

The plagues



Exodus 5–10

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh twice to entreat him in the name of God to allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt. But Pharaoh became very angry. Under no circumstances would he allow them to leave. On the contrary, he made them work even harder and punished them more severely. Then God sent terrible plagues over the Egyptians while sparing the Israelites. Yet Pharaoh remained adamant.

The children learn that the Lord acknowledges Moses. The people begin to trust God.

Aaron and Moses bow deeply before Pharaoh. Aaron speaks: "Noble King of Egypt, we are here by commission of the Lord, our God. Allow our people to go into the desert for three days to celebrate a feast in the Lord's honour." Pharaoh replies: "What do you mean by distracting the people from their work? Back to work! Get out of my sight!"

Aaron and Moses have scarcely left the palace, when Pharaoh gives instructions for his overseers to be summoned. He instructs them to demand even more from the people of Israel. In future they are to deliver the same number of bricks per day, but the straw needed for this they have to collect themselves early in the morning. The workers almost collapse of sheer exhaustion. It is impossible to comply with the king's demands. The Israelites have to endure whiplashes and punishment. Angriily they blame Moses: "It's all your fault! Now everything has become even harder for us. And you promised us freedom ..."

Moses is very sad. His heart goes out to his people. Despairingly he turns to God in prayer, who answers him: "I am your God, and you are my people. I shall lead you out of the land of bondage. Pharaoh will have to give in. Go now to Pharaoh and speak to him. I am with you." For the second time Moses and Aaron stand before Pharaoh's throne. After Aaron has again explained God's will, he throws

the shepherd's staff at the king's feet. The king stares at it in horror... A snake! He immediately summons his magicians. They also have to throw their staffs on the ground and these, too, turn into snakes. The king laughs mockingly. Even when Moses' snake swallows the snakes of the magicians, Pharaoh is unimpressed. He wants to prove his power. Moses and Aaron are in despair, but God strengthens them. He has a plan which will prove that he is the true God. He decides to send plagues over the land of Egypt so that Pharaoh will finally allow the children of Israel to leave. God tells Moses everything he plans to do.

On the third occasion when Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh, they do so on the banks of the river Nile where Pharaoh has come to bathe. Moses speaks: "King of Egypt, my God has once again sent me to speak to you. Allow my people to leave this land." Pharaoh now becomes very angry indeed and wants to send them away, but Moses continues: "God is mightier than you. Look, this sign will serve as proof to you." Aaron hits the water with his rod and it starts turning red. The stream, all the rivers, seas and marshes of Egypt have turned into blood! Shocked, Pharaoh hurries back to the palace. This first plague continues for a week. All the fish die. The people desperately dig for fresh water. Moses returns to Pharaoh and warns him: "If you do not allow us to go, other plagues will follow." But Pharaoh does not give in. Already the very next day thousands of frogs appear from all the ponds, pools and rivers of the land. They are everywhere: in the houses, clothes, sandals, beds and ovens.

God is merciful, gracious and patient – Moses

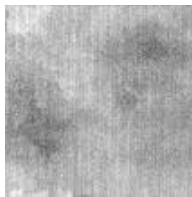
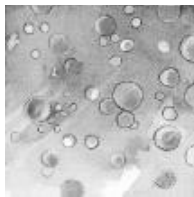
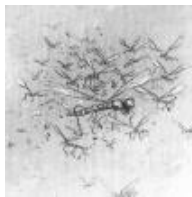
In desperation Pharaoh asks Moses to plead with God to rid them of these terrible plagues. He promises to let the people leave. As soon as all the frogs are dead and taken away, however, he changes his mind. New plagues befall the Egyptians. Soon tremendous swarms of flies cover the land so that even the sun is darkened. Those that have been bitten by these flies, itch unbearably. The third plague is hardly over when a new disaster follows: vermin cover the entire land. After this great numbers of the Egyptian's livestock die of a severe epidemic—but not a single animal belonging to the Israelites dies. The sixth plague affects the people themselves. Blisters and boils fester all over their skin. The people have scarcely recovered from this when a violent hailstorm ravages their fields. People and animals are killed and the crops in the fields, as well as the trees, are destroyed. Houses collapse. Those plants which have not been

destroyed by the hail, are later eaten away by enormous swarms of locusts. The land looks like a desert. Then total darkness follows ... For three days it is pitch-dark in Egypt, yet the Israelites have light. Finally the king says to Moses: "Go, but the animals remain here."

"But what shall we live on then, what shall we use to offer as sacrifices to the Lord? We will take our herds with us!" Moses replies. That is too much for the king. In a terrible rage, he shouts: "Get out and don't ever let me set eyes on you again otherwise I'll kill you!"

"I'm going," Moses replies calmly, "and I will definitely never see you again." Moses leaves and Pharaoh, filled with hate, watches him go. He is aware, however, that Moses emanates a mysterious power.

4



On God's instructions, Moses and Aaron kept pleading with the king to allow the children of Israel to leave. Pharaoh refused. Plagues befell Egypt, but the Israelites were spared. They saw God's power and trusted in him.

- 1 Moses and Aaron are on their way to see Pharaoh. They are led through the palace. Moses still knows the way. Many memories are awakened in him. The children relate what they remember of the first lesson.
- 2 The people of Israel suffer terribly under Pharaoh's oppression. Their worries, fear and hard work prevent them from understanding or believing God's word. They have not yet learnt to trust in God's help and strength. What do the children think of the Israelites' accusations against Moses?
- 3 We tell of the plagues by means of the pictures, emphasizing that the people of Israel were spared this suffering and destruction. The Israelites are more and more astonished at the might and power of their God. In this way they learn to trust God, as well as his servants, Moses and Aaron.
- 4 Let the children draw a picture of Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh.