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The Sabbath School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter Lesson 19, Dec. 9, 1901

MOSES AND PHARAOH.— Exodus 11: 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The angel of his presence saved them.—Isa. 63: 9

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—The plagues lasted nine or ten months, from June to the following April. In B. C. 1492-91, by the common reckoning; about 1300, according to Prof. or Price. The monuments of Egypt, refer to the death of a son of Manepthah and ominous uprisings in 1276 B. C.

Place.—The meetings of Moses with Pharaoh were at the capital, Zoan (Tanis), and the central place of the "marvellous things" was the field of Zoan. Moses—80 years old.

JUDGMENTS THAT WERE MERCIES.

The object in view was the deliverance of the Israelites, and the forming them into a nation which should be the representative of the one true God, and the means of bringing the whole world into his kingdom.

Two things were necessary: (1) Pharaoh must be made willing to let the people go free; and (2) the people must be willing to go.

The first work of Moses and Aaron was to convince the people that God had sent them, that the people could escape from bondage, and that the time had come. They did this by calling the elders together and telling them their message from God. Then they worked three miracles,—the rod and the serpent, the leprous hand cleansed, and some Nile water changed before them into blood (4: 1-9), as signs that God had sent them.

The result was that the people believed.

The second work was to present their request to Pharaoh in the name of the Lord God of Israel, "Let my people go." At first the request was to go three days into the wilderness on a special service of worship. To demand more might have seemed extravagant. It was an honest request, and the conditions would have been complied with. But it would have led to larger requests in due time.

The result was an indignant refusal, and an intensifying of their sufferings. The people blamed Moses for their sufferings.

The Third Work. Moses for a time was greatly discouraged. But God comforted him, renewed his promises; told him that the refusal of Pharaoh would work out good (5: 20-6: 13). The people would be more ready in the end to break their chains. Moses therefore went again to Pharaoh and wrought before him the three signs he had shown to the Israelites. But the magicians counterfeited what Moses did. After three thousand years, their successors are still performing the same curious trick. The Egyptian juggler takes up in his hand the naja,—a small viper,—and, pressing a finger on the nape of its neck, puts it into a catalepsy, which makes it motionless and stiff, like a rod; and when it regains its power of motion, the bystanders fancy that the magician's rod has been changed into a serpent. Moses showed the difference between the two kinds of work by his rod swallowing up the rods of the magicians.

The result was that Pharaoh still hardened his heart, and refused to let the people go.

Increase in severity. The plagues gradually increase in severity till the last terrible plague accomplishes the desired result. If a small trouble had made Pharaoh willing, that is all that would have been inflicted. But it had to go on with increasing severity till the object was accomplished.

The purpose of the plagues. The purpose of these plagues was double: (1) to make Pharaoh understand and honor the true God, and realize the evil of resisting his commands, till he should release the people; (2) to exalt God in the hearts of the Israelites so that they would trust in him.

A blow against idolatry. Each plague was directed against some object of idol worship, "dealt a blow upon the priesthood or the sacrifice or invaded a sphere which some deity should have protected. They ranged through all nature, and showed that Jehovah was the one God, and mightier than all the forces the Egyptians trusted in. He could send and he could remove. The fact that Hebrews were exempt from the plagues proved the superiority of their God."

FIRST PLAGUE: TURNING THE WATERS OF EGYPT INTO BLOOD, in June, for seven days, was directed against the Nile, which was worshipped by the Egyptians.

SECOND PLAGUE: THE FROGS (autumn) assailed the worship of frogs. "An ancient vignette repre-

sents the father of Rameses II. offering two vases of wine to a frog enshrined in a small chapel, with the legend, 'The sovereign lady of both worlds.'"

THIRD PLAGUE: OF THE LICE (October to November). The word includes poisonous flies and insects. Sir Samuel Baker says that in Africa "there is a kind of tick which lives in hot sand and dust, and is the greatest enemy to man and beast. From the size of a grain of sand, in its natural state, it swells to the size of a hazel nut after having preyed for some days upon the blood of an animal." The plague struck at idolatry, inasmuch as it came from the dust of the sacred soil.

FOURTH PLAGUE: FLIES (November). This appears to include winged pests of all kinds,—stinging flies, cattle flies, cockroaches, and beetles. "This was a blow at idolatry, since the most sacred symbol of the Egyptian religion was the scarabæus or common dung beetle of the country. It was sculptured on every monument, painted on every tomb, and on every mummy chest, engraved on gems, worn round the neck as an amulet, and honored in ten thousand images of every size: sad of all materials."

FIFTH PLAGUE: THE MURRAIN (December or January), still not uncommon in Egypt, struck at "the worship of Isis and Osiris, to whom the cow and the ox were sacred, and of the great god Amon, of whom the ram was the living symbol." A physician, for many years a resident in Cairo writes to a German paper that when the Nile has fallen the ground is filled with decayed animal life. "There can be no doubt that such a condition of affairs would bring a pestilence among the cattle. At present such a cattle plague is developed just in this way, and takes the shape of an inflammation of the spleen." The miracle lay in the unusual numbers, at a definite time, in a succession of such great plagues, and in the fact that Goshen was exempt.

SIXTH PLAGUE: BOILS OR BLAINS (Luther calls them "black blains"). They arose from a symbolic sprinkling of ashes from furnaces,—the special emblem in Scripture of the bitter slavery of the Hebrews. "In various Egyptian towns sacred to Set or Typhon, the god of Evil—foreigners, perhaps often Hebrews, were yearly offered in sacrifice to this hideous idol. After being burnt alive on a high altar their ashes were scattered in the air by the priests, in the belief that they would avert evil from all parts whither they were blown." But ashes now brought boils instead of blessings. "The Upper Nile Valley is the home of the smallpox, which there appears in its severest, or black form. This sickness afflicts not only people, but also nearly all kinds of domestic animals."

