

CHAPTER 8 And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: 1
 Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the Nile channels 2
 and over the ponds, and bring up the frogs over the land of Egypt.” And 3
 Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came 4
 up and covered the land of Egypt. And the soothsayers did thus with their 5
 spells and brought up frogs over the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh called to 6
 Moses and to Aaron and said, “Entreat the LORD that He take away the frogs 7
 from me and from my people, and I shall send off the people, that they may 8
 sacrifice to the LORD.” And Moses said to Pharaoh, “You may vaunt over 9
 me as for when I should entreat for you and for your servants and for your 10
 people to cut off the frogs from you and from your houses—only in the Nile 11

CHAPTER 8 1. *Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers.* The explicit repetition of language and gestures from the first plague has the emphatic effect of a formal refrain, with an overlap between the first two plagues in the location of the Nile as source of the catastrophe. The report of the Ten Plagues—other biblical traditions appear to have known a smaller number—exhibits a high degree of literary shaping and symmetry. Umberto Cassuto offers a good early synthesis of the scholarly literature that has been devoted to following these formal patterns, and subsequent discussions by Moshe Greenberg and William H. C. Propp are also noteworthy. The plagues are organized in three triads, followed by the climactic and most devastating tenth plague. Only in the first triad is Aaron with his outstretched staff the executor of the plagues. In each triad, in the first plague of the series Moses encounters Pharaoh going out early in the morning; in the second plague of the series, Moses comes into Pharaoh’s palace; and in the third plague of the series, the disaster is unleashed without warning. Cassuto also observes that the plagues are equally arranged in pairs: two involving the Nile, two plagues of insects, two epidemics affecting beasts and humans respectively, two plagues devastating the crops, and the final darkness paired with the death of the firstborn.

4. *take away the frogs from me.* Unlike the water turned to blood, the frogs actually invade the homes of Pharaoh and his subjects, thus impelling him to his first offer of terms to Moses.

5. *You may vaunt over me as for when.* The Hebrew “vaunt over me” (*hitpa’er ‘alai*) is a little odd. The construction of the consensus of commentators, medieval and modern, which seems plausible, is that Moses is offering Pharaoh the limited “triumph” of choosing the moment when the plague will cease. This choice, of course, in fact demonstrates God’s absolute power and Moses’s perfect efficacy as intercessor. “When” refers not to the time of entreaty but to the time of cessation of the plague, a distinction indicated in the Hebrew, as Rashi nicely observes, by affixing the prefix *le* (“for”) to *matay* (“when”). It is a bit surprising that Pharaoh does not choose to have the plague ended at once. Perhaps he is trying Moses’s powers: Can Moses really stipulate a given moment of cessation in the near future and make it come about?

cut off the frogs. In Moses’s proposal to Pharaoh, he uses a word that suggests abrupt extirpation of the frogs. In the prediction that he goes on to spell out (verse 7), he uses a less violent verb of evacuation or retreat (“turn away”). Finally, the narrator in his report of the

6 will they remain.” And he said, “For tomorrow.” And he said, “As you have
 7 spoken, so that you may know there is none like the LORD our God. And the
 frogs will turn away from you and from your houses and from your servants
 8 and from your people—only in the Nile will they remain.” And Moses, and
 Aaron with him, went out from Pharaoh’s presence, and Moses cried out
 9 to the LORD concerning the frogs that He had put upon Pharaoh. And the
 LORD did according to Moses’s word, and the frogs died, out of the houses
 10 and out of the courtyards and out of the fields, and they piled them up heap
 11 upon heap, and the land stank. And Pharaoh saw that there was relief and
 he hardened his heart and did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken.

12 And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: Stretch out your staff and
 strike the dust of the land and there will be lice in all the land of Egypt.”
 13 And thus they did, and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and
 struck the dust of the land, and there were lice in man and in beast, all
 14 the dust of the land became lice in all the land of Egypt. And thus the
 soothsayers of Egypt did with their spells, to take out the lice, but they
 15 were unable, and the lice were in man and in beast. And the soothsayers
 said to Pharaoh, “God’s finger it is!” And Pharaoh’s heart toughened, and
 he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken.

event (verse 9) says, with plain descriptive accuracy, “die” because his account includes a discomfiting idea not mentioned by Moses to Pharaoh—the piles of dead frogs throughout the country.

