

# **Fire & Ice**

**An Exegesis of Exodus 9:13-35**

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**Bible 1&2 • Rabbi Lisa Edwards  
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## Translation תרגום

### Exodus 9:13-25

**9:13** YHWH said to Moshe, “Eagerly-arise<sup>1</sup> in the morning and take-a-stand<sup>2</sup> before Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says YHWH, God of the Hebrews, ‘Send my people<sup>3</sup> to serve me<sup>4</sup>! **9:14** Because this time I will send all of my plagues to your heart, those-who-serve-you<sup>5</sup>, and your nation so that you will know that there is none like me in all the land.

**9:15** I could have sent my hand and struck you and your nation<sup>6</sup> with pestilence, and you would have been effaced<sup>7</sup> from the earth<sup>8</sup>. **9:16** However, for this purpose I have

<sup>1</sup> Heb. **הִשְׁכַּחְךָ**, an imperative form of **ש.כ.ח.** Some translators ignore its being a verb and simply understand it as a modifier to **בִּקְרָךְ**. For example, the New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translates, “Early in the morning present yourself to Pharaoh...” See Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1991), p. 45. Fox and Friedman both recognize that the command is to first get up. Fox: “Get-up-early in the morning...” See Everett Fox, *Now These Are the Names: A New English Rendition of the Book of Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1986), pp. 52-53. Friedman: “Get up early in the morning...” See Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah, with a New English Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 198. The word certainly means to arise early. See *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB), Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, Eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 1014. To simply translate as “arise early,” however, misses something. That the word is a verb suggests that it is a specific way of getting up, not just the time at which someone gets up. The implication of earliness, it seems, is that this is an instruction to get up quickly and “hit the ground running.”

<sup>2</sup> Heb. **הִתְנַחֵם**, hitpael imperfect of **נ.ח.מ.** The word literally means “to station oneself” or “to take a stand.” When followed by the word **לְפָנָי**, it can mean to station oneself “with implication of readiness for service,” or “holding one’s ground, maintaining one’s position before.” The latter seems to be the case here. See BDB.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. **שְׁלַח אֶת-עַמִּי**. NJPS and Friedman both translate as, “Let my people go...” See Sarna, p. 45, Friedman, p. 199. Fox, sticking closer to the literal meaning of the Hebrew verb, translates as, “Send free my people...” See Fox, p. 53. All of these seem to be addressing a problem (perhaps theological) with the idea that YHWH is specifically demanding that the Israelites be literally “sent to serve” Him, though not – at least in this case – necessarily sent free. Fox makes no note of this, but his translation seems to take “sent to serve” YHWH as an implication of being sent to freedom, thus equating service to YHWH with freedom. A literal reading, however, seems to suggest that the Hebrews are being sent from one kind of servitude (to Pharaoh) into another (to YHWH). See **וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי** below.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. **וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי**, qual imperfect jussive of **ע.ב.ד.** The root literally means “to work” or “to serve.” See BDB. It is the same root used when referring to enslavement, slaves, and servants. See Exod. 1:13, 6:5. In this case, it more probably means “to worship,” as in Exod. 3:12. The English word “to serve,” which can effectively work in both contexts, seems the most appropriate translation here.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. **עֹבְדֵי יְהוָה**. Given the usage of the same root in the previous verse to mean “to worship,” it would make sense that it could mean the same thing here. Since Egyptian pharaohs were understood to be divine, it makes sense that YHWH singles out Pharaoh’s worshippers for punishment. This is a battle of faith, and YHWH intends to prove that believing in Pharaoh is futile. For a similar usage, see II Kings 10:23, which refers to **עֹבְדֵי הַבַּעַל** (“worshippers of Baal”) in contrast with **עֹבְדֵי יְהוָה** (“worshippers of YHWH”). See also Psalms 113:1, 134:1, 135:1.

<sup>6</sup> Though the word **עַמֶּךָ** literally means “your nation” (and it is translated thusly), by implication YHWH seems to be saying, “I could have struck people, not just animals.”

<sup>7</sup> The choice of the English word “effaced” follows the NJPS. See Sarna, p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Though the word **אֶרֶץ** is consistently translated as “land,” here it seems that YHWH is talking about effacing Pharaoh from more than just the land of Egypt.

allowed-you-to-stand: So that you may see my power, and in-order-that my name will be recounted in all the land. **9:17** You continue to exalt-yourself-over<sup>9</sup> my people without sending them.

**9:18** Behold me!<sup>10</sup> I will rain down – at this time tomorrow – very heavy<sup>11</sup> hail, the likes of which has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded<sup>12</sup> until now. **9:19** Now send to take refuge<sup>13</sup> your cattle, and all you have in the field<sup>14</sup>. Every man and beast that will be found outside and is not gathered home-ward<sup>15</sup> shall be rained on by hail, and they will die.’’

**9:20** Those<sup>16</sup> worshippers of Pharaoh who were in-awe-of the-word of YHWH took in their workers and their cattle into their homes. **9:21** Those who did not pay-attention<sup>17</sup> to the word of YHWH abandoned their workers and their cattle in the field.

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<sup>9</sup> This translation reads **נִסְתַּחֲלַלְתָּ** as a hitpolel conjugation of **סָלַל**. See Propp, p. 333. This the only time the root appears in the Pentateuch. It is found 11 times elsewhere in the TaNaKh, almost always in qal form.

<sup>10</sup> The word **הִנְנִי** (not to be confused with **הִנְנִי**) usually begins a statement in which God explains something He is about to do. It is often followed by a hifil verb in the present tense, as is the case here. See Gen. 6:13, 6:17, 48:4, Exod. 8:17, 10:4, 14:17, 16:4.

