

AGAINST THE GODS OF EGYPT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
NARRATIVE OF THE TEN PLAGUES IN THE  
LIGHT OF EXODUS 12:12

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## ABSTRACT

In Exodus 12:12 the Lord said that His judgments were upon "all the gods of Egypt." Yet, with the vast number of Egyptian deities, how could ten plagues cover all of their gods? Assigning a few deities to a few plagues will not work. The key to this apparent dilemma is found through a combination of insights into Egyptian religion and the nature of the plagues.

A survey of early and modern interpretations of the narrative of the plagues makes up part I of this study. In part II the subjective arguments of source criticism are discussed in relation to Exodus 6-12. Also, in part II the text of Exodus 12:12 is examined. In part III the writer offers his own interpretation of the narrative of the plagues which is similar in some respects to the earlier rabbinical interpretation of "five pairs" of plagues.

Egyptian religion was an attempt, like all systems of mythology, to explain creation. Every god was connected to some element of creation. The plagues come upon all of creation in groups of two. The first two plagues, blood and frogs, are judgments upon the "waters" (hence the repetitive command to lift his staff over the waters). The second group, lice and flies, affects the dry land (first arising

from it and then defiling it). The third group, murrain and boils, strikes the creatures of the dry land. The fourth group, hail and locusts, destroys the vegetation. The fifth group, darkness and death of the firstborn, are judgments upon the heavens (and fall directly upon both Pharaoh and his son who were worshipped as the sun and moon respectively during the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty). The LORD is presented as the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Judge of all creation.

Part IV covers implications of the interpretation in part III. The interpretation of part III has potential ramifications for the date of the Exodus, the structure and theology of the first twenty chapters of Exodus, and the theology of the Old Testament.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Together with His promise to "bless those who bless you," the Lord's pledge to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 also included the warning that "whoever curses you I will curse."<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:5 revealed further that He was a God "punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." In an act of such hatred, the Pharaoh who reigned at the time of Moses' birth had commanded the death of all Hebrew boys by drowning them in the Nile. In doing so he touched the apple of God's eye, His "firstborn" (Ex. 4:22).

Eighty years later the Lord sent Moses to a man who was, perhaps, the grandson of the Pharaoh who perpetrated this atrocity. The time of judgment had come for the third and fourth generations of the murderous Pharaoh of Exodus 1. God had not forgotten.

Nine plagues had fallen, and Pharaoh's heart remained hardened against the LORD. Plagues of blood, frogs, lice, flies, murrain, boils, hail, locusts, and

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<sup>1</sup>All English biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible: New International Version.

darkness had brought Egypt to its knees; but Pharaoh still held on to the Hebrews. The Lord then gave directions in Exodus 12:12 for Israel to prepare for the final plague:

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first born--both men and animals--and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.

Though Pharaoh had not known Moses' God, all of the man-made gods whom he knew so well were powerless before יהוה.

This declaration from God about His judgment upon the "gods" of Egypt is alluded to in several other Scriptures. Moses and the Israelites referred to this contest of power in Exodus 15:11 when they sang the rhetorical question, "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?" Upon Moses' account of the deliverance to his father-in-law, Jethro exclaimed, "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods" (Ex. 18:11). In Numbers 33:3-4 this theme resounds again:

The Israelites set out from Ramesses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, who were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgments upon their gods.

Like an echo this statement returns in the Pentateuch calling the reader to consider the contest that laid the foundation for the first commandment and the declaration of Genesis 1:1.

Writers in the twentieth century have also seen this as a theme that brings some sense of unity to such diverse plagues. B. H. Carroll (entitling the section of his

commentary on the plagues, "The Ten Plagues, or The Great Duel") wrote of the whole of the narrative of the plagues:

What is the scope of the lesson? From Exodus 5:15, to 12:37. What is the theme of the lesson? The ten plagues, or God's answer to Pharaoh's question: "Who is the Lord?" What is the central text? Exodus 12:12: "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment."<sup>2</sup>

George Hart, in a work that is not exhaustive, was able to list over one thousand deities of the Egyptians.<sup>3</sup> With the vast number of Egyptian deities and the seemingly strange nature of some of the plagues, how could all of the gods of Egypt be judged through only ten plagues?

This question is further exacerbated by modern source critics. In Genesis the variation of divine names has been a primary criterion used for supposedly ascertaining the original source of portions of Scripture that have ranged from a few words to a passage.<sup>4</sup> Since a major shift in the frequency of the usage of יהוה occurs after Exodus 6:3, the criteria used for examining the narrative of the plagues (Ex. 7-12) has been quite subjective, changing from one source critic to another. Is the narrative of the plagues a chaotic procession of divine

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<sup>2</sup>B. H. Carroll, Exodus, Leviticus, vol. 2 of An Interpretation of the English Bible, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Nashville: Broadman, 1948), 51.

<sup>3</sup>George Hart, A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

<sup>4</sup>Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 2.

judgments resulting from a patchwork process over many centuries, or is the procession of the plagues marked by an original design that extends beyond the ability of editors removed in time by nearly a millennia? Are these diverse plagues merely the result of an editorial process, or does a unity exist that is beyond surface analysis and that may be found in the light of Exodus 12:12?

### Significance of the Study

The narrative of the plagues is an integral part of the theological foundation that serves to hold up both Old Testament religion and New Testament Christianity. It was in the context of the early chapters of Exodus that יהוה took the initiative in revealing Himself to Moses. Out of this encounter, according to both scriptural and traditional claims, came the written record that has come into controversy in modern times. The significance of a study that focuses on the relationship of the statement in Exodus 12:12 and the narrative of the plagues, therefore, has a number of important facets for both Jew and Christian alike.

After examining the text and surveying its available interpretations, the immediate question of relevance deals with how to understand the statement in Exodus 12:12. Numerous writers, many of whose contributions are surveyed in Chapter 2, have grappled with this theme in the past. The question must be asked if either a structural pattern or a thematic interpretation exists which demonstrates the

unity of the narrative in a convincing manner. If Exodus 12:12 does provide an interpretive framework that demonstrates narrative unity, then would such an interpretation weaken the arguments of source criticism?

Implications may also be considered in the area of dating the narrative of the plagues. Since the theme from Exodus 12:12 that is under consideration (הויה' judging the gods of Egypt) deals with pagan religion, it will be of interest whether the narrative portrays a historically accurate picture of any Egyptian religious data discerned in the text. The combination of the traits of narrative unity and narrative antiquity are of vital interest to those who hold Mosaic authorship.

In a similar vein, religious observations concerning the inauguration of monotheism are of interest to students of the "History of Religions." This writer's observations challenge the view of the Exodus event occurring in the thirteenth century B.C. The result of challenging the date of the Exodus event is to contest the view that an Egyptian pharaoh was the first monotheist.

The study also has potential ramifications both for the structure of the first twenty chapters of Exodus and for the theology of the Book of Exodus, which in turn deeply influenced the theology of the Old Testament. As an integral ingredient of the Exodus event, the impact of the narrative of the plagues is not limited to the immediate context of Exodus. It stands as the theological backdrop

for scenes located in other contexts on the long stage of the Bible.

### Structure of the Research

The methodology of the research and the organization of the research are complementary. The logical flow of the research travels consecutively through four steps which align with parts I-IV: a survey of interpretations of the narrative of the plagues in Exodus, an examination of the presuppositional and exegetical concerns which are critical to the text, a development of the interpretation of this writer, and the consideration of the implications of this writer's interpretation.

Part I is a survey of interpretations concerning both the structure and the meaning of the narrative of the plagues with special attention directed toward any interpretation that interacted specifically with Exodus 12:12. Chapter 2 introduces early interpretations of the narrative of the plagues. Modern interpretations that seem to follow earlier views are surveyed in chapter 3, together with the new interpretive insights of some modern writers.

Part II addresses two major concerns for examining the narrative of the plagues. Since any interpretation influences what the interpreter perceives to be the state of the text, chapter 4 presents the presuppositions of source criticism. Chapter 5 provides exegetical consideration of Exodus 12:12, a key text in the view of this writer.

Part III is the development of the writer's interpretation of the narrative of the plagues in the light of Exodus 12:12. Chapter 6 is a summary of some of the key elements of Egyptian religion which supplies the necessary background for the author's interpretation. Chapter 7 then covers this writer's explanation of each of the ten plagues.

Part IV develops the implications of the interpretation given in part III. Chapter 8 highlights the implications of the proposed interpretation of part III for the historical debate surrounding the question of the date of the Exodus event. Chapter 9 appraises the relevance of the interpretation outlined in part III both to the structure and to the theology of the first twenty chapters of Exodus. Chapter 10 weighs the theological impact of this theme in other parts of the Old Testament. A summary with final conclusions makes up the content of chapter 11.

PART I. A SURVEY OF INTERPRETATIONS

## CHAPTER 2

## EARLY INTERPRETATIONS

Five Pairs of Plagues: אלהים versus "Gods"

For over two millennia, the traditional Passover observance of the Jews has changed very little. The written order of service known as the Passover Haggadah, much of which is recorded in chapter 10 of the tractate *Pesahim* in the Talmud, has its roots in the ancient, traditional, orally-passed-down observance of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

After the opening prayer known as the kiddush and the washing of hands, the master of the seder is joined by the other participants around the table. Together they recite, "This is the bread of poverty which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt."<sup>2</sup> Then come the sections designed to involve the children known as the "Four Questions" and the "Four Sons," which are in turn followed by the midrash on Deuteronomy 26:5-8 that introduces the remembrance of the plagues.<sup>3</sup>

As soon as verse eight, the climax of the section,

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<sup>1</sup>The Passover Haggadah, with Hebrew and English Translation on Facing Pages, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, with an Introduction and Commentary by E. D. Goldschmidt (New York: Schocken, 1953), 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>The Passover Haggadah, 25.

<sup>3</sup>The Passover Haggadah, 25-39.

is introduced, it is tied to the reference in Exodus 12:12 of the "judgments" that יהוה would inflict upon the "gods of Egypt":

And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders [Deut. 26:8].

"And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt": not by the hands of an angel, and not by the hands of a seraph, and not by the hands of a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be he, himself, in his own glory and in his own person. As it is said: "For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord" [Exod. 12:12].<sup>4</sup>

After some initial commentary on each phrase of the verse, the Passover Haggadah offered a direct relationship to the narrative of the ten plagues:

Another explanation is: "A mighty hand" makes two, "an outstretched arm" makes two, "and with great terribleness" makes two, "and with signs" makes two, "and with wonders" makes two.

These make up the ten plagues which the Holy One, blessed be he, brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and they are these: blood, frogs, lice, beasts, blight, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, the slaying of the first-born.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps even earlier than the rabbinic commentary in tannaitic times of the first two centuries A.D., an ancient interpretation that grouped the plagues in pairs existed. With the exception of the above reference in the Passover Haggadah, most of the details of this early, potential

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<sup>4</sup>The Passover Haggadah, 45.

<sup>5</sup>The Passover Haggadah, 47-49.

interpretation have been lost.

Though medieval rabbinic commentary expanded this interpretation, there is no direct evidence for the earliest substance of this interpretation. Because of the close relationship of this statement and Exodus 12:12 in the midrashic commentary (and due to medieval rabbinic commentary), Norman Fredman asserted that this "analysis sees the ten plagues as a fulfillment of the Divine promise" found in Exodus 12:12 concerning the judgments upon the "gods."<sup>6</sup> Fredman further conjectured that Rabbi Nehemiah (middle of second century A.D.) may have been responsible for the ancient interpretation (or its preservation) in The Passover Haggadah. Fredman's assumption was due to the statement of Rabbi Judah which followed the interpretation of "pairs" (and the frequent debates in the Talmud, over 180 preserved, between the two rabbis).<sup>7</sup>

Nehemiah, active at the Jewish councils of Usha, Bet Rimmon, and Jabneh and one of the five men ordained by Judah ben Bava at the cost of his life, was one of the few pupils of Akiva to outlive the Bar Kokhba revolt.<sup>8</sup> The grammatical rule in Hebrew that the suffix ך, to a noun is

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<sup>6</sup>Norman Fredman, "The Ten Plagues," Tradition 20 (1982): 333.

<sup>7</sup>Fredman, 338, n. 9; and Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), s.v. "Judah bar Ilai (mid-second century C.E.), tanna," by Zvi Kaplan.

<sup>8</sup>Roth and Wigoder, eds., Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Nehemiah (middle of second century C.E.), tanna," by Cecil Roth.

equivalent to the prefix ל when used in a locative sense is attributed to this Nehemiah. He was, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, descended from the biblical Nehemiah.<sup>9</sup>

Three Triads Plus One: Key Phrase

Rabbi Judah bar Ilai from Usha in Galilee--a contemporary of Rabbi Nehemiah in the mid-second century A.D. and so famous among Talmudic scholars that in the Talmud he was referred to without patronymic--put together a mnemonic device for the correct memorization of the order of the plagues.<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Judah, like Nehemiah, had been one of the five rabbis ordained by Judah ben Bava at the cost of his life during the persecutions of Hadrian. The mnemonic of Rabbi Judah immediately follows the list of the ten plagues in the Passover Haggadah:

These make up the ten plagues which the Holy One, blessed be he, brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and they are these: blood, frogs, lice, beasts, blight, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, the slaying of the first-born.

Rabbi Judah made a mnemonic [out of the first letters of the Hebrew words for the plagues], thus: DeTZaKh ADaSH BeAHaB.<sup>11</sup>

In order to aid the memorization of the correct order of the ten plagues, Rabbi Judah took the first letter of each of

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<sup>9</sup>Roth and Wigoder, eds., Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Nehemiah (middle of second century C.E.), *tanna*," by Cecil Roth.

<sup>10</sup>Roth and Wigoder, eds., Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. Judah bar Ilai (mid-second century C.E.), *tanna*," by Zvi Kaplan.

<sup>11</sup>The Passover Haggadah, 49.

the words (blood, דָּם; frogs, צִפְרָדִּים; lice, כְּנֵיִם; flies, עָרוֹב; murrain, דָּבָר; boils, שֹׁחַיִן; hail, בָּרָד; locusts, אַרְבֵּה; darkness, חֹשֶׁךְ; and the slaying of the first-born, מִמַּכַּת-בְּכוֹרוֹת) and constructed a type of mnemonic acronym.

This mnemonic device is remarkable not only for its effectiveness for Jewish children but also it is apparently the earliest example of the now prevalent interpretation of "triads" of plagues. The mnemonic grouped the plagues in triads with the Passover as part of the final grouping.

Fredman commented:

In this way the Haggadah presents the classical argument between Bible scholars: Should the Ten Plagues be viewed as five pairs of plagues or as three triads of plagues (plus one)?<sup>12</sup>

No record was left in The Passover Haggadah or in the Talmud of the specific "key phrases" that marked this "three triads plus one pattern." Later medieval rabbis developed the "key phrase" pattern working from earlier midrashic comments concerning the relationship of warning and the plagues.<sup>13</sup> They noted the instructions given by הוֹיָה in the first and second plagues in each triad to warn of the coming plague with no warning being given in each of the third plagues in each triad. Among those rabbinic scholars who dealt with the pattern of triads were Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam, 1085-1174), Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1550), and Isaac

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<sup>12</sup>Fredman, 332.

<sup>13</sup>Fredman, 332-40.

Abravanel (1437-1508).<sup>14</sup> As their writings indicated, this third-century A.D. mnemonic device proposed by Rabbi Judah functioned as the catalyst for debate.

At least one early Christian writer made similar observations. Without naming his source of information (which may have been either Jewish midrashic commentary or similar original observation), Origen mentioned the key phrases of the narrative of the plagues in one of his Exodus Homilies.<sup>15</sup> He accurately picked out the same phrases that dealt with Moses warning Pharaoh in the first two plagues of each triad and the lack of warning in the third of each triad.

During Passover Night: יהוה' versus Idols

Pagan mythological "gods" found concrete expression in Egypt through the idols in the Egyptian temples. One of the earliest examples of the written preservation of this interpretation may be found in the Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael. This resource is one of the oldest of the tannaitic works, predating most other midrashic commentaries. The interpretation of Exodus 12:12 in the Mekilta focused on the destruction of the Egyptian idols on the night of passover:

*And Against All the Gods of Egypt I Will Execute  
Judgments: I Am the Lord.* Judgments differing from one

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<sup>14</sup>Fredman, 335-40.

<sup>15</sup>Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus, vol. 71 of The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), [Ex. 4.4] 264-65.

another. The stone idols melted, the wooden ones rotted away, the metal ones corroded, as it is said: "While the Egyptians were burying," etc. (Num. 33.4). Some say: Those of stone rotted away and those of wood melted. R. Nathan says: Judgments--not one, not two, but four judgments. They became soft, they became hollow, they were chopped down, they were burned.<sup>16</sup>

In the commentary on Exodus 15:11, the Mekilta repeated this view:

When the Israelites saw that Pharaoh and his hosts perished in the Red Sea and that the kingdom of the Egyptians came to an end, and that judgments were executed upon their idols, they all opened their mouths and said: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods."<sup>17</sup>

The Midrash Rabbah also interpreted this as יהוה destroying the idols of Egypt:

What caused them to be smitten by such a succession of plagues? The fact that they trusted their idols. So what did God do? He smote their gods together with them. One of which was wood, rotted; of stone, melted; those of silver, gold and brass, he reduced to their original molten state, as it says: "*Upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments* (NUM. XXXIII, 4)."<sup>18</sup>

Reflecting this view from the midrashic commentaries, the Targum of Jonathan also preserved the belief that the Lord attacked the idols of the Egyptians during the night of Passover:

And I will be revealed in the land of Mizraim in the

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<sup>16</sup>Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition on the Basis of the Manuscripts and Early Editions with an English Translation, Introduction and Notes, trans. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933), [*Pisha* 7, 51] 1:55.

<sup>17</sup>Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, [*Shirata* 8, 1] 2:59.

<sup>18</sup>Midrash Rabbah: Exodus, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans. S. M. Lehrman (London: Soncino, 1951), [*Bo*, 15.15] 178.

majesty of My glory this night, and with Me ninety thousand myriads of destroying angels; and I will slay all the firstborn in the land of Mizraim, of man and of beast, and against all the idols of the Mizraee I will execute four judgments: the molten idols shall be melted, the idols of stone be broken, the idols of clay shall be shattered, and the idols of wood be made dust, that the Mizraee may know that I am the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

The idol of Dagon toppled off of its perch and shattered on the floor of its temple in the days when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5. In a similar way, the writer of the Mekilta depicted the idols of Egypt as having been physically assaulted on the night of the Passover by יהוה.

While the Mekilta and the Midrash Rabbah focused directly upon the idols themselves, another explanation existed. This interpretation viewed the judgment of יהוה falling on the temples of the idols and was probably born out of an attempt to explain Exodus 12:12. Benno Jacob pointed out two ancient notations on the Exodus event that were closely related to the interpretations of the Mekilta and the Midrash Rabbah:

The judgments (*sh'fa-tim*) accompanying the Exodus were already mentioned in 6:6; they were passed upon the deities of Egypt as described in Num 33.4. How is this to be understood? A *haggadah* also cited by Hieronymus (*Epist ad Fabiolem*, Migne I, 702: *Hebraei autumant*) stated that all the temples of Egypt were destroyed through earthquake and lightning during this night (similarly *Mech. I, Tan., Sech. T.*). This miracle was

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<sup>19</sup>The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum, trans. J[ohn] W[esley] Etheridge (n.p., 1862; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1968), [12] 475.

added later but was not described by Scripture.<sup>20</sup> These early interpretations were probably inspired by an orthodox desire to understand these judgments as falling upon the only real forms of the pagan "gods." Since throughout the prophecies of the Old Testament they are declared to be "no gods" at all, then perhaps the only thing left in the mind of these writers for יהוה to judge was the concrete expression of these abstract vanities. However, even when these judgments fell historically, the "gods" of Egypt were very real in the minds of the Egyptians. Many non-Egyptian minds debated the power of the "gods" as well, as Jethro admitted in Exodus 18:11.

#### Assigning Plagues to "Gods"

Due to the statement concerning the "judgments upon the gods of Egypt" in Exodus 12:12, some have attempted to correlate plagues to deities. The Mekilta preserved several interpretations which correlated the "judgments" with "gods" as in idols, with the "mighty" of earth, with the "mighty" of heaven, with those of earth who call themselves "gods," and with those whom others call "gods."<sup>21</sup> Another early example of this trend of assigning certain of the plagues to certain of the Egyptian deities was preserved in the Midrash

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<sup>20</sup>Benno Jacob, The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus, trans. with an Introduction by Walter Jacob and Yaakov Elman (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992), 312.

<sup>21</sup>Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, [*Shirata* 8, 1-41] 2:59-62.

Rabbah:

Why were the "waters" first smitten, and with blood? Because Pharaoh and the Egyptians worshipped the Nile, and God said: "I will smite their god first and then his people," just as the common saying goes: "I will smite the gods and their priests will tremble." For so it says: "*The Lord will punish the host of the high heaven on high; and after that, And the kings of the earth upon the earth (Isa XXIV, 21).*"<sup>22</sup>

Origen took this approach as well, surpassing the midrashic observations perhaps due to his knowledge of the Egyptian pantheon:

But Egypt is struck in the fifth place by the death of animals or cattle. In this the madness and foolishness of mortals are reproved who, for example, gave worship to irrational cattle and the designation of god to figures not only of men, but also of cattle, impressed in wood and stone. They reverence Jove Hammon in the ram and Anubis in the dog. They worship Apis in the bull and other animals which Egypt admires as portents of the gods.<sup>23</sup>

Origen was well aware that the people of Egypt did not worship animals in the same way that the people of India venerate them (resulting in a vegetarian diet). The Egyptians ate meat. They did, however, have certain sacred animals (like the Apis bull) that exhibited special markings to distinguish them from other animals of their kind.<sup>24</sup>

### Creation and the Plagues

Early observations concerning the various spheres of

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<sup>22</sup>Midrash Rabbah: Exodus, [Bo, 9.9] 126.

<sup>23</sup>Origen: Homilies, [Ex. 4.6] 269.

<sup>24</sup>David Noel Freedman et al., eds., Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Egypt, plagues in," by James K. Hoffmeir; and George Hart, A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), s.v. "Apis."

creation which the plagues affected laid the foundation for this interpretation. The Midrash Rabbah divided the plagues into groups that aligned with the earth on one hand and with the heavens on the other:

Three of the plagues came through the agency of Aaron, three through Moses, three through God, and one through the united efforts of all three. Blood, frogs, and gnats, being on the earth, were through Aaron; hail, locust, and darkness, through Moses, because they were in the air and Moses had power over earth and heaven; the swarms, the murrain, and the plague of the firstborn through God, and the boils--through all of them.<sup>25</sup>

This division of the plagues into spheres of influence was similar to later observations in regard to the plagues' relationship to the elements of creation.

The earliest direct correlation between the elements of creation and the plagues appears to have come from the reflections of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria. Philo wrote:

The punishments inflicted were ten--a perfect number for the chastisement of those who brought sin to perfection. The chastisement was different from the usual kind, for the elements of the universe--earth, fire, air, water--carried out the assault. God's judgment was that the materials which had served to produce the world should serve also to destroy the land of the impious; and to show the mightiness of the sovereignty which He holds, what He shaped in His saving goodness to create the universe He turned into instruments for the perdition of the impious whenever He would.<sup>26</sup>

The building blocks of creation were thus, in Philo's view, used by הוה' to destroy the land of Egypt.

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<sup>25</sup>Midrash Rabbah: Exodus, [Bo, 12.4] 146.

<sup>26</sup>Philo, vol. 6, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), De Vita Moses I, 96.

### Other Early Interpretations

While the interpretations that have been dealt with thus far are not exhaustive, they are by far the most influential offered by early writers. Other early interpretations did not succeed in influencing many writers in modern times. The cause was either due to scarcity of evidence to make a strong case or due to historical error (such as faulty, anachronistic, historical method). A good example of the latter would be the allegorical method of Origen.

As a dweller in the land originally afflicted with the plagues, Origen had an excellent vantage point for considering the possible relationships between plagues and deities. However, his allegorical method yielded an historically impossible interpretation of the plagues. The rod was equated with the cross of Christ, the waters to the philosophers, the frogs to the poets, mosquitos to the art of dialectic, the flies to the cynics, murrain to be upon the "gods" of the Egyptians represented in animal form. Boils were equated with malice, hail with evil pleasures and passions, locusts with the fickleness of men, darkness with the blindness of the minds of the Egyptians, and the death of the first-born was directed against the principalities and powers that invented false religion.<sup>27</sup> Biblical hermeneutics in modern times moved on, leaving such behind.

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<sup>27</sup>Origen: Homilies, [Ex. 4.6-7] 267-73.

## CHAPTER 3

## MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

Five Pairs of Plagues: ארֹב' versus "Gods"

Though The Passover Haggadah gave a prominent place to this interpretation, modern commentaries seem either to ignore it or to be unaware of it. Umberto Cassuto considered the interpretation of "three triads plus one" a "literary" observation; while the other "fact" he considered necessary to "understand the plan and form" of the "structure" of the narrative of the plagues was linked to the "nature of the plagues":

From this aspect, they are divisible into pairs: the first pair (blood--frogs) pertain to the Nile; the second pair (gnats--swarm of flies) comprises two plagues that resemble each other if we assign to ארֹב 'ārōbh its more probable signification; the third pair (pest--boils) likewise consists of two similar plagues, the former affecting animals only, the latter also human beings; the fourth pair (hail--locusts) represents two sources of damage to crops; the last group (darkness--plague of the first-born) contains two kinds of darkness, first the darkness upon Egypt lasting three days, and then the darkness of death upon the first-born.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, two plagues affecting the Nile, two plagues that resemble one another, two more similar plagues, two sources of crop damage, and two types of darkness were the "five

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<sup>1</sup>U[mberto] Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967; reprint, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 92-93.

pairs" of plagues according to Cassuto.

