

Pestilence & the Sword – Jews & Gentiles in the Babylonian Haggadah

בדבר או בחרב – יהודים וגויים בההגדה שלפסח לפי נוסח הבבלי

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1) Unique, Two-Part Exegesis

Standard Haggadah Text (ed. Safrai & Safrai, pp. 220-2)

בִּיד חֲזָקָה - זוֹ הַדָּבָר, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: הִנֵּה יַד ה' הוֹיָה בְּמִקְנֶךָ
אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה, בַּסּוּסִים, בַּחֲמֹרִים, בַּגְּמָלִים, בַּבָּקָר וּבַצֹּאן, דָּבָר
כְּבֵד מְאֹד.

וּבְזֹרַע נְטוּיָה - זוֹ הַחֶרֶב, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַחֲרָבוֹ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ,
נְטוּיָה עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

וּבִמְרָא גָדֹל - זוֹ גְלוּי שְׂכִינָה, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: אוֹ הִנֵּסָה אֱלֹהִים
לְבָא לְקַחַת לוֹ גּוֹי מִקֶּרֶב גּוֹי בְּמִסַּת בָּאֵת וּבְמוֹפְתִים,
וּבְמִלְחָמָה וּבִיד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֹרַע נְטוּיָה, וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדֹלִים, כָּכֵל
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לָכֵם ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ.

וּבִאֲתוֹת - זֶה הַמָּטָה, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְאֵת הַמָּטָה הַזֶּה תִּקַּח
בְּיָדְךָ, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בוֹ אֵת הָאֲתוֹת

וּבְמִפְתֵּי־הַדֶּם, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְנָתַתִּי מוֹפְתִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם
וּבָאָרֶץ, דָּם וְאֵשׁ וְתִימְרוֹת עֶשֶׂן.

דָּבָר אַחֵר: בִּיד חֲזָקָה - שְׁתֵּים, וּבְזֹרַע נְטוּיָה - שְׁתֵּים, וּבִמְרָא
גָדֹל - שְׁתֵּים, וּבִאֲתוֹת - שְׁתֵּים, וּבְמִפְתֵּי־הַדֶּם - שְׁתֵּים. אֵלּוּ עֶשֶׂר
מִכּוֹת שֶׁהֵבִיא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל הַמִּצְרִיִּם בְּמִצְרַיִם

"By a mighty hand" – this refers to the pestilence, as it is said (Exod. 9:3): "then the hand of the Lord will strike your livestock in the fields – the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep – with a very severe pestilence";

"by an outstretched [*netuyah*] arm" – this refers to the sword, as it is said (1 Chron. 21:16): "with a drawn sword in his hand directed [*netuyah*] against Jerusalem";

"and awesome power [*u-ve-mora gadol*]" – this refers to the revelation of the *Shekhinah*, as it is said (Deut. 4:34): "Or has God ventured to go and take for Himself one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts, by signs and portents, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and awesome power [*u-ve-mora'im gedolim*], as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?";

"and by signs" – this is the staff, as it is said (Exod. 4:17): "And take with you this staff, with which you shall perform the signs";

"and portents" – this refers to the blood, as it is said (Joel 3:3): "I will set portents in the sky and on earth; blood and fire and pillars of smoke".

Davar *aher* [another explanation]: "by a mighty hand" denotes two; "by an outstretched arm" denotes two; "and awesome power" denotes two; "and by signs" denotes two; "and portents" denotes two. These are the ten plagues that the Omnipresent brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt.⁶

2) Begging the Question

Midrash Tannaim, ed. Hoffman, p. 173 n. 9

וְהִנֵּה דָבָר הִיָּה הַמַּכָּה הַחֲמִישִׁית וְהִיתָה ע"י
הַקֶּב"ה בְּעֶצְמוֹ, וְכֵן הַמַּכָּה הָעֲשִׂירִית חָרַב זֶה
מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת, וְע"כ מְדַרְשׁ דִּילָן אַחֲרֵי שֶׁאָמַר 'אֵלָּא
הַקֶּב"ה בְּעֶצְמוֹ דָּרַשׁ בִּיד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֹרַע נְטוּיָה עַל
דָּבָר וַחֲרָב

And behold pestilence was the fifth plague, and was performed by God Himself. Likewise, the tenth plague – "the sword" – this is the plague of the firstborn. And thus our *midrash*, [just] after it said "rather it was God Himself," explicated "with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm," as referring to pestilence and the plague of the firstborn.

Ra'avan (R. Eliezer b. Natan of Mainz, 1090-1170 CE), Commentary to Hagadah

וּבִאֲתוֹת, זֶה הַמָּטָה – שֶׁעָשָׂה בוֹ מֹשֶׁה אֵת הָאֲתוֹת

[And with signs] this is the staff – With which Moshe performed the signs.