<sup>11</sup> In Egyptian and Ugaritic, the root **.ג.ב.ר** can mean “to be heavy, burdensome.” In Hebrew, it can refer to something being difficult and burdensome. A large number of guests can be a burden to a host (II Sam 13:25), and a people can be difficult (1 Kings 3:9). See *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT), G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, Eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B Eerdmans, 1978), Vol. VII, pp. 13-18. In this case, the phrase “very heavy” is to be taken literally. The hail itself was heavy. See John Joseph Owens, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament: Exodus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Cassuto makes a strong case that the word **הִנְסַחֲלַלְתָּ** is not infinitive, but rather a niphil perfect. The unusual form is used in order to mimic Egyptian documents, which commonly use the phrase “since the country was founded.” See Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Israel Abrahams, transl. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> “...send to take refuge” is an attempt at translating the double verb **שְׁלַח הַעֲזֵז**. Fox handles it differently, suggesting that **שְׁלַח** (“send”) is a command to Pharaoh to “send word” (or to send instruction), and **הַעֲזֵז** (“take refuge”) is Pharaoh’s instruction to his people. Fox’s version reads, “Send word: Give refuge to your livestock...” See Fox, p. 54. It should be noted that the verb **הַעֲזֵז** (or, rather, the root **.ע.ר.ז**) appears only five times in the TaNaKh, and only once (here in Exod. 9) in the Pentateuch. Targum Onkelos translates “**שְׁלַח כּוּנֵשׁ**” (“send, gather in”). See also Rashi on Exod. 9:19.

<sup>14</sup> This is a literal translation of the Hebrew word **בְּשֵׂדֵי הָאָרֶץ**. Other translations, including NJPS, use the term “outside.” On one hand, NJPS may be correct, understanding that hail falls everywhere, not just on fields (see Exod. 9:22-23). This extraordinary hail, however, seems to fall only in certain places (see the repetition of the word **שֵׂדֵי** in Exod. 9:25). Propp points out that the word “connotes both a cultivated plot and the outdoors in general.” See William H.C. Propp, *Anchor Bible Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 334. Given this uncertainty, it seems appropriate to translate the word literally, as does Fox. See Fox, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> The letter **ה** at the end of **הַבְּיָתָה** is a suffix indicating direction.

<sup>16</sup> The Hebrew in verses 20-21 refers to individuals (lit. “he who was in-awe-of...” and “he who did not pay-attention...”), but is translated here in the plural (“those”) since the singular expression refers to anyone who fits the description.

<sup>17</sup> Lit. “put heart.” The idiom, which has survived to modern Hebrew, means to heed or to pay attention.

**9:22** YHWH said to Moshe, “Stretch-out your hand to the sky, and there will be hail in all of the land of Egypt, on humankind and on beasts and on all the grasses of the field<sup>18</sup> in the land of Egypt.” **9:23** When Moshe stretched-out his rod to the sky<sup>19</sup>, YHWH gave forth thunder-sounds<sup>20</sup> and hail, and fire streamed<sup>21</sup> earth-ward<sup>22</sup>. YHWH rained hail on the land of Egypt. **9:24** There was hail, and fire taking-hold-of-itself<sup>23</sup> in the midst of the hail, which was very heavy, the likes of which had not been in all of the land of Egypt since it was a nation. **9:25** The hail struck in all the land of Egypt, on everything that was in the field, from man to beast. And all the grasses of the field were struck, and every tree of the field was shattered.

<sup>18</sup> The mention of “grasses of the field” is particularly noteworthy, since the term suggests fields that require tilling by man and rain from God. Gen. 2:5 discusses a time when there was no grass in the field because God had yet to rain on it (כִּי לֹא הָיָה אֶלֶּהִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ). Here, YHWH is causing the destruction of the fields by raining too hard (or too heavy) on them.

<sup>19</sup> The preterit with the ו-consecutive is here subordinated to the next clause because of the emphasis put on the subject, YHWH, by the disjunctive word order of that clause. This translation clarifies that, though Moshe acts by raising his rod, it is YHWH that actually causes the hail.

<sup>20</sup> In Ugaritic, the root קול means voice, sound, and/or thunder. In Egyptian, it refers to the voice of God, a person, or an animal. It can also refer in a general sense to acoustic phenomena such as the sound of music and to natural phenomena like thunder and wind. In Hebrew, the root can refer to the acoustic perception of a rumbling sound. In both the singular and the plural, the lexeme קול refers frequently to “thunder” or “claps of thunder” and often appears with words for rain, hail, lightning, and clouds or pleonastically with ra’am. Only in two passages (Exodus 9, I Sam 12:17-18) does קול refer to an actual meteorological phenomenon; otherwise such thundering קול generally accompanies a theophany or is construed directly as the voice of God. See TDOT, pp. 576-580. The translation here follows Fox’s convention, which understands קול as thunder, but also preserves the word’s unique connotations. See Fox, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> The word תִּקְלֵךְ is notable. Propp notes that it is a “rare example” of a common root (ה.ל.כ.) used in an unusual form: “conjugated in the imperfect as a strong verb.” See Propp, p. 334. Alter calls it a “dialectic variant form rarely employed in the Bible and perhaps felt to be archaic, as a kind of epic gesture.” See Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 362.

<sup>22</sup> Here, the word אָרָץ is modified by a directional ה.