Norman Fredman was aware of this pattern because, like Cassuto, he was familiar with rabbinic commentary.

According to Fredman:

It is possible to view the Ten Plagues as five pairs:

Blood and Frogs	(Plagues of the Water)
Lice and Swarms	(Plagues of the Land)
Pestilence and Boils	(Plagues of the Light!)
Hail and Locusts	(Plagues of the Sky)
Darkness and Death of Firstborn	(Plagues of Darkness)

This analysis sees the Ten Plagues as a fulfillment of the Divine promise: "And against all the gods of Egypt I shall wreak judgments."<sup>12</sup> The ancient pagans had three main gods: the earth, the sky, and the ocean. High in all pantheons, especially that of Egypt,<sup>13</sup> were the gods of light and darkness.

<sup>12</sup>Exodus 12:12

<sup>13</sup>W. Max Müller, *The Mythology of All Races, Volume XIII*. Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1918.<sup>2</sup>

In the above quotation, the pattern of "five pairs" was directly tied by Fredman to Exodus 12:12. Cassuto and Fredman's familiarity with rabbinic commentary greatly aided their understanding of the narrative of the plagues.

Fredman's familiarity with Jewish thought and rabbinic commentary helped him to refine this view past the work of Cassuto. This familiarity, however, became a liability in his application of the interpretation. In Fredman's attempt to focus upon the "judgments" that were upon the "gods of Egypt," he instead drew from Hebrew and not Egyptian background material in relation to several of

<sup>2</sup>Norman Fredman, "The Ten Plagues," *Tradition* 20 (1982): 333.

the "pairs." Such was the case in his defense of the designation of plagues five and six as "Plagues of Light" because of the Talmudic belief in an association between diphtheria and the sun.<sup>3</sup>

Three Triads Plus One: Key Phrase

Unlike the scarcity of modern commentary on the view of "five pairs" of plagues, the interpretation known as "three triads plus one" has enjoyed wide circulation in modern times. This "key phrase" interpretation of the plagues has been either defended or briefly mentioned by a diverse assortment of scholars, including: W. J.

Melancthon,<sup>4</sup> James G. Murphy,<sup>5</sup> Benno Jacob,<sup>6</sup> Umberto Cassuto,<sup>7</sup> M. H. Segal,<sup>8</sup> Moshe Greenberg,<sup>9</sup> Nahum Sarna,<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Fredman, 334.

<sup>4</sup>W. Jacobus Melancthon, Notes, Critical and Explanatory, on the Book of Exodus: From Egypt to Sinai (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1874), 69.

<sup>5</sup>James G[racey] Murphy, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus with a New Translation (New York: Funk, 1881), 47-69.

<sup>6</sup>Benno Jacob, The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus, trans. with an introduction by Walter Jacob and Yaakov Elman (Hoboken, N. J.: Ktav, 1992), 177-312.

<sup>7</sup>Cassuto, 92-93.

<sup>8</sup>M[oses] H[irsch] Segal, The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 36.

<sup>9</sup>Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), s.v. "Plagues of Egypt," by Moshe Greenberg.

Brevard S. Childs,<sup>11</sup> John H. Dobson,<sup>12</sup> Frank E. Eakin Jr.,<sup>13</sup> Norman Fredman,<sup>14</sup> Ronald Youngblood,<sup>15</sup> and James K. Hoffmeir.<sup>16</sup>

Some theologians have been drawn to this interpretation in the wake of the source critical treatment of Exodus due to the unity of the narrative demonstrated by such a pattern. Jacob's comments and admonishments to Christian writers urged familiarity with Jewish sources:

A Talmudic comment about this, known to every Jewish child through the *Haggadah* but totally neglected by Christian commentators, provides an interpretation akin to this. R. Judah composed the mnemonic *d'zakh a-dash b'a-hav*; he constructed these three words from the initial letters of each plague. This was neither a playful trick nor only a mnemonic, but a clear indication of the divisions shown by the *Torah*. These divisions could not be overlooked by any careful reader, for the first blow of each series began with the specific command of God to Moses: "proceed and encounter Pharaoh early in the morning." The second in each series always demanded that Moses "go in" to Pharaoh.

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<sup>10</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus, vol. 2 of The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 38.

<sup>11</sup>Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary, vol. 2 of The Old Testament Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 150.

<sup>12</sup>John H. Dobson, A Guide to the Book of Exodus (Valley Forge: Judson, 1977), 44-68.

<sup>13</sup>Frank E. Eakin, Jr. "The Plagues and the Crossing of the Sea," Review and Expositor 74 (1977): 475.

<sup>14</sup>Fredman, 335-37.

<sup>15</sup>Ronald F. Youngblood, Exodus (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 51.

<sup>16</sup>David Noel Freedman et al., eds., Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Egypt, Plagues in," by James K. Hoffmeir.

The first warning therefore occurred in the open (at the Nile) and the second within the palace. The second plague was clearly intended as a first; it extended and completed the first. Pharaoh could not escape by retreating to his palace, as was *explicitly* stated in 7.23 following the first blow. For this reason the essential words were repeated three times with the second blow or plague of each series (Nile--7.28, 8.5, 7; hail--10.5,12,15). The third blow of each series was not preceded by any admonitory announcement to Pharaoh.<sup>17</sup>

Jacob brought out the earlier comments of medieval rabbis on the "key phrases" (commands given to Moses in relation to warning Pharaoh of the impending plagues) that demonstrate a textual unity based on the introductory formula of the first nine plagues.

Cassuto was also interested in material such as this which placed an obstacle in the path of the source critics, and he highlighted the pattern of warning:

<i>First Cycle</i>	<i>Second Cycle</i>	<i>Third Cycle</i>	<i>Prelude</i>
1. Blood	4. Swarm of flies	7. Hail	Warning: Moses stands before Pharaoh in the morning
2. Frogs	5. Pest	8. Locusts	Warning: Moses comes before Pharaoh
3. Gnats	6. Boils	9. Darkness	No Warning <sup>18</sup>

Cassuto then drew conclusions from the thematic unity of the "five pairs" analysis and from the "literary" unity of the "three triads plus one" analysis:

From what we have shown thus far, and from what we shall

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<sup>17</sup>Jacob, 180-81.

<sup>18</sup>Cassuto, 92.

later on, it is manifest that we have here before us an organically homogeneous composition, not the chance result of an involved process whereby various fragments from different sources were juxtaposed, as many scholars have supposed on the basis of preconceived ideas and a superficial examination of the passages, without deeply delving into their purport or properly understanding their form.<sup>19</sup>

Chiding the source critical approach, Cassuto defended the traditional form of the text.

Segal, another Jewish scholar, also argued unity of the narrative based on the "three triads plus one" interpretation of the structure of the narrative of the plagues. His conclusion wavered, however, on the antiquity of the "key phrases" in relation to the Mosaic authorship of the rest of the narrative:

This arrangement evidently emanates from a single author. But it is an artificial arrangement, and therefore the narrative in its present form must be assigned to a post-Mosaic author. But the striking familiarity with the Egyptian conditions displayed by the narrative shows that its contents go back to the Mosaic age, even to Moses himself.<sup>20</sup>

Evidently, in Segal's opinion, the "key phrases" were added by some later editor to the rest of the material, which he considered Mosaic. Such "unity" attributed to editorial action is far more palatable to source critics than when it is attributed to the original composition.

During Passover Night: הוֹר' versus Idols

The rabbinic interpretation that was so widespread

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<sup>19</sup>Cassuto, 93.

<sup>20</sup>Segal, 36-37.

in midrashic commentary concerning the Lord's attack upon the idols of the Egyptians during the night of the Passover found its way into some modern commentary as well. The Baptist theologian John Gill, writing in 1810, noted the rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 12:12:

This is rather to be understood literally of the idols of the Egyptians, their images of gold and silver, or of whatever they were made of: the Targum of Jonathan is, "on all the idols of the Egyptians I will exercise four judgments; the molten idols shall be melted, the idols of stone shall be cut asunder, the idols of earth shall be broken to pieces, and the idols of wood shall become ashes;" see Numb. xxxiii. 4. Isa. xix. 1.<sup>21</sup>

Gill also recognized the close association of this interpretation with ancient mentions of an earthquake during the night of Passover, possibly affecting the temples of the idols:

and there are some traces of this in Heathen writers; Artapanus<sup>e</sup> says, that by an earthquake most of the temples in Egypt fell.

<sup>e</sup>Apud Euseb. Praepar. Evangel. 1. 9. c. 27. p. 436.<sup>22</sup>

Though Gill, here, assumed Artapanus to have been a pagan, a growing consensus among scholars is that Artapanus, due to his propagandist stance in relation to Judaism, was actually a hellenized Jew.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>John Gill, Exposition of the Old Testament (London: Matthews & Leigh, 1810), 1:372.

<sup>22</sup>Artapanus, Περὶ Ἰουδαίων, as quoted in Eusebius, Εὐαγγελικὴ Προπαρασκευὴ, 9, 27; as cited by Gill, 372.

<sup>23</sup>Carl H. Holladay, Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, no. 40, ed. Howard C. Kee and Douglas A. Knight (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1977), 201-4.

Benno Jacob reflected upon some of the other early Jewish sources which probably orally preceded and gave rise to the view of Artapanus and which also mentioned such an earthquake at the time of the Exodus:

The judgments (*sh'fa-tim*) accompanying the Exodus were already mentioned in 6:6; they were passed upon the deities of Egypt as described in Num 33.4. How is this to be understood? A *haggadah* also cited by Hieronymus (*Epist ad Fabiolem*, Migne I, 702: *Hebraei autumant*) stated that all the temples of Egypt were destroyed through earthquake and lightning during this night (similarly *Mech. I, Tan., Sech. T.*). This miracle was added later but was not described by Scripture.<sup>24</sup>

If such an earthquake had occurred that was powerful enough to destroy the strongest buildings in Egypt, how could any of the lesser buildings have withstood the violence of the assault, especially those in Goshen? On the morning of the Exodus, this would have been a visible miracle nearly on a par with the crossing of the Red Sea. Would it have gone unrecorded?

To argue for the historical existence of such a catastrophic earthquake would be to argue from silence. The lack of scriptural mention of either the physical destruction of the Egyptian idols or of such an earthquake has been a key factor, no doubt, in the exclusion of this interpretation from other modern commentaries. Perhaps the real "earthquake" that influenced the mythical one was the struggle in the minds of the rabbis to understand Exodus 12:12 in relation to the plagues.

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<sup>24</sup>Jacob, 312.

Assigning Plagues to "Gods"

Other partial solutions to the reference in Exodus 12:12 have been offered by assigning certain Egyptian deities to certain of the plagues. In his commentary on Exodus, Ronald F. Youngblood wrote:

The Lord sent the plagues to judge Egypt and her gods (7:4; 10:2; 12:12; 18:11), and we will note that many of the individual plagues seem to have been directed against a specific Egyptian deity.<sup>25</sup>

John H. Walton and John J. Davis exemplify this approach.<sup>26</sup> However, when confronted with plagues three, four, and six, this approach breaks down. Youngblood left these plagues unassigned to any specific deities.<sup>27</sup> Walton left them unassigned as well.<sup>28</sup> Davis stated of the third plague (lice or gnats) that it is not clear "against what specific deities this particular plague was directed."<sup>29</sup> Plague four ("flies") Davis also left unassigned, and plague six (boils) he vaguely assigned to the Egyptian "gods" of healing.<sup>30</sup>

Ziony Zevit saw the numerous problems associated

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<sup>25</sup>Youngblood, 50.

<sup>26</sup>John H. Walton, Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament, with a Foreward by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 43; and John J. Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in the Book of Exodus (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1971), 103.

<sup>27</sup>Youngblood, 54.

<sup>28</sup>Walton, 43.

<sup>29</sup>Davis, 103.

<sup>30</sup>Davis, 106-17.

with past attempts to align certain Egyptian "gods" to certain of the ten plagues. In reference to the typical approach to the theme of הַלֹּהִים' verses the "gods" of Egypt, Zevit commented:

One weakness in interpreting the plagues *solely* as a religious polemic against Egyptian gods, however, is that some of the plagues are unaccounted for; and not all of the plagues can be conveniently matched up with Egyptian gods or texts. Specifically, divine candidates are lacking for the third, fourth and sixth plagues--lice, flies and boils.<sup>31</sup>

Aside from the futile attempt to match some of the plagues to Egyptian "gods," the problem of the vast number of Egyptian "gods" complicates the issue further. Unless "all of the gods of Egypt" (Ex. 12:12) is severely qualified, hundreds of deities seem to have escaped unharmed. With the vast number of Egyptian deities and the seemingly strange nature of some of the plagues, how could all of the "gods" of Egypt be judged through only ten plagues?

In order to see any correspondence of plagues to "gods," something of the essence of the religion of Egypt must be grasped. That essence is bound up in the Egyptian preoccupation with a mythological understanding of creation and its maintenance. While some modern writers have taken note of the apparent relationship between the plagues and the biblical account of creation, the plagues were blows dealt to the Egyptian mythological system which revered

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<sup>31</sup>Ziony Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Plagues: Were They Natural Disasters, a Demonstration of the Impotence of the Egyptian Gods or an Undoing of Creation?" Bible Review 6 (1990): 21.

false "gods" of creation. This is the lens used by the writer in part III to view the relationship of "gods" to plagues.

### Creation and the Plagues

The appearance of the landscape in Egypt upon the departure of the Hebrews must have resembled the worldwide devastation captured in the apocalyptic vision of the apostle John in Revelation. Creation was decimated.

According to Ziony Zevit:

the number of plagues in Exodus was meant to correspond to the ten divine utterances by which the world was created and ordered (Genesis 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,28,29).<sup>14</sup> The destruction of Egypt was part of the redemption of Israel, so the Exodus narrator tied his story of redemption to the story of creation through subtle echoes and word plays.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Mishnah Aboth 5:1,4.

<sup>15</sup>This conclusion does not contradict the findings of source criticism. According to source criticism, the final redactor of the plague narratives and of the creation stories was from the priestly school, P.<sup>32</sup>

Zevit saw the plagues as an "undoing of creation."<sup>33</sup>

However, as he found gaps in both the naturalistic view and in the view of הויה' in contest with the "gods," Zevit's view cannot be consistently maintained either. He sought to align the plagues to various key words in Genesis; however, the sequence of plagues compared with the key words in Genesis 1 does not give evidence of any consistent order. Zevit admitted that the sixth plague, boils, did not fit

<sup>32</sup>Zevit, 23.

<sup>33</sup>Zevit, 16.

this pattern at all.<sup>34</sup>

Terence E. Fretheim has also sensed the connection of the plagues with the theme of creation. His interpretation viewed the plagues in relation to the *chaoskampf* motif, God versus the forces of chaos. Of the plagues he wrote:

They are fundamentally concerned with the natural order; each plague has to do with various nonhuman phenomena. The collective image presented is that the entire created order is caught up in this struggle, either as cause or victim. Pharaoh's antilife measures against God's creation have unleashed chaotic powers that threaten the very creation that God intended.<sup>35</sup>

Both the narrative of the ten plagues and the episode of the crossing of the Red Sea were interpreted by Fretheim against this background:

The complexities of the divine, human, and cosmic interaction in the narrative cannot all be factored out, but the divine purpose for Israel in and through this entire experience is clear: to get Israel through the waters of chaos and to enable them to walk on the "dry ground" of creation. Hence, the creation themes will become prominent once again in Exodus as God works his re-creative deed (15:1-21).<sup>36</sup>

Zevit and Fretheim sensed the connection of the plagues to the issues surrounding the claims of the Creator. However, neither the key words of Genesis 1 pointed out by Zevit nor the *chaoskampf* alluded to by Fretheim fully captures the force of the relationship between the plagues and creation.

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<sup>34</sup>Zevit, 22.

<sup>35</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, "The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster," Journal of Biblical Literature 110 (1991): 393.

<sup>36</sup>Fretheim, 396.

This theme, treated both from the perspective of the Hebrews and the Egyptians, is another major element in the writer's proposal in part III.

#### Naturalistic Rationalization

With the turn of the 19th century, the influences of Deism and rationalistic philosophies began to be felt in the world of theology. This was especially true in Germany. At first, due to the backlash of the Lutheran, conservative majority, the rationalization of the supernatural in biblical narrative moved at a slow and somewhat cautious pace. Careers were at stake. Later in the century, however, caution was completely thrown to the wind. At first the basic, rationalistic approach to the plagues was to see them merely as bizarre intensifications of phenomena that naturally occurred from time to time on a smaller scale in the land of Egypt.

Heinrich Hävernich's approach was to combine a naturalistic explanation--the plague upon the water engendering the plagues which follow--with a vague reference about this "mode" of explanation being "by no means alone sufficient to explain them completely."<sup>37</sup> Benno Jacob, a rabbi who lived in Germany before World War II, viewed this approach, after it had been refined and radically asserted, as a calculated attack upon the biblical sense of the

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<sup>37</sup>H[einrich] A[ndreas] C[hristoph] Hävernich, An Historico-Critical Introduction to the Pentateuch, trans. Alexander Thompson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1850), 246.

plagues:

What was the source of these plagues? The usual explanations derive them from the natural calamities endemic to Egypt, which had in this instance struck in a more concentrated form. This is unsatisfying, however. . . . Any rationalistic approach to the plagues must be considered as falsifying the basic contention of Scripture, which saw the plagues as the works of God [emphasis in original].<sup>38</sup>

The obvious assertion of the biblical account of Exodus is that the ten plagues were supernatural, not merely natural, in origin.

Greta Hort's two articles became the most widely known example of this interpretation.<sup>39</sup> The bloody Nile was attributed to "the mass appearance of the flagellates *Euglena sanguinea* and *Haematococcus pluvialis*" coming down the Nile during an unusually high inundation due to heavy rainfall in Abyssinia.<sup>40</sup> Boils were attributed to "skin anthrax" from the biting flies.<sup>41</sup> Hort's argument in her first article asserted a potentially natural sequence for plagues one through six. At the end of Hort's first article the conjectured natural sequence encountered difficulty.

Zevit noted:

The ecological chain is broken after the sixth plague, there being no causality between the plague of boils

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<sup>38</sup>Jacob, 188-89.

<sup>39</sup>Greta Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt [Exodus 7:14-12:33]," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 69 (1957): 84-103; "The Plagues of Egypt [Ex 7:14-12:33]," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 70 (1958): 48-59.

<sup>40</sup>Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt," 69 (1957): 87-94.

<sup>41</sup>Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt," 69 (1957): 101.

(the sixth plague) and the hail. The chain is again broken between the ninth and tenth plagues. In addition, there is no real link between the plagues in the seventh-eighth-ninth sequence (hail-locusts-darkness).<sup>42</sup>

While the source critics generally split up these plagues among various sources, at least Hort's contentions viewed them as occurring in the order recorded in the Exodus narrative.

Another more radical approach to "naturalizing" the plagues was linked to the explosive volcanic activity of the Santorini volcano, modern Thera, of the Cyclades islands located in the Aegean sea, north of Crete.<sup>43</sup> In an article in 1976 Joel Block asserted of the nature of the biblical plagues:

In discussing the plagues of Egypt, one notices that these are not supernatural events, but phenomena associated with volcanoes or naturally occurring in this country with a volcanic impetus.<sup>44</sup>

Block's naturalistic position was influenced by a suggestion in 1972 from the inspector General of Antiquities in Greece that "a major volcanic catastrophe occurred about 1500 B.C. from the island of Santorini."<sup>45</sup>

Since Block's assertions, another proponent of this naturalistic view, Hans Goedicke, has popularized the

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<sup>42</sup>Zevit, 20.

<sup>43</sup>Joel Block, "The Ten Plagues of Egypt," Religious Education 71 (1976): 523.

<sup>44</sup>Block, 520.

<sup>45</sup>Block, 523.

theory.<sup>46</sup> Sensational claims such as those of Block and Goedicke resulted in interpretations of the plagues and the crossing of the Sea that defied any kind of historical probability.

William H. Stiebing, Jr., attacking the volcanic theory on scientific, biblical, and historical grounds, criticized Goedicke's popularization of this sensational theory.<sup>47</sup> Rather than dealing with all of the various charges brought against this theory by Stiebing on scientific grounds, Goedicke's stinging response dealt more with unjustified criticism both of Stiebing's credentials and of the credentials of the Bible as a document of historical worth.<sup>48</sup>

Only the main eruption of Thera from such a distance could have adversely affected Egypt. The Egyptian Delta is over five hundred miles away. Indeed, Stiebing wrote (concerning new evidence that the "wall of water" was only twenty to thirty feet high which hit Crete--seventy miles away) that, "a wave 30 feet high when it hit Crete would have become almost imperceptible by the time it reached

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<sup>46</sup>Hershel Shanks, "The Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea, according to Hans Goedicke," Biblical Archeological Review 7 (September-October 1981): 42-50.

<sup>47</sup>William H. Stiebing, Jr., "The Israelite Exodus and the Volcanic Eruption of Thera," Catastrophism & Ancient History 9 (Spring 1987): 69-80.

<sup>48</sup>Hans Goedicke, "Goedicke in Response to Stiebing," Catastrophism & Ancient History 10 (1988): 44-45.

Egypt."<sup>49</sup>

The probability is incalculable that an eruption five hundred miles away would trigger the phenomena of the plagues (which occurred over the course of several months); then months later, at the most opportune moment, the Egyptian army would be crushed by the seismic wall of water tumbling in from the Mediterranean. The main eruption would be needed to cause the plagues; thus, the wave supposedly responsible for drowning the Egyptians would have come ashore much earlier.

Though Biblical Archeological Review had been responsible for aiding the popularization of this theory, a recent addenda to the theory in the same magazine tolled the death knell for this naturalistic view:

Last year, as part of a study called the Greenland Ice Sheet Project 2, the ice cores' ash layers were examined by a team headed by Gregory A. Zielinski of the University of New Hampshire. The ice researchers analyzed the samples and compared their sulfur content with those ash fragments in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea known to have come from the eruption of Thera. The relative depth of the Thera ash in the 9,000-foot Greenland ice cores dates the eruption to 1623 B.C., Zielinski reported in the journal *Science* on May 13, 1994. Other evidence--oak trees preserved in Irish peat bogs with narrow tree rings believed to have been caused by the ash cloud from the Thera eruption--had previously put the eruption at roughly the same time. . . . The new evidence from Greenland gives added weight to the 1623 B.C. date of the eruption and would seem to put Goedicke's theory permanently on ice.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Stiebing, 75.

<sup>50</sup>"Ice Core Samples Date the Fiery End of an Island and a Theory," Biblical Archeological Review 21 (January-February 1995): 22.

Such an early date for the phenomena surrounding the eruption of Thera is entirely incompatible with the Exodus event. For a theist who believes in a God who created and who may suspend at will the "natural laws," the supernatural explanation is much more plausible than this type of "rational" explanation.

#### Chiastic Arrangement

Though some chiastic structures in the Pentateuch may be examined objectively due to their being rooted in the repetition of vocabulary and grammatical relationships,<sup>51</sup> claims of chiastic symmetry enter the realm of subjective speculation once a thematic nature divorces the observations from exact symmetry in vocabulary and syntax. Such subjectivity occurred in the observations of Dennis McCarthy in his "chiastic" treatment of the narrative of the plagues.<sup>52</sup>

For McCarthy, the symmetrical arrangement began with the casting down of Moses rod (instead of with the traditional first plague of blood):

Thus, if we divide the tales into two groups of five, the first including the trick with the rod and running through the plague of "flies" (Ex 7.8--8.28), the second including the murrain and running through the strange darkness (9.1--10.27), we find that each member of the

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<sup>51</sup>Genesis 9:6 is an example of a chiastic statement in Hebrew which may objectively be argued to demonstrate intentional symmetry: "שֶׁפֶךְ דָּם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם כִּימוֹ יִשְׁפֹךְ."

<sup>52</sup>Dennis J. McCarthy, "Moses' Dealings with Pharaoh: Ex 7:8-10:27," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 27 (October 1965): 336-47.

group shares certain formal characteristics with its opposite number in the other group.<sup>53</sup>

McCarthy's choice of the word "trick" demonstrated his anti-supernatural posture. The symmetry alluded to in the previous quotation was based on certain "key phrases" (much like the observations in the "three triads plus one" structural interpretation):

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|---|---|
| I. 7,8-13: 5 vv. with introductory and closing formulae.  | X. 10,21-27 (29): 5 vv. with introductory and closing formulae.   |
| II. 7,14-22 (25): 7 vv. with hardening of Pharaoh's heart at beginning and end; prophetic formula with specific request; second command to Moses. | IX. 10,1-20: 20 vv. with hardening of Pharaoh's heart at beginning and end; prophetic formula with specific request; second command to Moses. |
| III. 7,26--8,11: 14 vv. with second command to Moses; prophetic formula and specific request to serve Yahweh.                                     | VIII. 9,13-35: 22 vv. with second command to Moses; prophetic formula and specific request to serve Yahweh.                                   |
| IV. 8,12-15: 3 vv. in which the opening formula is a command to Moses for Aaron.  | VII. 9,8-12: 4vv. in which the opening formula is a command to Moses for Aaron.   |
| V. 8,16-28: 12 vv. with prophetic formula and specific request to serve Yahweh.   | VI. 9,1-7: 7vv. with prophetic formula and specific request to serve Yahweh. <sup>54</sup>  |

At times the form of a writer's presentation of the material is more symmetrical than the material itself. Such was the case here. As an initial observation, the disparity between

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<sup>53</sup>McCarthy, 341.