10. *and the land stank*. The stench of the putrefying dead frogs provides another link with the preceding plague, in which the stench was produced by the dead fish from the Nile.

12. *lice*. At least in postbiblical Hebrew, the terms *kinam* (a collective noun) and *kinim* (a plural) mean “lice,” though some have suggested that in this text they might mean “gnats” or “mosquitoes.” The plagues began with a profoundly ominous, symbolically portentous, and life-threatening transformation of water into blood. The next three plagues are afflictions of maddening or disgusting discomfort rather than actual threats to survival. The tone of the Plagues narrative is that of harsh (indeed, gloating) monotheistic satire against the pagan imperial power, and so pains are taken to show the Egyptians squirming before they are exposed to destruction.

14. *And thus the soothsayers of Egypt did . . . to take out the lice*. The syntax directs us to a kind of comic discovery: at first we imagine that still again the soothsayers are engaged in their own pathetic imitation of Moses and Aaron’s destructive act, bringing forth their own lice; then we realize that this time they are attempting to get rid of the plague, but to no avail.

15. *God’s finger it is*. Now that they have tried futilely to get rid of a plague instead of replicating it, they have been forced to recognize that they are contending with a greater power.

And the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and station yourself before Pharaoh—look, he will be going out to the water—and say to him, ‘Thus said the LORD: send off My people, that they may worship Me. For if you do not send off My people, I am about to send against you and against you servants and against your people and against your houses the horde, and the houses of Egypt will be filled with the horde and the soil, too, on which they stand. But I shall set apart on that day the land of Goshen upon which My people stands so that no horde will be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the land. And I shall set a ransom between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign will be.’” And thus the LORD did, and a heavy horde came into the

As Rashi neatly paraphrases their perception, “This plague is not through magic but from the Deity.” It is noteworthy that the preceding narrative repeatedly spoke of God’s hand or arm; the soothsayers appear to concede a lesser trace of divine action in mentioning God’s finger.

And Pharaoh’s heart toughened. The repeated formula for Pharaoh’s obduracy takes on added meaning here because he willfully ignores the testimony of his soothsayers. The narrative provides no indication as to whether the plague of lice comes to an end, like the previous two, or whether the Egyptians simply continue to live with the infestation as God proceeds to launch the next blow.

17. *if you do not send off . . . I am about to send.* Although the two verbs are in different conjugations, the pun, with its measure-for-measure emphasis, is quite explicit in the Hebrew.

the horde. The Hebrew term ‘*arov*’ occurs only here, and the only plausible derivation is from the verbal root that means “to mix.” Some medieval Hebrew commentators imagined this as a mingling of sundry beasts of prey, but this seems unlikely because, as verse 27 makes clear, the ‘*arov*’ has infested the Egyptians rather than torn them limb from limb, and “not one remained” probably suggests minuscule constituents of the horde. A plague of maddeningly noxious insects also makes a much better pair with the preceding plague. The King James Version’s “swarm of flies” is as good a guess as any, though it seems wise to avoid “swarm” in order not to introduce a misleading echo of the verb “swarm” in Exodus 1:7 and 7:28.

18. *But I shall set apart on that day the land of Goshen.* Goshen is the region of northeastern Egypt that, according to the account in Genesis (46:34), was set aside for Hebrew settlement. This is the first clear indication in Exodus that the Hebrews lived in a segregated area in Egypt. That geographical segregation will play a crucial role in the climactic ninth and tenth plagues.

19. *I shall set a ransom.* Most interpreters understand the Hebrew *pedut* to mean something like “separation” or “distinction.” Everywhere else, however, this root means “to ransom,” “to redeem,” “to rescue from danger,” including the three other occurrences in the biblical corpus in this form of a verbal noun. It seems wise to retain the semantic force of “ransom” and assign the indication of separation to the preposition “between” that follows—that is, God will grant ransom or rescue from the horde to the Israelites, and that saving act will set them apart from the afflicted Egyptians.

house of Pharaoh and the house of his servants, and in all the land of
 21 Egypt the land was ravaged in the face of the horde. And Pharaoh called
 to Moses and to Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your god in the land."
 22 And Moses said, "It is not right to do thus, for the abomination of Egypt
 we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of
 23 Egypt before their eyes, will they not stone us? A three days' journey into
 the wilderness we shall go, and we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God as
 24 He has said to us." And Pharaoh said, "I myself will send you off, that you
 may sacrifice to the LORD your god in the wilderness, only you must not
 25 go far away. Entreat on my behalf." And Moses said, "Look, I am going out
 from your presence and I shall entreat the LORD, that the horde may turn
 away from Pharaoh and from his servants and from his people tomorrow.
 Only let not Pharaoh continue to mock by not sending the people off to
 26 sacrifice to the LORD." And Moses went out from Pharaoh's presence and
 27 entreated the LORD. And the LORD did according to Moses's word, and

20. *the land was ravaged.* This indication of general devastation suggests that the second of the two plagues of insects is somehow more intense than the first.

