

The Ten Plagues of the Exodus in Light of the Bahá'í Writings

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Overview

1: The Exodus Narrative and Theories

The Exodus narrative is an important ancient tradition. There is compelling evidence that the story does not represent literal historical facts.

2: Understanding Bahá'í References

The Bahá'í Writings sometimes refer to the Exodus narrative as if it really happened. These references validate the spiritual truths contained in the scripture; however, they do not validate the story as historical fact.

3: Inner Meanings in the Exodus Narrative

The Exodus narrative contains spiritual truths that are universally relevant.

Part One: Exodus Narrative and Theories

Exodus Narrative

- Israelites in forced labor in Egypt under a tyrannical Pharaoh
- Moses confronts Pharaoh “Let my people go.” (5:1)
- Moses inflicts the land of Egypt with ten plagues



Plagues

- 1 Water to blood
2. Frogs*
3. Gnats
4. Flies*
5. Diseased cattle
6. Boils
7. Thunder, hail, fire*
8. Locusts*
9. Three days of darkness*
10. Death of the Egyptian firstborns**

* False release

**Release, then pursuit



- Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt
- Pharaoh sets out in pursuit with the Egyptian army
- Moses parts the waters, the Israelites advance on dry land, Pharaoh's army drowns
- 13th Century B.C.*



* Finkelstein and Silbrerman, *The Bible Unearthed*, p. 57

The Exodus Narrative is Much Loved

- Cherished in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Bahá'í Faith, and cited in world literature
- Universal appeal: Illustrates victory of the Word of God over the oppressor and divine solidarity with the oppressed
- A central story in theology of liberation



Traditional View

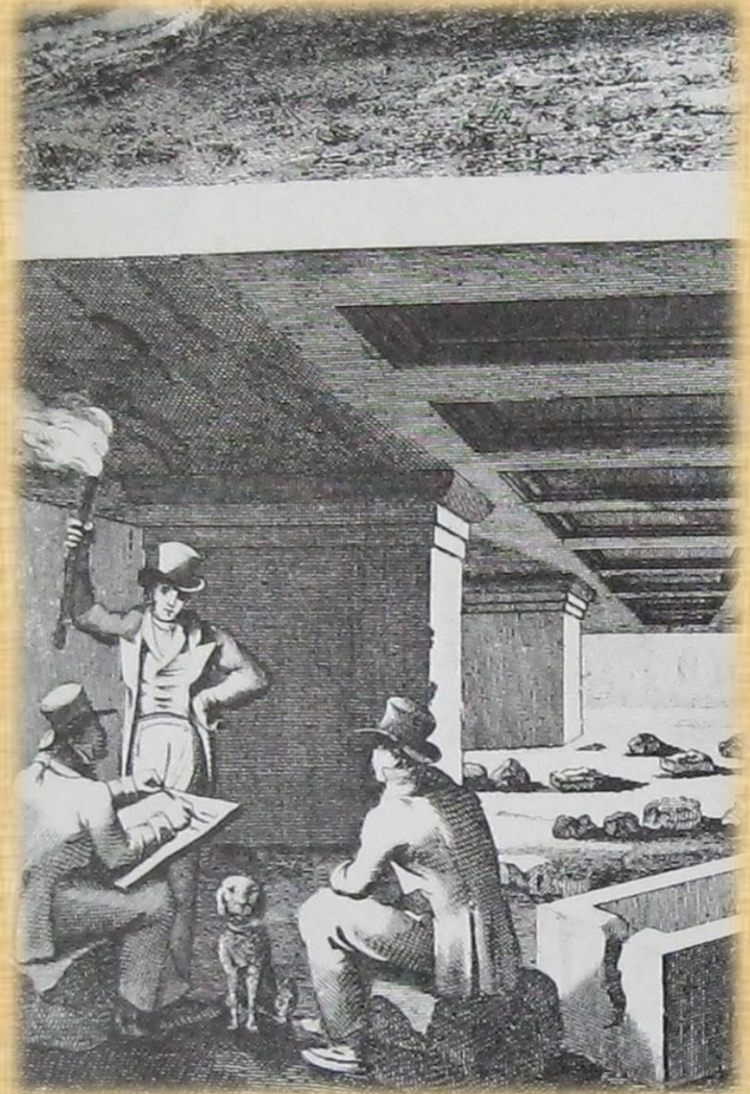
The Exodus as
an accurate
and literal
recording of
ancient history