<sup>54</sup>McCarthy, 342.

the amount of material (number of verses) assigned by McCarthy to each of these pairs was far from symmetrical. The most damage to this structural interpretation may be seen not in what McCarthy included but in what he left out.

McCarthy's first "plague," the casting down of the rod, was actually not a plague at all. The "introductory formulae" was addressed to Moses and Aaron; while in McCarthy's "tenth" plague (darkness) the "introductory formulae" was directed to Moses alone. McCarthy conveniently left out this difference.

In McCarthy's "second" plague involving the bloody Nile, the second command was given directly. During his "ninth" plague, which was the plague of locusts, Moses prays and the Lord acts--there was no second command. The perfect symmetry in McCarthy's chart does not exist in the biblical text.

In addition, the reason that there was no "specific request" in McCarthy's plagues four (lice), seven (boils), and ten (darkness) was because these plagues were unannounced as noted in the "three triads plus one" structural interpretation. In McCarthy's "third" plague (frogs), the second command given to Moses involved Aaron; while in his "eighth" plague (hail) the second command was for Moses alone. Judging by McCarthy's table, his "fourth" plague (lice) and "seventh" plague (boils) were the only times that Moses received from the Lord a command for Aaron. As already noted, this was not the case; the miracle of the

rod and the plague of frogs included a command to Moses to involve Aaron.

Finally, in reference to McCarthy's plagues "five" (flies) and "six" (murrain), both the "prophetic formula" of "thus says the Lord" and the "specific request to serve Yahweh" occurred in each of the traditionally numbered plagues (from blood to the death of the firstborn) whenever warning was given. As previously discussed in the structural interpretation "three triads plus one," this warning was delivered before the first two plagues of each of the triads.

Though other writers, such as G. W. Coats<sup>55</sup> and Ari Mark Cartun,<sup>56</sup> have given serious attention to this structural interpretation, McCarthy's structural pairing of plagues was both highly subjective and forced. Cartun attempted to pair the ten traditional plagues, from blood to the death of the firstborn, in a chiastic arrangement because of McCarthy's approach.<sup>57</sup> His attempt was more subjective than McCarthy's due to its total reliance upon words and themes that were in places supposed to be implied by the situation. His pairing of plagues two and nine well

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<sup>55</sup>George W. Coats, Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, no. 57 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 81-108.

<sup>56</sup>Ari Mark Cartun, "'Who Knows Ten?' The Structural and Symbolic Use of Numbers in the Ten Plagues: Exodus 7:14-13:16," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 45 (1991): 65-119.

<sup>57</sup>Cartun, 92-94.

illustrated how far he had to reach subjectively in order to demonstrate this "pattern":

Frogs and darkness are connected as plagues upon the houses of the Egyptians. "Houses" are mentioned a retributive five times in the plague of frogs,<sup>54</sup> with further details that they would spread into every nook and cranny of every kind of house (Exod 7:28). Similarly, by pointing out that the darkness did not extend to the dwellings of the Israelites, and by saying that no one could get up from where they were (Exod 10:23), the text implies that the Egyptians were confined to their houses in the black, palpable gloom.

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<sup>54</sup>Exod 7:28 (twice), 8:5,7,9.<sup>58</sup>

Any association of these plagues due to an emphasis upon "houses" was not an explicit association in the text. In this type of forced structural approach, subjectivity reigns.

#### Other Modern Interpretations

Various numerical groupings of the plagues have been attempted from nearly every imaginable angle.<sup>59</sup> Though some of the attempts were very creative, they do not tend to add anything of substance to the interpretation of the narrative of the plagues as a whole.

James K. Hoffmeir offered a related, partial reply to the reference in Exodus 12:12 and 18:11 in his analysis of the use of the imagery of their "victorious arm" by both God and Pharaoh.<sup>60</sup> This analysis may have been the

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<sup>58</sup>Cartun, 93.

<sup>59</sup>Cartun, 65-108.

<sup>60</sup>James K. Hoffmeir, "The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives," Biblica 67 (1986): 387.

catalyst for the dissertation of David Rolph Seely.<sup>61</sup> Quoting inscriptions of Amenhotep II and other pharaohs who made similar statements, Hoffmeir detailed how the Pharaoh claimed to be "a god whose arm (*ḥpš*) is great."<sup>62</sup> He was also called the "good god, strong of arm . . . who achieves with his arms."<sup>63</sup>

Alluding to Jethro's statement in Exodus 18:10-11, Hoffmeir concluded: "By extending his victorious arm, God showed his superiority over pharaoh and the gods of Egypt."<sup>64</sup> While Pharaoh was certainly worshipped as the greatest "god" in human form, he was not worshipped as the greatest of all of the "gods." Hoffmeir's discussion of this motif highlighted a colorful, indirect, literary allusion to the power of the Lord that resulted in Egypt's decimation; but the direct means that God used, which were alluded to in Exodus 12 and Numbers 33, were the "judgments" known as the ten plagues.

Though the motif of the "arm of יהוה" may overlap somewhat with the plagues themselves, this *leitmotif* should properly be understood as standing for the source of the plagues. The identification by Hoffmeir of this abstract motif as one which communicated well to the Egyptians would

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<sup>61</sup>David Rolph Seely, "The Image of the Hand of God in the Exodus Traditions." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1990.

<sup>62</sup>Hoffmeir, "The Arm of God," 381.

<sup>63</sup>Hoffmeir, "The Arm of God," 381.

<sup>64</sup>Hoffmeir, "The Arm of God," 387.

certainly compliment any interpretation that explained how the plagues concretely demonstrated to the Egyptians the power of יהוה' over all of the hundreds of the deities of the Egyptians. Nevertheless, the identification of a motif which is somewhat parallel to the plagues still leaves the dilemma of interpreting the plagues in light of the "judgments upon all of the gods of Egypt" mentioned in Exodus 12:12.

The "modern" development which has had the greatest impact on the way that scholars have approached the plague narrative has been the Documentary Hypothesis. Though this is not an "interpretation" of the plagues, it certainly has affected how many scholars have attempted to understand the narrative of the plagues, both as to the narrative's historical trustworthiness and as to the narrative's literary composition. For this reason, the Documentary Hypothesis poses the primary presuppositional concern.

PART II. CRITICAL CONCERNS FOR AN EXAMINATION  
OF THE NARRATIVE OF THE PLAGUES

## CHAPTER 4

## PRESUPPOSITIONAL CONCERNS: SOURCE CRITICISM

Source Critics and the Narrative

The Documentary Hypothesis, perhaps better known as either the JEDP Theory or the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis, has its roots in the eighteenth century. Tracing the origins of this hypothesis, Duane W. Garrett wrote:

The Documentary Hypothesis began when Jean Astruc (1684-1766) came to believe that he could uncover the sources of the Pentateuch by using the divine names *Yahweh* and *Elohim* as a guide. He placed passages that use the name *Elohim* in one column (A), those that use *Yahweh* in another (B), and passages with "repetitions" (C) and interpolations (D) in a third and a fourth column.<sup>1</sup>

The divisions of the biblical text into numerous conjectured sources ran wild during the nineteenth century. T. R. Birks commented on Ilgen's source division in the nineteenth century:

Ilgen supposes seventeen documents, but only three authors, one Jehovist and two Elohist; and is so acute in his sense, as sometimes to divide single verses among the three, and give each his own.<sup>2</sup>

Uuras Saarnivaara succinctly stated the logical inference of

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<sup>1</sup>Duane A. Garrett, Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 14.

<sup>2</sup>T. R. Birks, The Pentateuch and Its Anatomists or, The Unity and Authenticity of the Books of Moses Vindicated and Confirmed, in Reply to Modern Criticisms (London: Hatchards, 1869), 4.

such a theory: "This 'documentary hypothesis' implies that the Pentateuch originated in a series of literary forgeries and fictions."<sup>3</sup>

This basic theory was modified numerous times through the decades of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even after many modifications to the initial theory had been proposed, Hermann Gunkel well summarized his own view:

From primitive times there existed a tradition in Israel that the divine ordinances regarding worship, law and morality, as proclaimed by the mouth of the priests, were derived from Moses. When, then, these ordinances, which had originally circulated orally, were written down in larger or smaller works, it was natural that they passed under the name of Moses. Now our Pentateuch consists, in addition to the collection of legends, of such books of law from various periods and of very diverse spirit. And because the legends also, from the time of the Exodus, have to do chiefly with Moses, it was very easy to combine both legends and laws in one single book. Thus it happened that Genesis has become the first part of a work whose following parts tell chiefly of Moses and contain many laws that claim to come from Moses. But in its contents Genesis has no connection with Moses.<sup>4</sup>

This type of treatment of the books traditionally assigned to Moses has remained in most circles of biblical scholarship as a fairly standard approach to the material in the Pentateuch. Therefore, the Pentateuch has been characterized as a compilation of a few ancient legends, a

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<sup>3</sup>Uuras Saarnivaara, Can the Bible Be Trusted?: Old and New Testament Introduction and Interpretation (Minneapolis: Osterhus, 1983), 72.

<sup>4</sup>Hermann Gunkel, The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History, trans. W. H. Carruth, with an Introduction by William F. Albright (New York: Schocken, 1964), 159-60.

few spurious sources, and later editorial accretions--all erroneously assigned to Moses.

Though the primary focus of early criticism was upon Genesis, Exodus was certainly not left unscathed. Exodus was the beginning of the bulk of the narrative material in the Pentateuch that was traditionally claimed to be autobiographical in nature. Frank E. Eakin, Jr. and John I. Durham, both of Southern Baptist institutions, thought that three sources were traceable in the narrative of the plagues.<sup>5</sup> The assumptions of most liberal critics would never allow a traditional approach to be entertained as a possibility. Yet, using the same criterion of divine names that was used in the criticism of Genesis would prove to be problematic for the treatment of Exodus.

#### Source Criticism and Exodus 7-12

Not only has several millennia of years of tradition ascribed to Moses the authorship of Exodus, but several sections of the book directly claim that he is the author (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; and 34:27).<sup>6</sup> Treating these claims as intentional misrepresentations to be believed only by the naive faithful who follow the course of centuries of

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<sup>5</sup>Frank E. Eakin, Jr. "The Plagues and the Crossing of the Sea," Review and Expositor 74 (1977): 475; and John I. Durham, Exodus, vol. 3 of Word Biblical Commentary ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), 95-180.

<sup>6</sup>W. H. Gispen, Exodus, vol. 2 of Bible Student's Commentary, trans. Ed van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 2.

blindness, source criticism has subjectively carved the Exodus material into the various bits and pieces that supposedly existed separately before the assumed editorial process began.

Moshe Greenberg outlined what he believed to have been the original process of compilation for the narrative:

To sum up: The plague narrative is the product of an elaborate growth of traditions, which reached the redactor in two crystallizations--partly overlapping, partly divergent. The present shape of the material was arrived at by intermeshing the two in as unforced a manner as possible.<sup>7</sup>

Could the reason that Greenberg commented in the above quotation on the "shape of the material" being "arrived at by intermeshing the two in as unforced a manner as possible" be because it is his subjective theory that is the only thing that was forced upon the material?

By the mid-seventies the numerous variations of the source theory were beginning to multiply again as in the nineteenth century. Ziony Zevit wrote:

S. R. Driver assigns eight plagues to J, five to E, and five to P (Driver, pp xxiii); M. Noth discerns only two sources in the narrative and assigns eight plagues to J and eight to P (Noth, pp. 67-84; 93-97); G. Fohrer assigns seven plagues to J, five to E, and five to P (*Überlieferung und Geschichte des Exodus* [BZAW 91, Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1964] 71); M. Greenberg assigns seven plagues to his source A which corresponds to a combined JE and six to his source B which corresponds to P (Greenberg, pp. 186-88); B. S. Childs assigns eight plagues to J, five to E, and six to P (Childs, p. 131). Childs, however, like Greenberg,

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<sup>7</sup>Moshe Greenberg, "The Redaction of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," in Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright, ed. Hans Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 252.

argues that J and E were already combined before the final redactor of the narrative began his work. I have accepted their conclusion and it is taken for granted in the following discussion (cf. Childs, p. 138).<sup>8</sup>

The joining of the "J" material and the "E" material before the "P" redactor's work poses a serious problem for source critics that should seem obvious. If a redactor joined the JE material before the time of the P redactor, then how did the P redactor draw sometimes from the J material alone?

John Van Seters, however, denied the "three source" theory in favor of a theory which proposed that the Yahwist writer composed the first nine plagues based on general references to plagues in Deuteronomy.<sup>9</sup> According to Van Seters, the work of the Yahwist was exilic at best.<sup>10</sup> Van Seters also denied the traditional relationship of Passover to the other nine plagues:

In a recent study<sup>14</sup>, I argued that the theme of the passover is not in the Yahwist's version of the exodus and was never a part of the exodus tradition until it was incorporated into the account by P. This conclusion, if it is correct, has important implications for the plague narratives as well.

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<sup>14</sup>John Van Seters, The Place of the Yahwist in the History of Passover and Massot, ZAW 95 (1983), 167-82.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ziony Zevit, "The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," Jewish Quarterly Review 66 (1976): 193, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup>John Van Seters, "The Plagues of Egypt: Ancient Tradition or Literary Invention?" Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 98 (1986): 31-38.

<sup>10</sup>Van Seters, 38.

<sup>11</sup>Van Seters, 32.

Van Seters attributed most of the conjectured work by ancient editors to the exilic period:

The Yahwist (in the exilic period) drew upon Dtn 28, Lev 26 and the common Near Eastern curse tradition to create a series of seven plagues as the »signs and wonders« by which Yahweh delivered Israel from the Egyptians. Consequently, there was never any ancient preliterate plague tradition.<sup>12</sup>

The period of time suggested by Van Seters was nearly a thousand years removed from the actual claim of the narrative of Exodus. Intricate literary devices are granted to most ancient civilizations like Sumer, Akkad, Ugarit, and Egypt. It is a disgrace to modern scholarship that the ancient Hebrews are not granted the same literary ability to have used different terms to describe the acts of the judgment of their God without a source critic trying to find evidence of some editorial process based on variety of terms.

#### Criteria for Source Divisions

The earliest criteria used in Genesis to distinguish between "sources," as noted earlier, was the use of the divine names יהוה and אלהים. A major challenge to the documentary theory is the question, "Why after Exodus 6:3 has the editor(s), all of a sudden, decided to be much more careful and consistent in his use of divine names?" Without the criteria of "divine names" in Exodus 7-12, source critics were forced to become much more resourceful in their

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<sup>12</sup>Van Seters, 39.

subjective observations.

Concerning the vague nature of some of the criteria used to distinguish between sources in the plague narrative, James K. Hoffmeir wrote:

The Reason for distinguishing J from E is not at all clear. The use of the rod in introducing the first plague (Exod 7:15b, 17b) is assigned to E (Childs, Exodus, 137), and yet the introduction of the magical rod is found in a passage generally regarded as belonging to J (Exod 4:1-4; Hyatt, Exodus, NCB, 48; Clements Exodus, 26). When the rod is in Aaron's hand, that section is assigned to P (Hyatt, Exodus, 103).

The use of divine names, 'elohim (E) and YHWH (J), is considered as diagnostic for these two sources. However, this criterion does not work in the story of the plagues. . . . Noth (Exodus OTL, 9-18) recognized this problem and maintained that J and E were virtually indistinguishable, and hence he referred to these narratives as JE, and the remaining sections were the work of P.<sup>13</sup>

Consistency, it appears, is not the mark of the Documentary Hypothesis. Appendix 1 further illustrates the subjective differences between the source critics.

James Plastaras maintained that the "Priestly (P) version of the plagues can be easily identified" in the plagues of Blood (Ex. 7:19-20a, 21b-22); Frogs (Ex. 8:5-7, 15b); Gnats (Ex. 8:16-19); and Boils (Ex. 9:8-12).<sup>14</sup> The subjective nature of his method did not allow certainty, for he wrote:

It is also possible that the original P narrative is represented in plagues VII (Hail: 9:22-23a), VIII

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<sup>13</sup>David Noel Freedman et al., eds., Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Egypt, plagues in," by James K. Hoffmeir.

<sup>14</sup>James Plastaras, The God of Exodus: The Theology of the Exodus Narratives (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 127.

(Locusts: 10:12-13a), and IX (Darkness: 10:21-23), but the only thing that can be said of these latter sections with certitude is that they do not belong to the original J narrative.<sup>15</sup>

For confirmation of their observations, source critics have appealed both to the variant arrangements and to the variant numbers of the plagues in biblical and extra-biblical material.

#### Variant Arrangements of the Plagues

In reflecting on the mnemonic of Rabbi Judah and the order of the plagues, Solomon Zeitlin wrote:

The question may arise why Rabbi Judah thought it necessary to give a mnemonic sign. There were only ten plagues and they were well known from the Pentateuch. In the Book of Psalms, Chapter 78, however, only seven plagues are mentioned,<sup>299</sup> and in Chapter 105 eight are given,<sup>300</sup> and in neither case is the order the same as given in the Pentateuch. Furthermore in the Book of Jubilees while ten plagues are recorded they do not follow the same order as in the Book of Exodus.<sup>301</sup> Most likely the various orders as given in the Book of Psalms and the Book of Jubilees were well known. Therefore Rabbi Judah thought it necessary to give the mnemonic sign to memorize the order as given in the Book of Exodus.

<sup>299</sup>Blood, swarms of flies, frogs, locusts, hail, pestilence, first born.

<sup>300</sup>Darkness, blood, frogs, swarms, lice, hail, locusts, first born.

<sup>301</sup>48.5. Blood, frogs, lice, dog-flies, boils, pestilence, hail, locusts, darkness, first born, Josephus (*Ant.* II) numerates nine plagues he omits the fifth.<sup>16</sup>

Though the rest of his observations were correct, Zeitlin's remark on Josephus was inaccurate. Murrain was indeed

<sup>15</sup>Plastaras, 127.

<sup>16</sup>Solomon Zeitlin, "The First Night of Passover," Jewish Quarterly Review 38 (1948): 455.

alluded to in its proper order, though it was a vague and indirect allusion:

For he filled that country full of various sorts of pestilential creatures, with their various properties [flies] . . . but if any thing escaped destruction from them, it was killed by a distemper which the men underwent also.<sup>17</sup>

Source critics have been quick to assume variant traditions of the narrative of the plagues. Moshe Greenberg, while recognizing the conservative rebuttal to the liberal assumption of various traditions of the plague narrative, said, "The Psalms' divergence from Exodus has been ascribed to poetic license: the likelihood is, however, that it attests to independent, variant traditions."<sup>18</sup> Nahum Sarna demonstrated more restraint when he wrote:

Due to the uncertain meaning of some of the Hebrew terms in those Psalms, it is difficult to determine exactly how many and what kind of plagues the two compositions respectively present. Nor can one establish with certainty whether the differences represent variant traditions or poetic license.<sup>19</sup>

Since the source critical treatment of the plague narrative has come to rely so heavily upon the record of the plagues in the book of Psalms, these Psalms must be individually examined.

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<sup>17</sup>Flavius Josephus, Josephus: Complete Works, trans. William Whiston, with a Foreword by William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960), [Ant. Jud. 14.3] 61.

<sup>18</sup>Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Plagues of Egypt," by Moshe Greenberg.

<sup>19</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus, vol. 2 of The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 38.

Biblical Variants

Psalm 78. James Plastaras well illustrated the reasoning of source critics when he wrote:

The division of the text into J and P material which has been proposed in this chapter is based on the literary and theological characteristics of the text itself. Fortunately, in this case we can check the accuracy of our division against an outside source. The author of Psalm 78, a long meditation upon the events of the exodus, seems to have only known the J, and possibly the E, version of the exodus story. At any rate, the author of Psalm 78 seems to have been unacquainted with the later Priestly narrative.<sup>20</sup>

Psalm 78 is thus used by source critics in an attempt to demonstrate objectively the correctness of their divisions of the narrative. On the surface it would appear that Psalm 78 left out the plagues of lice, murrain, and boils-- listing blood (דָּם), swarms (עֲרָב), frogs (צִפְרִדִּים), locusts (אַרְבֵּה), hail (בָּרָד), and the death of the firstborn (בְּכוֹרִים).

Beneath the surface observation, the reality is not so simple. Psalm 78 poetically rehearsed the history of the Exodus twice, both times following the "chorus":

They forgot what he had done,  
the wonders he had shown them.  
He did miracles in the sight of their fathers  
in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan (Ps.  
78:11-12).

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 (Ps. 78:42-43).

After the first "chorus" the plagues were entirely omitted and the psalmist skipped over to the deliverance at the Red

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<sup>20</sup>Plastaras, 129.

Sea (Ps. 78:13). The "chorus" thus functioned as a summary of the plagues. After the second "chorus" most of the plagues were listed (perhaps all if some were grouped together). Since they were omitted after the first "chorus" entirely, should it be surprising that some are not mentioned specifically after the second "chorus" since that chorus was earlier used as a summary?

Some of the plagues seem to have been rearranged due to considerations concerning severity, such as "swarms" being placed by the psalmist before "frogs" and "locusts" before "hail." This same tendency was operative in Psalm 105 as will be discussed in the next section.

Benno Jacob noted that although "Psalm 78 omits the last plagues," it "hints at them in verse 48."<sup>21</sup> The mention of מ'שׁפּוּן at the end of verse 48 could have been a poetic reference to the murrain on the livestock. In verse fifty-one the psalmist mentioned that the Lord gave over the lives of the Egyptians to the "plague" (רָבָה). This was the same word used to describe the plague of boils in Exodus 9:15. The plague of "lice" could have been simply thought of as part of the "swarms" of Psalm 78:45. Thus, it may be argued that all of the plagues received varying degrees of allusion due to poetic license on the part of the psalmist.

Indeed, poetic license can be argued in at least

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<sup>21</sup>Benno Jacob, The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus, trans. with an Introduction by Walter Jacob and Yaakov Elman (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992), 191.

three different ways: (1) poetic license which grouped some of the plagues together, (2) poetic license which rearranged some of the plagues based on severity, and (3) poetic license due to some historical occasion that compelled the psalmist to use poetic variation for contemporary relevance.

Two types of poetic license have been discussed.

The third category was developed by Archie C. C. Lee:

The interpretation that Ps. 78:49 refers to the wrath of God as executed through Assyria and, in turn, upon Assyria is confirmed further by the phrase 'a sending of his messenger of destruction'. This phrase does not have any counterpart in the Exodus account. It is most likely that the destruction brought about by the *ml'k yhwh*, who is commissioned by God to execute his punishment upon the Assyrians as recorded in Isa. 37.36 (2 Kgs. 19.35; 2 Chron. 32.31), forms the historical background of the account of the death of the Egyptian firstborn in Ps. 78.49-51.<sup>22</sup>

In opposition to the widely held belief within source critical circles of variant, early traditions of the plagues, Lee came to the unexpected conclusion that the psalmist did not depend upon some conjectured, independent account of the plagues.<sup>23</sup> Instead, Lee's observations led him to attribute the variation to poetic license:

He [the psalmist] is creative in his treatment of the story, and he is free to relate his congregation's experience to it, reading into it the more recent historical happenings--in this case, the saving deed of Yahweh for Israel that punishes the arrogant Assyrians.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Archie C. C. Lee, "The Context and Function of the Plagues' Tradition in Psalm 78," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 48 (1990): 84.

<sup>23</sup>Lee, 85.

<sup>24</sup>Lee, 85.

Certainly, this creative treatment is identical to the conservative argument in reference to Psalm 78 that the variation is due to some type of poetic license.

Thus, the source critics have actually attempted to strengthen their subjective arguments concerning "sources" of the narrative account, "sources" which no longer exist as separate written documents, by appealing to a hypothetical, variant plagues' tradition inferred from a poetic account of the narrative. Invented evidence, no matter how creative it may be, is not admissible. Due to a lack of proven existence, these "sources" referred to by source critics bolster nothing more than a weak argument from silence.

Psalm 105. The chief assumption of source critics concerning the psalmists who wrote Psalms 78 and 105 is:

If the psalmists knew all of the plagues of the Exodus narrative in the correct order of the book of Exodus, then surely they would reproduce them in their poetry in exactly that same order.

However, such stiffness in poetry would probably have been used by these same critics as signs of redaction by some later editor who tried to level the account from variant sources. Though Lee is far from being classified as a conservative, he admitted that "a closer look at these two psalms and the Pentateuch will reveal that they cannot be totally independent of the Pentateuchal traditions."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Archie C. C. Lee, "Genesis I and the Plagues Tradition in Psalm CV," Vetus Testamentum 40 (Fall 1990): 257.