22. *for the abomination of Egypt we shall sacrifice.* The most likely meaning is that the Hebrews will sacrifice cattle or other beasts considered taboo by the Egyptians and so infuriate them. There is some evidence that Egypt in the late Bronze Age was in fact quite tolerant about different kinds of sacrifice. The Hebrew writer could well be reflecting the awareness of a later age, when Egyptian attitudes may have shifted. By the time of Herodotus, the Egyptians had developed a reputation for rigid sacrificial restrictions.

24. *I myself will send you off.* The desperate Pharaoh now uses a new turn of urgent speech, prefacing the first-person imperfective verb with an emphatic *'anokhi*, "I myself."

only you must not go far away. Having yielded to Moses's argument on the three days' journey, he still stipulates that the Hebrews should go no farther, for he is unwilling to contemplate the permanent loss of this population of slave workers.

25. *Look, I am going out from your presence.* There is temporal urgency in Moses's response, as he uses a participial verbal form to indicate that he is already on his way to entreat the LORD. The coy game of asking Pharaoh to stipulate a time of deliverance that marked the previous plague is set aside as Pharaoh's own sense of desperation grows.

Only let not Pharaoh continue to mock. Moses's "only" clause is a clearly marked formal rejoinder to Pharaoh's "only" clause in the previous verse. The verb here, *hatel*, is rendered as "deal deceitfully" by the King James Version and some modern versions, but elsewhere it means "to mock," "to toy with," and, from Moses's point of view, that would be a reasonable representation of Pharaoh's repeated reflex of seeming to yield and then reasserting his intransigence.

the horde turned away from Pharaoh and from his servants and from his people, not one remained. And Pharaoh hardened his heart this time, too, and he did not send off the people.

CHAPTER 9 And the LORD said to Moses, “Come into Pharaoh and you shall speak to him, ‘Thus said the LORD, God of the Hebrews: send off My people, that they may worship Me. But if you refuse to send them off and you still hold on to them, look, the hand of the LORD is about to be against your livestock which is in the field, against the horses, against the donkeys, against the camels, against the cattle, and against the sheep—a very heavy pestilence. And the LORD will set apart the livestock of Israel from the livestock of Egypt, and nothing of the Israelites’ will die.’” And the LORD set a fixed time, saying, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.” And the LORD did this thing on the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died, but of the livestock of Israel not one died. And Pharaoh sent

CHAPTER 9 2. *and you still hold on to them.* As we move to the end of the first half of the Ten Plagues, a note of impatience is introduced into God’s words through Moses to Pharaoh as this clause is added to the formulaically repeated language. Perhaps this new emphasis on Pharaoh’s continuing torment of Israel is the reason that Rashi surprisingly glosses the transparent verb “hold on to,” *maḥaziq*, by citing a bizarre parallel from Deuteronomy 25: “should . . . she reach out her hand and seize [or hold on to] his pudenda.”

3. *the hand of the LORD is about to be against your livestock.* The Hebrew verb here has a spine-tingling effect for which there is no obvious English equivalent. The verb “to be” in Hebrew is not supposed to have a participial, or present, tense. At this ominous and supernatural juncture, however, that verbal stem *h-y-h* yields an anomalous *hoyah*, rendered in this translation as “about to be.” This strange usage involves a kind of fearsome pun on the divine name YHWH that was mysteriously highlighted in the Burning Bush episode. God’s intrinsic and unique capacity for being, we are made to see, is not just a matter of static condition but an awesome power of action—the hand that is “about to be” against all the livestock of Egypt.

camels. As in Genesis, the reference is anachronistic. Although camels were widely introduced to Mesopotamia and the land of Israel by early in the first millennium B.C.E., they were not used in Egypt until several centuries later; and in any case, the actual setting of the Exodus story would be some time in the thirteenth century B.C.E.

