterly banished from among men, or as if those who had endured one punishment were not wont to be chastised a second time; but when they suffered they were taught like young children, not to despise those who corrected them; for the punishment which followed, on the track of the last, was slow indeed to come, while they were also slow, but when they hastened to do wrong, it ran after them and overtook them.

**Moses 1:103** For again, the brother of Moses, being ordered to do so, stretched out his hand and held his rod over all the canals, and lakes, and marches; and at the holding forth of his rod, so immense a multitude of frogs came up, that not only the market-place, and all the spots open to the air, were filled with them, but likewise all the stables for cattle, the houses, and all the temples, and every building, public or private, as if nature had designed to send forth one race of aquatic animals into the opposite region of earth, to form a colony there, for the opposite region to water is earth. Inasmuch then as they could not go out of doors, because all the passages were blocked up, and could not remain in-doors, for the frogs had already occupied all the recesses, and had crawled up to the very highest parts of the houses, they were now in the very greatest distress, and in complete despair of safety. Again, therefore, they have recourse to the same means of escape by entreating Moses, and the king now promised to permit the Hebrews to depart, and they propitiated God with prayers. And when God consented, some of the frogs at once returned into the river, and there were also heaps of those which died in the roads, and the people also brought loads of them out of their houses, on account of the intolerable stench which proceeded from them, and the smell from their dead carcasses, in such numbers, went up to heaven, especially as frogs, even while alive, cause great annoyance to the outward senses.

**Moses 1:106** And when they had a little recovered from this punishment, then, like wrestlers at the games, who have recovered fresh strength after a struggle, that so they may contend again with renewed vigour, they again returned to their original wickedness, forgetting the evils which they had already experienced.

**Moses 1:107** And when God had put an end to the punishments which were to proceed out of the water, he brought up others out of the land, still employing the same minister of punishment; and he now, in obedience to the command which he received, smote the ground with his rod, and an abundance of lice was poured out everywhere, and it extended like a cloud, and covered the whole of Egypt. And that little animal, even though it is very small, is exceedingly annoying; for not only does it spoil the appearance, creating unseemly and injurious itchings, but it also penetrates into the inmost parts, entering in at the nostrils and ears? And it flies into the eyes and injures the pupils, unless one takes great care; and what care could be taken against so extensive a plague, especially when it was God who was inflicting the punishment? And perhaps some one may here ask why God punished the land with such insignificant and generally despised animals, omitting bears, and lions, and leopards, and the other races of wild beasts who devour human flesh; and if he did not send these, at least, he might have sent Egyptian asps, the bites of which have naturally the power to cause death instantly.

**Moses 1:110** But if such a man really does not know, let him learn, first of all, that God was desirous rather to admonish the Egyptians than to destroy them: for if he had designed to destroy them utterly once

for all, he would not have employed animals to be, as it were, his coadjutors in the work of destruction, but rather such heaven-sent afflictions as famine and pestilence; and in the second place, let him also learn a lesson which is necessary to be learnt, and applicable to every condition and age of life; and what is the lesson? This; that men, when they make war, seek out the most mighty powers to gain them over to their alliance, such as shall make amends for their own want of power: but God, who is the supreme and mightiest of all powers, having need of no assistant, if ever he desires to use any instruments as it were for the punishments which he desires to inflict, does not choose the most mighty or the greatest things as his ministers, since he takes but little heed of their capacity, but he uses insignificant and small agents, which he renders irresistible and invincible powers, and by their means he chastises those who do wrong, as he does in this instance, for what can be more insignificant than a louse? And yet it was so powerful that all Egypt fainted under the host of them, and was compelled to cry out, that “this is the anger of God.” For all the earth put together, from one end to the other, could not withstand the hand of God, no nor all the universe.