The psalmist's listing of the ninth plague first in Psalm 105 and his apparent omission of the fifth and sixth plagues, though assumed by source critics as some type of variant tradition of the plagues, may be explained by poetic license similar to that used in Psalm 78. Lee combined his observations on Psalm 105 with those of B. W. Anderson in reference to the change in order and number of the plagues:

These two problems can be explained if we compare Ps cv 28-36 with the overall literary design of the creation account in Gen. i as it is described by B. W. Anderson.<sup>8</sup>

Day	Gen. i	Ps. cv
1+4 Heaven	Light + luminaries (Sun, Moon, Stars)	Darkness (v. 28a) + It became dark (v. 28b)
2+5 Waters	Water separated + Life populates water	Waters turned to blood (v. 29a) + Fish in water died (v. 29b)
3 + 6 Earth	(a) Dry land made + Living creatures according to their kinds  (b) Vegetation multiplies + Man was created	(a) Land swarmed with frogs, flies and gnats (vv. 30-1)  (b) Vegetation destroyed (vv. 32-5) + Egyptian first-born died (v. 36)

The Plagues narrative of Ps. cv 28-36 reveals similarities in literary structure. The same movement from heaven, to waters, to earth is clearly discerned and the focus of concern is also on the earth

<sup>8</sup>"A Stylistic Study of the Priestly Creation Story", in G. W. Coats and B. O. Long (ed.), *Canon and Authority* (Philadelphia, 1977) pp. 148-62.<sup>26</sup>

Such use of the narrative of the plagues provides an

<sup>26</sup>Lee, "Genesis I," 259.

excellent example of poetic license.

Like the summary "chorus" in Psalm 78, before the plagues were listed by the Psalmist in Psalm 105 a summary statement introduced them:

He sent Moses his servant,  
and Aaron whom he had chosen.  
They performed his miraculous signs among them,  
his wonders in the land of Ham [Ps. 105:26-27].

As in Psalm 78, this may have acted as a summary statement. The psalmist who wrote Psalm 78 also seemed to rearrange some of the plagues due to considerations concerning severity. In addition to any consideration of aligning the plagues with the days of creation, placing the ninth plague (darkness) first could be seen as the same type of poetic license (order based on severity) demonstrated in Psalm 78.

If the narrative of the plagues was as integral to the history of the Exodus in the days of the psalmist as is traditionally claimed, then knowledge of the correct narrative order was assumed. If this was the case, then listing the plagues in their narrative order could be done with the eyes closed. Indeed, it was probably so often recounted in the correct order of the narrative that to do so in poetry might seem routine. Poetic license on the part of the psalmist challenged his audience to follow his creative meditation on the scriptural account of the narrative of the plagues.

Other Psalms. Psalm 78 and Psalm 105 were not the only places in the Book of Psalms where the plagues were

remembered. Similar summary statements of the plagues (as in Ps. 78:11-12 and 105:26-27) also occurred:

He struck down the firstborn of Egypt,  
the firstborn of men and animals.  
He sent his signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt,  
against Pharaoh and all his servants [Ps. 135:8-9].

In reference to Psalms 78 and 105 leaving the tenth plague in its proper climactic place, Ronald Youngblood pointed out that in at least two other places the tenth plague (death of the firstborn) was the only plague mentioned:

In both psalms [78 and 105] the plague on the firstborn is mentioned last to stress its climactic importance. In Psalms 135:8 and 136:10 it is the only plague referred to at all, apparently because its story in Exodus made a much greater impression on later generations than the accounts of the other plagues did. The tenth plague can therefore stand for all the plagues because it was the most astounding and destructive of them all (see also Heb. 11:28).<sup>27</sup>

Considering the case for "poetic license" in the Psalms, the source critics may not appeal to the lists of plagues in Psalm 78 or in Psalm 105 as objective verification for variant plague traditions.

#### Extrabiblical Variants

The Book of Jubilees. The Book of Jubilees (second century B.C.) was one of the most ancient midrashic works found in fragmentary form in the caves at Qumran.<sup>28</sup>

Before this find the work was known primarily through an

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<sup>27</sup>Ronald F. Youngblood, Exodus (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 49.

<sup>28</sup>Philip Birnbaum, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts (New York: Hebrew, 1991), s.v. "Book of Jubilees, ספר היובלות."

Ethiopic manuscript that was discovered in Abyssinia which had been translated from the Greek (about a third of which was in Latin).<sup>29</sup> The Book of Jubilees recorded all ten of the plagues in the narrative of Exodus:

And the Lord inflicted a great vengeance upon them for Israel's sake, and beat them and killed them through blood and frogs and flies and dog flies and breaking-out skin-diseases, and also their animals by death, and through hail, by which he destroyed everything that grew for them; and through grasshoppers, who ate the rest that had been left by the hail, and through darkness; and also the first-born of man and animals; and on all their idols the Lord took vengeance and burned them with fire.<sup>30</sup>

As noted by Zeitlin, the order of the ten plagues varied slightly from the Exodus narrative.<sup>31</sup> The sixth plague ("boils") was apparently placed before the fifth ("plague on the livestock"). According to the "five pairs" analysis of the plagues, however, these two "similar plagues" were grouped together because of their similitude.<sup>32</sup> Since the statement of the firstborn moved from man to beast, perhaps this was simply a pairing of the two similar plagues with the afflictions on men listed before animals.

De Vita Mosis. Philo of Alexandria also departed

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<sup>29</sup>Birnbaum, s.v. "Book of Jubilees, סֵפֶר הַיּוֹבִלִיּוֹת;" and The Book of Jubilees, trans. George H. Schodde (Oberlin, Ohio: E. J. Goodrich, 1888), xi.

<sup>30</sup>The Book of Jubilees, 125.

<sup>31</sup>Zeitlin, 455.

<sup>32</sup>U[mberto] Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967; reprint, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987), 93.

from the order of the plagues as given in the narrative of Exodus:

He distributed the punishments in this wise: three belonging to the denser elements, earth and water, which have gone to make our bodily qualities what they are, He committed to the brother of Moses; another set of three, belonging to air and fire, the two most productive of life, He gave to Moses alone; one, the seventh, He committed to both in common; and the other three which go to complete the ten He reserved to Himself.\*

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\*The above grouping of the ten plagues compels Philo to depart from the order of Exodus, as will appear in the sequel. The first three, however, are in the same order. See Ex. vii. 14-vii. 19.<sup>33</sup>

Philo attributed blood, frogs, and gnats to Aaron; hail, locusts, and darkness to Moses; boils to Moses and Aaron; and the "dog-fly," murrain, and death of the first-born to God.<sup>34</sup> Thus Philo's order: blood, frogs, gnats, hail, locusts, darkness, boils, flies, murrain, and death. The numerical variation from the Massoretic text was 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 6, 4, 5, and 10.

Philo's departure from the biblical order was either due to a desire to present a creative account of the chronology of the plagues or due to paying more attention to midrashic commentary than to the scriptural account. The Midrash Rabbah attributed these same plagues to Aaron, Moses, and God; but it did not teach Philo's order:

Three of the plagues came through the agency of Aaron, three through Moses, three through God, and one through

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<sup>33</sup>Philo, vol. 6, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), De Vita Mosis I, 96-97.

<sup>34</sup>De Vita Mosis I, 96-142.

the united efforts of all three. Blood, frogs, and gnats, being on the earth, were through Aaron; hail, locust, and darkness, through Moses, because they were in the air and Moses had power over earth and heaven; the swarms, the murrain, and the plague of the firstborn through God, and the boils--through all of them.<sup>35</sup>

The Midrash simply assigned certain plagues to certain agencies, but the intention of the midrashic writer was not to teach that they occurred in this chronological sequence.

#### Response to Source Criticism

The criteria of the variation of divine names, part of the original criteria for source division, is not valid for the narrative of the plagues. In order to prop up the documentary theory, other subjective criteria were invented for Exodus. A consensus on "source" division has never existed (see appendix 1). The division of the narrative into sources representing variant traditions was subjectively contrived, for no concrete evidence of any other "variant plague tradition" has ever come to light.

All ten plagues of the Exodus narrative were preserved in the Masoretic Text,<sup>36</sup> the Septuagint,<sup>37</sup> the Samaritan Pentateuch,<sup>38</sup> and the versions. In 4QPaleoExod,

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<sup>35</sup>Midrash Rabbah: Exodus, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans. S. M. Lehrman (London: Soncino, 1951), [Bo, 12.4] 146.

<sup>36</sup>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, Exodus 7-12.

<sup>37</sup>Septuaginta, Exodus 7-12.

<sup>38</sup>Judith E. Sanderson, An Exodus Scroll from Qumran: 4QPaleoExod<sup>m</sup> and the Samaritan Tradition, Harvard Semitic Studies, 30, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 197.

though the manuscript is fragmentary with only eight of the ten plagues preserved, where the manuscript is extant each plague occurs in the order of the Massoretic Text.<sup>39</sup> The witness to the ten plagues was consistent in sources outside of the textual witnesses to Exodus as well. Midrashic commentaries such as the Mekilta, the Midrash Rabbah, and the Book of Jubilees testified consistently to the ten plagues recorded in the biblical account. All ten of the plagues from the account in Exodus were recorded in the Targum of Onkelos and the Targum of Jonathan,<sup>40</sup> in Josephus,<sup>41</sup> and in Philo.<sup>42</sup> Psalm 78 and Psalm 105 were the only sources to which source critics could turn to claim "variant traditions."

The arrangements in the Psalms, however, were due to poetic license. Some of the plagues were grouped together. Some were rearranged based on severity. Variation may have occurred due to some historical occasion that compelled the psalmist to use poetic variation in reference to the ancient account for contemporary relevance. Structural considerations may also have played a role in the psalmist's order as well.

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<sup>39</sup>Sanderson, 197.

<sup>40</sup>The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum, trans. J[ohn] W[esley] Etheridge. (N.p., 1862; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1968), 359-69 and 461-81.

<sup>41</sup>Josephus, [*Ant. Jud.* 14.3] 61.

<sup>42</sup>De Vita Mosis I, 96-142.

Therefore, if all of the early Hebrew textual witnesses, together with the early versions, presented the same order, then the source critic's argument concerning the plagues of Exodus is one from silence. A concrete example of a variant, narrative plague tradition does not exist; and the source critics' treatment of Psalms 78 and 105 has been as subjective as their criteria for dividing the Exodus narrative.

In a court the "burden of proof" is on the prosecution. In biblical studies, for over one-hundred years, the burden of proof has been on the defendant, the biblical narrative. Faith, either in the documentary hypothesis or in scriptural trustworthiness, is still required for both conservatives and source critics to maintain their positions.

## CHAPTER 5

## EXEGETICAL CONCERNS: EXODUS 12:12

Preliminary Considerations

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn--both men and animals--and I will bring [אֶעֱשֶׂה] judgment [שְׁפָטִים] on all the gods of Egypt [וּבְכָל־אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם]. I am the LORD [Ex. 12:12].

Before the text of Exodus 12:12 may be considered as a key verse for interpreting the narrative of the plagues as a whole, the meaning of the verse itself must be examined. Questions pertaining to the force of the verb אֶעֱשֶׂה and the identity of the אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם concern the immediate context. Questions relating to the context of the use of שְׁפָטִים and the context of the comparison of gods concern the broader context of the first twenty chapters of Exodus.

## Force of אֶעֱשֶׂה

The verb עָשָׂה (to do, to make), translated variously in Exodus 12:12 as "execute,"<sup>1</sup> "mete out,"<sup>2</sup> and "bring"<sup>3</sup> is a first person singular, imperfect verbal form. The

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<sup>1</sup>The Holy Bible: King James Version; The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version; The Holy Bible: New American Standard Version; and The Holy Bible: Douay Version.

<sup>2</sup>Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>The Holy Bible: New International Version.

"state" of the action of the verb is "imperfect." An interpretational dilemma arises, however, because of the tendency to translate this verbal form in this context without careful consideration to matters of the "aspect" of the verb in relation to contextual clues.

Should the tense be rendered as a simple future "I will bring," or with a frequentative force "I will [continually, frequently, or continue to] bring judgments upon all of the gods of Egypt"? In other words, does the verse speak of judging "all of the gods" in the Passover night alone, or does the use of the imperfect indicate something more than simple, future action?

The simple future rendering probably led to interpretations such as יהוה' judging the idols during the night of Passover or יהוה' judging deified humans during the Passover night alone. In this way the action was viewed as divorced from the past, a prophetic utterance that dealt only with the coming night of Passover.

Rendering the verb with frequentative force, however, would lend itself more to the view that all of the plagues fell to judge the אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם. J. Wash Watts graphed frequentative imperfects with "a series of dots, representing a repeated action, or a series of short lines, representing a repeated state ( . . . . or - - - - )."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>J. Wash Watts, A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964; reprint, South Pasadena, Calif.: Jameson, 1978), 54-58.

Concerning the problem of reflecting this nuance in English translation, Watts wrote:

Translation of this idea of repetition into English cannot as a rule be accomplished by English verbs standing alone. Some sort of adverbial modifier must be added. If the Hebrew text does not provide one like the "day and night" of Ps. 1:2, it is necessary to add to the English verb an adverb like frequently, repeatedly, regularly, customarily, habitually, or always. A paraphrase that says one is accustomed to do so and so has the same effect.<sup>5</sup>

If the context best fits the frequentative category, then a suitable adverb or dynamic equivalent should be sought in order to convey the meaning of the narrative. For Exodus 12:12 the resultant translation would be, "And I will [continually, frequently, or continue to] execute judgments upon the gods of Egypt."

The frequentative is also common in proverbial sayings as Ronald J. Williams illustrated under the category of frequentative imperfect: **בֶּן חָכָם יִשְׂמַח אָב**, "A wise son makes a father glad" (Pro. 15:20).<sup>6</sup> Williams made it a point to mention that the usage in the preceding example was "in parallelism with a participle." The reason that this is significant is because of the type of continuous action conveyed by the participle. Watts captured the distinction well with his comments on the action of the participle as compared with that of the frequentative imperfect:

This continuous state of the participle needs to be

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<sup>5</sup>Watts, 56.

<sup>6</sup>Ronald J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax: An Outline, 2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 31.

clearly distinguished from the continual state of a frequentative imperfect. A telephone line is continuous like a participle, but its poles are continual like a frequentative. Thus the graph of a participle is a long line ( ————— ).<sup>7</sup>

Such continuous state of action inherent in the participle conveyed a "timeless" quality to the proverb. If such a usage of the imperfect is applied to Exodus 12:12, the resultant translation is "and I execute [continued, iterative action continued from the past into the future] judgments upon all of the gods of Egypt."

Biblical Hebrew syntax has been a somewhat neglected and a thoroughly controversial field of study. A syntactical observation of Exodus 12:12, however, may help solve the translational dilemma. The verb choice within Exodus 12:12 included: וַעֲבַדְתִּי, וַהֲכִיתִי, and אֶעֱשֶׂה. While the action described with the two correlative perfects seems to belong together as parts of the same action, a break was intended with the phrase "וְ. . . אֶעֱשֶׂה"<sup>8</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor noted:

Scholars are agreed that the *we* in the *wegatalti* construction usually (though not always) signifies succession (temporal or logical), but they are not agreed about the meaning of the suffix conjugation in this construction.<sup>9</sup>

The first two verbs (וַעֲבַדְתִּי, וַהֲכִיתִי) are in temporal

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<sup>7</sup>Watts, 71.

<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of correlative perfects, see Watts, 47-54.

<sup>9</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), [32.1.3a] 523.

succession. The temporal succession of the verse does not include  $\text{הָעֲשֵׂה}$ .

If the action of  $\text{הָעֲשֵׂה}$  were intended as prophetic solely of Passover night, then another perfect form without Vav would have sufficed well. A perfect would have conveyed either "solely past action," "solely future action," or perhaps future perfect action--"I will have executed." Past action alone would have indicated that the judgment ended with the ninth plague ("I executed judgments"). Future action alone would have excluded the first nine plagues and perhaps the Red Sea crossing. Future perfect action ("I will have executed") would have included all ten plagues but would have excluded the crossing of the Red Sea.

Since another form could have been used, was the use of the imperfect meant to convey something that a perfect could not? Other contextual factors must be considered to determine whether the action described was meant to convey limited future action or frequentative force.

#### Identity of the $\text{אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם}$

The masculine plural noun " $\text{אֱלֹהִים}$ " in biblical Hebrew was used in reference to humans (rulers, judges); in reference to deities ("gods"), and in reference to God Himself (with a masculine singular verb and often with the article).<sup>10</sup> In Exodus the word was used in all three

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<sup>10</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius as translated by

ways. It was used explicitly of יהוה' (Ex. 2:24-25; 3:1f; 4:20; 5:1-3,8; 6:2; 7:16; 8:10; 9:15; 13:17-19, etc.), of false deities (Ex. 15:11; 18:11; 20:3,23; 32:1,4,8,23,31; and 34:16), and of human "rulers" or "judges":

Then all the elders [אֱלֹהִים] of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley . . . [Ex. 21:6].

But if the thief is not found, the owner of the house must appear before the judges [אֱלֹהִים] to determine whether he has laid his hands on the other man's property [Ex. 22:8].

Several contextual factors should be considered before אֱלֹהִים in Exodus 12:12 is hastily cast into any one category to determine the meaning of אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם.

### Contextual Considerations

#### Context of the Use of שָׁפְטִים

If the verb אֶשְׁפֹּט were granted frequentative force that included both the past judgments of the first nine plagues together with similar action contemplated for the night of Passover, this would align well with the references in Exodus 6:6 and 7:4 to the coming "mighty acts of judgment" by which יהוה' would "redeem" the Hebrews.

It would seem hard to divorce the force of the verb in Exodus 12:12 in connection with its plural object, "judgments," as in Exodus 6:6 and 7:4, from some indication that all of the plagues were intended as "judgments" upon these "אֱלֹהִים." This could have referred either to the

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Edward Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), s.v. "אֱלֹהִים."

Egyptian gods (in the sense of the Egyptians' false gods being powerless and put to shame by יהוה during the plagues) or to the Egyptian "rulers" upon whom the plagues fell physically.

#### Context of the Comparison of Gods

In order to determine the meaning of אֱלֹהִים in Exodus 12:12, the broader context of its use must be surveyed. Due to the crushing blows of the plagues, the Hebrews eventually arrived at the foot of Sinai. The first commandment of their God was:

לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי:

You shall have no other gods before me.

The statement in Exodus 12:12 should be considered against the claim in the narrative that the plagues provided a historical catalyst. They broke Pharaoh's will and granted the Hebrews freedom to form a monotheistic nation in a world of polytheism. Thus, the broader context of the conflict between the "God of the Hebrews" and the "gods of the Egyptians" may serve to help clarify the statement in Exodus 12:12.

From the very beginning of the contest of power, the rhetorical challenge of Pharaoh functioned much like the throwing down of the gauntlet:

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert." Pharaoh said, "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" [Ex. 5:1-2].

From this point forward the allusions made to deity were polarized. The contest with the "sorcerers" illustrated the battle between the gods of Egypt and the "God of the Hebrews" (Ex. 7:10-12,22; and 8:7,18-19). יהוה is called by Moses and Aaron "the God of the Hebrews" (Ex. 5:3; 7:16; 9:13; and 10:3.) and "the LORD our God" (Ex. 5:3; 8:10,27; 10:25-26).

In contrast to the Egyptians, the Lord called the Hebrews "my people" (Ex. 5:1; 6:7; 7:16; 8:1; 8:20,23; and 9:1). Pharaoh, on the other hand, did not even refer to יהוה as אֱלֹהִים until after the third plague when his "sorcerers" counselled him that "this is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). After their counsel, Pharaoh refers to יהוה as "your God" (Ex. 8:25-28; and 10:8,16-17).

The direct claims of יהוה before Pharaoh and his counsellors were assertions that יהוה was unique, the only אֱלֹהִים with such power:

Moses replied, "It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God" [Ex. 8:10b].

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 you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth" [Ex. 9:13-14].

The first time the claim that יהוה was unique was uttered by Moses, he used the phrase "למען תדע כי אין פיתנה אלהינו" (Ex. 8:6). Since "our God" was the focus of the contrast, the implication was clearly that "there is no" אֱלֹהִים like our

God. In Exodus 9:14, the second claim was that the very purpose of the plagues was "so that you may know that there is no one [אלהים implied] like me in all the earth."

After the victorious crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites sang:

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?  
Who is like you--  
majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glory,  
working wonders? [Ex. 15:11].

Though the primary translation in the Mekilta listed for באלם at Exodus 15:11 was "gods," it preserved two interpretations that picked up on the possible translation "mighty":

Another Interpretation: *Who is like unto Thee among the Mighty.* It is written *ba-alm:*<sup>1</sup> Who is like unto Thee among the strong and who is like unto Thee in the wonders and mighty deeds which Thou didst perform at the sea, as it is said: "Terrible things by the Red Sea" (Ps. 106:22); "And He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up" (*ibid.* v. 9).

<sup>1</sup>באלם is written defectively without a Yod after the Lamed. It accordingly means: "In strength." For אלם is not the plural of אל, but a singular noun, meaning "strength" (see Jastrow, *Dictionary*, p. 71; and Ben Jehudah, *Dictionary*, p. 247).<sup>11</sup>

The Mekilta listed the interpretations "gods" as in idols, "mighty" of earth, "mighty" of heaven, those who call themselves "gods," and those whom others call "gods."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition on the Basis of the Manuscripts and Early Editions with an English Translation, Introduction and Notes, trans. Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933), [Shirata 8, 17] 2:60.

<sup>12</sup>Mekilta, [Shirata 8, 1-45] 2:59-62.

Finally, upon Moses' report to his father-in-law about their great deliverance from the Egyptians, Jethro exclaimed: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly" (Ex. 18:11). The statement of Jethro in 18:11 calls for more than an understanding of the LORD being compared with deified mortals. However, the ancients often did not draw the same clear distinctions between deified men and mythological "gods."

The comparisons of Exodus 12:12; 15:11; and 18:11 have indicated possible double entendre. The reference in these verses was both to the humans upon whom judgment was falling and to the conceptual deities (represented by idols) who were shown to be powerless during the rest of the plagues. A play on words that encompassed anyone or anything else that was called "אֱלֹהִים" fits the context well. Considering all of the contextual data, the best translation is one which takes the verb as indicating frequentative force:

For I will pass throughout the land of Egypt during this night, and I will slay every firstborn throughout the land of Egypt--from man to beast; and upon all of the "gods" of Egypt I will [continue to] execute judgments. I am the LORD [Ex. 12:12].<sup>13</sup>

Neither a deified human nor a human mythological "god" could stand before יהוה. Through this contest of power, the stage was set for the first commandment.

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<sup>13</sup>Writer's translation.

PART III. EGYPTIAN RELIGION AND THE PLAGUES

## CHAPTER 6

## EGYPTIAN RELIGION: AN OVERVIEW

Explaining Creation: The Origin of Egypt's "Gods"

To speak of Egyptian "religion" is somewhat of a misnomer, for "the Egyptians themselves had no word for religion, which they did not see as a separate aspect of their lives, as modern man tends to do."<sup>1</sup> Their religion was their life as bound up in an ordered cosmos that was created by gods who must be looked to in worship for its maintenance. As creation is vast, so the number of Egypt's gods was vast. Sir E. A. Wallis Budge stated in 1930:

As every district, city, town, and village possessed a god, often with a female counterpart and a son, and sometimes also a being of evil . . . it follows that the gods of the Egyptians must have been very numerous. The names of a great many have been lost, but about 200 gods are mentioned in the Pyramid Texts, about 480 in the Theban recension of the "Book of the Dead," and about 1,200 in various works which deal with the other-world; a total of about 2,200 names has been noted. The ancient Egyptians may then be regarded as the most polytheistic that the world has ever seen.<sup>2</sup>

Though some of these names may well have been repetitions of the names of previously cataloged divinities, the number of

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<sup>1</sup>Rita E. Freed, A Divine Tour of Ancient Egypt (Memphis, Tenn.: Art Department, Memphis State University, 1983), 16.

<sup>2</sup>[Ernest A.] Wallis Budge, A General Introductory Guide to the Egyptian Collection in the British Museum (London: Harrison & Sons, 1930), 202.

Egypt's gods was vast nonetheless. In a more recent work that is not exhaustive, George Hart was able to list over one thousand deities of the Egyptians.<sup>3</sup>

### Triads

As dynasties in Egypt came and went, so the principal family's triad of deities often changed with the dynasty. Triads of deities were associated with the people and place from which they arose in antiquity. As early as 1880, P. LePage Renouf stated what has become an established fact in relation to the relationships among the "gods" of Egypt:

In the principal temple of each province, the chief deity was associated with other gods; hence the expression θεοί συνναίοι of the Greek inscriptions; hence from an early period triads (consisting of the principal god, a female deity and their offspring).<sup>4</sup>

In Memphis, Egypt, the triad was Ptah, Sakmet (the wife of Ptah), and Nefertum (the son of Ptah and Sakmet).<sup>5</sup> Abydos' triad consisted of Osiris, Isis, and Horus.<sup>6</sup> The triad of the Theban kings who expelled the Hyksos in the Eighteenth Dynasty was made up of Amun-Ra, Mut, and Khonsu.<sup>7</sup> During the time period that the Hebrew text designates for the

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<sup>3</sup>George Hart, A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

<sup>4</sup>P. LePage Renouf, Religion of Ancient Egypt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), 86.

<sup>5</sup>Freed, 46.

<sup>6</sup>Renouf, 86.

<sup>7</sup>Freed, 67.

Exodus event, this Theban triad of deities was in ascendancy; for Amun-Ra, Mut, and Khonsu comprised the triad of the city of the royal family from Thebes.