<sup>23</sup> The word בָּרָק־לְקַח־עַצְמוֹ is perhaps the most difficult to translate in the entire chapter. It can also be found in Ezek. 1:4. Cassuto says the term refers to lightning which takes-hold-of-itself “because it does not travel in a direct line, but in a zigzag fashion, as though it took hold of itself, every now and again, to turn back or turn to a side.” See Cassuto, p. 119. Ibn Ezra and Rashi maintain that the balls of hail themselves contain both fire and ice. Rashbam suggests that the term describes a violent storm that features hail, sulphur, snow, and smoke. See *Rashbam’s Commentary on Exodus: An Annotated Translation*, Martin I. Lockshin, Ed. (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), p. 86. Fox translates it “taking-hold-of-itself,” leaving the reader to decide exactly what this phenomenon means. See Fox, p. 54. This is a choice to translate the term reflexively, rather than passively (“caught up”). See Propp, p. 334.

## Structure מבנה

### Exodus 9:13-35<sup>24</sup>

I. Speech Report	9:13-19
A. Speech Formula: God to Moses	13αα
B. Speech	13 αβ-19
1. Message Commission Formula	13αβ-bα1
2. Message	13bα2-19
a. Messenger Formula	13bα2
b. Prediction/Oracle	13bβ-19
i. Instructions for Action	13bβ
ii. Knowledge Formula	14
iii. Expansion of Knowledge Formula	15-16
iv. Prediction of Judgment	17-19
(i) Indictment	17
(ii) Judgment	18-19
II. Narration of Response	20-21
III. Speech Report	22
A. Speech Formula: God to Moses	22αα
B. Instructions for Action	22αβ-b
IV. Execution of Instructions	23-26
A. Against Egypt	23-25
B. Exception of Goshen	26
V. Negotiations Dialogue	27-30
A. Speech Report	27-28
1. Speech Formula: Pharaoh to Moses and Aaron	27αα-αβ1
2. Speech	27αβ2-28
a. Confession of Guilt	27αβ2-b
b. Request for Intercession	28a
c. Concession	28b
B. Speech Report	29-30
1. Speech Formula: Moses to Pharaoh	29αα
2. Speech	29αβ-30
a. Agreement	29αβ-bα
b. Knowledge Formula	29bβ
c. Warning	30
VI. Description of Conditions in Egypt	31-32
VII. Execution of Agreement	33
VIII. Narration of Pharaoh's Response	34-35
A. Hard Heart (כ.ב.ד.)	34
B. Hard Heart (ח.ז.ק.)	35

<sup>24</sup> This outline is based on the structural scheme found in George W. Coats, *Exodus 1-18* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 60-64.

Exodus 9:13-31 is a discrete piece of the Torah's recounting of the exodus from Egypt. More specifically, it is part of the epic narrative that tells of the ten plagues inflicted on Egypt by YHWH.

Much has been written on the structure of the entire plague narrative. Most scholars agree that the ten plagues can be broken into four groups: three series of three plagues each, and then the final plague, which stands on its own.<sup>25</sup>

The following table illustrates this organizational break-down of the plague narrative.<sup>26</sup>

	<b>Plague</b>	<b>Exodus Source</b>	<b>Forewarning</b>	<b>Time Indication of Warning</b>	<b>Instruction Formula</b>	<b>Agent</b>
<b>First Series</b>	1. Blood	7:14-24	yes	"in the morning"	"Station yourself..."	Aaron
	2. Frogs	7:25-8:11	yes	none	"Go to Pharaoh"	Aaron
	3. Lice	8:12-15	none	none	none	Aaron
<b>Second Series</b>	4. Insects	8:16-28	yes	"in the morning"	"Station yourself..."	God
	5. Pestilence	9:1-7	yes	none	"Go to Pharaoh"	God
	6. Boils	9:8-12	none	none	none	God/Moses
<b>Third Series</b>	7. Hail	9:13-35	yes	"in the morning"	"Station yourself..."	Moses
	8. Locusts	10:1-20	yes	none	"Go to Pharaoh"	Moses
	9. Darkness	10:21-23	none	none	none	Moses
<b>Climax</b>	10. Death of Egyptian firstborn	11:4-7, 12:29-30	yes	none	none	God

<sup>25</sup> Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1986), p. 77. See also Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus* (Jersey City, N.J.: KTAV, 1992), p. 189.

<sup>26</sup> This table is based on similar charts in Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 76, and James K Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 146-147.

As the chart illustrates, each set of plagues share a number of characteristics. The first and second plagues in each series come with forewarning, while the third plague in each occurs without warning. The warning for the first plague in each series comes “in the morning,” and the plague itself always begins with a command to “station yourself” before Pharaoh. The second plague in each series is ushered in with a command from God to “go to Pharaoh.” These “fixed verbal formulas” serve to “round out the design” of the literary whole.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, notes Martin Noth, the plague narrative is a discrete unit, a “symmetrical scheme” that is “clearly rounded off.”<sup>28</sup>

Sarna points out that the plague narrative is one of three episodes in the TaNaKh where “fixed literary formulas” can be found “punctuating” the story. In Genesis, the creation narrative is recounted according to a “schematized arrangement” whereby God’s formation of the world

...is laid out as a systematic progression from chaos to cosmos through a series of six successive units of time culminating in a climactic seventh that pertains only to God. The creative acts are arranged in two corresponding groups, each comprising four productions within three days, while the third day each time witnesses two creations.<sup>29</sup>

This sort of “parallel literary symmetry” can also be found in the opening prose narrative of the Book of Job. There, the protagonist is beset by a series of misfortunes, organized into three groups of two, followed by a “divinely wrought seventh calamity.”<sup>30</sup>

Other commentators note a different organizational structure. Benno Jacob suggests that the plagues be divided into two groups:

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<sup>27</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 68-69.