Research from the last century in

- Archaeology
- Near Eastern History
- Ancient Literature

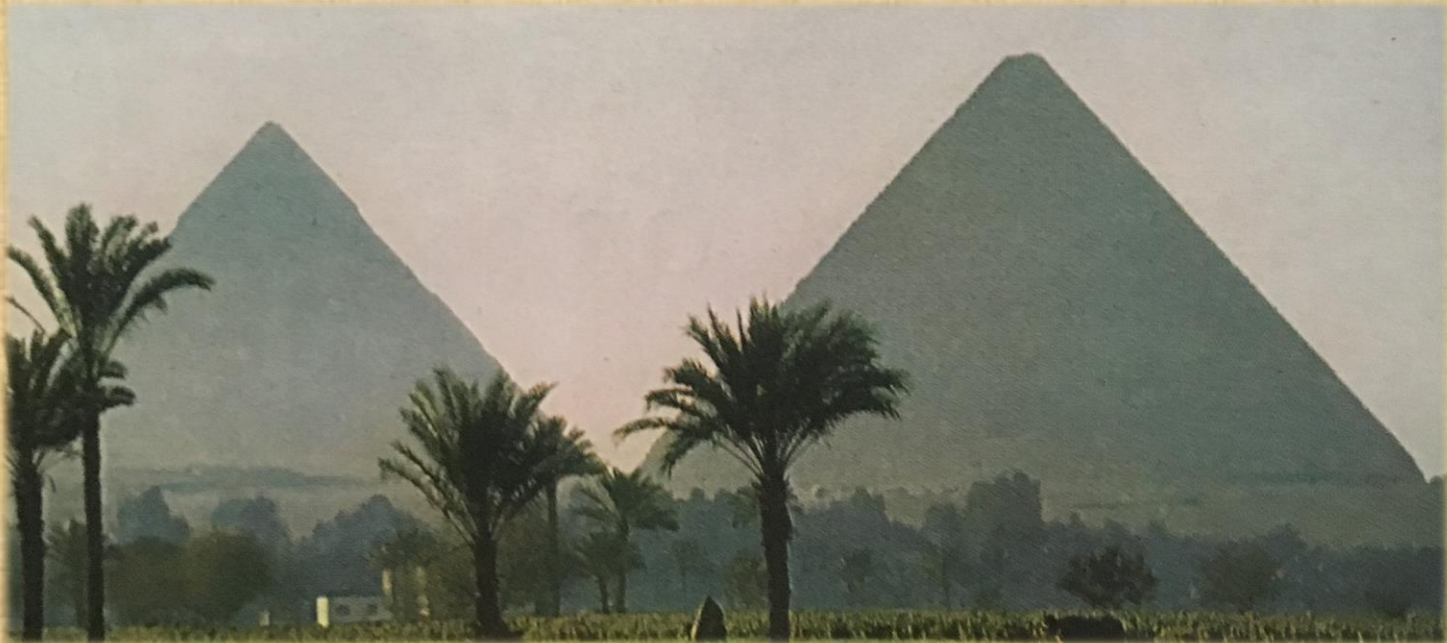
Shows no conclusive evidence of the Exodus events.



Elusive

The entire Exodus story “remains the most elusive of all the salient events of Israelite history. The event is supposed to have taken place in Egypt, yet Egyptian sources know it not.”

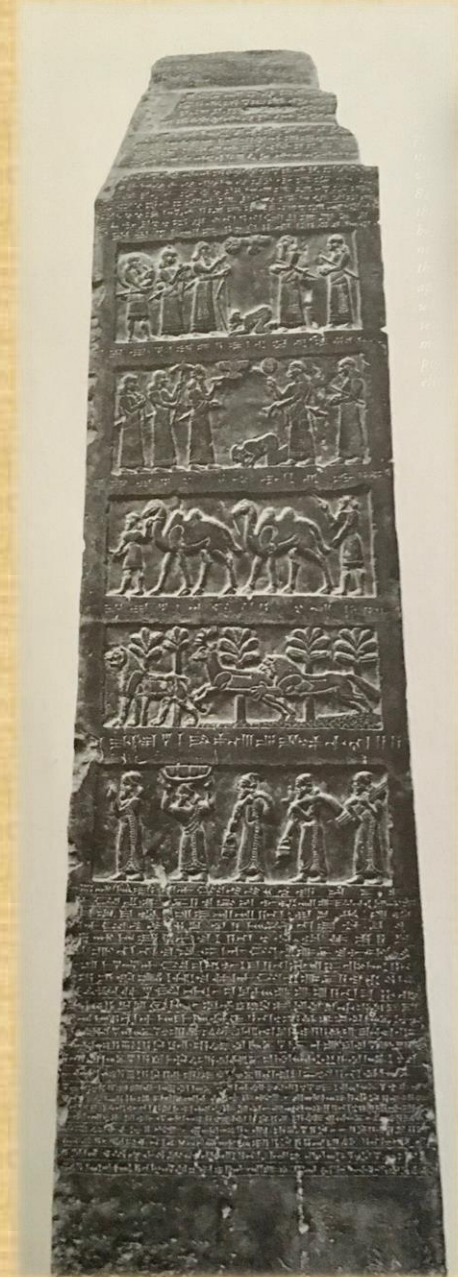
Donald B. Redford - Egyptologist, Archaeologist (*Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, p. 408)



Where Would one Find Traces of the Exodus?

- Artists and scribes of biblical times documented events on architecture, in tombs, on clay tablets, on papyrus.
- Over 100 years of steady archaeological excavation and interpretation have unearthed massive amounts of information.

(Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, pp. 16-19)

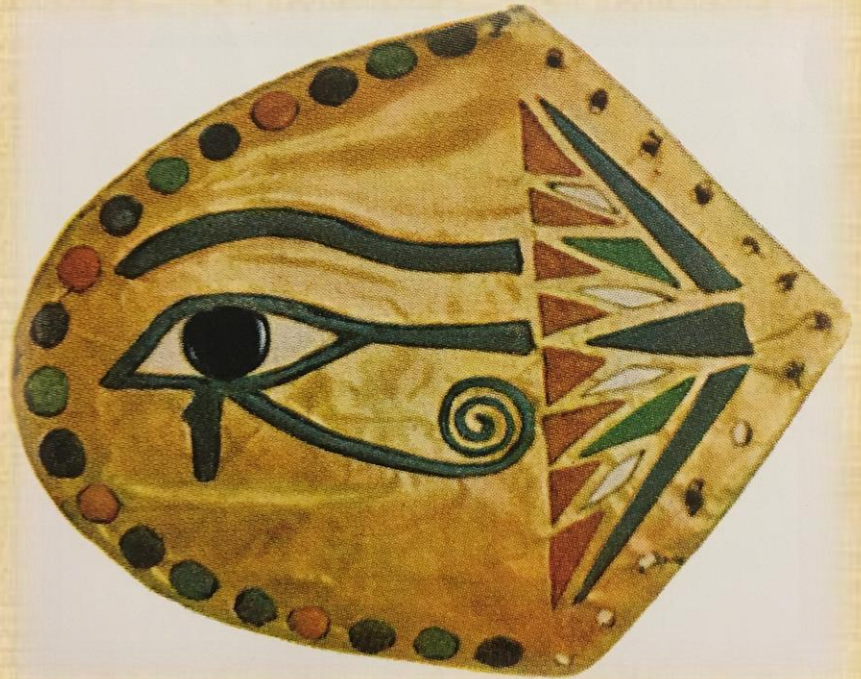


Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

Egyptian Archives

13th century B.C.
papyrus records show
the movement of
people in and out of
Egypt was closely
monitored and
recorded.