#### Enneads

Another common grouping of deities was the "ennead," or "paut," consisting generally of nine deities.<sup>8</sup> Although rival systems of deities were believed responsible for creation, the powerful priesthood of the Heliopolis listed three companies (enneads) of gods:

At the Heliopolis, the On of the Bible, the priests believed in the existence of the three companies of the gods. The first Company (paut) was called the "Great" . . . the second the "Little" . . . and the third had no special title; these Companies represented the gods of heaven, earth, and the Other World respectively.<sup>9</sup>

The Great Company consisted of Temu (or Atum), Shu, Tefnut, Seb (Geb), Nut, Osiris, Isis, Set (Seth), and Nephthys (Nebthet).<sup>10</sup>

These larger groupings of deities formed a sequence of creation as one sprang from two god-parents, each appearing in order to add some new aspect in the ordering of creation and living to maintain that addition.<sup>11</sup> Each deity was depicted in a variety of forms that were possible

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<sup>8</sup>{Ernest A.} Wallis Budge, Egyptian Religion (New York: University Books, 1959) 112-15.

<sup>9</sup>Budge, Guide to the Egyptian Collection, 190.

<sup>10</sup>Budge, Egyptian Religion, 116-24.

<sup>11</sup>Vincent Arieh Tobin, Theological Principles of Egyptian Religion, with a Foreword by Roland G. Bonnel (New York: Lang, 1989), 202.

for purposes of incarnation.<sup>12</sup> The assimilation of male attributes, female characteristics, and the traits of their sons (between deities of like sex and position) caused any single deity to be identified by the use of several names of other deities that either shared his or her alignment in a triad (as to sex and position) or shared some related function in the cosmos.<sup>13</sup>

The final generation of the Great Company (which consisted of the two sons and two daughters of Geb, god of the earth, and Nut, goddess of the sky--namely, Osiris, Seth, Isis and Nephthys) was the generation that joined the idea of order in creation with that of order in the political dominion of Egypt.<sup>14</sup> The precarious balance of maintaining creation in its cycles and the balance of politics for the dominion of Egypt were inseparably intertwined in Egyptian thought. This is most powerfully portrayed in the daily offerings to the goddess Ma'at.

#### Sustaining Creation: The Concept of Ma'at

R. T. Rundle Clark characterized Ma'at as the goddess of the "World Order."<sup>15</sup> As great an association as this is, her nature for the Egyptians was even greater

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<sup>12</sup>Budge, Guide to the Egyptian Collection, 190-201.

<sup>13</sup>Budge, Guide to the Egyptian Collection, 190-201.

<sup>14</sup>Tobin, 64.

<sup>15</sup>R. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 43.

than "World Order" and far more complex. T. G. H. James stated:

Practically all of the activities of the Egyptian state religion, including the building of the temples themselves, was devoted to the maintenance of Ma'at, so that the gods might be contented and Egypt would benefit as a consequence.<sup>16</sup>

Daily consideration of the goddess by both Pharaoh and the people appears to have been the norm. After all, it was the ostrich feather from her crown, the "feather of truth," which the hearts of all people were to be weighed against in the afterlife to determine their eternal destiny.<sup>17</sup> The symbolism of her feather emphasized the delicate balance in all things that she required every man to keep. This duty fell heavily upon Pharaoh. Rita Freed noted:

It was the king's as well as the gods' duty to maintain Ma'at, the social order, established at the time of creation. Harmony in the universe--namely the annual flood, fertility of the land, daily rising and setting of the sun, and the well-being of mankind--depended upon it. The king made offerings to the gods in temples on behalf of the people of Egypt and magically vanquished all their enemies. In return for this, the people gave him loyalty, service, and taxes [emphasis added].<sup>18</sup>

Pharaoh thus functioned, between the Egyptians and their non-human, mythological "gods," much like a priest or mediator for Upper and Lower Egypt. Of course, there were priests and priesthoods as well; but part of Pharaoh's duty was "priestly." Vincent Arieah Tobin well expressed the

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<sup>16</sup>T. G. H. James, An Introduction to Ancient Egypt (London: British Museum, 1979), 140.

<sup>17</sup>Budge, Egyptian Religion, 161-62.

<sup>18</sup>Freed, 54.

concept of this relationship between the king and the maintenance of "order":

In essence, monarchy and creation were thus two mythic expressions of one and the same principle, the principle of order (Ma'at) in the universe and in the state, founded by the divine creative force and continued and renewed in the royal succession, just as it was continued and renewed each day with the rising of the sun god [emphasis added].<sup>19</sup>

Hence the daily, primary concern of the Pharaoh was that the balance in the cosmos might be maintained, as embodied in Ma'at; and by so doing, he assured his own continuance in the balance of political dominion of Upper and Lower Egypt.

As Ma'at symbolized order in the cosmos, both in creation and in political dominion, when one Pharaoh died, royal succession occurred at sunrise in order that the balance of Ma'at not be disturbed.<sup>20</sup> To threaten either the maintenance of creation by the gods or the succession to the throne would be to jeopardize the balance of Ma'at. What feelings of fear, frustration, and humiliation must have increasingly dominated the hearts of Pharaoh and his people when יהוה, God of the Hebrew slaves, demonstrated that He was not only the Lord over all of creation, but also Lord even over the succession to Egypt's throne?

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<sup>19</sup>Tobin, 206.

<sup>20</sup>Freed, 54.

## CHAPTER 7

## THE LORD OF ALL CREATION: JUDGMENTS UPON

## FALSE GODS

For I will pass throughout the land of Egypt during this night, and I will slay every firstborn throughout the land of Egypt--from man to beast; and upon all of the "gods" of Egypt I will [continue to] execute judgments. I am the LORD [Ex. 12:12].<sup>1</sup>

The gods of Egypt were man-made, mythological gods that were invented for the purpose of explaining and maintaining all within creation. For the judgments of יהוה' to fall upon all of the gods of Egypt, as claimed in Exodus 12:12 and Numbers 33:4, they must fall upon Egypt from the water, to the dust of the earth, to the creatures of the dry land, to the vegetation of the dry land, to the heavens above, and finally to the very throne of the insolent Pharaoh.

By showing His power over all of these spheres of creation, יהוה' would show both the Egyptian gods to be false and Himself to be the true source of creation and its sustenance. Two plagues, as two witnesses legally confirmed a claim (Deut. 17:6), advanced upon Egypt affecting each sphere of creation and ascending from the waters, to the dry land, to the creatures of the dry land, to the assault on

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<sup>1</sup>Writer's translation as discussed in Chapter 5.

the vegetation from the atmospheric heaven, to the judgments upon the heaven above the clouds. The purpose of these plagues, stated by Moses to Pharaoh during the second plagues, was "so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God" (Ex. 8:10).

### Plagues upon the Water

#### Blood

It is interesting, in the light of the memory of the destruction of the Hebrew male children in the Nile, that the first plague upon Egypt was to turn its waters into blood. The command of the Lord recorded in Exodus 7:19 listed individually the sources of available water in the land of Egypt:

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."

Many gods were associated with the Nile. It was the lifeline of Egypt and was considered the bloodstream of Osiris.<sup>2</sup> Ernest A. Wallis Budge recorded an interesting assimilation of Nile deities:

In a hymn to Hapi, the Nile god, we find a remarkable passage in which some of the chief attributes of God are ascribed to the power which causes the inundation and who is being addressed under the names of Ptah and

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<sup>2</sup>John H. Walton, Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament, with a Foreward by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 43; and John J. Davis, Moses and the Gods of Egypt (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1971), 43.

Khnemu . . . the local god of Memphis, Ptah, whom he styles "lord of fish," and the "creator of wheat and barley," . . . Khnemu, the local god of the First Cataract, . . . "the bringer of food and provisions."<sup>3</sup>

Ptah was here proclaimed "lord of fish," and in Exodus 7:21 it was recorded that "the fish . . . in the river died; and the river stank." Khnum was the god who supposedly fashioned man on a potter's wheel.<sup>4</sup> In Khnum's triad of deities, from Elephantine, his wife was Heq't, who aside from offering his clay creations the breath of life was also the goddess of frogs.<sup>5</sup>

#### Frogs

The second of the ten plagues came from the river and began the pattern of two plagues for each part of creation. Moses warned Pharaoh in Exodus 8:3 that for his refusal to let the Hebrews go the Lord would cause "the river" to "bring forth frogs abundantly." Moses was commanded by the Lord:

"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 [Ex. 8:5-6].

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<sup>3</sup>[Ernest A.] Wallis Budge, The Gods of the Ancient Egyptians (London: Open Court, 1904), 1:146.

<sup>4</sup>Alan W. Shorter, An Introduction to Egyptian Religion: An Account of Religion in Egypt during the Eighteenth Dynasty (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1931), 75.

<sup>5</sup>[Ernest A.] Wallis Budge, A General Introductory Guide to the Egyptian Collection in the British Museum (London: Harrison & Sons, 1930), 195-96.

In this second plague, the Lord gave the same command concerning the stretching out of both the rod and the hand over the "waters of Egypt" as in the first plague. The frogs, amphibious creatures of the water with the capacity to invade the land, came up from the waters of Egypt.

Veronica Ions noted concerning the Egyptian "goddess" Heq't:

Heket was a water goddess in the form of a frog or a frog-headed woman. At Hermopolis she was connected with the four frog-deities who lived in Nun before creation. . . . She was usually called the wife of Khnum and became a birth-deity for all his creatures. . . . Sometimes Heket was taken for a form of Hathor and called the mother of Horus the Elder.<sup>6</sup>

She was associated with the duties of the creation of the world and the creation of man, and as such she was assimilated in the pantheon with Hathor (and with Isis, who was technically the mother of Horus). Such a sharing of traits and functions was common; and it demonstrates that in judging the waters of Egypt and the goddess Heq't, all of the gods and goddesses that were interconnected with this aspect of creation were judged as well. A transition may be noted between these plagues upon the water and the coming plagues upon the earth. In Exodus 8:14 it is recorded that after the frogs died the Egyptians gathered the ones together that had not gone back into the river into great piles, "and the land stank."

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<sup>6</sup>Veronica Ions, Egyptian Mythology (London: Hamlyn, 1968), 109.

Plagues upon the Earth

Lice

The plague of lice,<sup>7</sup> as it has been traditionally known, has alternately been called the plague of gnats.<sup>8</sup> It was a plague that demonstrated God's sovereignty over the dust of the ground, over the earth. יהוה commanded 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 [or lice]" [Ex. 8:16].

As the first plague had demonstrated the power of יהוה over

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<sup>7</sup>The Holy Bible: King James Version, 8:16; New American Standard rendered "gnats", but footnoted "lice"; the New JPS version, "lice"; "כְּנִיִּם" [Ex. 8:12] as translated in the Septuaginta (by Jews in Egypt according to tradition) "σκνίφες" (this Greek word only occurred in Ex. 8 in the Septuagint) which was probably a variant spelling for the insect known as a "σκνίψ" which was originally "an insect found under the bark of trees eaten by the woodpecker," however, "from its quick jump comes the proverb, ἡ σκνίψ ἐν χώρῃ 'a flea at home'"; see Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, 8th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901), s.v. "σκνίψ"; from the Greek came the Douay version's rendering "sciniphs"; see also Ben-Yehuda's Pocket English Hebrew, Hebrew-English Dictionary, ed. Ehud Ben-Yehuda and David Weinstein (New York: Washington Square, 1964), s.v. "כְּנִיִּם"; see also Kostas Y. Mumcuoglu and Joseph Zias, "How the Ancients De-Loused Themselves," Biblical Archeological Review 15 (November-December 1989): 66-69.

<sup>8</sup>The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, "gnats"; the New American Standard Version, "gnats" with "lice" in the footnote; the New International Version, "gnats"; see William L[ee] Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), s.v. "כְּנִיִּם"; [Fredrich] [Heinrich] William Gesenius, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament Including the Biblical Chaldee, trans. Edward Robinson (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1836), s.v. "כְּנִיִּם"; and Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, based on the lexicon of William Gesenius as translated by Edward Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), s.v. "כְּנִיִּם".

the waters by changing its physical properties (much as Jesus would later change water to wine in John 2), so the first plague upon the dry ground seemed to indicate the power of יהוה' to change the very composition of the dust. An attempt to explain away such supernatural implications should be avoided, for the obvious intent of the earlier narrative concerning the rod (or staff) contrasted the miracle of יהוה' over the physical properties of the wood of the rod against the trickery of the court magicians.

Moses and Aaron were not presented as "career magicians." To the contrary, the powers with which יהוה' invested them seemed to surprise them as well. Hence the record of the first occasion of such a miracle recorded that it was Moses' normal rod that was physically changed into a serpent, and he fled (Ex. 4:3).

The Egyptians associated many gods with the earth; but perhaps Geb was the foremost, as he held a high position in the Great Company as the father of the generation of Osiris, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys, and thus all of the gods and goddesses which were assimilated with them. The plagues to this point had not only demonstrated the Lord's power over the water, but also over the dry land. Pharaoh's priest-magicians knew the difference between magic tricks and supernatural power. The Egyptian priest-magicians were beginning to realize, as they also counselled Pharaoh, that "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19).

## Flies

The next command of יהוה to Pharaoh continued the emphasis of the LORD's power over the dry land:

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 will know that I, the LORD, am in this land [emphasis added; Ex. 8:20-22].

This second plague upon the land, and the fourth of the ten, caused "the land" to be "ruined [corrupted] by the flies" (Ex. 8:24). In Genesis 1:10, God called the dry land (בְּשֵׁתָהּ) "Earth" (אֲרֶץ). In Exodus 8:22, the stated purpose of יהוה was to cause Pharaoh to know: "אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ."<sup>9</sup>

### Plagues upon the Creatures on the Land

#### Murrain

The Lord had demonstrated to Pharaoh that He was Lord over the waters and over the earth. God would now show His power over creatures upon the earth. Moses proclaimed to Pharaoh:

[Behold] 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 [Ex. 9:3].

Livestock of all kinds, animals that were in the field and unstabled, were to be affected by the plague. Multitudes of Egypt's gods were associated with animals, for numerous

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<sup>9</sup>English text, Ex. 8:22; Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, Ex. 8:18; writer's translation: "I am the LORD in the midst of the Earth."

Egyptian gods had some zoomorphic form. Though Egyptians as nonvegetarians did not revere all animals in the same way as modern Hindus, they did have certain select "sacred" animals (such as the Apis bull).<sup>10</sup> Those animals which escaped this plague may have been stabled out of a growing respect for יהוה'. The survivors would face yet another plague upon the creatures of the dry land.

### Boils

In the second plague upon the creatures on the face of the earth, which is the sixth of ten, the Lord would show His power not only over the beasts but also over the Egyptians themselves who were highly respected in the ancient world for their medical knowledge and skill. Jamieson B. Hurry quoted the Greek writer Homer who praised the men of ancient Egypt because they demonstrated "more skilled in medicine than any of human kind."<sup>11</sup> The command to Moses and Aaron in Exodus 9:8-9 made clear that both man and beast were the targets of God's wrath:

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."

This judgment brought disgrace to the medical practitioners,

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<sup>10</sup>James Karl Hoffmeir, Sacred in the Vocabulary of Ancient Egypt: The Term Dsr, with Special Reference to Dynasties I-XX, *Orbis biblicus et orientalis*, 59 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985), 108, 115-20, and 202.

<sup>11</sup>Homer as quoted by Jamieson B. Hurry, Imhotep: The Egyptian God of Medicine (Chicago: Ares, 1987), 1.

who were probably synonymous with the priest-magicians; and the "magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians" (Ex. 9:11). The Lord had demonstrated His power over the waters, over the earth, and over the creatures on the face of the earth.

### Plagues upon the Vegetation

#### Hail

The first of the two plagues upon vegetation in Egypt, like the transition between frogs and lice, formed a type of transition from the two plagues upon creatures to the two plagues upon vegetation (which stem from the atmospheric heaven):

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" [Ex. 9:22].

A continuity, a building upon the plagues that went before, may be seen. The plagues on the Nile River caused the land to stink (due to the frogs), extending the reminder of God's judgments upon the water (Ex. 8:14). The plagues showing God's power over the earth (lice and flies) affected the creatures upon the earth--even before the more devastating plagues of the disease upon the livestock in the field and of boils upon man and beast. The plagues upon vegetation began with deadly hail upon man, beast, and "everything growing in the fields" (Ex. 9:22). This plague "struck everything in the fields--both men and animals; it beat down

everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree" (Ex. 9:25). The "flax and barley were destroyed" by the plague (Ex. 9:31). Yet the Egyptians still had hope for crops of wheat and spelt; for the wheat and the spelt "were not destroyed, because they ripen later" (Ex. 9:32). That hope was soon to be shattered.

### Locusts

The pride of Pharaoh was still unabated. He hardened his heart still. Pharaoh knew and revered hundreds of deities of the Egyptians. His attitude from before the first plague seemed unaltered: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go?" (Ex. 5:2). Moses and Aaron entered Pharaoh's court and declared in behalf of יהוה:

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 [Ex. 10:5].

The crops of wheat and spelt were now both consumed. The hand of יהוה was victorious over the waters, the earth, the creatures upon the earth, and the vegetation of the earth. The hail had come from the atmospheric heaven upon the vegetation. The locusts, brought and taken away by the wind, had come and gone through the power of the atmospheric heaven.

Once again the climactic ascension of the plagues should be noted. They moved upward from the waters, to the

dry land, to the creatures of the dry land, to the vegetation. The atmospheric phenomenon associated with the plagues upon the trees and vegetation physically escalated the realms judged one step higher (see Appendix 2). Even the "eye" (אֵי) of the land, the sun, was darkened by the locusts (Exodus 10:15), thus foreshadowing the ninth plague. As a reference to the sun over Egypt this was a fitting poetic allusion considering the widely known solar associations with the cult of Horus ("eye of Horus").<sup>12</sup>

One further realm was left. The heavens above the clouds remained as the last part of creation over which יהוה needed to demonstrate His sovereignty.

#### Plagues upon the Heavens

##### Sun, Moon, and Stars

The land of Egypt lay desolate as the picture given in the Apocalypse of John of the desolate earth after the waves of judgments sent by its Creator. Upon the desolate landscape of Egypt and the increasingly insolent Pharaoh came the ninth plague.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky [עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם] so that darkness will spread over Egypt--darkness that can be felt. So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky [עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם], and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days [Ex. 10:21-22].

It would prove an almost endless task to identify all of the

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<sup>12</sup>Manfred Lurker, The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt: An Illustrated Dictionary, trans. Barbara Cummings (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), s.v. "eye."

gods associated with "the heavens" [הַשָּׁמַיִם]. A sample listing would include: Amun-Ra, Anit, Anget, Anubis, Asar-Hup (Serapis), Asari (Osiris), Atmu (Atum), Ded (also Djed), Djehuti (Thoth), Eset (Isis), Hathor, Hur (Horus), Khepheri, Khnum, Khonsu, Muut (Menthu-Ra), Nebt-het (Nepthys), Ptah-Sokari, Ra-Horakhti, Sebek, Sekmet, Sokan, Taueret, and Urt-Hekau.<sup>13</sup>

During the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt, Pharaoh was considered the incarnation of Amun-Ra, the sun.<sup>14</sup> With this plague the face to face communication between Moses and Pharaoh was forever ended, initiated by Pharaoh's command. This plague humiliated Pharaoh by striking at his own divine claim. Yet, the final plague would come much closer to home than the heavens for Pharaoh.

#### Moon

The time of the tenth plague, the Passover, was announced to the Hebrews by Moses. Moses said, "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt'" (Ex. 11:4). This was a fascinating detail, considering that in Egyptian religion "the judgment of souls took place at midnight, and the righteous were rewarded, and the condemned punished before a new day began."<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup>Budge, Guide to the Egyptian Collection, 190-200.

<sup>14</sup>E. O. James, The Ancient Gods (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1960), 108.

<sup>15</sup>Budge, Guide to the Egyptian Collection, 212.

Lord passed through the land accompanied by "the destroyer" (Ex. 12:23). For the Egyptians, the time (midnight) and the title (destroyer) would have brought to mind Ammit, the goddess who awaited the outcome of the weighing of the heart (variously depicted as part lion or leopard, part hippopotamus, and part crocodile)--who was the feared monster of judgment at midnight.<sup>16</sup> Surely, after four hundred years of bondage, this theme was familiar to the Hebrews as well; and possibly through fear it helped to communicate to children and adults alike the necessity of obedience, of staying within their home that was marked with the blood of the lamb.

A religious calendar based on the cycles of the moon had been used by the Egyptians since Dynasty II, early in the third millennium B.C. This was over a thousand years before the Exodus.<sup>17</sup> One of the primary symbols of Thoth, the "god of time," was the moon. Thus, the importance of lunar observation in Egypt was tremendous because dates of religious festivals were calculated according to the lunar year. During the Opet festival, which was the most popular event of the religious year and fell in late summer during the second month of the inundation, Amun and his triad left Karnak to visit Luxor on the fifteenth day of the lunar

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<sup>16</sup>[Ernest A.] Wallis Budge, Egyptian Religion (New York: University Books, 1959), 169.

<sup>17</sup>Rita E. Freed, A Divine Tour of Ancient Egypt (Memphis, Tenn.: Art Department, Memphis State University, 1983), 27.

cycle.<sup>18</sup> Even the initial orientation of a temple was fixed on the night of a new moon.<sup>19</sup>

The sun and the moon were considered by the Egyptians as the right and the left eyes of the heavens respectively.<sup>20</sup> The primary target of the ninth plague was the sun. Moving from right to left, as does the Hebrew language, the moon was the next target. The emphasis on the close observance of time in the Passover narrative of Exodus chapter twelve outlines a new calendar based on the cycles of the moon.

יהוה' commanded, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year" (Ex. 12:2). The lunar observations by the Hebrews for purposes of their calendar were preserved by the psalmist:

Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon,  
and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast;  
this is a decree for Israel,  
an ordinance of the God of Jacob [Ps. 81:3-4].

The lamb was set apart on the tenth for inspection, kept until the fourteenth, and slain on the eve of the fifteenth day of a lunar cycle (Ex. 12:2,6). The lambs were slain at twilight on the close of the fourteenth day of Nisan. The fifteenth began at sunset, because the Jews began their days at sunset due to Genesis 1:5, "there was evening and there

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<sup>18</sup>Freed, 73.

<sup>19</sup>Freed, 62.

<sup>20</sup>Budge, Egyptian Religion, 119; Lurker, s.v. "Wedjat-eye," et "Horus, Eye of Horus."

was morning--the first day." It is no coincidence that the Passover, gauged by a lunar calendar, fell at midnight of the 15th of Nisan, the time of the paschal full moon.

#### Theban Triad and the Last Plagues

Triads were more than simple units based on the family, used to explain the origin and ordering of creation. As the concepts of order in creation and political order were interlaced, the triads represented not only elements of creation but also roles within the royal family. The Theban triad consisted of Amun-Ra, Mut, and Khonsu.<sup>21</sup>

#### Amun-Ra

Amun was originally a god whose primary association was with the ram. However, due to the powerful priesthood of the Heliopolis, when the Theban king's triad rose to ascendancy through the expulsion of the Hyksos, Amun became associated with the sun god, thus becoming Amun-Ra.<sup>22</sup>

The name of the deity Amun was preserved in a couple of places in the Bible. In one of his prophecies concerning Egypt, Baruch recorded Jeremiah's utterance from מְנַחֵם:

The LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "I am about to bring punishment on Amon [אֲמוֹן] god of Thebes, on

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<sup>21</sup>Shorter, 25.

<sup>22</sup>Adolf Erman, Die Religion der Ägypter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1934), 37, 105; Samuel A. B. Mercer, The Religion of Ancient Egypt (London: Luzac, 1949), 157-62; Siegfried Morenz, Ägyptische Religion, Die Religionen der Menschheit, ed. Christel Matthias Schröder, no. 8 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 10, 101, 110, 254; and Budge, Egyptian Religion, 127-29.

Pharaoh, on Egypt and her gods and her kings, and on those who rely on Pharaoh [Jer. 46:25].

The name was also preserved in Nahum 3:8 in a prophecy against Nineveh where the rhetorical question of יהוה' demanded, "Are you better than Thebes [תְּבַיִם אֲמוֹן], than No of Amun]."

The Pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty was identified with this chief god of his triad, as E. O. James commented:

Thus, in the New Kingdom when Amon-Re became the head of the Theban pantheon, it was he who embodied himself in the king, and visited the queen in his divine majesty to beget an heir to the throne from his own loins.<sup>23</sup>

The king as the "incarnation" of Amun-Ra visited the queen who was associated with Amun's wife Mut in order to beget an heir, a prince aligning with Khonsu. As the incarnation of the sun, the ninth plague struck at Pharaoh's pride.

#### Mut

Amun's wife was Mut.<sup>24</sup> Pharaoh was identified with Amun-Ra, as his wife was with Amun's wife, Mut. Alan W. Shorter related:

It followed naturally, therefore, that the queen became Amon's consort, bearing the title "god's wife" and standing at the head of the concubine priestesses. We find this title given to the queen at the very beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty. . . . In this capacity the queen on special occasions actually officiated in person as priestess of Amon.<sup>25</sup>

Pharaoh was the embodiment of Amun-Ra, the sun. His wife

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<sup>23</sup>James, 108.

<sup>24</sup>Erman, 259; Mercer, 208-9; Morenz, 259.

<sup>25</sup>Shorter, 17.

gave physical expression to Mut, wife of Amun; and Pharaoh's son, therefore, was believed to be the incarnation of Khonsu, god of the moon.