**Moses 1:113** Such then were the chastisements which were inflicted by the agency of the brother of Moses. But those in which Moses himself was the minister, and from what parts of nature they were derived, must be next considered. Now next after the earth and the water, the air and the heaven, which are the purest portions of the essences of the universe, succeeded them as the medium of the correction of the Egyptians: and of this correction Moses was the minister;

and first of all he began to operate upon the air. For Egypt almost alone, if you except those countries which lie to the south of the equator, never is subject to that one of the seasons of the year which is called winter, perhaps, as some say, from the fact of its not being at any great distance from the torrid zone, since the essence of fire flows from that quarter in an invisible manner, and scorches everything all around, or perhaps it is because the river overflows at the time of the summer solstice, and so consumes all the clouds before they can collect for winter;

for the river begins to rise at the beginning of the summer, and to fall towards the end of summer; during which period the etesian gales increase in violence blowing from a direction opposite to the mouths of the Nile, and by which it is prevented from flowing freely into the sea, and by the violence of which winds, the sea itself is also raised to a considerable height, and erects vast waves like a long wall, and so the river is agitated within the country. And then when the two streams meet together, the river descending from its sources above, and the waters which ought to escape abroad being turned back by the beating of the sea, and not being able to extend their breadth, for the banks on each side of the river confine its streams, the river, as is natural, rises to a height, and breaks its bounds; perhaps also it does so because it was superfluous for winter to occur in Egypt; for the object for which showers of rain are usually serviceable, is in this instance provided for by the river which overflows the fields, and turns them into one vast lake, to make them productive of the annual crops; but nature does not expend her powers to no purpose when they are not wanted, so as to provide rain for a land which does not require it, but it rejoices in the variety and diversity of scientific operations, and arranges the harmony of the universe from a number of opposite qualities. And for this reason it supplies the benefits which are derivable from water, to some countries, by bestowing it on them from above, namely from heaven, and to others it gives it from below by means of springs and rivers; though then the land was thus arranged, and enjoyed spring during the winter solstice, and since it is only the parts along the seacoasts that are ever moistened with a few drops of rain, and since the country beyond Memphis, where the palace of the king of Egypt is, does never even see snow at all; now, on the contrary, the air suddenly assumed a new appearance, so that all the things which are seen in the most stormy and wintry countries, come upon it all together; abundance of rain, and torrents of dense and ceaseless hail, and heavy winds met together and beat against one another with violence; and the clouds burst, and there were incessant lightnings, and thunders, and continued roarings, and flashes which made a most wonderful and fearful appearance. For though the lightning and the thunderbolts penetrated and descended through the hail, being quite a contrary substance, still they did not melt it, nor were the flashes extinguished by it, but they remained as they were before, and ran up and down in long lines, and even preserved the hail.

And not only did the excessive violence of the storm drive all the inhabitants to excessive despair, but the unprecedented character of the visitation tended likewise to the same point. For they believed, as was indeed the case, that all these novel and fearful calamities were caused by the divine anger, the air having assumed a



novel appearance, such as it had never worn before, to the destruction and overthrow of all trees and fruits, by which also great numbers of animals were destroyed, some in consequence of the exceeding cold, others though the weight of the hail which fell upon them, as if they had been stoned, while some again were destroyed by the fire of the lightning. And some remained half consumed, bearing the marks of the wounds caused by the thunderbolts, for the admonition and warning of all who saw them.

**Moses 1:120** And when this evil had abated, and when the king and his court had again resumed their confidence, Moses stretched forth his rod into the air, at the command of God. And then a south wind of an uncommon violence set in, which increased in intensity and vehemence the whole of that day and night, being of itself a very great affliction; for it is a drying wind, causing headaches, and terrible to bear, calculated to cause grief, and terror, and perplexity in Egypt above all countries, inasmuch as it lies to the south, in which part of the heaven the revolutions of the light-giving stars take place, so that whenever that wind is set in motion, the light of the sun and its fire is driven in that direction and scorches up every thing. And with this wind a countless number of animals was brought over the land, animals destroying all plants, locusts, which devoured every thing incessantly like a stream, consuming all that the thunderstorms and the hail had left, so that there was not a green shoot seen any longer in all that vast country.