<sup>29</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>30</sup> Sarna, “Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957), pp. 13-25.

It might be simple to divide the plagues into two groups, those stemming from *earth* and those from *heaven*. The blows of the first two rounds came from earth while those of the third round came from heaven; the sixth plague (the soot tossed heavenward) formed the transition. The former were troublesome, but did not endanger life, while the latter deprived the Egyptians of their source of food, freedom of movement, and life itself.<sup>31</sup>

Jacob's conception mimics popular structural analysis of the Ten Commandments, which understand the first group as being "between humans and God" and the second group as being "between humans and their fellows," with "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy." and "Honor your father and mother" serving as transitions between the two series.<sup>32</sup>

Sarna notes that the plagues' structural symmetry serves as proof of "God's active presence in the life of the world."<sup>33</sup> Such a world is one where events take place according to a certain order, through which God makes His presence known. Sarna writes,

In the case of the plagues, in particular, precisely because the first nine are rooted in familiar afflictions, the literary presentation stresses that they are not a fortuitous succession of random, senseless visitations of Nature's blind fury, but the calculated, purposeful, directed, and controlled workings of the Divine Intelligence.<sup>34</sup>

This carefully-constructed literary structure is almost certainly the work of the Biblical redactor, since the plague narrative contains material from the three Biblical authors known as "J," "E," and "P." These authors can be identified by two distinct "narrative threads" evident in the text: one representing the combined efforts of J and E,

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<sup>31</sup> Jacob, p. 189.

<sup>32</sup> This division of the commandments in Exodus 20 can be found among commentators as early as Josephus ("Ant." iii. 5, § 4) and Philo ("De Decalogo," § 12, δύο πεντάδας).

<sup>33</sup> Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Sarna is explicitly responding to Greta Hort's theory of natural succession, which will be discussed later. See Greta Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 69:84–103 (1957) and 70:48–59 (1958).

and other from P. These “narrative threads” or “narrative frameworks” (Noth uses both terms) “run alongside each other” to make up the complete narrative. It is, however, unclear whether all the original authors included all ten plagues in their accounts. It is possible that each account included a lesser number of plagues (probably seven), and the redactor’s amalgamated version added up to ten.<sup>35</sup> This suggestion is supported by the presence of two “parallel narratives” in the Book of Psalms that retell the story of the plagues. Both cases – Psalm 78:42-51 and Psalm 105: 28-36 – feature seven plagues each, though the Psalmist’s accounts are not consistent with each other. Psalm 78, for example, does not include any mention of darkness, whereas Psalm 105 leaves out pestilence. Both accounts, it should be noted, include hail.<sup>36</sup>

In the case of the plague of hail (Exod. 9:13-35), there is some disagreement over authorship. Some scholars agree that the section “reads pretty much like a homogenous story,” that is largely based on a J-authored scaffold with “fragments” from E and P as well as “redactional additions.”<sup>37</sup> This view is shared by a number of modern exegetes, including J. Coert Rylaarsdam, a prominent scholar of documentary hypothesis.<sup>38</sup> G.A. Te Stroete, an expert on the priestly source, also concurs, noting the P origin of 9:35, as well as possible P fragments in 9:22 and 23a.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Noth argues that the episode is made up of *only* J and P, and argues against the presence of E fragments and redactional additions.<sup>40</sup> In light of significant scholarly arguments against him on this point, Noth’s assertion is hard to accept, especially the notion that the passage lacks redactional

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<sup>35</sup> Noth, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> For a comparative analysis of the three plague accounts, see Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus, Vol. II* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1996), p. 81.

<sup>38</sup> J.C. Rylaarsdam “Introduction and Exegesis to the Book of Exodus.” *Interpreter’s Bible*. Vol. 1 (New York: Cokesbury-Abingdon, 1951), pp. 833—1099.

<sup>39</sup> G.A. Te Stroete, *Exodus* (Roermond, Netherlands: Romen & Zonen, 1966), p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> Noth, p. 70.

additions. Even considering the prevalence of J in the hail narrative, the passage is too well-rounded and too artfully-constructed (or, as Houtman puts it, “pretty much... homogenous”) to have been cobbled together without editorial insertions to smooth out the edges.

Further evidence of redactional work is the presence of a number of key words that help the reader progress through the text. The presence of multiple words makes it difficult to categorize them as *leitwort*, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig’s notion of a “lead word” that “guides the reader.” Presumably, a text can only have one *leitwort* for it to be considered a *leitwort*.<sup>41</sup> The plague narrative, however, has a few key words that provide continuity. They appear in sections credited to J, E, and P, supporting the notion that a redactor edited and added to the original source texts so that they fit together.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Exod. 9:34-35. In previous plagues<sup>42</sup>, the narrative always ends with Pharaoh’s heart hardening. The text always uses one of two Hebrew roots to describe this: *ח.ז.ק.* or *כ.ב.ד.* The root *ח.ז.ק.* is understood to be a feature of the P source, while *כ.ב.ד.* is used in J. This does not mean that the narrative for a plague featuring *ח.ז.ק.* is definitely from the P source. For example, the bulk of the darkness narrative is credited to J, but Pharaoh’s reaction is described using *ח.ז.ק.* In such a case, the redactor combines pieces of both narratives to provide the reader with an amalgamated whole.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, transl. Yael Lotan (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2001), p. 11. See also Franz Rosenzweig, “The Secret of Biblical Narrative Form,” in *Scripture and Translation: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, transl. L. Rosenwald with E. Fox (Berlin: Schocken, 1936; English transl., Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 129-142.