#### Khonsu

Khonsu ruled the month, which is worth mention considering the lunar base of the Hebrew calendar and Exodus 12:2, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year."<sup>26</sup> He was also believed to possess "absolute power over the evil spirits which infested earth, air, sea, and sky, and which made themselves hostile to man and attacked his body through pains, sicknesses, and diseases" and produced "decay, madness, and death."<sup>27</sup> Khonsu's power over evil spirits was illustrated in the famous "Legend of Khonsu, Nefer-Hetep and the Princess of Bekhten."<sup>28</sup>

Some of Khonsu's titles included "the traveller," as he moved through the sky as the moon; "the slaughterer," able to cut the throats of gods; and "the messenger," whom Pharaoh sent out to meet hostile gods.<sup>29</sup> Upon Khonsu's right shoulder, hanging down from his head, "falls the sidelock of plaited hair which was always worn by young

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<sup>26</sup>Erman, 39, 329; Mercer, 153; and Morenz, 22-23.

<sup>27</sup>Budge, The Gods of the Ancient Egyptians, 2:37; see also Erman, 39, 329; Mercer, 153; and Morenz, 22-23.

<sup>28</sup>Mercer, 153.

<sup>29</sup>Budge, The Gods of the Ancient Egyptians, 2:33.

princes, and on his chin is a stiff plaited beard . . . an ornament . . . carried only by gods and kings." Shorter compared Khonsu's cap and appearance to the boy-king, Tutankhamen.<sup>30</sup>

Khonsu pictured the young prince, son of his god-like parents. He was "lord of Maat," like Ptah, and the "moon by night."<sup>31</sup> In the light of the events in Exodus, one particular title is the most interesting. As the full moon, he was "KHONSU HUNNU," "KHONSU the strong youth."<sup>32</sup> At the time the symbolic figure for the son of Pharaoh was at the height of its strength, Pharaoh's son was slain.

All of creation lay in ruins in Egypt. The successor to the throne of Pharaoh was dead. Ma'at's balance was destroyed. Hope for the Egyptians lay shattered. All of the gods of Egypt were judged and found to be no gods at all.

The Israelites sang the praises of יהוה as the Egyptian army was crushed in the sea: "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you--majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Ex. 15:11). It was יהוה who created all, and it was He who sustained His creation. It is He who is:

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings, and

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<sup>30</sup>Shorter, 26.

<sup>31</sup>Budge, The Gods of the Ancient Egyptians, 2:35.

<sup>32</sup>[Ernest A.] Wallis Budge, From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 172.

Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen [1 Tim. 6:15-16].

Ancient mythology had encountered the Eternal Reality. The idols were powerless. יהוה' is Lord.

PART IV. IMPLICATIONS

## CHAPTER 8

## DATE OF THE EXODUS EVENT

Nineteenth Dynasty Arguments

Though there are various "two-phase" theories of the Exodus, the two most prominent views of the date of the Exodus revolve around questions of the chronology of two Egyptian dynasties. W. H. Gispen wrote:

Two views are predominant; the one holds that the Exodus took place under the Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1580-1321 B.C.), while the other places the Exodus in the Nineteenth Dynasty (1321-1205 B.C.).<sup>1</sup>

One argument (Nineteenth Dynasty) places the Exodus in the thirteenth century B.C., while the other argument places the Exodus in the fifteenth century B.C. (Eighteenth Dynasty). The appeal of the time period of Ramesses II and Merneptah (Nineteenth Dynasty) as the time period of the Exodus is not a twentieth century improvement on nineteenth and twentieth century data.

The view that the Exodus took place in the thirteenth century B.C. is not new at all. According to John J. Bimson:

The oldest theory since the rise of modern Egyptology is that which makes the XIXth Dynasty pharaoh Ramesses II

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<sup>1</sup>W. H. Gispen, Exodus, vol. 2 of Bible Student's Commentary, trans. Ed van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 21.

the pharaoh of the Oppression and his successor Merneptah the pharaoh of the Exodus. This theory was first put forward by C. R. Lepsius (1849).<sup>2</sup>

In Lepsius' time the dates for the reigns of Ramesses II and Merneptah were very uncertain. As more historical markers came to light through time, Nineteenth Dynasty regnal dates moved farther away from the time period given in the Biblical material for the Exodus.

#### Minor Arguments

##### Sojourn and the Hyksos

One of the assumptions of the late date theory of the Exodus has been that it would be impossible to reconcile a 430 year sojourn with a Hyksos date for Joseph's career.

Jack Finegan wrote:

As for the original entry of the Israelites into Egypt, if we reckon backward from an Exodus around 1441 B.C. and allow for a sojourn of 430 years in accordance with Exodus 12:40 (pp. 58f.), we arrive at a date around 1870 B.C. This is nearly two centuries before the coming of the Hyksos, however, in whose time it is historically probable that the Israelites first entered Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Gleason Archer answered this assumption by pointing out that Joseph's career best fits in the time of the Twelfth Dynasty which would make the "new king" who came to power in Egypt the Hyksos ruler, thus correlating perfectly with the early

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<sup>2</sup>John J. Bimson, Redating the Exodus and Conquest, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, ed. David J. A. Clines, Philip R. Davies, and David M. Gunn, no. 5 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1978), 18.

<sup>3</sup>Jack Finegan, Light from the Ancient Past: The Archeological Background of the Hebrew-Christian Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 106.

date for the Exodus.

### Delta Building Projects

Another supposed "external evidence" for a late date had to do with building projects in the Delta near where the Israelites lived in Goshen. Finegan wrote:

Furthermore, while Thutmose III carried out large building projects, those activities centered as far as we know in Upper Egypt, and it was not until Ramesside times that the kings resided in the Delta and directed major attention to building operations there. But it was in the Delta that the Israelites are said to have lived and worked.<sup>4</sup>

Omar Zuhdi answered this argument well by an astute observation concerning the need for brick buildings in the Delta:

During his long reign, king Thutmose III mounted some seventeen military campaigns into Western Asia; it is unlikely he would have done so without the benefit of staging areas in that part of Egypt closest to the theater of war. Such facilities--probably consisting of supply depots, barracks and command centers--would not have been constructed of stone, but rather of mud brick, the ubiquitous building material of the ancient Two Lands.<sup>5</sup>

Zuhdi went further to point out the less permanent nature of these structures, and that they "would not have survived more than a few decades in the moist topography of Lower Egypt."<sup>6</sup> Consequently, little if any evidence of such building activity by Thutmose III would remain today.

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<sup>4</sup>Finegan, 106-7.

<sup>5</sup>Omar Zuhdi, "Dating the Exodus: A Study in Ancient Egyptian Chronology." KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt 4 (1993): 18.

<sup>6</sup>Zuhdi, 18.

### Archeology of Transjordan

The tribes of Israel encountered several people groups according to the biblical narrative as they passed through the wilderness on their way into Canaan. The record of such early settlement in southern Transjordan was questioned posing another argument for a late date. The archeological record of the Transjordanian lands supposedly presented a picture of a landscape with little or no settled population between 1900-1300 B.C.<sup>7</sup> Continued archeological work in the Transjordanian region, however, has drawn a much different picture. Tombs, temples, and Middle Bronze pottery at Mt. Nebo and Naur, which date to the period between 1900-1300 B.C., have since come to light.<sup>8</sup>

### Amarna Letters

When the Amarna letters first came to light, they were seen by some conservative Old Testament scholars as letters presenting a Canaanite picture of the turmoil in their land during the Hebrews' entry into the promised land.<sup>9</sup> Finegan, in opposition to such a view, wrote:

The identification of the Habiru of the Amarna letters with the biblical Hebrews is improbable, since the

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<sup>7</sup>Nelson Glueck, "The Other Side of the Jordan," Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1940): 44-49; and Finegan, 106-8.

<sup>8</sup>Gleason L. Archer, Jr. A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 232; and Bimson, 67-79.

<sup>9</sup>J. W. Jack, The Date of the Exodus in the Light of External Evidence (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925), 119-68.

frantic correspondence of Abdi-Hiba indicates that Jerusalem was in immanent danger of being taken, and we know that the Israelites did not conquer Jerusalem until in the time of David (II Sam. 5:6f.).<sup>10</sup>

Though the identity of the *Habiru* or *Hapiru* continues to be debated, Finegan's line of reasoning was not tenable:

But the fallacy of this argument is obvious. The armies of Joshua did indeed menace Jerusalem, for they routed the Jerusalemite troops (together with their allies from Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon) at the battle of Gibeon, and their king, Adoni-zedek, was subsequently flushed out of hiding and put to death (Jos 10). But neither the letters of Abdi-Hepa nor the Hebrew account in Joshua states that the city itself was captured or destroyed.<sup>11</sup>

Moshe Greenberg's findings were inconclusive regarding any associations between the "*Hab/piru*" and the biblical Hebrews.<sup>12</sup> Outside of philological concerns, Greenberg's historical assumptions were evident when he wrote, "It is the appropriateness of placing them in El-Amarna Palestine which is doubtful."<sup>13</sup>

Though Henri Cazelles acknowledged that any conclusions made about the *Hab/piru* must be tentative, he wrote (after thoroughly examining the same philological evidence available to Greenberg):

The Hebrews of the Bible, *ʿib(iyy)im*, can be identified with the *Hapiru* of cuniform texts, the *ʿprw* of Egypt and

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<sup>10</sup>Finegan, 106.

<sup>11</sup>Archer, 231.

<sup>12</sup>Moshe Greenberg, *The Hab/piru*, American Oriental Series, ed. Henry M. Hoenigswald, John De Francis, and George E. Mendenhall, no. 39 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1955), 91-96.

<sup>13</sup>Greenberg, 96.

the *špru* of Ugarit. They are not so much an ethnic group as a sociological phenomenon. This "class" seems to be linked with the Hurrians, following their movements without being identified with them.<sup>14</sup>

Those who argue a late date must maintain that it is mere coincidence that the biblical date given for the entrance of the Hebrews into Canaan coincided with an invasion of Canaan by the "Ḥab/piru."

### Egyptian Military Campaigns

The Book of Judges is silent concerning the apparent Egyptian domination of much of Canaan during that period. Some biblical commentators in an attempt to correlate the biblical chronology to the extra-biblical evidence have reduced "time spans to generations," rounding off larger figures to better align with extra-biblical data. In reference to conservative efforts to correlate biblical data with extrabiblical data, Donald B. Redford attacked such orthodox assent to the biblical record:

Such manhandling of the evidence smacks of prestidigitation and numerology; yet it has produced the shaky foundations on which a lamentable number of "histories" of Israel have been written.<sup>15</sup>

Redford's bias was obvious, however, when he compared the biblical sources to the legends of King Arthur.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>H[enri] Cazelles, "The Hebrews," in Peoples of the Old Testament Times, ed. D[onald] J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 23-24.

<sup>15</sup>Donald B. Redford, Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 260.

<sup>16</sup>Redford, 261.

The late date theory asserts that the military campaigns into Canaan of Seti I, Rameses II, and Merneptah cannot be reconciled with the silence of the Book of Judges. J. W. Jack wrote a lengthy rebuttal which argued that the Egyptians' dominance occurred primarily in the coastal plain and so did not threaten the Israelite dominance of the highlands.<sup>17</sup> Of the Philistines in the plains, Jack wrote:

Besides, many of the conflicts which Israel had with the people on the plains may have been inspired by Egypt, for it is well known that the Pharaohs used native levies and contingents. Egyptian raids may thus appear in the Book of Judges as those of "Canaanites" or "Philistines." . . . In repelling these attacks, the Israelites were actually fighting Egypt through her outposts in Canaan.<sup>18</sup>

Though the reply that Jack offered was the main reply of those who maintained the early theory for some years, Bimson argued that due to further archeological finds it has "become untenable."<sup>19</sup> Bimson noted the finds at Beth-shan:

Excavations at Beth-shan have uncovered stelae of Seti I and Rameses II, and a statue of Rameses III, showing that the town was probably in Egyptian hands from c. 1310 to 1150 B.C.<sup>20</sup>

According to Bimson, these finds at Beth-shan wiped out the earlier conclusions of Jack by showing that the Egyptian

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<sup>17</sup>Jack, 59-85.

<sup>18</sup>Jack, 84.

<sup>19</sup>Bimson, 74.

<sup>20</sup>Bimson, 75.

campaigns and dominance were not limited to the coastal plain. Considering the location of Beth-shan, Bimson was too quick to dismiss all of Jack's arguments.

Beth-shan is at the eastern end of the long valley that eventually joins Jezreel with the Jordan. Since the Egyptians had to defend the coastal route, Beth-shan would have been a strategic outpost situated at the mouth of the Jezreel valley. Beth-shan was the ideal "back door" to the coastal plain for a flank attack in Jezreel. It was in a strategic position that warranted the maintenance of a garrison to defend against incursions of foreign troops invading from the direction of Syria around the Sea of Galilee. As a strategic outpost, it would be unwarranted to draw conclusions from the occupation of Beth-shan as to the extent and continuity of Egyptian control over the rest of the highlands during this long period.

#### Major Arguments

Bimson argued that the thirteenth century date for the Exodus has "two main pillars, one being the information contained in Exodus 1:11, the other being archeological evidence for a conquest in the decades around 1230 B.C."<sup>21</sup> The first main argument centered around the designation of the two store cities, Pithom and Ramesses, that were mentioned in Exodus 1:11. The identification of these two ancient sites has been a source of great debate.

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<sup>21</sup>Bimson, 35-66.

Cities along the Route

Prominence is given to this mention because the assumption is that the city "Ramesses" must have been named for Ramesses II. However, cities were often renamed by later kings, and the designation of the city updated by later scribes. If such was the case with Exodus 1:11, then this argument is invalid.

Another possible argument against using this verse as a concrete historical marker is the question of priority, "Which came first?" Could the king have been given a name that already named a city? If the city had its own significance apart from the king, then the significance of its name may have been linked to its function. A "store city" (as it is denoted in Exodus 1:11) could have been used to store grain or stage military supplies long before the time of either Ramesses I or Ramesses II. The significance of the name for the city could have been "the sun god brought it forth" in reference to the founding of a military staging complex or a grain "store city." Ramesses I was originally an administrative official named "Paramessu" from a "prominent military family" in the Eastern Delta.<sup>22</sup> His administrative work evidently had a military focus.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Rita E. Freed, Ramesses the Great: An Exhibition in the City of Memphis (Memphis, Tenn.: City of Memphis, 1987), 26.

<sup>23</sup>Stephen Quirke, Who Were the Pharaohs? A History of Their Names with a List of Cartouches, cartouches drawn by Richard Parkinson (London: British Museum, 1990), 62.

Considering these details, another suggestion would be the possibility that "Paramessu" could have derived his royal name, Menpehtyra(t) Ramesses, from his home city or from one of his places of military service.

### Fall of Jericho

The second pillar mentioned by Bimson is the archeological record of thirteenth century Canaan. Much of the argument for a thirteenth century date was given impetus by the work of Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho. Dating the destruction of Jericho to the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt (circa 1560 B.C.), Kenyon stated that Jericho "was abandoned for a lengthy period after a destruction at the end of the Middle Bronze Age."<sup>24</sup> Not only did this imply that Jericho was not even in existence when the biblical account claimed that the Israelites destroyed it, but also her conclusions directly contradicted the earlier work at Jericho of John J. Garstang.<sup>25</sup>

The work of both Kenyon and Garstang has recently been reviewed by Bryant G. Wood. After considering the data listed by Kenyon for reaching her conclusion, Wood wrote:

When the evidence is critically examined there is no basis for her contention that City IV was destroyed by

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<sup>24</sup>Kathleen Kenyon, "Jericho," in Archeology and Old Testament Study: Jubilee Volume of the Society for Old Testament Study 1917-1967, ed. D[avid] Winton Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 272.

<sup>25</sup>John J. Garstang, "The Date of the Destruction of Jericho," Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement (1927), 96-100.

the Hyksos or Egyptians in the mid-16th century B.C.E. The pottery, stratigraphic considerations, scarab data and a Carbon 14 date all point to a destruction of the city around the end of Late Bronze I, about 1400 B.C.E. Garstang's original date for this event appears to be the correct one!<sup>26</sup>

Even before the reevaluation by Wood, Bimson made significant observations in connection with the archeological record. He wrote:

Yet despite the confidence with which many writers interpret the archeological evidence, there are factors which cast serious doubt upon the commonly held view. When these factors are considered together, the case for an Israelite Conquest of Palestine towards the end of the 13th century is seen to be very weak.<sup>27</sup>

With the "two pillars" of the thirteenth century B.C. date standing on such shaky assumptions, being made up of such weak arguments, and being so alien to the biblical chronology, the theory is destined to fall under future scrutiny. Gispén was right when he firmly asserted that "the biblical data make the nineteenth dynasty date untenable."<sup>28</sup>

#### Eighteenth Dynasty Arguments

The second major theory of the historical time period for the Exodus is an old theory as well. Bimson mentioned the first person to propose the view:

The second oldest theory since the rise of modern Egyptology seems to have had its origin with E. Lefébure

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<sup>26</sup>Bryant G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archeological Evidence," Biblical Archeological Review 16 (March-April 1990): 57.

<sup>27</sup>Bimson, 52.

<sup>28</sup>Gispén, 23.

in 1896 (cf. de Witt 1960: 4). In this view, the pharaoh of the Oppression was the XVIIIth Dynasty pharaoh Thutmosis III, and the pharaoh of the Exodus was his successor Amenhotep II.<sup>29</sup>

Much of the support for this view eroded, according to Bimson, after the work of Kenyon was published. Some of the impetus for the erosion came from W. F. Albright's views of the archeology of the period at a couple of neighboring sites.<sup>30</sup>

#### Biblical Record

Exodus 12:40, asserting a 430 year sojourn, placed Joseph in the reign of a Twelfth Dynasty king, Senusret III (1878-1841). Genesis 47:20 recorded that Joseph bought all the land of the Egyptians for Pharaoh, including the people themselves. It is well known that Senusret III accomplished a radical reorganization of the Two Lands and greatly enhanced his power in so doing.<sup>31</sup>

Reasoning from biblical data, W. H. Gispen wrote concerning the date of the Exodus:

According to 1 Kings 6:1 the 480th year after the Exodus coincides with the fourth year of Solomon's reign. We know from Assyrian inscriptions that the fourth year of Solomon's reign was 969 B.C. Thus, according to 1 Kings 6:1 the Exodus took place in 1449 B.C. But since at that time Thutmose III was still Pharaoh in Egypt, and since he died before the Exodus (2:23), the date of the Exodus must be set at 1447 or ca. 1445 B.C.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Bimson, 19-20.

<sup>30</sup>Bimson, 20-21.

<sup>31</sup>Zuhdi, 17.

<sup>32</sup>Gispen, 23.

Not only does the mention in 1 Kings have to be dealt with in connection to reconstructing the composite historical frame of reference given in the Bible, but also the Book of Judges must be dealt with as well.

According to Judges 11:26, the Israelites had been in the land three hundred years by Jephthah's day. This would place the conquest around 1400 B.C. Bimson pointed out:

The material in the book of Judges is in keeping with a date for the Exodus in the 15th century BC. The chronological notice in Jdg 11:26 and the absence of references to Philistines in the early part of the book preclude the possibility of placing the entire period between 1200 and 1030 BC.<sup>33</sup>

The consistency of Scripture is complemented by a decline in Egyptian power in the early-fourteenth century B.C.:

We have paintings, dating from the reign of Thutmose III, depicting Semites working as slave laborers on building projects (cf. commentary on 5:8). . . . It is also striking that during the final years of the reign of Amenhotep III (1421-1376 B.C.) Egypt's hold over Syria and Palestine weakened, and that under Amenhotep IV (1380-1362 B.C.), the well known worshipper of the sun-god, the Habiru invaded Canaan.<sup>34</sup>

At the close of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Egypt's frontiers were sorely neglected (as the Amarna letters make clear). The fact is that Canaan was ravaged during the early fourteenth century by the Hab/piru, a time which corresponds well with the biblical date given for the entrance of the Hebrews into Canaan. In the eleventh century the Hab/piru

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<sup>33</sup>Bimson, 110.

<sup>34</sup>Gispén, 22-23.

"disappear from Egyptian sources" about the time "Israel" appears.<sup>35</sup>

#### Merneptah Stele

Much more substantial, however, is the mounting historical evidence which suggests that the Eighteenth Dynasty was the time period of the Exodus. Since the discovery of the Merneptah Stele, it has been harder to believe that Merneptah was the pharaoh of the Exodus and at the same time a pharaoh who fought the nation of Israel already settled in Canaan. Bimson wrote, "The Stele of Merneptah actually records a clash with Israel, and hence provides a *terminus ad quem* for the entry into Palestine by the Israelites."<sup>36</sup>

Most adherents to the Nineteenth Dynasty date for the Exodus are familiar, however, with this argument and simply opt for a "two-phase" entrance into Canaan. This would imply that some of the Israelites had already been in the land before the rest were released by Merneptah. Such a view squarely contradicts the biblical account.

The northern wall of the portico of the temple of Ramesses II may hold an even earlier mention of Israel:

Below are nine crenelated ovals, each surmounted by the bust of an Asiatic prisoner of war (Fig. 22-4) and containing the names of countries conquered by Ramesses. Among these are Libya, Naharina, Crete, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phoenicia, and a place called Isel (or Iseru)

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<sup>35</sup>Cazelles, 4.

<sup>36</sup>Bimson, 75.

which Professor Gauthier identifies as a part of Palestine. Can this be a reference to Israel earlier than the one on the famous Victory Stela of Mer-en-Ptah?<sup>4</sup> It could be since it represents half of the name of Israel (Iser-el) which in Hebrew means, "Slave of God."

<sup>4</sup>Gauthier, "Dictionnaire Geographique," vol. 1, p. 105.<sup>37</sup>

The signs are (using Alan Gardiner's identification) flowering reed, folded cloth, recumbent lion (above single stroke), and the determinative for foreign land or "hill country."<sup>38</sup> The signs in Egyptian could be read either *isr* or <sup>2</sup>*sr* (depending on which way "flowering reed" is taken).<sup>39</sup> Henri Gauthier wrote:

 *asr* (liste Ramsès II à Abydos, n° 8 = MARIETTE, Abydos, II, pl. 2), . . . Ce pays, qui est le biblique אֲשֶׁר (Josué xvii, 7), constituait, suivant Max Müller (Asien p. 236-239), l'hinterland de la Phénicie méridionale, soumis à l'Égypte depuis l'an 8 de Ramsès II.<sup>40</sup>

Even though the name of the land *isr*/<sup>2</sup>*sr* was written with Egyptian *s* and not *š*, to identify it with the land of the biblical tribe of Asher (אֲשֶׁר) would still be possible. Assyria (biblical אַשּׁוּר) was written in Egyptian with . No philological manipulation is required.

<sup>37</sup>Omm Sety and Hanny El Zeini, Abydos: Holy City of Ancient Egypt (Los Angeles: L. L. Co., 1981), 208.

<sup>38</sup>Alan Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs, 3d ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1957), 27, 460, 488.

<sup>39</sup>Gardiner, 20.

<sup>40</sup>Henri Gauthier, Dictionnaire des Noms Géographiques Contenus dans les Textes Hiéroglyphiques avec Indices et Cartes (Paris: De L'Institut Français D'Archéologie Orientale pour la Société Royale de Géographie de Égypte, 1925-31; reprint, Osnabrück, Germany, 1975), s.v. "asr."

It could not be Assyria unless it was a *hapax legomenon*, however, because it was written  $\text{𐎗𐎗𐎗--𐎗𐎗}$  plus  $\text{𐎗𐎗𐎗𐎗}$ .<sup>41</sup> Gauthier must have ruled out Assyria not only because of their territory already being listed in the topographical list of captive lands, but also due to the sequence of the nine ovals. He listed  $\text{𐎗𐎗𐎗--𐎗𐎗}$   $\text{𐎗𐎗𐎗𐎗}$  in a separate entry on the same page differentiating between it and *isr*.<sup>42</sup>

Gauthier was not the only linguist to carefully distinguish between  $\text{𐎗𐎗𐎗}$  and *isr*. J. Simons wrote:

10. *i-š-š-<w>-r* . . .  $\text{𐎗𐎗𐎗𐎗}$  . . . . This name (Assur) is frequently mentioned in the Topographical Lists in the same form and with double "š." . . . The constant duplication of "š" suffices to show that this name ought not to be identified with *i-š-r*.<sup>43</sup>

If the reed-leaf in *isr/𐎗sr* is read as initial "yod," Omm Sety's observation has merit.<sup>44</sup> The lack of the theophoric element ("El" in Israel) could have been due to an Egyptian scribe's awareness of the differences between the Canaanite "god" *El* and the God of Israel.

The scribal choice of the determinative that represented foreign "land" ( $\text{𐎗𐎗}$ ) in the case of *isr/𐎗sr* has implications as well. The scribe of the Merneptah Stele

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<sup>41</sup>Raymond O. Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1991), s.v. " $\text{𐎗𐎗𐎗}$ "; and Gardiner, 27, 482.

<sup>42</sup>Gauthier, s.v. "assour."

<sup>43</sup>J. Simons, Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 126.

<sup>44</sup>Sety and El Zeini, 208.

used a determinative for "people." Much has been made of this in connection with the possibility of Israel not being settled in their land as yet. One consideration should be the length of time it has taken in the twentieth century for modern Israel to be recognized by her neighbors as a legal territory. Perhaps things have changed in this regard very little through the centuries.