**Moses 1:122** And then at length the men in authority came, though late, to an accurate perception of the evils that had come upon them, and came and said to the king, “How long wilt thou refuse to permit the men to depart? Dost thou not understand, from what has already taken place, that Egypt is destroyed?” And he agreed to all they said, yielding as far as appearances went at least; but again, when the evil was abated at the prayer of Moses, the wind came from the sea side, and took up the locusts and scattered them. And when they had been completely dispersed, and when the king was again obstinate respecting the allowing the nation to depart, a greater evil than the former ones was descended upon him. For while it was bright daylight, on a sudden, a thick darkness overspread the land, as if an eclipse of the sun more complete than any common one had taken place. And it continued with a long series of clouds and impenetrable density, all the course of the sun’s rays being cut off by the massive thickness of the veil which was interposed, so that day did not at all differ from night. For what indeed did it resemble, but one very long night equal in length to three days and an equal number of nights?

And at this time they say that some persons threw themselves on their beds, and did not venture to rise up, and that some, when any of the necessities of nature overtook them, could only move with difficulty by feeling their way along the walls or whatever else they could lay hold of, like so many blind men; for even the light of the fire lit for necessary uses was either extinguished by the violence of the storm, or else it was made invisible and overwhelmed by the density of the darkness, so that that most indispensable of all the external senses, namely, sight, though unimpaired, was deprived of its office, not being able to discern any thing, and all the other senses were overthrown like subjects, the leader having fallen down. For neither was any one able to speak or to hear, nor could any one venture to take food, but they lay themselves down in quiet and hunger, not exercising any of the outward senses, but being wholly overwhelmed by the affliction, till Moses again had compassion on them, and besought God in their behalf. And he restored fine weather, and produced light instead of darkness, and day instead of night.

**Moses 1:126** Such, they say, were the punishments inflicted by the agency of Moses alone, the plague, namely, of hail and thunderstorms, the plague of locusts, and the plague of darkness, which rejected every imaginable description of light. Then he himself and his brother brought on one together, which I shall proceed to relate.

**Moses 1:127** At the command of God they both took up ashes from the furnace in their hands, which Moses on his part sprinkled in the air. Then a dust arose on a sudden, and produced a terrible, and most painful, and incurable ulceration over the whole skin both of man and of the brute beasts; and immediately their bodies became swollen with the pustules, having blisters all over them full of matter which any one might have supposed were burning underneath and ready to burst; and the men were, as was natural, oppressed with pain and excessive agony from the ulceration and inflammation, and they suffered in their

souls even more than in their bodies, being wholly exhausted with anguish. For there was one vast uninterrupted sore to be seen from head to foot, those which covered any particular part of any separate limb spreading so as to become confused into one huge ulcer; until again, at the supplication of the lawgiver, which he made on behalf of the sufferers, the disease became more tolerable.

**Moses 1:129** Therefore, in this instance the two brothers afforded the Egyptians this warning in unison, and very properly; the brother of Moses acting by means of the dust which rose up, since to him had been committed the superintendence of the things which proceeded from the earth; and Moses, by means of the air which was thus changed for the affliction of the inhabitants, and his ministrations were assigned to the afflictions to be caused by the air and by the heaven.

**Moses 1:130** The remaining punishments are three in number, and they were inflicted by God himself without any agency or ministration of man, each of which I will now proceed to relate as well I can. The first is that which was inflicted by means of that animal which is the boldest in all nature, namely, the dog-fly (*kynomyia*) 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 impudent 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 any one drives them away, they still resist and renew their attack, so as never to yield until they are sated with blood and flesh.

**Moses 1:131** And so the dog-fly, having derived boldness from both these animals, is a biting and 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 its own natural covetousness, but also all that eagerness which it derived from the divine providence which went it forth, and armed it and excited it to acts of valour against the natives.