4. *the LORD will set apart.* The theme of the setting apart of the Hebrews from the Egyptians, first introduced in the previous plague, is again stressed.

and, look, not a single one had died of the livestock of Israel, and Pharaoh's heart hardened, and he did not send off the people.

- 8 And the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron, "Take you handfuls of soot from the kiln and let Moses throw it toward the heavens before Pharaoh's
9 eyes, and it shall become a fine dust over all the land of Egypt and it shall become on man and on beast a burning rash erupting in boils in all the land
10 of Egypt." And they took the soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it toward the heavens and it became a burning rash with
11 boils erupting on man and on beast. And the soothsayers could not stand before Moses because of the burning rash, for the burning rash was on the
12 soothsayers and in all of Egypt. And the LORD toughened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

7. *Pharaoh's heart hardened.* This is one of many instances in which the literal meaning of the verb is "became heavy." That usage in turn echoes ironically against the qualifying adjective of "a very *heavy* pestilence" (verse 3).

8. *Take you handfuls of soot from the kiln and let Moses throw it toward the heavens.* The beginning of the second half of the Ten Plagues is marked by a switch from the set formula for launching the plague with an outstretched staff. This scooping up of soot and casting it skyward intensifies the ominousness of the moment and has the look of an act of sympathetic magic. The black dust from the kiln turns into broadcast contamination, a plague clearly paired with the preceding plague of livestock pestilence but affecting man as well as beast.

9. *burning rash.* The Hebrew *sheḥin* obviously refers to a painful skin disease, but no definitive identification of the malady has been made. The noun is probably related to a root that means "to be hot"—Rashi cites the rabbinic idiom *shanah sheḥunah*, "a torrid year"—and hence this translation represents it as "burning rash." The fact that the plague is inaugurated with soot taken from a kiln may reinforce an association between burning heat and the skin disease in question.

11. *the soothsayers could not stand before Moses because of the burning rash.* Their repeated gesture in the earlier plagues of a weak imitation of Moses vanishes. After "could not," on the basis of 8:14, we might have expected something like "cure the burning rash." In fact, the soothsayers, themselves painfully smitten by the maddening skin disease, are in no condition to make any effort of the sort but instead flee from Moses's presence. There is added irony in the idiom used, for "to stand before" elsewhere has the sense of "stand in attendance upon." In any case, what was noxious in the earlier plagues has now become physically unbearable.

12. *And the LORD toughened Pharaoh's heart.* For the first time, it is not Pharaoh, or his heart, that is the subject of the verb of obduracy but God. However, in the biblical perspective this may amount to the same thing because God is presumed to be the ultimate cause of human actions, and Pharaoh's stubborn arrogance can still be understood as the efficient

And the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and station your- 13
 self before Pharaoh, and you shall say to him, ‘Thus said the LORD, God of 14
 the Hebrews: send off my people, that they may worship me. For this time 14
 I am about to send all My scourges to your heart and against your servants 15
 and against your people, so that you may know that there is none like Me 16
 in all the earth. For by now I could have sent forth My hand and I could 15
 have struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been 16
 wiped off the face of the earth. And yet, for this I have let you stand—so as 16
 to show you My power, and so that My name will be told through all the 17
 earth. You still block the way to My people, not sending them off. Look, 17,18
 I am about to rain down very heavy hail at this time tomorrow, the like 18
 of which there has not been in Egypt from the day of its founding until 19
 now. And now, send, gather in your livestock and everything you have in 19
 the field. Every man and the beasts that will be in the field and that are 20

cause. It is striking that Pharaoh persists in his resistance even as his afflicted soothsayers, the experts upon whom he has been depending, flee the scene.

14. *I am about to send.* The Hebrew writer cannot resist any opportunity to confront the two senses of “send”—the sending off or dismissal that Pharaoh is unwilling to implement and the dire sending by God of plague after plague.

16. *so as to show you My power, and so that My name will be told through all the earth.* Here we are given an emphatic summary of the theological rationale for the elaborate and excruciating sequence of plagues. The God of Israel is above all a God of history. His unrivaled supremacy as God is manifested for the Hebrew writers by His powerful acts in the arena of history. The Exodus story is conceived as an establishing of the credentials of the God of Israel for all humankind. Hence his awesome power has to be demonstrated in one plague after another, and Pharaoh’s repeated resistance is a required condition of the demonstration. The scope of the demonstration is also noteworthy. The elastic Hebrew term *’erets*, which until this point in the Plagues narrative had meant “land” (as in “the land of Egypt”), clearly here means “earth”: YHWH’s mighty acts in Egypt are to confirm his reputation as omnipotent deity throughout the world.