*(The Bible Unearthed,
p. 59)*



Lack of Evidence

“But we have no clue, not even a single word, about early Israelites in Egypt: neither in monumental inscriptions on walls of temples, nor in tomb inscriptions, nor in papyri. Israel is absent – as a possible foe of Egypt, as a friend, or as an enslaved nation.”

(Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, p. 59-60)



“There was no mass Exodus from Egypt.”

(Finkelstein and Neil Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, p. 118)



Natural Cause Theories

- Thera Volcano
- Comet
- Red Algae, anthrax

Chain of unfortunate events caused by a natural disaster

Natural Cause Theories

“Considerable scholarship, both scientific and biblical, indicate that the natural cause models cannot be reasonably sustained.”

(Mark Harris,
University of Edinburgh’s
Lecturer on Science and
Religion. “Science as
Salvation in the Exodus
Tradition” in *Moses in
Biblical and Extra Biblical
Traditions*, p. 21)



Trend in Current Scholarship

- Exodus is one of the “founding myths” of Israel, a literary masterpiece. (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 81-82)
- Draws on ancient traditions from many sources
- Reflects the geographical, demographic, and political situation of the 7th cent. B.C.
- Visionary ideology of King Josiah

(Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*)



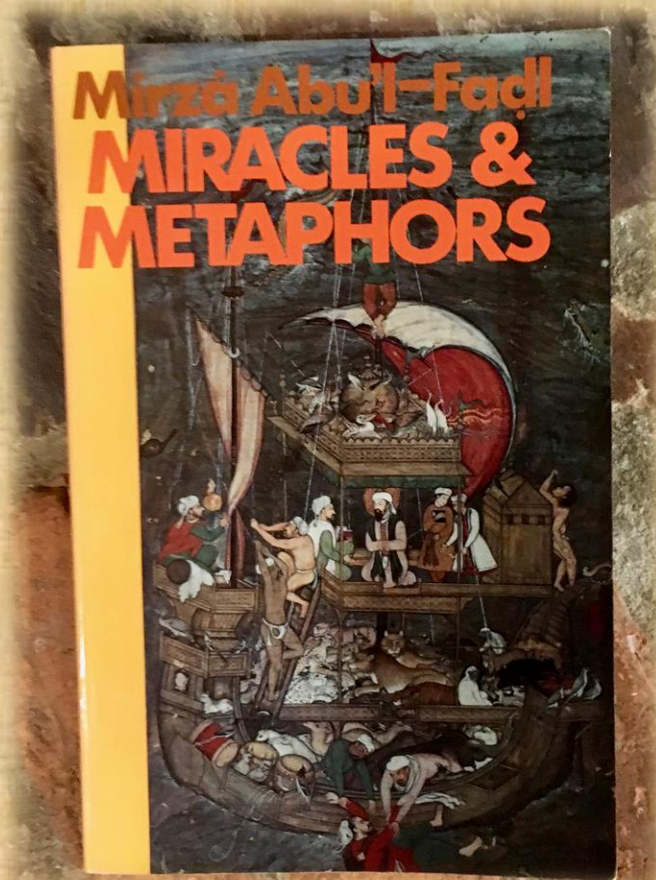
Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl

(Father of all Excellences)

1844-1914

“The most outstanding scholar of the Bahá’í Faith” (Momen, *Basic Bahá’í Dictionary*, p. 6)

- Apostle of Bahá’u’lláh
- Exponent of the Faith in Egypt (1894-1900, 1905-1914)
- Guided the Bahá’í community in North America (1901-1904)



Essays Published in 1900

Bahai-Library.com

Unimaginable

“It is unimaginable that the Egyptians, who depicted on walls every event, great or small, and inscribed in stone everything that happened in Egypt, should have neglected to mention such extraordinary and stupendous occurrences as Moses’ demonstration of amazing signs and the drowning of Pharaoh and his huge army.”

(Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl-i-Gulpáygání, *Miracles and Metaphors*, p. 16)



It Would Have Been Recorded

“The Egyptian History recorded even trifling events. Had such a wonderful thing happened as the parting of the physical sea it would also have been recorded.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá,
Daily Lessons
Received at ‘Akkâ,
Goodall & Cooper
p. 45)



Part Two

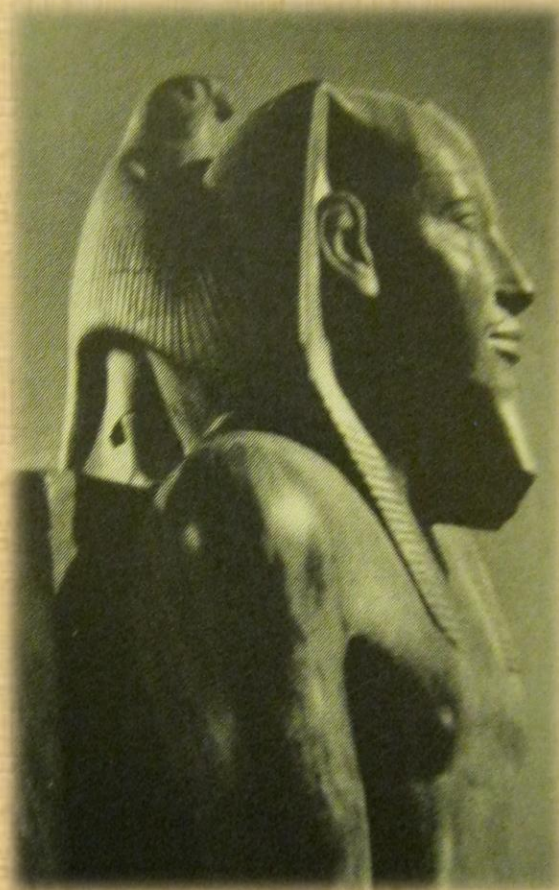
Understanding Bahá'í References to the Exodus

The Bahá'í Writings sometimes refer to the Exodus narrative as if it really happened.