**Moses 1:133** And after the dog-fly there followed another punishment unconnected with any human agency, namely, the mortality among the cattle; for all the herds of oxen, and flocks of goats, and vast flocks of sheep, and all the beasts of burden, and all other domestic animals of every kind died in one day in a body, as if by some agreement or at some given signal; foreshowing the destruction of human beings which was about to take place a short time afterwards as in a pestilential disease; for the sudden destruction of irrational animals is said to be an ordinary prelude to pestilential diseases.

**Moses 1:134** After which the tenth and last punishment came, exceeding in terror all that had gone before, namely, the death of the Egyptians themselves. Not of them all, for God had not decreed to make the whole country desolate, but only to correct it. Nor even of the greatest number of the men and women of every age all together, but he permitted the rest to live, and only passed sentence of death on all the first-born, beginning with the eldest of the king's sons, and ceasing with the first-born son of the most obscure grinder at the mill; for, about midnight, all those children who had been the first to address their fathers and their mothers, and who had also been the first to be addressed by them as their sons, though they were in good health and in full vigour of body, all, without any apparent cause, were suddenly slain in the flower of their youth; and they say that there was not a single house in the whole land which was exempt from the visitation.

**Moses 1:136** But at dawn of day, as was natural, when every one beheld his nearest and dearest relatives unexpectedly dead, with whom up to the evening before they had lived in one home and at one table, being overwhelmed with the most bitter grief, filled every place with lamentation. So that it came to pass, on account of the universality of the calamity, as all men were weeping altogether with one accord, that there was but one universal sound of wailing heard over the whole land from one end to the other. And, for a while, they remained in their houses, no one being aware of the misfortune which had befallen his neighbour, but lamenting only for his individual loss. But when any one went out of doors and learnt the misfortunes of

others also, he at once felt a double sorrow, grieving for the common calamity, in addition to his own private misfortune, a greater and more grievous sorrow being thus added to the lesser and lighter one, so that every one felt deprived of all hope of consolation. For who was likely to comfort another when he himself stood in need of the same consolation? But, as is usual in such circumstances, men thinking that the present evils were the beginning of greater ones, and being filled with fear lest those who were still living should also be destroyed, ran weeping to the king's palace, and rent their clothes, and cried out against the sovereign, as the cause of all the terrible evils that had befallen them. "For if," said they, "immediately when Moses at the beginning first came to him he had allowed his nation to depart, we should never have experienced any one of the miseries that have befallen us at all. But he yielded to his natural obstinacy and haughtiness, and so we have reaped the ready reward of his unreasonable contentiousness." Then one man encouraged another to drive the Jewish people with all speed out of the whole country, and not to allow them to remain one day, or rather one single hour, looking upon every moment that they abode among them as an irremediable calamity.

**Moses 1:140** So they, being now driven out of the land and pursued, coming at last to a proper notion of their own nobility and worth, ventured upon a deed of daring such as became the free to dare, as men who were not forgetful of the iniquitous plots that had been laid against them; for they carried off abundant booty, which they themselves collected, by means of the hatred in which they were held, and some of it they carried themselves, submitting to heavy burdens, and some they placed upon their beasts of burden, not in order to gratify any love of money, or, as any usurer might say, because they coveted their neighbours' goods. (How should they do so?) But, first of all, because they were thus receiving the necessary wages from those whom they had served for so long a time; and, secondly, because they had a right to afflict those at whose hands they had suffered wrong with afflictions slighter than, and by no means equal to, what they had endured. For how can the deprivation of money and treasures be equivalent to the loss of liberty? on behalf of which those who are in possession of their senses dare not only to cast away all their property, but even to venture their lives?