17. *You still block the way to My people.* The meaning of the Hebrew verb here, *mistolel*, has long been in dispute. This translation presumes a connection with the military term *soleleh*, “siege-ramp,” which might imply that Pharaoh is keeping the Hebrews penned in as a besieging army would do to the population trapped within a city.

18. *from the day of its founding until now.* As the plagues are intensified, rhetorical drum-rolls such as this punctuate the report of the catastrophes. Compare verse 24, “the like of which there had not been in all the land of Egypt from the time it became a nation.”

19. *Every man and the beasts.* The beasts are a little puzzling because verse 6 clearly reports a total destruction of Egyptian livestock. Perhaps all the reports of general destruction are meant to be taken as hyperboles; in any case, it seems unwise to look for absolute logi-

not taken indoors, the hail shall come down on them and they shall die.”

20 Whoever feared the LORD’s word among Pharaoh’s servants sheltered his
 21 slaves and his livestock indoors. And whoever paid no mind to the LORD’s
 22 word left his slaves and his livestock in the field. And the LORD said to
 Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the heavens, that there be hail in all
 23 the land of Egypt, upon man and upon beast and upon all the grass of
 the field in the land of Egypt.” And Moses stretched out his staff over the
 heavens, and the LORD let loose thunder and hail, and fire went along
 24 earthward, and the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. And there
 was very heavy hail, with fire flashing in the midst of the hail, the like of
 which there had not been in all the land of Egypt from the time it became
 25 a nation. And the hail struck through all the land of Egypt whatever was
 in the field, from man to beast, and all the grass of the field did the hail
 26 strike, and every tree of the field did it smash. Only in the land of Goshen,
 in which the Israelites were, was there no hail.

cal consistency in this narrative, which is chiefly focused on conveying a sense of grand cumulative catastrophe.

indoors. The literal meaning of the Hebrew is “in the house.” The house/field antonyms in biblical Hebrew (*bayit/sadeh*) also have the idiomatic sense in some contexts of inside and outside.

20. *Whoever feared the LORD’s word.* Elsewhere, this is an idiom that indicates piety (as in “God-fearing”), but here the idiom has been stripped down to its literal meaning: whoever was struck with terror by this grim threat of God’s took the necessary steps to protect his slaves and livestock. The existence of a contingent of Egyptians now genuinely terrified by the dire predictions of the Hebrews is an indication of developing cracks in the pharaonic front.

23. *the LORD let loose thunder and hail, and fire went along earthward.* The dramatic nature of this plague is another manifestation of the pattern of intensification. Instead of disaster welling up from the Nile or somehow coming through the air, it appears here as a direct and violent assault from above against the land of Egypt. In biblical poetry, as in its Canaanite antecedents, thunder and lightning are the characteristic weapons of the sky god. The raining down of celestial fire also sets up an allusive correspondence with the story of the destruction of Sodom.

went along earthward. Instead of the standard form for the Hebrew verb “to go” (*telekh*), the writer uses a dialectic variant form (*tihalakh*) rarely employed in the Bible and perhaps felt to be archaic, as a kind of epic gesture. “Went along earthward” seeks to produce an equivalent strangeness of effect while replicating the rhythm of the Hebrew.

26. *Only in the land of Goshen . . . was there no hail.* The setting apart of Israelite Goshen from the rest of Egypt is extended here into an implicit image of a kind of protective canopy—we would say, umbrella—shielding the Hebrews from the destructive wrath pouring down from the sky.

And Pharaoh sent and called to Moses and to Aaron and said to them, “I have offended this time. The LORD is in the right and I and my people are in the wrong. Entreat the LORD, and no more of God’s thunder and hail! And let me send you off, and you shall not continue to stay.” And Moses said to him, “As I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will stop, and the hail will be no more, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s. And as for you and your servants, I know that you still do not fear the LORD God.” And the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was in bud and the flax was in ear. But the wheat and the emmer were unripened. And Moses went out from Pharaoh’s presence out of the city and spread out his hands to the LORD, and the thunder stopped and the hail and the rain were not sluiced earthward. And Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had stopped, and he continued to offend, and he hardened his heart, both he and his servants. And Pharaoh’s

27. *I have offended this time.* The terrifying display of celestial violence for the first time triggers a confession of wrongdoing from Pharaoh (and the terms “in the right,” *tsadiq*, and “in the wrong,” *resha'im*, reflect legal usage). But “this time” is restrictive, as though Pharaoh were suggesting: I did nothing to offend before now, but I admit, in the face of the destruction hurled from the heavens, that this time I have done wrong.