<sup>42</sup> When speaking about the structure of the plagues narrative, Coats uses the term “signs” so as to include the “rod to snake trick” (Exod. 7:8-13) as the first element of the “sign cycle.” For Coats, hail is the eighth “sign”, not the seventh plague. See Coats, p. 60.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

The hail narrative is unique in this regard in that it is the only one of the “signs” that features both descriptors of heart-hardening.<sup>44</sup> The root .ק.ז.ח certainly qualifies as a “key word.” It appears fourteen times in the plague narrative, though only once (Exod. 9:35) in the hail narrative. Similarly, .כ.ב.ג.ר is frequently used in the plague narrative (twelve occurrences), three times in the hail narrative. In this context, it appears in two very separate ways: twice to describe the hardness of the hail (9:18, 24), and once to describe the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (9:34). In Egyptian and Ugaritic, the root .כ.ב.ג.ר can mean “to be heavy, burdensome.” In Hebrew, it can refer to something being difficult and burdensome. A large number of guests can be a burden to a host (II Sam 13:25), and a people can be difficult (1 Kings 3:9).<sup>45</sup> In first two cases, the phrase “very heavy” is to be taken literally. The hail itself was heavy.<sup>46</sup>

Other such key words include .ש.ל.ח and .ע.ב.ר. The former appears thirty-five times in the plague narrative (eight times in the hail account), and refers to four types of “sending”. First: “send My people...” (or, as most translate, “Let My people go!”).<sup>47</sup> Also, it refers to God “sending” Moses to speak with Pharaoh.<sup>48</sup> It can also refer to Pharaoh “sending” people to refuge, or “sending for” Moses and Aaron.<sup>49</sup> Last, it refers to God “sending” the plagues (or sending His hand against the Egyptians).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> It could be argued that the locust (Exod. 10:1-20) narrative also includes both. The root .כ.ב.ג.ר, however, does not appear as a description of Pharaoh’s reaction at the end of the narrative. Rather, it comes as a description of the expected results of the plague. See Exod 10:1b.

<sup>45</sup> See *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT), pp. 13-18.

<sup>46</sup> See Owens, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> For examples, see Exod. 7:16 and 9:13.

<sup>48</sup> See Exod. 7:16: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַחַנִי אֵלֶיךָ לְאמֹר (“YHWH, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say...”).

<sup>49</sup> See Exod. 9:19, 27.

<sup>50</sup> See Exod. 9:14, 15.

Similarly, the root ע.ב.ד appears a number of times in the plagues narrative. It can be found thirty-eight times in the entire narrative, seven of them in the hail episode. It is used in a number of ways: in reference to slaves, worship (or, service to God), worshippers, slavery/bondage, servants/courtiers, and labor. The frequent use of the root may cause a translator to wonder whether YHWH is specifically demanding that the Israelites be literally “sent to serve” Him, though not necessarily sent free.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See “Translation” section, above.

## Genre טפוס

The hail narrative – and the larger plagues narrative within which it resides – provides a controversial subject for scholars seeking to place it within a certain genre of literary form.

Some suggest that it represents an “original mythological battle in a historicized form,” though the notion is hard to accept because it has little grounding in the text itself (and is instead reliant on later references to the plagues in apocalyptic/Christian literature like Enoch and Revelation).<sup>52</sup> Others suggest that the narrative be classified as didactic literature, owing to the interests of the Deuteronomic redactor. Though this is based on observable evidence in the text, it focuses on the story’s redaction, not its provenance, and is thus incomplete.<sup>53</sup> Benno Jacob suggests that the plagues originated as legal literature, an assertion he supports by comparing the text to the curses in Deut. 28 and the laws regarding the rebellious son in Deut. 21:18-21. While Jacob’s analysis is clever, it is based on loose linguistic parallels and is, ultimately, unconvincing.<sup>54</sup>

A number of critical scholars agree on Martin Buber’s conception that the plagues represent the recurrent Biblical motif of “prophet versus king.”<sup>55</sup> This genre – labeled “prophetic legend” by Klaus Koch – is not really connected to the prophetic narratives found in Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.<sup>56</sup> Rather, “prophetic legend” refers to the prophetic narratives found commonly in the Pentateuch, as well as in I and II Kings.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), p. 143.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142-144.

<sup>54</sup> Jacob, p. 277.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Buber, *Moses* (New York: East and West Library-Harper Torchbooks, 1947), p. 60.

<sup>56</sup> Klaus Koch, *The Growth of Biblical Literature* (London: A.C. Black, 1969), p. 184.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander Rofé, “The Classification of the Prophetic Stories,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970), pp. 427-40. See also Childs, p. 144.

Prophetic legend narratives share several common elements. First, they are “transmitted in prose narrative style with a clear introduction and conclusion.”<sup>58</sup> Second, the story begins with God instructing the prophet to meet with a king in order to convey a prophetic message. These instructions include who to meet, where to meet them, and exactly what to say to them.<sup>59</sup> The instructions – God speaking to the prophet – come in the “messenger commission formula,” and are followed by the “messenger formula.”<sup>60</sup> As the following table illustrates, comparison of the plague narrative to other “prophet versus king” narratives uncovers a parallel structure.