So they now prospered in both particulars: whether in that they received wages as it in price, which they now exacted from unwilling paymasters, who for a long period had not paid them at all; and, also, as if they were at war, they looked upon it as fitting to carry off the treasures of the enemy, according to the laws of conquerors; for it was the Egyptians who had set the example of acts of injustice, having, as I said before, enslaved foreigners and suppliants, as if they had been prisoners taken in war. And so they now, when an opportunity offered, avenged themselves without any preparation of arms, justice itself holding a shield over them, and stretching forth its hand to help them.

**Moses 1:143** Such, then, were the afflictions and punishments by which Egypt was corrected; not one of which ever touched the Hebrews, although they were dwelling in the same cities and villages, and even houses, as the Egyptians, and touching the same earth and water, and air and fire, which are all component parts of nature, and which it is impossible to escape from. And this is the most extraordinary and almost incredible thing, that, by the very same events happening in the same place and at the same time, one people was destroyed and the other people was preserved. The river was changed into blood, but not to the Hebrews; for when these latter went to draw water from it, it underwent another change and became drinkable. Frogs went up from the water upon the land, and filled all the market-places, and stables, and dwelling-houses; but they retreated from before the Hebrews alone, as if they had been able to distinguish between the two nations, and to know which people it was proper should be punished and which should be treated in the opposite manner.

**Moses 1:145** No lice, no dog-flies, no locusts, which greatly injured the plants, and the fruits, and the animals, and the human beings, ever descended upon the Hebrews. Those unceasing storms of rain and hail, and thunder and lightning, which continued so uninterruptedly, never reached them; they never felt, no not even in their dreams, that most terrible ulceration which caused the Egyptians so much suffering; when that most dense darkness descended upon the others, they were living in bright daylight, a brilliancy as of noon-day shining all around them; when, among the Egyptians, all the first-born were slain, not one of the Hebrews

died; for it was not likely, since even that destruction of such countless flocks and herds of cattle never carried off or injured a single flock or a single beast belonging to the Hebrews.

**Moses 1:146** And it seems to me that if any one had been present to see all that happened at that time, he would not have conceived any other idea than that the Hebrews were there as spectators of the miseries which the other nation was enduring; and, not only that, but that they were also there for the purpose of being taught that most beautiful and beneficial of all lessons, namely, piety. For a distinction could otherwise have never been made so decidedly between the good and the bad, giving destruction to the one and salvation to the other.

**Moses 1:147** And of those who now went forth out of Egypt and left their abodes in that country, the men of age to bear arms were more than six hundred thousand men, and the other multitude of elders, and children, and women were so great that it was not easy to calculate it. Moreover, there also went forth with them a mixed multitude of promiscuous persons collected from all quarters, and servants, like an illegitimate crowd with a body of genuine citizens. Among these were those who had been born to Hebrew fathers by Egyptian women, and who were enrolled as members of their father's race. And, also, all those who had admired the decent piety of the men, and therefore joined them; and some, also, who had come over to them, having learnt the right way, by reason of the magnitude and multitude of the incessant punishments which had been inflicted on their own countrymen.

**Moses 1:148** Of all these men, Moses was elected the leader; receiving the authority and sovereignty over them, not having gained it like some men who have forced their way to power and supremacy by force of arms and intrigue, and by armies of cavalry and infantry, and by powerful fleets, but having been appointed for the sake of his virtue and excellence and that benevolence towards all men which he was always feeling and exhibiting; and, also, because God, who loves virtue, and piety, and excellence, gave him his authority as a well-deserved reward. For, as he had abandoned the chief authority in Egypt, which he might have had as the grandson of the reigning king, on account of the iniquities which were being perpetrated in that country, and by reason of his nobleness of soul and of the greatness of his spirit, and the natural detestation of wickedness, scorning and rejecting all the hopes which he might have conceived from those who had adopted him, it seemed good to the Ruler and Governor of the universe to recompense him with the sovereign authority over a more populous and more powerful nation, which he was about to take to himself out of all other nations and to consecrate to the priesthood, that it might for ever offer up prayers for the whole universal race of mankind, for the sake of averting evil from them and procuring them a participation in blessings.