Reference by Bahá'u'lláh

““And when His [Abraham’s] day was ended, there came the turn of Moses. . . . Surely you are aware of the fierce opposition of Pharaoh and his people, and of the stones of idle fancy which the hands of the infidels cast upon that blessed Tree.”

(Kitab-i-Iqan, par 12)



As Though it Were Truth

“Certain matters are in reality just stories, but the Divine Manifestations bring them out as though it were truth and discourse upon them.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Amr va Khalq Volume 2*, p. 211, provisional translation from the Persian)

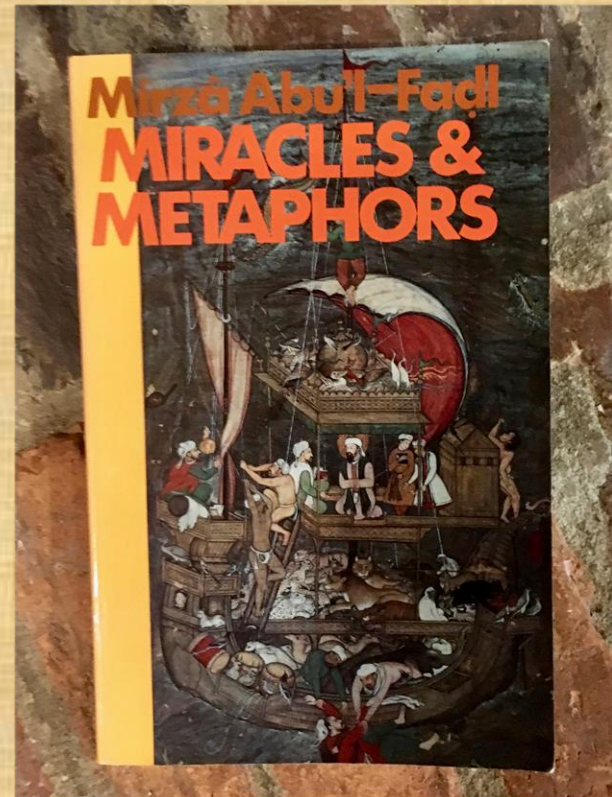


Indulged the People

“The prophets have indulged the people in regard to their historical notions, folk stories, and scientific principles, and have spoken to them according to these.

“They conversed as was appropriate to their audience and hid certain realities behind the curtain of allusion.”

(Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl-i-Gulpáygání,
Miracles and Metaphors, p. 9)



According to Local Traditions

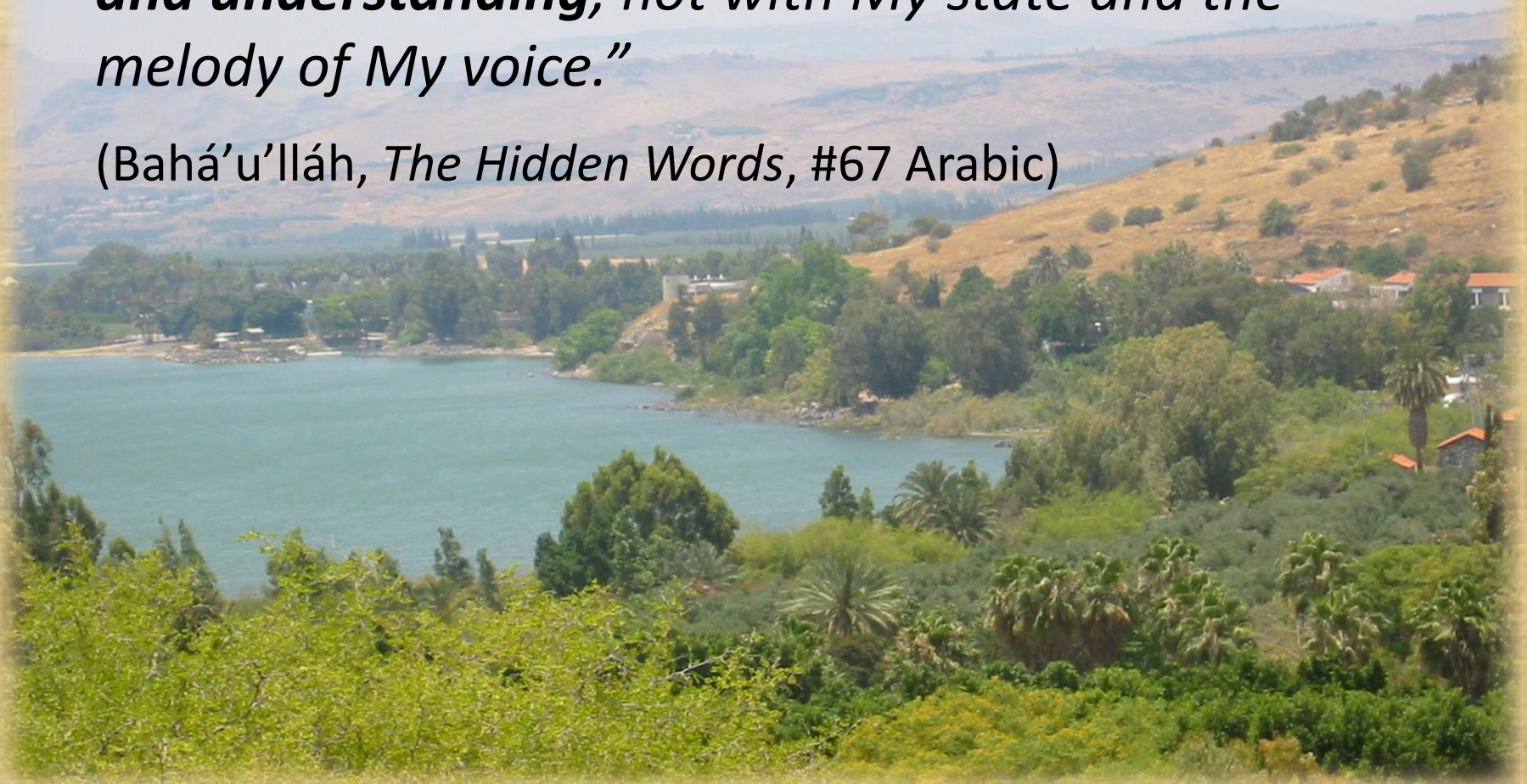
The prophets and Manifestations never “engaged in disputes with the people about their historical beliefs, but **addressed them according to their local traditions.**”

(Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl-i-Gulpáygání, *Miracles and Metaphors*, p. 14)



“All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been **in accordance with thy capacity and understanding**, not with My state and the melody of My voice.”

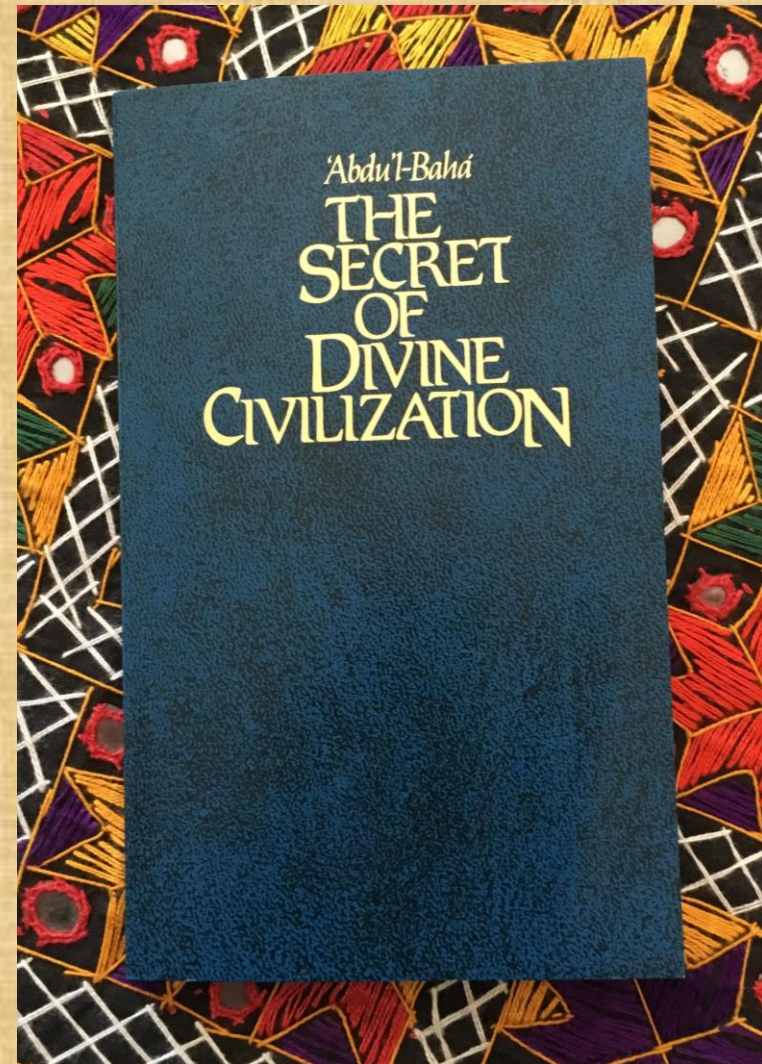
(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, #67 Arabic)



'Abdu'l-Bahá

Message addressed to
the rulers and people
of Persia, 1875

Includes references to the
Exodus narrative

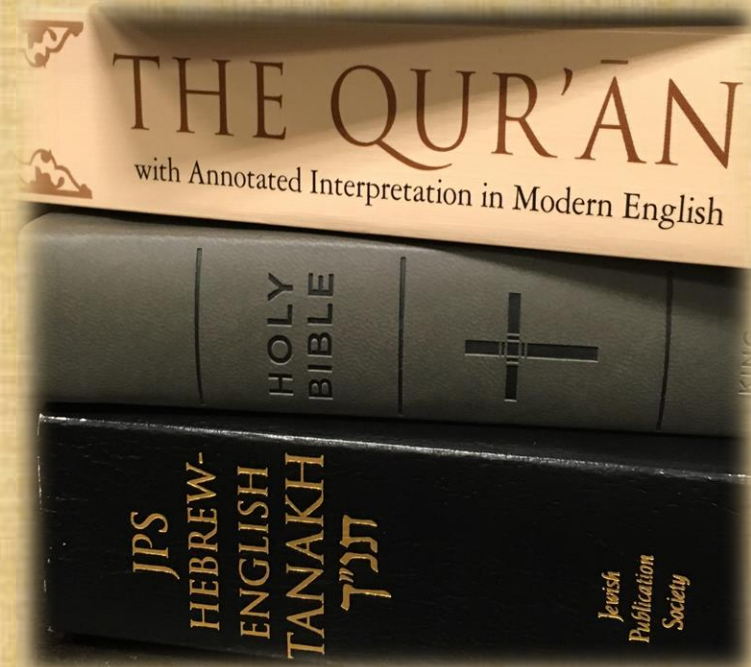


'Abdu'l-Bahá

Introduction to Discourse on the Exodus

“The events that transpired at the advent of the Prophets of the past, and Their ways and works and circumstances, **are not adequately set down in authoritative histories** and are referred to only in condensed form in the verses of the Qur'án, the Holy Traditions and the Torah.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 75)



Abdu'l-Bahá

Introduction to Discourse on the Exodus

“To preclude once and for all objections on the part of any of the world's peoples, We shall conduct Our discussion **conformably** to those authoritative accounts which all nations are agreed upon.”