SEVENTH PLAGUE: HAIL, from a storm of fearful thunder and lightning, in February, as we learn from the state of the crops destroyed.

EIGHTH PLAGUE: LOCUSTS.—Wherever they appear they cover the ground for miles, and sometimes to the depth of two or more feet. It is in vain to attempt to drive them away. Only when the last bit of grain or grass is devoured do they depart.

NINTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS.—"In April, there begins in Egypt a period of fifty days in which peculiar meteorological phenomena occur. During this period the south wind at times brings a fine sand storm in great masses. Wherever the storm passes is heard a cracking sound as of electric sparks. A nervous depression seizes mankind. The period of this depression often lasts for several days. This is the Egyptian darkness. It is not impossible that it should result even in total darkness for the period of two or three days." Artificial light at such times is of little use, for it cannot pierce the opaque air. The streets are perfectly empty, and a deep silence, like that of night, reigns everywhere. Other plagues were worse in some ways, but this tended most to awe Pharaoh's heart with a ghastly foreboding. He commanded that Moses should see his face no more.

TENTH PLAGUE: DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN.—Vs. 1-10. All lesser punishments had failed in rendering Pharaoh willing to let the people go; but they had prepared the kings and the people so that the last great plague could succeed; so that not only he will let you go hence, but he shall surely trust you . . . hence altogether. In preparation for this the people were advised to obtain some small portion of what they had earned. Let every man borrow of his neighbor . . . jewels of silver and . . . gold. The translation of two words in this account, "borrowed" and "lent" (Ex. 11: 2; 12: 35, 36), has been peculiarly unfortunate, because it gives an entirely false impression, and charges a dishonest command on the part of God, and a dishonest transaction on the part of the

Israelites. The Israelites did not borrow, but "asked for," as in R. V. jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and garments. And the Egyptians did not lend but gave, "let them have" them. The custom is universal to give presents at the close of any service, as an expression that the service was satisfactory. The Israelites did exactly what is done down to the present day, only the Lord made them unusually liberal. Thus the Israelites had some reward for their long services, and we understand how they had so much silver and gold in the wilderness.

Moses was very great in the land. As the natural result of what he had done. Will I go out. It was distinctly God's work. All the firstborn shall die. The heaviest punishment, but the only one that would allow the people to become a nation. The maid-servant . . . behind the mill. The mill consisted of two flat millstones one upon the other. A woman sat behind it and turned the upper stone with her hand. But against any of the children of Israel. The distinction would make it clear that it was the Lord's doings, that his enemies could not resist him, but his friends would be protected. And all those thy servants. Moses warned Pharaoh that the next plague would be so terrible that he would not only be willing, but would urge, that the people go. And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. 1. "Hardened" is used nineteen times in this account, in which it is said eleven times that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, three times that he hardened it himself, and five times simply the fact that it was hardened.

2. What the effect is depends on the man. God did everything with the express design of making Pharaoh let the people go. The revolting idea that God sends his Holy Spirit to hearts with the express design of hardening them finds no warrant in the Scriptures. The office of the Holy Spirit is to soften and win the soul. God did to Pharaoh exactly what in the beginning he did to Moses, and for the same purpose.

3. Everything God did was right and good, and this good was used as the occasion for Pharaoh to harden his heart. It is the same to-day. 4. God made the natural laws under which Pharaoh acted, and by misusing which his heart was hardened. Every act of resistance and disobedience always hardens the heart. 5. When Pharaoh had hardened his own heart, so that there was no possible hope of his yielding obedience, than God, by his providence, by natural law, perhaps by the withdrawal of special influences, let him go on in his high-handed and blind course to his own destruction. This was the fruit and punishment of Pharaoh's hardening his own heart. God never hardens a willing and obedient heart.

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LOCAL OPINION is strong in favor of Pury-Balsam. It cures coughs and colds with absolute certainty. Pleasant to take and sure to cure. Manufactured by the proprietors of Perry Davis' Pain-Killer.

Go On, Sir, Go On.

Arago, the great French astronomer, tells us that he became so discouraged in the study of mathematics that he almost resolved to abandon his effort. He was just about ready to give up when he happened to notice something printed or written under the paper binding of his book. He unfolded the leaf and found it was from D'Alembert. The letter said: Go on, sir, go on! The difficulties you meet will resolve themselves as you advance. Persevere and the light will dawn and shine with increasing clearness upon your path. This striking passage made an impression upon the young mathematician's mind which he never forgot. It was a perpetual spur to his ambition, and came to him just in the nick of time. He resolved then and there that he would surmount every difficulty; then he would become a great mathematician himself. He tightened his grip and urged himself on until fame took him up and told the world the story of one of the greatest astronomers of his time.

Hanging on was one of Grant's strong points. He did not know how to let go. He would keep pecking away, no matter what the obstacles, until he triumphed.

The race is to the plodder. I have in mind several very brilliant graduates of last year and years before, who promised a great deal and of whom friends predicted great things, but somehow they have disappointed all expectations, simply because they lack sticking qualities. They are good scholars, and they imagined because they ranked high in college that they would rank high in life without great effort.

But they lack the hanging-on quality. They do not realize that, in practical life, the race is to the plodder, and not necessarily to the swift. This is why so many brilliant class leaders have become disappointments to their friends. The chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and lack of perseverance is a fatal deficiency which nothing else will supply.

Perhaps the greatest secret of success in life is due to those sticking qualities. Grip conquers the world—the faculty of sticking and hanging on when everybody else lets go. It is the five minutes more which wins the battle—the dogged perseverance, the determination of never giving up until death or victory comes.—Siftings.

The Century Magazine

will make of 1902 a year of HUMOR

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