	<b>Exodus 9:13-18</b>	<b>I Kings 21:17-22</b> <sup>61</sup>
<b>Speech Formula: God to Prophet</b>	YHWH said to Moshe	Then the word of YHWH came to Elijah the Tishbite
<b>Message Commission Formula</b>	“Eagerly-arise in the morning and take-a-stand before Pharaoh and say to him...”	“Go down and confront King Ahab of Israel who resides in Samaria... Say to him...”
<b>Messenger Formula</b>	‘Thus says YHWH, God of the Hebrews...’	‘Thus says YHWH...’
<b>Knowledge Formula</b>	‘Because this time I will send all of my plagues to your heart, those-who-serve-you, and your nation so that you will know that there is none like me in all the land...’	‘In the very place where the dogs lapped up Naboth’s blood, the dogs will lap up your blood too.’
<b>Indictment</b>	‘You continue to exalt-yourself-over my people without sending them.’	‘...you have committed yourself to doing what is evil in the sight of YHWH...’
<b>Judgment</b>	‘Behold me! I will rain down – at this time tomorrow – very heavy hail, the likes of which has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.’	‘I will bring disaster upon you. I will make a clean sweep of you, I will cut off from Israel every male belonging to Ahab...’

<sup>58</sup> Childs, p. 145.

<sup>59</sup> Koch, p. 186. See I Kings 21:17, II Kings 1:3, Exodus 9:13.

<sup>60</sup> Coats, p. 77. The forms mentioned here are referenced in the Structure section, above.

<sup>61</sup> The text from I Kings is based on the NJPS translation.

As striking as this analysis is, Buber and Rofé's notion of the plagues fitting into the classification of a prophetic story is incomplete. As Childs points out,

The pattern in Exodus is for God to announce the approach of the plague and then to execute it either directly or through his leaders. The sequence is immediate. The plague is produced by the direct action of Moses and Aaron, not by the prophetic word which is subsequently fulfilled. The power is not in a prophetic word which ultimately brings an event to pass, but in the prophet himself who possesses the charisma to unleash it at will.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, Elijah and Elisha can call down fire from heaven (I Kings 18, II Kings 1) and induce other miraculous "plagues" (II Kings 2, II Kings 7). Childs supposes that these instances – along with the plague narrative found in Exodus – represent an earlier form of prophet literature in which the protagonist is less a typical נביא, conveying power within a prophetic message, and more a magician or wizard who is known as a "possessor of power."<sup>63</sup> For this reason, Childs categorizes the plagues narrative as an early form of prophetic literature. Coats disagrees, though perhaps only semantically, and categorizes the plagues narrative as a *sui generis* genre he calls "Moses Legend," a subcategory of the larger "Moses Saga."<sup>64</sup> In the end, both agree that these passages from Exodus must be understood in comparison to the prophetic literature found in I and II Kings, and they simply disagree over whether the plagues narrative is part of the same genre or a different – though related – literary form.

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<sup>62</sup> Childs, p. 145.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>64</sup> Coats, p. 70.

## Setting מסגרת

Coats understands the setting of the plagues narrative simply. He dismisses the notion that it is related to cultic practice, though he admits that “this may have been the case” with the P document, a source which is found only sparingly within the description of the plague story. Rather, he understands the narrative (“and the larger history it is part of”) as “national lore, transmitted in the family from father to son.”<sup>65</sup>

Houtman concurs, noting hail in particular because it “fits the Palestinian milieu very well.” The plague of hail must have had impact on its earliest readers, who feared the damaging effects of extreme weather on their own crops.<sup>66</sup>

In analyzing the setting of the plagues cycle, scholars make much of the informational interruption that breaks the narrative in 9:31-32 in which the text notes that flax and barley were affected by the hail, but that wheat and spelt, which had not yet ripened, were unhurt. The section’s inclusion provides a dating reference, since flax and barley are harvested at one time of year, and wheat and spelt at another. To take the Biblical comment at face value, the text is indicating that the hail occurred sometime around February or March (or, rather, their Egyptian calendrical equivalent), when the barley and flax harvests take place.<sup>67</sup> Some commentators suggest that the informational note

... shows that the writer of these narratives had an excellent knowledge of the Egyptian agricultural calendar. The presence of this type of information could

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<sup>65</sup> Coats, p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> Houtman, p. 84-85.

<sup>67</sup> Childs, p. 159.

hardly be the guesswork of an author removed by a great amount of space and time from the events.<sup>68</sup>

Childs refutes this view, noting that these verses could reflect “a later archaeological interest... or a midrashic attempt to account for the continued existence of crops after the hail.” He notes that the “agricultural time” could be that of First or Second Temple –era Palestine, not Egypt.<sup>69</sup> Benno Jacob concurs. He writes,

We may be certain that the *Torah* was familiar with Egypt, but it rarely shows its knowledge of the conditions or history of Egypt. The *Torah* wrote within the framework of Israelite thought, and for Israel; it was not concerned with general history of archaeology. Of course, it integrated its description with natural and historical events, for even the wildest imagination could not invent plagues which were totally outside man’s experience. The *Torah* used plagues known to the Israelites or which were universal, as locust are throughout the Near East. Other plagues were unfamiliar to Israel and Egypt; nether had known three days of darkness, or water turning to blood.<sup>70</sup>

Other commentators – including traditional rabbinic sources – place the narrative within its immediate setting, that of Pharaonic Egypt. The rabbis understood the plagues as “measure for measure” punishment for Egyptian treatment of the Israelite plagues. Though this comparison is obviously evident in the final plague, which seems a parallel of Pharaoh’s command to kill Israelite boys (Exod. 1:16), the midrashic tradition creates similar parallels, including a description of the slaves harvesting Egyptian crops that seems an impetus for God’s wrath against barley and flax.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, many commentators suggest that the plagues are direct attacks on the Egyptian polytheism, with each plague an assault on a different Egyptian god. In the case of hail, Lockyer

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<sup>68</sup> Hoffmeier, p. 148. Others concur with this analysis. See Herbert Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), p. 56. Also, Dewey M. Beegle, *Moses, the Servant of Yahweh* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 112-113.