28. *no more.* Literally, “enough” or “much.”

29. *spread out my hands.* Spreading out the hands (literally, “palms”) is a gesture of prayer or supplication.

the earth is the LORD’s. Again, the scope of the theological argument reaches beyond the confines of the land of Egypt: the God Who has wreaked such inconceivable destruction on the great empire of Egypt is surely the God of all the earth.

30. *And as for you and your servants, I know that you still do not fear the LORD God.* Moses appears to be shrewdly reading the grudging nature of Pharaoh’s admission, “I have offended this time.” And Pharaoh’s reversal of direction after each of the previous plagues scarcely inspires confidence that he has now undergone a change of heart. The phrase “you still do not fear the LORD God” neatly straddles both senses of the idiom (see the comment on verse 20); Pharaoh is far from fearing the LORD, as Moses recognizes, in the sense of pious submission to divine authority. He does fear the LORD’s destructive power—that is why he is pleading with Moses—but probably not sufficiently to prevent him from renewing his obduracy.

31. *flax and barley.* Umberto Cassuto reminds us that flax was used to make linen, a principal Egyptian fabric for clothing (and also an important Egyptian export item), and goes on to suggest that the barley would have been used for cheap bread to feed slaves.

34. *and he continued to offend.* This phrase was not used in the earlier reports of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. It is directly motivated by the language of his confession: after saying “I have offended this time” as the thunder and hail rattle down, he finds himself once more under blue skies and directly proceeds to offend again by reneging on his promise to send off the Hebrews.

heart toughened, and he did not send off the Israelites, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

- 1 CHAPTER 10 And the LORD said to Moses, “Come into Pharaoh, for I Myself have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants,
 2 so that I may set these signs of Mine in his midst, and so that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son how I toyed with Egypt, and My signs that I set upon them, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”
 3 And Moses, and Aaron with him, came into Pharaoh, and they said to him, “Thus said the LORD, God of the Hebrews: ‘How long can you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Send off My people, that they may worship Me.
 4 For if you refuse to send off My people, look, I am about to bring tomorrow
 5 locust in all your territory. And it will cover the eye of the land, and one will

CHAPTER 10 1. *for I Myself have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants.* This is the first time that God informs Moses before his audience with Pharaoh that He has hardened (once again, the literal sense is “made heavy”) the heart of the Egyptian monarch. This is a signal that the elaborate toying (verse 2) with Egypt is approaching endgame: Pharaoh is showing himself ever more fiercely recalcitrant, and the plagues are becoming more fearful as we draw near the last plague which will break Pharaoh’s will.

2. *so that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son.* The rationale of establishing God’s enduring fame shifts here from the global scope of Exodus 9:16 (“that My name will be told through all the earth”) to a consideration of educating the future nation. Confirming the LORD’s supremacy throughout the world might be viewed as a kind of monotheistic ideal, though not a very realistic one. The particular importance of the Exodus story is that it served as the foundational narrative for the nation.

3. *How long can you refuse to humble yourself before Me?* These words are a translation into other terms of the just announced hardening of Pharaoh’s heart by God, and thus constitute a strong indication that events caused by God and events flowing from human will, or willfulness, are merely different biblical ways of accounting for the same phenomenon. It should be noted that the language God directs to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron has become more confrontational: now Pharaoh is inveighed against not only for blocking Israel from fulfilling its obligations to God but for failing to humble himself before God—humble submission being the last thing the supreme monarch of Egypt would imagine he would ever have to do.

4. *locust.* The Hebrew, like this translation, uses a collective noun. In verse 6, when the narrator wants to emphasize the multiplicity of the locusts invading every nook and cranny of Egypt, he switches to a plural verb.

5. *it will cover the eye of the land.* This striking Hebrew metaphor seems worth preserving in English. The Hebrew ‘*ayin*, which has the primary meaning of “eye,” obviously suggests something like “surface,” “aspect,” or “look” in this context. It is a linguistic usage common to many languages in which the object of the organ of perception shares a designation with