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá,
*The Secret of Divine
Civilization, p. 75*)



Out of Ignorance

“He [Moses] led that lost people out of the shadows of ignorance into knowledge and perfection.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 75)



Purpose

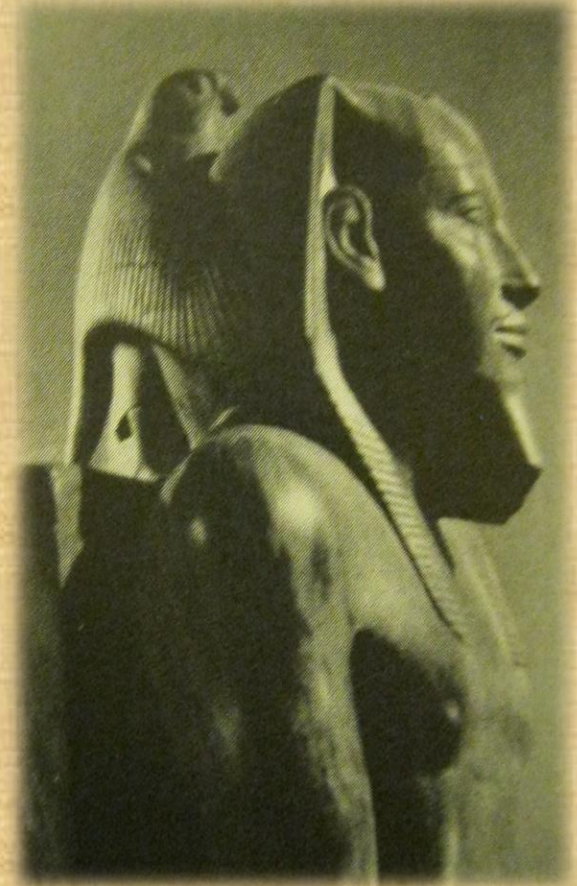
“Our purpose is to show how true religion promotes the civilization and honor, the prosperity and prestige, the learning and advancement of a people once abject, enslaved and ignorant, and how, when it falls into the hands of religious leaders who are foolish and fanatical it is diverted to the wrong ends, until this greatest of splendors turns into the blackest night.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 75)

Review of Reference by Bahá'u'lláh

““And when His [Abraham’s] day was ended, there came the turn of Moses. . . . Surely you are aware of the fierce opposition of Pharaoh and his people, and of the stones of idle fancy which the hands of the infidels cast upon that blessed Tree.”

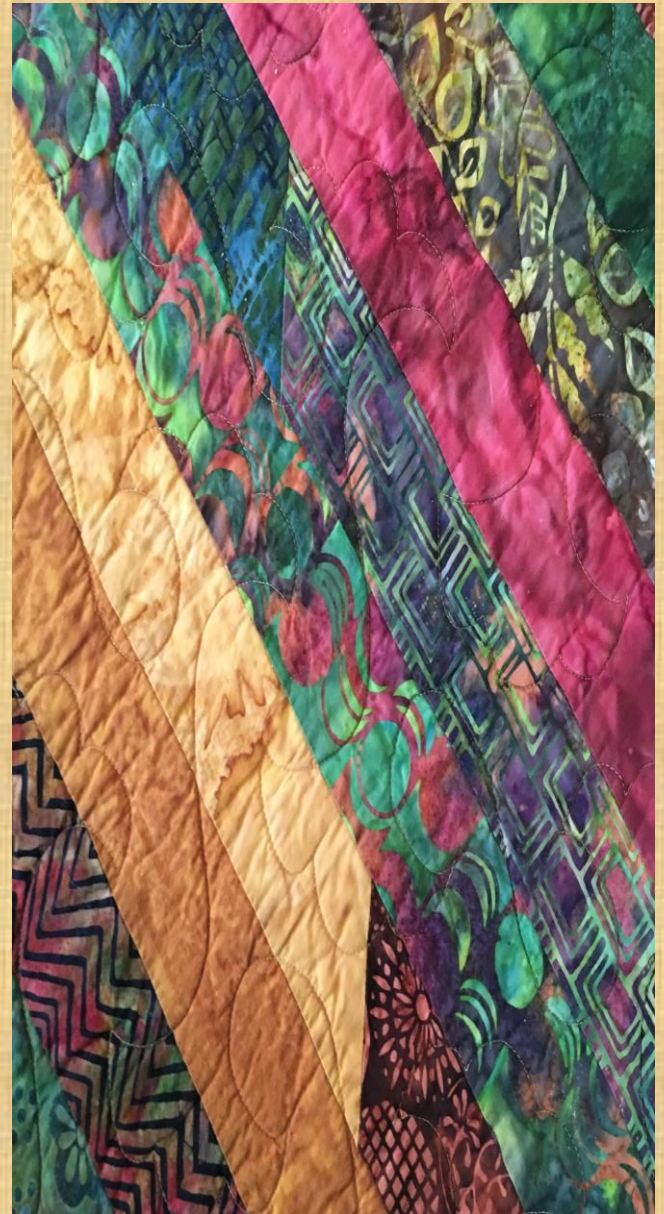
(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Iqán, par 12)



Divers Accounts

“A brief mention will be made in this Tablet of **divers accounts relative to the Prophets of God, . . .**

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, par 6)



Divers Accounts

“A brief mention will be made in this Tablet of **divers accounts relative to the Prophets of God**, that they may demonstrate the truth that throughout all ages and centuries the Manifestations of power and glory have been subjected to such heinous cruelties that no pen dare describe them.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, par 6)



Purpose -
Insight into this Age

“Perchance this may enable a few to cease to be perturbed by the clamour and protestations of the divines and the foolish **of this age**, and cause them to strengthen their confidence and certainty.”