3) Blood

R. Aharon ha-Kohen of Lunel, *Orchot Chayyim* 1, *Seder Leil Pesach* (13th-14th century CE, Provence)

וּבְמוֹפְתִים פִּי' לֹא מִמַּכַּת הַיָּאוֹר קָאָמַר אֵלָּא "And with portents." The explanation: it refers not to the plague of

מאשר היו לדם ביבשת כאשר עש' האותות לעיני העם שעל ידי אותו האות האמינו בו כל ישראל	the Nile, but rather to that it turned to blood upon dry ground, when he performed the signs in front of the entire nation, that via the sign all of Israel believed in him.
Exodus 4:9 (ca. 1250 BCE)	
וְהָיָה אִם-לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ גַם לְשְׁנֵי הָאוֹתוֹת הָאֵלֶּה, וְלֹא יִשְׁמָעוּן לְקוֹלִי--וּלְקַחַת מִמִּימֵי הַיָּאֵר, וְשִׁפְכָתָהּ הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה; וְהָיוּ הַמִּים אֲשֶׁר תִּקַּח מִן-הַיָּאֵר, וְהָיוּ לְדָם בַּיַּבֶּשֶׁת	And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe even these two signs, and shall not listen to your voice, that you shall take from the water of the river, and pour it onto the dry land; and the water that you take out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land.

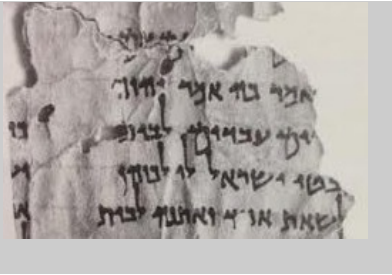
4) The Staff

Exodus 4:2-5 (ca. 1250 BCE)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו ה', מִזֶּה (מֵה-זֶה) בְּיָדְךָ; וַיֹּאמֶר, מֶסֶה. וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁלִיכֵהוּ אַרְצָה, וַיִּשְׁלַכְהוּ אַרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנָחָשׁ; וַיִּנָּס מֹשֶׁה, מִפָּנָיו. וַיֹּאמֶר ה', אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, שְׁלַח יָדְךָ, וְאַחֲזֵ בְזָנְבוֹ; וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּחֲזֶק בּוֹ, וַיְהִי לְמֶסֶה בְּכַפּוֹ. לְמַעַן יֵאֱמִינוּ, כִּי-נְרָאָה אֵלֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲבֹתָם: אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב	2 Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. 3 The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. 4 Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. 5 "This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you."
Exodus 4:17 (ca. 1250 BCE) – cited in Hagadah	
וְאֶת-הַמֶּסֶה הַזֶּה, תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה-בּוֹ, אֶת-הָאוֹתוֹת	But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.

5) Revelation of the שכנה

I Samuel 2:27

וַיָּבֹא אִישׁ-אֱלֹהִים, אֶל-עֲלִי; וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, כֹּה אָמַר ה', הֲנִגְלָה נְגִלְתִּי אֶל-בֵּית אָבִיךָ, בְּהִיוֹתְם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְבֵית פַּרְעֹה	A man of God came to Eli, and said to him: 'Thus said the Lord: Did I reveal Myself to your father's house, when they were in Egypt [in bondage to] the House of Pharaoh?'	
Targum Yonatan to I Samuel 2:27 (rooted in late 1 st – early 2 nd century CE, Israel; redacted in 4 th century CE Babylonia)		4QSamA (4Q51) IIIb (ca. 50-25 BCE)
וְאֶתָּא נְבִיא דִּי לֹת עָלֵי וְאָמַר לֵיהּ כַּדָּנָא אָמַר יִי אֲתַגְלָאָה אֲתַגְלִיתִי עַל בֵּית אָבוּךָ כַּד הָווּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וּמִשְׁעַבְדִּין לְבֵית פַּרְעֹה:	And the prophet of God came to Eli and said to him: "Thus said the Lord: I was surely revealed to your father's house when they were in Egypt and subject to the house of Pharaoh.	 <div>[...] said: 'Thus said the Lord... [...] were slaves to the House of...</div>

6) Pestilence & the Sword

Exodus 5:3 (ca. 1250 BCE)

וַיֹּאמְרוּ, אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים נִקְרָא עָלֵינוּ; נֵלְכָה נָא דֶרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בְּמִדְבָּר, וְנִזְבַּחָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ--פֶּן-יִפְגַּעֲנוּ, בְּדַבָּר אוֹ בַחֶרֶב	Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with pestilence or with the sword."
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