<sup>69</sup> Childs, p. 142.

<sup>70</sup> Jacob, p. 189. The italics reflect Jacob’s emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> See Exodus Rabbah 12:3, as well as Houtman, p. 85.

suggests that “the miracle, announced in the morning, was directed against Shu, god of atmosphere, and the two gods, Iris and Osiris, of water and fire.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lockyer, p. 56.

### **באור (מטרה/כוונה) Intention/Meaning**

A modern person can learn a lot by buying their produce at a local farmer's market. It turns out that – despite what the produce manager at the local supermarket might say – most fruits and vegetables aren't available year-round. In most urban-dwellers' reality, the advent of refrigeration and inexpensive air freight has made it possible to eat tomatoes in December and navel oranges in July, and Americans have become accustomed to eating whatever they want whenever they want it.

At the farmer's market, things are different. A few weeks ago, it was pea season. Booths were piled high with sugar snap peas, snow peas, and shelling peas. Peas, it turns out, do not grow in a can. Also, peas are very seasonal. Though a pea plant grows year-round, it only produces peas for a short time, and the pods must be picked at just the right moment.

At this particular week's farmer's market, the sugar snap peas looked a little strange. They had white dots on them. Sugar snap peas, a vendor explained, are very delicate plants. An unexpected late-season frost had hit California's pea fields a few weeks earlier, and though very brief (the frost lasted just a few hours), had a profound affect on the appearance of the peas. Thankfully, the defect was purely aesthetic; as a free sample proved, the frost failed to damage the peas sweet, crisp flavor.

It may be possible that the farmer's market is the only place that a modern Los Angelino really understands the plague of hail described in Exod. 9:13-35. Though rain causes traffic and heat brings on churning air conditioners and increased energy bills, human industrious has created a world where weather hardly affects our lives in profound ways. Admittedly, the peas were similarly affected only superficially, but the changing

colors of the farmer's market illustrate the once obvious realism that our very sustenance is still at the mercy of an extremely powerful force we cannot control: weather. Even more so, dramatic weather patterns still frighten us with their ability to cause death and destruction with little warning. Like the peas, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes are a reminder that we live in an unpredictable world.

Legumic existentialism aside, our own experiences with weather (or lack thereof) speak to some of the central questions regarding hail's place in the plague narrative: Is it possible to understand the hail (and perhaps the entire plague narrative) not as divine wrath, but as natural phenomena credited to YHWH by scientifically ignorant ancients? Why would God choose to punish the Egyptians with a seemingly natural occurrence? What about hail is so scary?

In the late 1950s, Greta Hort published "The Plagues of Egypt" in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. In the article, she argues that the plagues were connected natural phenomena triggered by an occurrence of a specific type of algae in the Nile river. Whether or not her hypothesis of causation is correct (and a number of scientists believe that it's not<sup>73</sup>), Hort's main point – that the plagues were a series of natural events that were simply *understood* as divine wrath – sparked considerable debate. Since the publication of "The Plagues of Egypt," her hypothesis has sparked the interest of scientifically-minded exegetes. Colin Humphreys points out that intense hail is rare, but not unheard of in Egypt. He suggests:

The hail and rain described in the book of Exodus provided the ideal condition for the locusts to settle... The plague of locusts was caused by two natural

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<sup>73</sup> See Brad Sparks, "Did Anthrax Plague the Egyptians?" *Bible and Spade*, Summer and Winter 2004.

phenomena occurring at the same time: the east wind, which brought the locusts over Egypt, and the very damp soil left from the plague of hail.<sup>74</sup>

For Humphreys, the plagues were a set of interconnected “natural events” occurring at “an unusually high intensity.”<sup>75</sup> Hoffmeier agrees, noting, “Violent rainstorms do strike Egypt from time to time, with several devastating examples occurring in recent years.”<sup>76</sup> He goes on to connect the descriptions of hail damage in Exod. 9:34-35 to the Egyptian archaeological record. He explains,

The note in 9:31 that ‘the flax and barley were ruined’ by the hail is interesting in that these two crops are known to have grown together as paintings from mid Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Paheri at el-Kab depict the harvesting of barley and the pulling of flax occurring in adjacent fields. While this scene illustrates that these two crops did in fact grow side by side at the same time, their harvest was not necessarily concurrent since flax can be pulled at different states in development depending on its use. From the period of 1000 to 1800 BC, wheat and flax are known to have overlapped, and the statement that the wheat was not destroyed because it would have appeared after the plague of hail (Exodus 9:32) is also consistent with the agricultural growth and harvest pattern over the past one thousand years; wheat, although planted before the other two, was harvested a month and a half to two months after the barley. Barley and flax are among the first crops planted and harvested after inundation. This information lends further support to Hort’s thesis that the first six plagues are connected to the inundation, and those that followed occurred over several following months.<sup>77</sup>

Many scholars reject the approach of scientific explanation. From a literary perspective, the scientific approach is problematic because it assumes that the Exodus account is an accurate description of a set of historical events. Understanding, however, that the plagues narrative is a redacted document made up of multiple original sources, literarily-minded exegetes understand the plagues as a literary device. Most understand hail as a natural phenomenon operating under YHWH’s control. They point out that the

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<sup>74</sup> Colin Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus: A Scientist's Discovery of the Extraordinary Natural Causes of the Biblical Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 134.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>76</sup> Hoffmeier, p. 147.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 148.