(Bahá'u'lláh,
Kitab-i-Iqan, par 6)



Pharaoh/Unbelief

“The Pharaoh of unbelief can never hope to recognize the hand of the Moses of truth.”

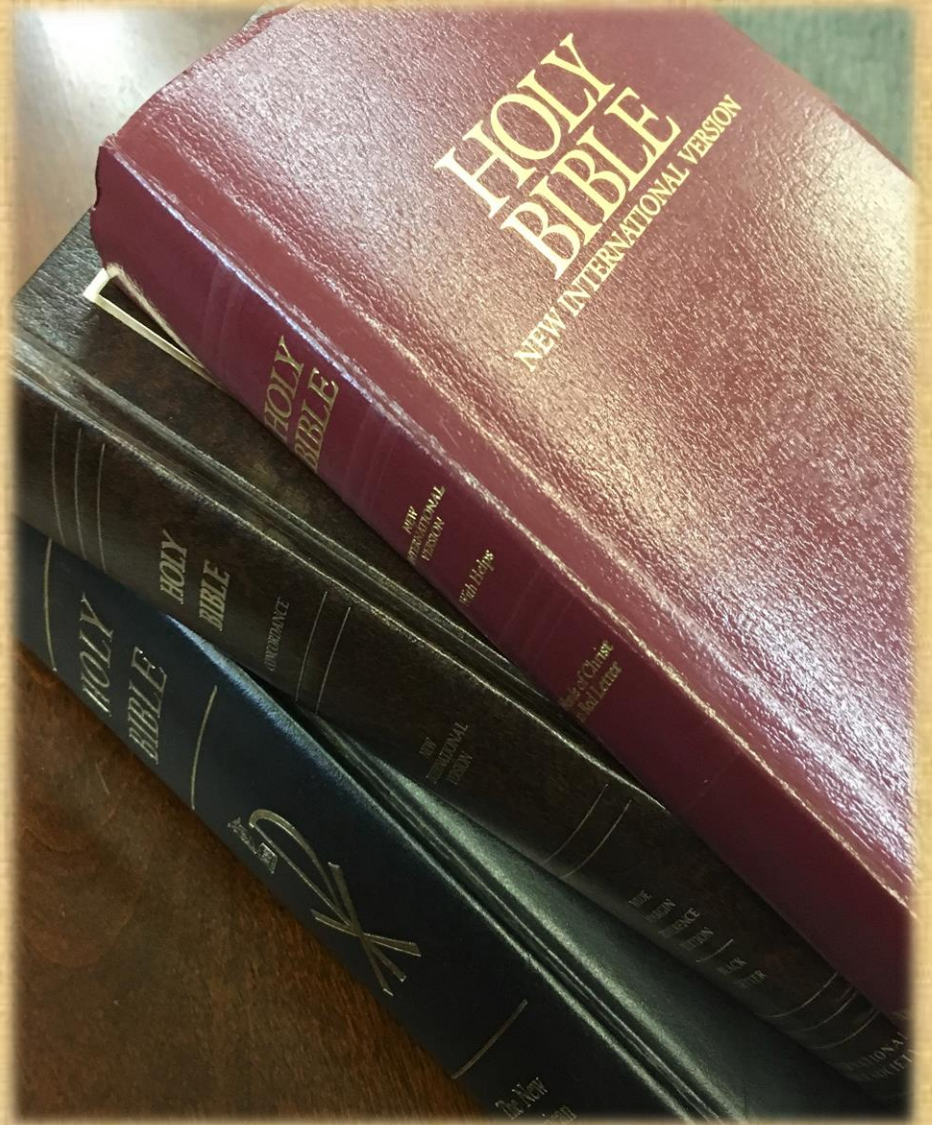
(Bahá'u'lláh,
Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 17)



Inner Meaning

“As these events have not been recorded in any history, it is evident that they are not to be understood literally but according to their inner meaning.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá,
*Some Answered
Questions*,
no. 10.5)



Part 3

Inner Meanings in the Exodus Narrative

The Exodus narrative contains spiritual truths that are universally relevant.

Not Confined to Same Connotations

“Although, in conveying His Revelation, the Manifestation uses the language and culture of the country into which He is born, He is not confined to using terminology with the same connotations as those given to it by His predecessors or contemporaries; **He delivers His message in a form which His audience, both immediate and in centuries to come, is capable of grasping.**”

(Universal House of Justice, “Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá’í Faith” 1998, Bahai-Library.com)

'Abdu'l-Bahá Interprets the Plague of Bloody Waters

“That which was the cause of the Egyptians life, through their ignorance and pride, became the cause of their death.” (*Some Answered Questions*, no. 11.17)



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**Nile (water)
symbolizes
traditional
source of
power and
wealth**



When your traditional source of power and wealth* comes between you and the Word of God, then what once sustained you becomes your poison.