The context of the statement in the Merneptah Stele alludes to the "seed" of Israel. For this reason a determinative for "people" fit the context much better than one for land. The determinative for "foreign land" or "hill country" used in the occurrence of *isr* or *ꜥsr* from the time of Ramesses II needs consideration. If this was a reference to biblical Israel, then the nation was already settled in their land. In this case the date for the Exodus would have to be placed much earlier than the time of Ramesses II.

Though the Merneptah Stele is the first direct reference to ancient Israel by the name "Israel," arguments still linger over the identity of the land of "Iser" or "Ašer," and the "Hab/piru" who are mentioned much earlier than the time of Merneptah.

#### Destruction of Cities

While Jericho received much liberal, critical attention due to Kenyon's assertions, other sites have received less critical attention in connection with the biblical claim of an early conquest. Bimson dealt with the

existence of several of these cities (such as Hazor, Hebron, Hormah, and Arad) at the time of the entrance into Canaan.<sup>45</sup> Of Hebron he wrote:

If the Conquest is placed at the end of MBA, we have precise harmony between the archeological record and the biblical traditions. The archeological record shows a gap between the end of the MBA and the second half of Iron I; the Bible records the destruction of Hebron (Kirath-arba) at the time of the Conquest, and makes no mention of it until the early Monarchic period . . . which is what we would expect if, as both archeology and Num 13:22 indicate, Israelite Hebron was not built until the 11th century BC.<sup>46</sup>

The existence of Hormah during the Conquest poses an archeological problem for proponents of the late date since the city was a ruin during the time proposed for a late exodus. However, if the Conquest is placed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age "the problem disappears."<sup>47</sup>

Charles R. Krahmalkov disputed some of the critical assertions about several cities (Dibon, Hebron, and Qishon) which were listed in the biblical narrative by appealing to Egyptian records.<sup>48</sup> Of Dibon he posed the question:

The excavation of Tell Dhiban, ancient Dibon, has revealed no city there in the Late Bronze Age II (c. 1400-1200 B.C.E.), when the Exodus supposedly occurred. Indeed, nothing was found there earlier than the ninth century B.C.E. How could the Israelites encamp at (and presumably conquer) a city that didn't exist?<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Bimson, 185-241.

<sup>46</sup>Bimson, 203.

<sup>47</sup>Bimson, 203.

<sup>48</sup>Charles R. Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence," Biblical Archeological Review 20 (September-October 1994): 54-62.

<sup>49</sup>Krahmalkov, 55.

Krahmalkov went on to demonstrate its existence during the period assigned to the Exodus through the use of Egyptian inscriptions that listed the city, such as maps dating from the time of Thutmose III, *circa* 1550-1400 B.C.; Amenophis III *circa* 1387-1350 B.C.; and Ramesses II, *circa* 1279-1212 B.C. Though archaeologists have not as yet found its ruins, it certainly existed during the period of the Exodus and Conquest.<sup>50</sup> The existence of Hebron and Qishon at the time of the Conquest was demonstrated both from Egyptian records and from Babylonian sources.<sup>51</sup>

#### Temple of Amun at Soleb

As the maps of Amenophis III that listed Dibon were from Soleb, other evidence for an early date has come to light from this area of Egypt. One fascinating reference on a monument in Egypt that predates the Merneptah Stele by nearly two centuries was described by Raphael Giveon:

La plus intéressante donnée de ce groupe est la mention du Yahwe comme toponyme dans un groupe où apparaît également Séir et en connexion avec les Shosou, ces derniers étant liés avec Séir et Edom en général dans les sources égyptiennes<sup>3</sup> [sic]. Le lien de Yahwe avec ces régions est marqué, entre autres textes, par le Cantique de Déborah: „Yahwé, grand tu sortis de Séir, quant tu marchas hors des campagnes d'Edom . . .” Jud v 4.

<sup>3</sup>GARDINER, *AEO* I, pp. 209\*-212\*; II, p. 324.<sup>52</sup>

Theodore J. Hiebert, while writing on the theophany in

<sup>50</sup>Krahmalkov, 57.

<sup>51</sup>Krahmalkov, 58-62.

<sup>52</sup>Raphael Giveon, "Toponymes ouest-asiatiques á Soleb," *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964): 245.

Habakkuk 3 that portrayed יהוה entering Canaan from Edom, wrote concerning this inscription:

Extrabiblical evidence which has come to light reinforces these traditions of a sanctuary of Yahweh in southern Transjordan. Most striking is the mention of Yahweh in a list of place names recorded in the temple of Amon at Soleb, from the time of Amenophis III (1405-1367 B.C.E.) and copied later during the time of Ramesses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.) in the temple of Amarah-West. In this list the name *t3 ssw yhw3*, "Yahwe (of the) land of the Shasu," appears alongside the names *s'rr*, "Seir," and *rbn*, possibly "laban" (Deut. 1:1). The association of the toponym Yahweh with Seir indicates its location in southern Transjordan.<sup>53</sup>

This mention corresponds well with the view of an Eighteenth Dynasty exodus that is presented in the time frame of the Hebrew text. The tabernacle was portable and was in this vicinity before the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan.

Arguments still linger surrounding the identity of the "Shasu."<sup>54</sup> Though Donald B. Redford's reconstruction of Israel's history stands in vehement opposition to the biblical record, his comments on the phenomenon at Soleb were interesting:

The localization of the "Land of the Shasu" in the mountainous districts of Se'ir east of the Arabah has an interesting consequence for one name in the mentioned lists from Soleb and Amarah--"Yhw (in) the land of the Shasu." For half a century it has been generally admitted that we have here the tetragrammaton, the name of the Israelite god, "Yahweh"; and if this be the case, as it undoubtedly is, the passage constitutes a most precious indication of the whereabouts during the late

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<sup>53</sup>Theodore J. Hiebert, God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3, Harvard Semitic Monographs, ed. Frank Moore Cross, no. 38 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 91.

<sup>54</sup>Redford, 269-80; and Edward F. Wente, "Shekelesh or Shasu?" Journal of Near Eastern Studies 22 (1963): 167-72.

fifteenth century B.C. of an enclave revering this god.<sup>55</sup>

Redford thought that it would be wrong to "jump to the conclusion" that Israel was already in existence at this time.<sup>56</sup> It did not fit the scheme of his assumptions.

#### Akhenaten and the Amarna Period

With the dawn of the Amarna age came the ruin of an empire and the forsaking of the ancient family gods of Amenhotep IV (who changed his name to Akhenaten). William H. Stiebing, Jr., wrote of the later reaction to this religious revolution:

The revolutionary changes of the Amarna era were regarded as heresies by later generations of Egyptians. The monuments from this time were smashed, the ruler's names destroyed, and all records and memories of the period suppressed.<sup>57</sup>

In the days of Akhenaten, the desert capitol of Amarna became an isolated retreat for a pharaoh that gradually lost touch not only with his subjects, but also with his own provinces. This religious "bunker mentality" may be seen in Akhenaten's disregard of the cries for help that flooded in from Canaan due to the invasion of the *Hab/piru*.

In most evaluations of the history of religions, Amenhotep IV is presented as the first monotheist in the

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<sup>55</sup>Redford, 272-73.

<sup>56</sup>Redford, 273.

<sup>57</sup>William H. Stiebing, Jr. "The Amarna Period," in Palestine in Transition: The Emergence of Ancient Israel, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series, ed. David Noel Freedman and David Frank Graf, no. 2 (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1983), 1.

world. Gispen commented:

But if the Pharaoh of the Exodus is Amenhotep II then the suggestion made by Kittel and other that Moses' religion was influenced by the sun worship of Akhenaten or Amenhotep IV (cf. pp. 22-23) is invalidated.<sup>58</sup>

A reexamination of Akhenaten is in order in the light of the pattern discussed in Part III due to the obvious disgrace that would have been dealt to the gods of Akhenaten's ancestors by such a pattern of judgment. Was Akhenaten an innovator or merely an imitator?

What caused the fall of the powerful Theban Dynasty? Was it the intermarriage of the pharaoh with his sister that seriously weakened the genetics of the royal house, eventually producing an effeminate, mentally weak heretic known to history as Akhenaten? In reference to the gradual weakening of the dynasty, Angela P. Thomas remarked:

Some of the features, including the flowing lines of figures and drapery, the softening of the face, the effeminacy exhibited by males and the more relaxed and informal poses, were not sudden innovations but had been developing gradually. The king and his officials are no longer lean and ambitious for conquest but well dressed and fed and enjoying the luxuries of empire.<sup>59</sup>

Thomas also noted the unusual way in which the Aten heresy dealt with the past tendency toward the traditional triad of deities:

The concept of Aten appears to lack the female element so often seen in the families of deities in Egypt comprising a god, goddess and their godly child.

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<sup>58</sup>Gispen, 25.

<sup>59</sup>Angela P. Thomas, Akhenaten's Egypt, Shire Egyptology, ed. Barbara Adams (Aylesbury, Eng.: Shire, 1988), 47.

However, Aten and Akhenaten are called father and mother of all, the king refers to himself as father and mother of his people and in some of his early statues is hermaphrodite.<sup>60</sup>

However, the characterization by Thomas of this unique pharaoh was not one of weakness in the area of political shrewdness:

These hardly seem to be the actions of a monotheist, visionary or messiah born out of his time, but more those of a political opportunist, dogmatically and rationally imposing his will. A king who was high priest, sole mediator and synonymous with one god would hold truly absolute power.<sup>61</sup>

Though Akhenaten's awkward physical appearance in the art of his period gave the impression to many commentators on his times of a man who was perhaps as unsound in mind as he apparently was in body, the historical record complicates the enigma of his times by portraying him in complete, calculated control of his reforms.

His apparent soundness of mind begs the question, "To what was Akhenaten reacting in his break with his entire religious heritage?" What caused him so abruptly to end the reverence for the gods of his fathers? Could it have been the "loss of face" suffered by the priesthood due to the defeat of their gods by יהוה resulting in the tremendous economic loss of over one million slaves with their possessions? If so, then the Exodus marked the beginning of a serious decline for Egypt, a decline that was not reversed

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<sup>60</sup>Thomas, 45.

<sup>61</sup>Thomas, 45-46.

until Ramesside times (and then only briefly).

William C. Hayes commented that the "rise to prominence of the solar deity Aten" has been traced back to the time of Amenhotep II.<sup>62</sup> If the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Amenhotep II (fifteenth century B.C.), then the rise of an emphasis in a monotheistic principle during the later part of his reign would not be surprising. Indeed, it would be expected.

#### Imagery of the Son of Pharaoh

Due to the emphasis of the last plague upon the son of Pharaoh, who in the Eighteenth Dynasty was worshipped as the incarnation of the god of the moon, the triad of the ruling family of the Eighteenth Dynasty was attacked through this plague. Though the worship of the triad of Thebes continued into the Nineteenth Dynasty and beyond, it was the ruling family of the Eighteenth Dynasty that brought these deities to greatest prominence:

The period of greatest glory for Amon-Ra followed the expulsion of the foreign Hyksos pharaohs by the prince of Thebes and the second reunification of the Two-Lands under their rule in about 1570 B.C.<sup>63</sup>

Though a connection could have been made in the minds of the Egyptians between Khonsu and Pharaoh's son in the Nineteenth

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<sup>62</sup>William C. Hayes, The Hyksos Period and the New Kingdom (1675-1080 B.C.), vol. 2 of The Scepter of Egypt: A Background for the Study of the Egyptian Antiquities in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1959), 141.

<sup>63</sup>Veronica Ions, Egyptian Mythology (London: Hamlyn, 1968), 93.

Dynasty, the connection would not have had the same force with a pharaoh from the Delta as it would with a Theban pharaoh.

In the Delta, associations with Pharaoh's son would have been more readily made with Nefertum, or perhaps Horus. The ruling family of the Nineteenth Dynasty was from the Eastern Delta.<sup>64</sup> Hayes noted:

Though Thebes, then, remained the site of the royal necropolis and its god, Amūn, retained his exalted status as Egypt's state deity, the residence of the king and the capital of the empire had been transferred to the northeastern Delta, the home district of the new dynasty, and the deities of that region, including the ancient god Sēth, had been elevated to positions of primary importance in the Egyptian pantheon.<sup>65</sup>

The physical appearance of the young prince of the Eighteenth Dynasty with his side-lock and occasional beard like Khonsu, his association with Thebes, and his position in the royal family of Thebes tied him to Khonsu in a far more powerful way than during the Nineteenth Dynasty.

While the priesthood of Amun-Ra grew in power in Upper Egypt during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties, Pharaoh's power did not. John Baines and Jaromír Málek wrote:

The most important long-term change was that a high proportion of land passed to temples, in particular that of Amun at Karnak. State and temple were interlocked in the management of the country, but the temple of Amun acquired virtual control of Upper Egypt. The major priestly offices became hereditary, and thus largely independent of the king, so that the high priests formed

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<sup>64</sup>Freed, 26.

<sup>65</sup>Hayes, 326.

a dynasty that came to rival him.<sup>66</sup>

During the Eighteenth Dynasty this tension did not exist. Pharaoh was from Thebes. Pharaoh and his family, more than at any other period, were identified with the "gods" of Thebes.

During the reign of Osorkon IV, the religious associations of Thebes changed drastically. Baines and Málek commented:

Osorkon IV of the 23rd Dynasty (777-749) installed his daughter Shepen-wepet in an old office with the title "divine adoratrice of Amun" in Thebes. From this time on the adoratrice, who could not marry, and passed on her office by "adoption," was a member of the royal family and the chief religious figure in the Theban area.<sup>67</sup>

The shift of the power of pharaohs to the Delta and the changes in religious associations within the royal family presented a significantly different religious alignment in Egypt after the Eighteenth Dynasty.

The near extinction of the worship of the triad of Amun, Mut, and Khonsu came with the Assyrian onslaught of 663 B.C. (nearly two hundred years before many commentators have placed the conjectured redaction of the supposed sources of the plagues).<sup>68</sup> Later editors, especially a millennium removed from the time of the Exodus, could not have reconstructed this attack upon a dynasty which

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<sup>66</sup>John Baines and Jaromír Málek, Atlas of Ancient Egypt (New York: Facts on File, 1980), 46.

<sup>67</sup>Baines and Málek, 48.

<sup>68</sup>Ions, 99.

flourished primarily in the fifteenth century B.C.

To the mounting circumstantial evidence on the side of an early Exodus may be added the imagery of the son of Pharaoh. Khonsu, who was the son of Amun-Ra and god of the moon from the Theban triad, and the son of Pharaoh were most directly associated during the years of the Theban Eighteenth Dynasty. During the fifteenth century B.C., an attack upon the son of Pharaoh at midnight on the fifteenth day of a lunar cycle (the time of the full moon) would not have escaped notice by the Egyptians. Thus, the imagery of the son of Pharaoh, as seen through the tenth plague, aligns perfectly with what is known of the time period assigned to the exodus in the biblical record.

CHAPTER 9  
STRUCTURE AND THEOLOGY IN EXODUS 1-20

Contrary to the popular Documentary approach to the record of the plagues, the approach outlined here gives evidence that the plague narrative did not stem from either an "elaborate growth of traditions" or from two or three varying sources (none of which of which contained all ten of the plagues). Instead, if the pattern given in part III is valid, then an intricate unity may be seen in the first twenty chapters of Exodus that could only have existed if these chapters were a unit when composed. The aspects which exhibit unity of the material include Moses' journey from Sinai to Sinai, an emphasis in both the first and last plagues that ties chapter one to chapter twenty, and the presentation of Yahweh as the true Creator through the pattern of judgments upon each part of creation.

Return to Sinai

The first part of Moses' mission, as given to him by the Lord during the encounter at Sinai, was to bring the people back to Sinai to worship (Ex. 3:12). Therefore, the movement of Moses from chapter three to chapter nineteen forms a cycle that arches over the plagues narrative.

At the end of this over-arching cycle from Sinai to

Sinai is a short reference that may explain the reason for the inclusion of the material in Exodus 1-2. Upon the return to Sinai, in giving the first two commandments which were the prohibitions against idolatry, the Lord made a curious reference in Exodus 20:5 to "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." The first two chapters of Exodus summarized the first eighty years of Moses' life. In that summary the story of the command to kill the baby boys that were born to the Hebrews is given by Pharaoh. Moses grows up in the generation of the son of the Pharaoh who gave the command to kill the other male, Hebrew children of Moses' generation. It is from this second-generation pharaoh that Moses flees after he kills the Egyptian; and it is to the third generation that he returns to give the command to let the slaves go free. It is the fourth generation upon which the judgment of Passover fell.

Moses moved from the Sinai experience of the call to deliver Israel to the Sinai experience of the giving of the Law. Alongside this cycle that over-arched the plagues narrative was another intricate development linked to the divine judgment of an act recorded in Exodus 1. The slaying of the baby Hebrew boys had demonstrated contempt for both the Hebrews and their God. The evidence which links Exodus 1 to Exodus 20:5 does not end with one vague allusion. The first and the last of the ten plagues echo the resounding judgment of God upon the unforgotten act of the first

generation of pharaohs to demonstrate hatred for both the Hebrews and their God.

### Remembrance of Iniquity

#### First Plague

The instrument of Pharaoh's judgment in chapter 1, which was the Nile, became the instrument of Yahweh's judgment in the first plague as the Nile turned to blood. As Abel's blood had cried from the dust of the earth as a witness against his brother (Gen. 4:10) and as the Old Testament prophets would later describe the violence of cities and nations that God would judge by saying that their "land/city is filled with blood", such a concept is concretely displayed by God in this act. Egypt was guilty. The land was filled with blood. God had visited the "iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" of those who demonstrated hatred for him by their treatment of his people.

#### Last Plague

Not only did the first plague point backward to the guilt of the pharaoh who commanded the death of the young Hebrew boys, but also the tenth plague was the culmination of a judgment that was pronounced before any of the plagues had fallen. God told Moses before the first plague:

Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son" [Ex. 4:22-23].

This fits perfectly into the literary context introduced in chapter one of the killing of the Hebrew boys. The plagues, therefore, may be seen as a very carefully designed pattern that began and ended in the judgment of the sin of the "first generation" that "cursed" Israel in an action that was surely carried out without sincerely believing in Israel's God. This also reverberates with the same concept as the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee."

#### Extent of Judgment

The focus of God's wrath in the judgment of Passover might seem cruel at first glance. Some have condemned the killing of children as a barbaric act which mirrored only the barbarity of the times and not the nature of any just God. Others have generally emphasized that the justice of God's ways cannot be measured by the finite mind of man. The fact is that all of the Egyptians were under the wrath of God.

It was the great-great-grandparents of the Egyptians living at the time of the Passover who had carried out the decree of Pharaoh to cast the baby Hebrews into the Nile. With the coming of the Passover, judgment fell from the house of Pharaoh who had commanded the atrocity to the houses of those who had obeyed his command. The two midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh's command had been rewarded in the past (Ex. 1:17-20). The third generation of those who

cursed Israel's children watched helplessly as the firstborn of the Egyptian children of the fourth generation perished in the judgment of God.

#### Relevance for the Divine Name

As mentioned earlier, the earliest argument for the evidence of contradictory sources being used in a redaction of the Pentateuch was based upon the usage of יהוה' and אֱלֹהִים.<sup>1</sup> Hermann Gunkel alluded to this as the primary piece of evidence for the documentary hypothesis:

The difference between them is found first in their use of language, the most significant feature of which is that J says Jahveh before the time of Moses, while E says Elohim.<sup>2</sup>

A faulty interpretation of Exodus 6:2-3 has been the central component of this two hundred year-old argument:

God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them."

Since this verse seems to indicate that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know the name יהוה', critical scholarship hastily jumped to the conclusion that the occurrences in Genesis where the patriarchs used the name יהוה' were anachronistic.

Conservative objections in the nineteenth century,

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<sup>1</sup>Duane A. Garrett, Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 14.

<sup>2</sup>Hermann Gunkel, The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History, trans. W. H. Carruth, with an Introduction by William F. Albright (New York: Schocken, 1964), 133.

such as those of T. R. Birks, were ignored:

The text, with its context, far from proving that the mere word-name was unknown to the patriarchs before Moses, proves the exact reverse; that the name, as a word, was already familiar to Moses and the people of Israel, though its deep significance was now, for the first time, to be clearly revealed.<sup>3</sup>

The usage of יהוה and אלהים became one of the tell-tale markers for the source critic subjectively to divide Genesis up into two easily discernible, variant traditions that were arranged in a rather sloppy manner by some unknown redactors of the past. Such a view not only revealed an assumption that attributed an incredible carelessness to the ancient Hebrew scribes; but it also betrayed a lack of honest, scholarly effort to give the benefit of the doubt to the biblical material by considering alternative interpretations of the passage.

Umberto Cassuto in his classic defense of the biblical material pointed out that there was a very valid linguistic reason for the difference in the usage of the terms.<sup>4</sup> The reason that he proposed had to do with what the context of each usage required: אלהים being used when "the subject-matter appertains to the universal tradition," and יהוה when "the theme concerns Israel's tradition."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>T. R. Birks, The Pentateuch and Its Anatomists or, The Unity and Authenticity of the Books of Moses Vindicated and Confirmed, in Reply to Modern Criticisms (London: Hatchards, 1869), 26.

<sup>4</sup>Umberto Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch: Eight Lectures, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 15-41.

<sup>5</sup>Cassuto, 32.

Another observation focused upon the concept of what it meant to "know" God "in his name"; this is the literal translation of the Hebrew. Garrett commented on the work of J. A. Motyer on this topic:

El Shaddai is preceded by the  $\aleph$  *essentiae*,<sup>3</sup> which implies that God filled the name with special significance for them when he made a covenant with them and promised the land of Canaan as their inheritance (v. 4). Now he is going to fill the name *Yahweh* with significance ("And my name is *Yahweh*") in the even greater deliverance of the Exodus (v. 5).

<sup>3</sup>See J. A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (London: Tyndale, 1959), 11ff.<sup>6</sup>

What was the significance of the name? While many suggestions have been made through the years, C. F. Burkitt suggested that the divine name  $\aleph\aleph$  be translated "He who creates."<sup>7</sup> W. F. Albright concurred with this rendering in all but one point, preferring the causative form of the verb:

The enigmatic formula in Ex. 3:14, which in Biblical Hebrew means "I am what I am," if transposed into the form in the third person required by the causative *Yahweh*, can only become *Yahweh asher yihweh* (later *yihyeh*), "He Causes to be what Comes into Existence." Later this formula was modified, presumably because the old causative was no longer used in later Hebrew.<sup>8</sup>

Albright went on to point out that a similar form of this epithet was used repeatedly in a hymn to Amun in the fifteenth century B.C.: "(A god) who causes to be (or who

<sup>6</sup>Garrett, 20-21.

<sup>7</sup>C. F. Burkitt, "On the Name of *Yahweh*," Journal of Biblical Literature 44 (1925): 353-56.

<sup>8</sup>William Foxwell Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process, 2d ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), 261.

creates) what comes into existence."<sup>9</sup>

The translation of יהוה' as "He causes to be" is a very fitting epithet for the true Creator. The emphasis on His ability to create and to sustain His creation is the same emphasis that was seen in the pattern of the plagues that was discussed in part III. Though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew the name יהוה' (perhaps abstractly understanding the implications of it), they did not have an experience in their lifetime that concretely filled that name with meaning. Moses was to come to know God "in his name" יהוה'. The pattern of judgments upon every part of the creation filled the name with a significance that had not been experienced by the Patriarchs. Any former abstract notions about the essence of the Name were experientially filled with meaning through the plagues.

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<sup>9</sup>Albright, 261.

CHAPTER 10  
THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Record of Genesis 1

What was the occasion for the writing of Genesis 1? Beginning with the assumption of variant sources and contradictory traditions, this would be impossible to trace. The documentary approach could only speculate as to the origin of any of the lines in Genesis 1. However, beginning with the assumption that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the pattern in the plagues discussed in part III takes on an even broader application. If the plagues demonstrated to the ancient audience that יהוה was the true Creator, then the occasion for Genesis 1:1 was the concrete, powerful demonstration of this truth taken only on faith by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the early tribes of Israel.

Knowing יהוה through this new, powerful display of His claim to be the Creator revealed something of His character that was only believed abstractly by earlier generations. This seems to be the real force behind the revelation of the divine name in Exodus 6:2.

Remembrance at Jericho

The last event before the fall of Jericho, recorded in Joshua 5:10-11, was the celebration of the Passover. The

name "Jericho" is from יֵרִיכוֹ and signifies a place name the English equivalent of which would be something like "moonville." The town was evidently named after the ancient Canaanite god of the moon.

The Israelites were outside of the city looking up at seemingly impenetrable walls. Bryant Wood noted the evidence that the fall of Jericho came on the heels of the Spring harvest.<sup>1</sup> The Israelites would have been aware that, at such a time of year as the postharvest season, Jericho could hold out indefinitely. At the human level the situation was less than ideal for besieging the well fortified city.

While the inhabitants of Jericho were ostensibly inside the city praying to the god of the moon for which the city was named, the Israelites were outside the city commemorating the defeat of the god of the moon by יהוה in the days of their fathers. Since they were gauging the time of their feast to the correct lunar dates for the festival, they were aware of the religious significance of the lunar cycles. If they were aware of the significance of the Passover in reference to the god of the moon, then this Passover fell at what might be considered a truly providential time for giving the Israelites assurance that יהוה would be the victor.

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<sup>1</sup>Bryant G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archeological Evidence," Biblical Archeological Review 16 (March-April 1990): 51.

