

The Passover Story

Chapter Five: Free at Last

Moses returned to his father-in law in Midian and asked for permission to return to Egypt to help his fellow Jews. Jethro gave him his blessing, and Moses left to Egypt. Aaron, at G-d's command, went to greet Moses. They met in the desert, and Moses told his older brother about the great mission they had been given.

When they got to Goshen, they visited the Jewish leaders, and Moses performed the miracles as G d had instructed him. Recognizing that Moses and Aaron had, indeed, been sent by G-d, the Jewish leaders told the people the good news, and the Jews were filled with hope and faith.

Moses was eighty years old, and his brother eighty-three, when they entered the palace of King Pharaoh. Courageously, they walked past the guards and wild animals that surrounded the king's inner chambers, which normally prevented anyone other than Pharaoh's astrologers and counselors from coming to see him.

Shocked by their sudden appearance, Pharaoh asked the two brothers what they wanted. They answered, "The Lord, G d of Israel, said, 'Let My people go, so they can offer sacrifices to Me in the desert.' "

Pharaoh refused, saying that he had never heard of the G d of the Israelites. He accused Moses and Aaron of working against the Egyptian government, and he wasn't impressed by the miracles they performed because his magicians could do similar tricks.

That day, Pharaoh ordered his supervisors to make the Jews work even harder. Until then, they had been given the supplies they needed for building, but now they had to get the materials they needed on their own.

The Jews were not able to handle this impossible task, and they suffered even more than before. Bitterly, they complained to Moses and Aaron for making their situation even worse.

Hurt and disappointed, Moses prayed to G d. G d assured him that his mission would eventually succeed, but first, Pharaoh and all of Egypt would be struck by terrible plagues, as a punishment for oppressing the Israelites. The plagues would also show the Jews how great their G-d was.

The ten plagues took place over the next ten months. They were as follows:

1. Blood

When Pharaoh continued to refuse to let the Jews go, Moses and Aaron warned him that G d would punish him and his people. The first punishment was turning all the water in the land of Egypt into blood. Only the province of Goshen, where the Jewish people lived, wasn't affected by this plague or any of the others that followed.

Moses and Aaron walked to the edge of the river. There Aaron raised his staff, hit the water, and transformed it into streams of blood. Pharaoh and all the people of Egypt saw this miracle take place.

It was impossible for them to drink the water of the Nile, and they tried to dig deep into the ground for water. Unfortunately for the Egyptians, not only the water of the Nile, but all the waters of Egypt, had turned to blood. The Egyptians suffered horrible thirst, but still, Pharaoh would not give in.

2. Frogs

After Pharaoh ignored another warning from Moses and Aaron to listen to G-d and free the Jews, the second plague came to Egypt. Aaron stretched his hand over the waters of Egypt, and frogs swarmed forth. They covered every inch of land and entered the houses and bedrooms; wherever an Egyptian turned, there were slimy frogs, croaking loudly.

Pharaoh grew frightened, and he asked Moses and Aaron to pray to G d to remove the frogs, promising that he would free the Jewish people right away. But as soon as the frogs disappeared, he broke his promise and refused to let the Jews go.

3. Lice

G d then ordered Aaron to hit the dust of the earth with his staff, and immediately, swarms of lice crawled from the dust and covered the land, making the Egyptian people and their animals miserable with itchiness.

Although Pharaoh's advisors told him this must be a punishment from G-d, Pharaoh didn't pay attention, and he continued to refuse to let the Jews go free.

4. Wild Animals

For the fourth plague, G-d sent hordes of wild animals to wander all over the country and destroy everything in their path.

Terrified, Pharaoh promised to let the Jews go to the desert, on the condition that they would not go too far. Moses prayed to G d, and the wild animals disappeared.

But as soon as they were gone, Pharaoh took back his promise and refused Moses' demand.

5. Animals Dying

Next, G d sent a disease that killed most of the farm animals of the Egyptians.

But Pharaoh remained stubborn, and he would not let the Israelites go.

6. Boils

The sixth plague was boils. G d commanded Moses to take ashes and toss them up towards heaven. As Moses did that, painful boils broke out and covered the Egyptians, causing them terrible suffering.

7. Hail

Once the boils cleared up, Moses announced to Pharaoh that a horrible hail-storm would sweep the land; he stretched out his staff, and the hail poured down with violence, killing anyone and everyone it hit.

Pharaoh asked for Moses to appear before him. "The Lord is righteous," he said, "and I and my people are wicked. Ask the Lord to stop the hail, and I will let you and your people go."

Moses did what Pharaoh asked. The storm stopped, but Pharaoh's heart remained hard and he refused to let the Jews go.

8. Grasshoppers

The next time Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, he said he would give permission to the men, but not the women and children, to leave Egypt and serve G-d in the desert. Moses and Aaron insisted that the women and children be allowed to go, too, and Pharaoh became angry and ordered them to leave his palace.

As soon as Moses left the palace, he raised his arms toward the sky, and an east wind brought swarms of grasshoppers into Egypt. There were so many grasshoppers, they devoured all the grass and plants that were left in Egypt.

Again Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and he begged them to pray to G d to stop the plague. Moses listened, and G d sent a strong west wind that drove the locusts into the sea.

Once the plague stopped, Pharaoh again refused to free the Jewish people.

9. Darkness

Then came the ninth plague. For several days all of Egypt- except for Goshen, of course- was enveloped in a thick, heavy darkness. The Egyptians were terrified, and they stayed glued to their places wherever they stood or sat.

Again Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron that they could leave Egypt, and even take their wives and children with them, but he did not give them permission to take their animals. Moses and Aaron did not accept this condition, and Pharaoh angrily ordered Moses and Aaron to leave and never return. He warned them that if they were to come before him again, they would die.

Moses warned Pharaoh that G-d would send one more plague over Egypt, and then Pharaoh would give permission for the Jews to leave with whomever and whatever they wanted.

Exactly at midnight, Moses continued, G d would pass over Egypt and kill the firstborn Egyptian boys and men. The Egyptians would be filled with panic, scared they would all die. Then Pharaoh would run to Goshen and beg Moses and Aaron to take the Jews out of Egypt without delay.

With these words, Moses and Aaron went home, leaving Pharaoh filled with fury.

10. Death of the Firstborn

On midnight between the fourteenth and fifteenth day of Nissan, G d killed all the firstborn men and boys in the land of Egypt, exactly as Moses had warned.

Loud, bitter cries were heard from all the houses in Egypt. Pharaoh ran from his palace to find Moses and Aaron and said to them, “Please take the Jews and leave. Go serve the Lord as you have said and take your animals with you.”

Quickly, the Jews, who had been preparing for this moment, gathered in groups to eat the Passover sacrifice of roasted lamb before midnight, as they had been commanded by G-d.

And then, when they were done, they marched out of Egypt, free at last.

Additional resource: Click [here](#) to watch an entertaining video on how matzo is made.