*Family, skin color, social class, job, bank account, education, career, culture, nationality, neighborhood, religious community, social connections

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Interpretation of the Plague of Bloody Water



- Is a spiritual lesson
- Is not a history lesson
- Makes the story universally relevant, timeless

Crossing of the Sea

“The crossing of the Red Sea has a spiritual meaning. It was a spiritual journey, through and above the sea of corruption and iniquity of Pharaoh and his people, or army.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá,
Recorded by Goodall &
Cooper, *Daily Lessons
Received at 'Akka
January 1908*, p. 45)



Crossing of the Sea

“By the help of God, through Moses, the Israelites were able to cross this sea safely and reach the Promised Land, a spiritual state, while Pharaoh and his people were drowned in their own corruption.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Recorded by Goodall & Cooper, *Daily Lessons Received at 'Akka January 1908*, p. 45)



Plagues of Frogs and Flies Personal Interpretation

“Their articles signify nothing other than the buzzing of flies or the croaking of a frog of the material world.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Volume Two*, p. 9)



Plague of Gnats: Sound of Dismay

Personal Interpretation

“Take heed lest Thou falter on that Day when all created things are filled with dismay. . . . Assist Thy Lord to the utmost of Thine ability, and pay no heed to the peoples of the world, for that which their mouths utter is like unto the droning of a gnat in an endless valley.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 10)



Plague of Diseased Cattle: Materialism

Cattle are “without knowledge of God” and “deniers of Divinity.” They “understand nothing of the Kingdom and its heavenly mysteries.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 262)

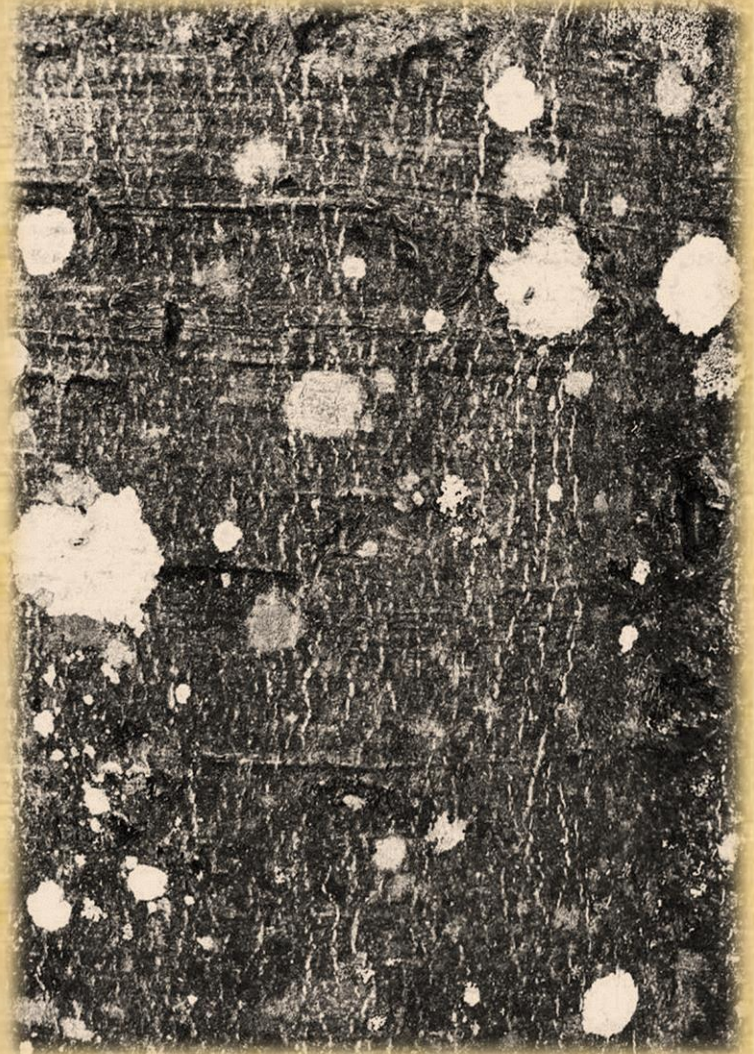


Photograph by Frances Worthington

Plague of Boils (Infections):
False Doctrines

“Dark”, “false”, and
“crooked doctrines” that
bring destruction on
“people who believe in
them” are “like
opportunistic infections.”

(Century of Light,
Commissioned by The
Universal House of Justice,
paragraph 537)



Photography by Ashley Borovicka

Plague of Thunder, Hail, and Lightning:
Wrath of God, Violation of the Covenant, Hail of Torments

“**Lightnings** of the anger and wrath of God will flash, the noise of the **thunder** of the violation of the Covenant will resound, the earthquake of doubts will take place, the **hail** of torments will beat upon the violators of the Covenant, and even those who profess belief will fall into trials and temptations.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 11.45)

Plague of Locusts:
Corruption

Corrupt officials
“prey upon the
people like a swarm
of locusts.”

(Introduction to *The
Dawn-Breakers*, p. xi.
Written by George
Townsend and
approved by Shoghi
Effendi)



Plague of Darkness:
The Darkness of Ignorance

The purpose of the Manifestation
of God is “first to liberate men
from the darkness of ignorance
and guide them to the light of
true understanding.”

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of
Baha'u'llah XXXIV)*

Plague of the Death of the Firstborns:
Failure to be Born Into the Life of the Spirit

“The ‘first birth’ is to be born into the ‘world of nature.’ In the second birth the spirit is born ‘out of the baser nature’ by acquiring ‘the attributes of God’ and thereby ‘lives forever in the eternal realm.’

“Pray . . . that the world of mankind shall be saved from the ordeals of ignorance, blindness and spiritual death.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 418, 441)

Review

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2: Understanding Bahá'í References

The Bahá'í Writings sometimes refer to the Exodus narrative as if it really happened. These references validate the spiritual truths contained in the scripture; however, they do not validate the story as historical fact.

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