Request of Joshua

The battle between the tribes of Israel and the confederation of Adoni-Zedek of the cities from the hill country of Canaan included warriors of the Jebusites from Jerusalem and men from Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. During this engagement Joshua made an incredible request of יהוה:

On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel:  
 "O sun, stand still over Gibeon,  
 O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon."  
 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies [Josh. 10:12-13].

Where did Joshua get the idea that יהוה had absolute power over both the sun and the moon?

Many who have dealt with this passage would not agree with this writer's conviction that this event was historical and not legendary; however, historical arguments cannot prove or disprove a supernatural event. Faith must be exercised to draw a conclusion both by the skeptic and the believer. Though this request of Joshua has been considered legendary by many writers, a similar question would still be relevant even to the liberal position. For the liberal the question would be phrased, "Where did the writer who recorded this legendary account get the idea that יהוה had power over the sun and the moon?"

If the proposed outline of the writer for the ten plagues is accurate, יהוה demonstrated his power over both the sun and the moon in the ninth plague and in the tenth

plague with Joshua as a witness. This would have been reinforced at Jericho as discussed in the last section. While the confederation of Adoni-Zedek possibly cried out to their "gods" (the sun and the moon) to help them escape by cloaking them with darkness, Joshua risked his reputation in front of his warriors by crying out to יהוה' to exercise His power over the sun and the moon.

#### Relevance for Habakkuk

The "Psalm of Habakkuk," chapter three of the book, has been considered by many writers to predate the prophet himself by several centuries. The evidence of geography in the hymn in dating the song, though circumstantial, is strong nonetheless. יהוה' is marching from the far south, and not from Jerusalem as would be expected in Habakkuk's time. O. Palmer Robertson stated:

According to Habakkuk, the Lord comes from *Teman* and *Mount Paran*. By these designations, the prophet traces back along the steps by which God led Israel into the possession of the land. The two locales designate roughly the boundaries of the journey of Israel in the desert. *Teman* is generally associated with Edom (cf. Obad. 9; Amos 1:12), although it may refer to the "south" in more general terms (Josh. 12:3; Isa. 43:6; Zech. 9:14). *Paran* designates the desert area about Sinai and Egypt (cf. Gen 21:21; 1 K. 11:18; Deut. 33:2), although it may refer to Kadesh (Num. 13:26) or to territory near the southern border of Judah (1 Sam. 25:5).<sup>2</sup>

The movement of God from the area south of Judah would not

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<sup>2</sup>O. Palmer Robertson, The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 222.

have been expected to be depicted during Habakkuk's time. Robertson went on to conclude that, "Habakkuk depicts God in movement from Sinai through Edom on the way to the possession of the land for his people."<sup>3</sup> Habakkuk was recalling Israel's past experience when they entered Canaan as a means of anticipating the intervention of the Lord in the future.

In the third chapter of Habakkuk the archaic third person masculine pronoun occurs three times. In Habakkuk 3:4, the word  $\text{הוּנִי}$  appears to be masculine in form while the verbs surrounding it are feminine. Robert D. Haak, though taking another course in translation, recorded the conclusion of Dahood and others that *thyh* is a *taqtul* third masculine singular form.<sup>4</sup> The *t* prefix, instead of the *y*, is the standard form in much of the Ugaritic and Amarna material.<sup>5</sup> Another occurrence in the chapter of the archaic third masculine suffix comes at the end of verse four ( $\text{עֲזִיה}$ );<sup>6</sup> while another is possibly contained in the language of verse eleven ( $\text{זִבְלָה}$ ).

Though the presence of archaic suffixes could be attributed to mere archaizing, the case for the antiquity of

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<sup>3</sup>Robertson, 222.

<sup>4</sup>Robert D. Haak, Habakkuk, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, ed. J. A. Emerton, no. 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 84.

<sup>5</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 497, n. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Haak, 90.

the text is strengthened by the presence of words known only from Ugaritic sources. While Umberto Cassuto found similarities to the Ugaritic material in the occurrence of the god *Resheph* and the parallel pair *Yam/Nahar*, he was also interested in the meaning of the verb  $\text{רָחַף}$ :

Another parallel to a Canaanite text I find in the verb  $\text{רָחַף}$  in verse 6. The sense of the sentence to which this verb belongs is difficult, and so, too, is the meaning of the passage in the Ugaritic writings (I AB vi 50-52), where the expression *ytr* likewise occurs. However, these two difficult passages explain each other. The Ugaritic poem (*bym 'ars wtann Ktr-w-Hss yd, ytr Ktr-w-Hss*) deals with the casting of marine monsters, which helped Mot, into the sea: "Into the sea *Ktr-w-Hss* shall cast the venomous one (so I am inclined to explain *'ars*, which I regard as a synonym for the serpent, *btn*, of I\*AB) and the dragon, *Ktr-w-Hss* shall make them jump downwards." A similar idea is expressed in Habakkuk: to make the representatives of the dominion of evil jump down. We are thus dealing here with a word that is fixed in the traditional, literary usage to convey this idea.<sup>7</sup>

Considering that the climactic verses of Habakkuk 3 deal with Yahweh's battle with *Yam* and *Nahar*, the use of  $\text{רָחַף}$  is interesting indeed. Other examples of words that were used in the Ugaritic epic texts are the word used for "shaft" in verses 9 and 14 ( $\text{מִטּוֹת}$  and  $\text{בְּמִטָּיו}$ )<sup>8</sup> and the word "threshed" in verse 12 ( $\text{תִּרְוֹשׁ}$ ).<sup>9</sup>

The conclusion of such geographical and philological

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<sup>7</sup>U[mberto] Cassuto, Biblical and Oriental Studies Volume II: Bible and Ancient Oriental Texts, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 10.

<sup>8</sup>Johannes C. De Moor and Klaas Spronk, eds., A Cuneiform Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit, Semitic Studies, ed. J. Hoftijzer and J. H. Hospers, no. 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), [*Ba'al*, 3.b.15] 15.

<sup>9</sup>De Moor and Spronk, eds., A Cuneiform Anthology, [*Aqhat*, II.i.19] 103-5.

considerations is a strong argument for linking this poem to the nation of Israel's earliest poetry such as Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 33; and Judges 5. The time of the conquest of Canaan best commends itself to the march of יהוה described in the hymn.

An echo of the Israelites defeat of the coalition of Adoni-Zedek in Habakkuk 3:11, where the Hebrew poet wrote "Sun and moon stood still in the heavens." Cohen pointed out that the "Targum sees in the verse an allusion to the standing still of the sun and moon in Gibeon (Josh. x. 12f.)."<sup>10</sup> This would have been the understanding of the original Hebrew audience as well, considering the similarities of expression between the two passages. In Joshua 10:13, the phrase is "הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּרֶחַ עָמְדוּ." In Habakkuk 3:11, the identical construction "הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּרֶחַ עָמְדוּ" appears.

A reference to the standing still of the sun and moon would have drawn the imaginations of the audience to the story of the defeat of the Amorites by Joshua. The power of יהוה over both the sun and the moon demonstrated his absolute power over the very gods to whom the Canaanites prayed.

In Habakkuk 3, יהוה was depicted as going out from southern Canaan on a march to battle with Canaan's gods. As יהוה had defeated the Egyptian gods (Ex. 12:12), so He alone

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<sup>10</sup>A[braham] Cohen, ed. The Twelve Prophets: Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary, vol. 8 of The Soncino Books of the Bible (London: Soncino, 1957), 227.

led Israel to triumph over the Canaanites and their gods. Marching toward Him is *Daber*<sup>11</sup> (the personification of the Canaanite kings in their battle regalia); falling at His feet is *Resheph*, a servant now to יהוה (Hab. 3:5).<sup>12</sup> From the field of the battle on the earth below (*Daber/Resheph*, 3:5), to the waters (*Yam/Nahar*, Hab. 3:8), to the heavens (*Shemesh/Yareah*, Hab. 3:11), יהוה is Lord.

#### Reflections in Psalms

The "Psalm" of Habakkuk was not the only Psalm that reflected the theological truth that יהוה was greater than any mythological "god." A number of psalms repeated the truth of this lesson (Ex. 12:12; 15:11; 18:11; and Num. 33:4). The equivalent of the declaration that the God of Israel is "greater than all gods" occurred in such psalms as 77:13; 86:8; 95:3; 96:4; 97:7; 135:5; 136:2; and 138:1. These should not be understood either as indications of polytheism or of henotheism; for with such statements often

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<sup>11</sup>This would interpret "לפניו ילך דבר" literally as "To His [יהוה] face walks Daber." Daber has long been considered a reference to a deity as is indicated in William Foxwell Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 186. "Daber" was also among the deity names discovered at Ebla: Giovanni Pettinato, The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay, with an Afterword by Mitchell Dahood (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 245-47, 296.

<sup>12</sup>For a full discussion of the imagery in Habakkuk 3, see Robert Kirk Kilpatrick, "Against the Gods of Canaan: the Mythopoetical Background of Habakkuk 3," seminar paper for Old Testament Languages and Literatures (Memphis: Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, May 1992), typewritten.

came affirmations, such as, "you alone are God" (Ps. 87:10) or "all the gods of the nations are idols" (Ps. 96:5).

Of the above psalms, the texts of Psalms 77, 95, 135, and 136 directly mentioned the Exodus event. Psalm 135 illustrates how the deliverance from Egypt (showing the Lord's power over all of creation) may have served as the catalyst for such declarations:

I know that the LORD is great,  
 that our LORD is greater than all gods  
 The Lord does whatever pleases him,  
 in the heavens and on the earth,  
 in the seas and all their depths.  
 He makes the clouds to rise from the ends of the earth;  
 he sends lightning with the rain  
 and brings out the wind from his storehouses.  
 He struck down the firstborn of Egypt,  
 the firstborn of men and animals.  
 He sent his signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt,  
 against Pharaoh and all His servants [Ps. 135:5-9].

The psalm moves from the claim that "our LORD is greater than all gods" to the declaration of His right of rule as the unrivalled Creator. This theology is immediately supported by the "signs and wonders" of the Exodus.

Another example may be found in Psalm 136. After the declaration in verse two, "Give thanks to the God of gods," the psalm continues by praising the Creator of the "heavens" (136:5), the "earth" upon the "waters" (136:6), and the maker of the sun and moon (136:8-9). Immediately after mentioning the moon in verse nine (which was associated with the Passover in part III), the psalm speaks of the Creator as He "who struck down the firstborn of Egypt" (Ps. 136:10).

No "god," whether human or mythological, could stand before יהוה, the God of Israel. He demonstrated that He was the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Judge of all through the Exodus. Though there were occasions other than the Exodus that gave rise to similar reflections, the truth of such assertions was definitely supported by the record of their deliverance from Egypt.

#### Relationship to Eschatology

The great deliverance of יהוה during the night of Passover was associated in the minds of many Jews of later times with the future deliverance that Messiah would bring:

It is customary to have on the seder table a full cup of wine known as "Elijah's cup." Reflections on past deliverance awaken hope for the final redemption, and Elijah, being the herald of Messiah (Mal. 3:23), is welcomed; toward the end of the seder, the front door of the house is opened to demonstrate that this is a "night of watching" (Ex. 12:42) on which Israel knows no fear.<sup>13</sup>

The day of יהוה, the coming of Messiah, and the inauguration of the "Time to Come" were eschatological concepts linked in Jewish commentary to their former deliverance. According to Jewish tradition, "the messianic era will begin in the spring month of *Nisan*, which marks the historic redemption of Israel from Egypt (בניסן ננאלו ובניסן עחירין להנאל)." <sup>14</sup>

The Mekilta made a direct connection between the

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<sup>13</sup>Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), s.v. "Passover," by Moshe Greenberg.

<sup>14</sup>Philip Birnbaum, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts (New York: Hebrew, 1991), s. v. "Passover, פסח."

past judgment upon Egypt and the future day of יְהוּה.<sup>15</sup>  
 Indeed, the Midrash Rabbah abounded with references  
 connecting the historical time of the deliverance of Egypt  
 with the future time of the coming of the Messiah (as in  
 these two selections):

Then will Messiah who is called 'first' shall come in  
 the first month, as it is said: THIS MONTH SHALL BE  
 UNTO YOU THE BEGINNING OF MONTHS.<sup>16</sup>

Why does He call it A NIGHT OF WATCHING (XII, 42)?  
 Because, on that night, He performed great things for  
 the righteous, just as He had wrought for Israel in  
 Egypt.<sup>6</sup> On that night, He saved Hezekiah, Hananiah and  
 his companions, Daniel from the lion's den, and on that  
 night Messiah and Elijah will be made great.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>It is called *Shimmurim* because God had kept that  
 night specially for Israel's deliverance.

<sup>7</sup>Radal emends: will appear--merely omitting one  
 letter (7).<sup>17</sup>

Other examples in the Midrash Rabbah were too numerous and  
 lengthy for purposes of quotation.<sup>18</sup>

The Targums are also replete with such messianic,  
 eschatological references linked to the judgments upon Egypt  
 as recorded in the Book of Exodus. One of the many  
 fragmentary targums preserved the expectancy of the month of

<sup>15</sup>The Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition  
 on the Basis of the Manuscripts and Early Editions with an  
 English Translation, Introduction and Notes, trans. Jacob Z.  
 Lauterbach (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933),  
 [Pisha 7.25] 1:53.

<sup>16</sup>Midrash Rabbah: Exodus, ed. H. Freedman and  
 Maurice Simon, trans. S. M. Lehrman (London: Soncino, 1951),  
 [Bo, 15.1] 161.

<sup>17</sup>Midrash Rabbah, [Bo, 18.12] 227 [emphasis in  
 original].

<sup>18</sup>Midrash Rabbah, [Bo, 15.11] 173-74; [Bo, 15.21]  
 185-86; [Bo, 18.11] 227.

Nisan:

The month of Nisan shall be the beginning<sup>19</sup> of all the months, for in it the Lord redeemed His people, the Israelites, and in it He will eventually redeem them.

<sup>19</sup>Lit: "Head".<sup>19</sup>

The Targum of Jonathan, as well as a fragmentary targum, commented upon the "four nights" that were "written in the Book of Memorials before the Lord of the world":

Night the first,--when he was revealed in creating the world; the second,--when he was revealed to Abraham; the third,--when he was revealed in Mizraim, His hand killing all the firstborn of Mizraim, and His right hand saving the firstborn of Israel; the fourth,--when He will yet be revealed to liberate the people of the house of Israel from among the nations.<sup>20</sup>

The association of this "fourth night" of the future was unmistakable as the Targum of Jonathan called it the night "when the end of the age will be accomplished" and when the Messiah will come; and MS Vatican Ebr. 440 called it the night when "the world will reach its fixed time to be redeemed" and "King Messiah" will come.<sup>21</sup>

These associations in the Jewish commentaries on the

<sup>19</sup>Michael L. Klein, The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch According to Their Extant Sources, vol. 2, Translation, Analecta Biblica Investigationes Scientificalae in Res Biblicas, 76 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1980), [MS Paris Bibliothèque nationale Hébr. 110, P Exod 12.2] 39.

<sup>20</sup>The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum, trans. J[ohn] W[esley] Etheridge (N.p., 1862; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1968), Targum of Jonathan, 479-80; and Klein, The Fragment-Targums, vol. 2, Translation, [MS Vatican Ebr. 440, Exod 12.42] 126.

<sup>21</sup>Targum of Jonathan, 481; and Klein, The Fragment-Targums, vol. 2, Translation, [MS Vatican Ebr. 440, Exod 12.42] 126.

Pentateuch may give some insight into statements by the Hebrew prophets in reference to the "day of the LORD." In Isaiah 13:9-11, the prophet wrote:

See, the day of the LORD is coming  
 --a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger--  
 to make the land desolate  
 and destroy the sinners within it.  
 The stars of heaven and their constellations  
 will not show their light.  
 The rising sun will be darkened  
 and the moon will not give its light.  
 I will punish the world for its evil,  
 the wicked for their sins.

If the ninth plague dealt primarily with the sun and the tenth with the moon as asserted in the writer's interpretation of the ten plagues, then the eschatological framework described by Isaiah would align well with the later rabbinic commentary that associated the Passover with the coming of the day of the LORD.

Joel's prophecies concerning the sun and the moon also align well with this eschatological framework:

Before them the earth shakes,  
 the sky trembles,  
 the sun and moon are darkened,  
 and the stars no longer shine . . .  
 The day of the LORD is great [Joel 2:10-11].

I will show wonders in the heavens  
 and on the earth,  
 blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
 The sun will be turned to darkness  
 and the moon to blood  
 before the coming of the great  
 and dreadful day of the LORD [Joel 2:30-31].

The sun and moon will be darkened,  
 and the stars no longer shine [Joel 3:15].

The references in Joel 2:30 to the "wonders on earth" of "blood" and "fire" were reminiscent of the ten plagues. The

statement in Joel 2:31 about the "moon" being turned to blood would make sense as a reference to the judgment of the LORD on the bloody night of Passover.

Thus, the Jewish eschatological framework looked to the past and then to the future. This aligns well with the "plagues" of the book of Revelation, such as the waters turning to blood (Rev. 11:6; 16:1-6), frogs (Rev. 16:13), plague (Rev. 6:8), boils (Rev. 16:2), hail (11:19; 16:21), "locusts" (Rev. 9:3), the sun darkened (Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 16:10), and the moon turned to blood (Rev. 6:12). Even the "hardness of heart" typical of Pharaoh was to be repeated (Rev. 9:20-21). The "passover that once was" became in Jewish eschatology the type of the "passover that will be."

## CHAPTER 11

## CONCLUSION

In the survey of interpretations of the narrative of the plagues in part I, the "three triads plus one" view of the narrative pointed out certain "key phrases" which unified the narrative. No doubt such unity would be attributed to later editors of the text by source critics. However, the thematic unity of the "five pairs" interpretation that was initially observed by early rabbis and further developed in part III demonstrated a unity that could not have been achieved by a later editor. Both of these interpretations (as discussed in chapter 1) were represented in the Haggadah to be remembered year after year at Passover.

Other interpretations contributed observations on the relationship of the plagues to idolatry, to the judgment of particular Egyptian deities, to the elements of creation, and to the theme of "the arm of יהוה" that functioned like an appositive to the plagues (Ex. 6:6; 7:4). These were basically attempts to explain the relationship of the plagues to the judgment of יהוה upon "all the gods of Egypt" (Ex. 12:12). The interpretation of part III expanded on former efforts. In order for יהוה to demonstrate His power

over mythological gods that were linked with creation, He would have to demonstrate His power over the waters, the dry land, the creatures of the dry land, the vegetation, and the heavens.

In part II the subjective arguments of source criticism were discussed in relation to the present text. A major shift was noted in the use of יהוה and אֱלֹהִים after Exodus 6:3. The two original source critical markers were no longer valid. New divisions of the text were argued with more subjectivity than in Genesis. The arguments of source criticism were demonstrated to be merely arguments *ex silentio*.

Also, in part II the text of Exodus 12:12 was examined. The verb אֶשְׁפֹּט could be rendered as a simple future "I will bring," or with a frequentative force "I will [continually, frequently, or continue to] bring judgments upon all of the gods of Egypt." Considering all of the contextual data, the verb indicates frequentative force; thus the resultant translation, "and I will [continue to] execute judgments upon the 'gods' of Egypt."

The interpretation of the writer in part III was similar in some respects to the earlier rabbinical interpretation of "five pairs" of plagues. The designations of the writer differed from the spheres of creation assigned in the rabbinic version, and included observations on the ninth and tenth plagues (and observations elsewhere) drawn from information on Egyptian religion that would have been

unknown to medieval rabbis. The plagues advanced in pairs demonstrating the power of יהוה' over the waters, the dry land, the creatures of the dry land, the vegetation, and the heavens.

The initiative was taken by יהוה' to reveal Himself to Moses and to demonstrate His power over creation through the plagues. Israel's experience at the nation's birth was full of implications for several areas of study treated in part IV. For too long the view of a late Exodus has dominated scholarly studies of the narrative record of the Exodus event. The writer argued in chapter 8 that the biblical record in combination with new observations in archeology, Egyptology, and history of religions have tipped the scales in favor of an early exodus.

Other implications of the pattern of the plagues for the structure and theology of the first twenty chapters of Exodus were discussed in chapter 9. Textual unity was demonstrated in the inclusion of Moses' birth narrative in Exodus 1-2, the movement of Moses from Sinai to Sinai in Exodus 3-19, and the reference in Exodus 20:5 to "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."<sup>1</sup> The "third generation" from the decree to kill the Hebrew boys was that of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The firstborn of the "fourth generation" died in the Passover. Thus, the first plague

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<sup>1</sup>The Holy Bible: King James Version.

turned the Nile, which was the instrument used to drown the Hebrew babies, into blood. The last plague fell upon the third and fourth generation of Egyptians who had carried out the murderous command of the Pharaoh.

It was also in the context of the Exodus that the play on the divine name occurred that was used by source critics to divide the text. Conservatives have argued for well over a century that the statement in Exodus 6:3 had to do with the significance of the name יהוה and not the mere fact of the name. Since this occurred just before יהוה demonstrated that He is the Creator and the Sustainer of creation, the name was filled with significance as He taught both Israel and Egypt that "He causes to be."

One of the implications discussed in chapter 10 was the relation of the plagues to the occasion for Genesis 1. If יהוה had just demonstrated that He was responsible for creation and its maintenance, then the Exodus was the perfect occasion for Genesis 1:1.

According to the writer's theory in part III, the last two plagues had to do with the sun and the moon. Since the Israelites celebrated Passover just before the conquest of Jericho (a "city of the moon"), this association may have been made as they observed the moon for calculating the feast and as they considered the Exodus. Joshua's later request that the sun and moon stand still as well as the allusion to it in Habakkuk were also discussed in chapter 10. The theology of Exodus 12:12 was examined in relation

to several psalms that mentioned יהוה being "greater than all gods."

Finally, the interpretation of the writer was discussed as the potential basis for eschatological references dealing with the sun (ninth plague) and the moon (tenth plague). Early Jewish commentaries and Old Testament scriptures were examined from this perspective.

By the initiative of יהוה the tribes of Israel were miraculously delivered "with an outstretched arm and with a mighty hand" at the birth of their nation. This experience indelibly marked their theology. In the eyes of the tribes of Israel, יהוה rightfully demanded that there be no other "gods" before Him. Against the "gods" of Egypt, as well as any mythological system on earth, יהוה had triumphed gloriously.

## APPENDIX 1: SOURCE CRITICS AND THE PLAGUES

Source Critic	Bl	Fr	Li	Fl	Mu	Bo	Ha	Lo	Da	De
Driver (1911) R <sup>JE</sup> , R <sup>D</sup> , R <sup>P</sup>	JEP <sup>K</sup> R <sup>JE&amp;P</sup>	JP <sup>R</sup> R <sup>P</sup>	P <sup>R</sup> R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	P <sup>R</sup> R <sup>P</sup>	JE R <sup>JE&amp;P</sup>	JE R <sup>JE&amp;P</sup>	JE R <sup>JE&amp;P</sup>	JEP <sup>R</sup> R <sup>JE&amp;P</sup>
Noth (1962)	JP <sup>R</sup>	JP <sup>R</sup>	P <sup>R</sup>	J	J	P <sup>R</sup>	JP <sup>R</sup>	JP <sup>R</sup>	JP <sup>R</sup>	JP <sup>R</sup>
Fohrer (1964)	JEP R <sup>P</sup>	JP R <sup>P</sup>	P R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	P R <sup>P</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	E R <sup>P</sup>	JENP R <sup>P</sup>
Plastaras (1966)	JP	JP	P	J	J	P	J(P?)	J(P?)	(P?)	JP
Greenberg (1969)	AB	AB	B	A	A	B	A	A	B	AB
Hyatt (1971)	JEP	JP	P	J	J	P	JE	JE	E	JEP
Beegle (1972)	JEP	JP	P	J	J	P	JE	JE	E	JEP
Clements (1972)	JP R <sup>D</sup>	JP R <sup>D</sup>	P R <sup>D</sup>	J R <sup>D</sup>	J R <sup>D</sup>	P R <sup>D</sup>	J(E?) R <sup>D</sup>	J(E?) R <sup>D</sup>	JE R <sup>D</sup>	JEP R <sup>D</sup>
Childs (1974)	JEP <sup>R</sup>	JP <sup>R</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	P <sup>R</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>
Zevit (1976)	JEP <sup>K</sup>	JEP <sup>R</sup>	P <sup>R</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	J R <sup>P</sup>	P <sup>R</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	JE R <sup>P</sup>	JEP
Van Seters (1986)	DJ <sup>K</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	DJ <sup>R</sup>	P
Durham (1987)	JEP	JP	P	J	J	P	JP	J	?	JEP
Schmidt (1990)	JEP	JEP	P	JE	E	P	E	JE	?	JE

Sources: S[amuel] R[olles] Driver, The Book of Exodus, vol. 3 of The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ed. A. F. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), xxiii; Martin Noth, Exodus: A Commentary, vol. 2 of The Old Testament Library, ed. G.

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APPENDIX 2: ESCALATION OF THE PLAGUES

Heavens: Darkness (sun) and Death of Firstborn (moon).

Transition: Locusts darken "eye" (sun) of Egypt (10:15).

Vegetation: Hail and Locusts (both from atmospheric heaven).

Transition: Hail strikes man, beast, and vegetation.

Creatures on the Land: Murrain and Boils.

Transition: Creatures irritated and bitten.

Earth (or Dry Land): Lice and Flies.

Transition: Land made to stink.

"Waters": Blood and Frogs.

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