Bible's authors made a point of depicting the plague of hail as extraordinary (and not simply a natural phenomenon accredited to God) in three ways: (1) the hail itself was exceptionally severe, and a rare occurrence at the time in question; (2) it came, struck specifically, and went at the will of God; and (3) it co-mingled with fire, lightning, and/or thunder.

Hail is a form of "divine weaponry," a notion reinforced by Job 38:22-23, in which God is described as having "storehouses" of hail and snow, reserved for a time of divine battle. In Biblical terms, hail was a powerful force that "inevitably evoked fear and images of devastation."<sup>78</sup> The fact that hail storms are very rare in Egypt serves to support the notion that it was a much-feared weather phenomenon.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the pure intensity and power of the hail – "...very heavy hail, the likes of which has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded..." – suggests divine origin.<sup>80</sup> The hailstorm is the first plague to cause human death, and it destroyed Egyptian agricultural infrastructure (the destruction of trees, which are difficult to replace, is notable).<sup>81</sup> This is not ordinary hail. This is the sort of "awful weather that could only be regarded as divine judgment."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 359.

<sup>79</sup> Houtman, p. 84. See also Noth, p. 80.

<sup>80</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. I: Genesis – Leviticus*, Leander E. Keck, ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 759.

<sup>81</sup> Lockyer, pp. 55-56.

<sup>82</sup> Houtman, p. 82. Though written from a literary perspective, Houtman's suggestion that the text is describing supernaturally intense hail is plausible in light of scientific evidence. In the past hundred years, "only a handful" of people have died in the United States from hail. In Zhengzhou, China, a recent hailstorm killed seven people, and a "legendary" hailstorm in Bangladesh killed dozens in 1986. Though these real-life hail tragedies must have been devastating, they all occurred in locales where hail is common (seven to ten days of hail, annually). The possibility of such powerful hail occurring in a usually hail-free region is virtually zero. See Daniel Engber, "How Dangerous is Hail?" *Slate Magazine*, April 3, 2006. Available online: <http://www.slate.com/id/2139183/>. Hail damage to crops and infrastructure, it should be noted, is rather common. In the United States, hail causes over one billion dollars in damage annually. Farmers in Illinois alone spend six hundred million dollars a year on hail insurance. See Mel Goldstein, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Weather* (New York: Alpha Books, 2002), p. 36.

Loud, scary, destructive weather is even more terrifying when summoned and controlled at the will of an angry deity. In the narrative, YHWH – speaking through Moses – foretells the hail, controls where it falls, and stops it from falling. According to Houtman, this “serves to highlight the miraculous nature of the plague”:

The fact that [God] is capable of accurately aiming his weapons only at Egypt, and at the exact time he announced he would, and that he can put these weapons aside at the prayer of Moses, underscores the greatness of his power.<sup>83</sup>

The idea of controlling weather is particularly associated with God because human efforts to control weather only serve as lessons in humility. Even in modern times, people are at the mercy of the clouds, and hail is an interesting example. Due to its aforementioned tendency to damage crops, scientists have long attempted to stop it, or at least lessen its effects. In 1896, an Austrian wine grower, concerned over the damage done by hail to his vineyards, manufactured a device called a “hail cannon,” a modified cannon with a smokestack attached to the muzzle. When fired, the cannon’s smokestack amplified the sound of the explosion into the sky, supposedly interrupting the growth of ice crystals in clouds. In 1900, the cannons killed eleven people in Italy and Austria, more than had been killed by hail in the previous hundred years combined. Their use was discontinued two years later, when voluminous hail destroyed the Austrian wine economy, despite thousands of cannon explosions.<sup>84</sup>

The miraculous nature of the hail is also evidenced by the supernatural nature of the storm itself, which featured thunder-sounds, fire streaming earth-ward, and “fire taking-hold-of-itself in the midst of the hail.” Though hail, lightning, and thunder all

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>84</sup> Goldstein, p. 33.

appear in the Bible as instruments of divine wrath, their appearance together is noteworthy.<sup>85</sup> Lightning adds to the hail's destructive force and thunder adds to the frightening noise of falling ice chunks. As Lockyer suggests, "Such a combination of forces, as well as their intensity, must have been awe-inspiring, as well as destructive."<sup>86</sup>

It should be noted that, scientifically, coexistence of hail, thunder, and lightning is not particularly unusual. In fact, hail comes from the same cumulonimbus clouds that cause thunder and lightning.<sup>87</sup>

It might also be possible that the "fire streaming earth-ward," and "fire taking-hold-of-itself in the midst of hail" are not references to lightning at all. Later in Exodus, lightning is discussed more explicitly. As the Israelites assemble at Sinai, they experience קִלְתָּ וּבִרְקָיִם, literally "thunder and lightning." Some rabbinic commentators suggest that the fire mentioned in 9:23-24 is not lightning, but a miraculous element of the hail. Rashi, citing Midrash Tankhumah<sup>88</sup>, calls the fire and hail a "miracle within a miracle." His understanding "fire taking-hold-of-itself in the midst of hail" as fire existing *within the hailstones themselves*. Such "flaming hail," in which fire and ice coexist, is precisely the sort of exceptional weather "the likes of which has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Houtman, p. 80. See also *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 359.

<sup>86</sup> Lockyer, p. 56.

<sup>87</sup> "Hail," National Center for Atmospheric Research Fact Sheet. Available online: <http://www.ucar.edu/communications/factsheets/Hail.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Tankhumah Va'era 14.

<sup>89</sup> Rashi on Exod. 9:24.

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Fire & Ice - click to play online. This is the Fire Princess and the other is the Princess of Ice. Even though they have the opposite character, they are BFF! They are fighting against the evil people! Wanna watch them while fighting? Then maybe you can pick their costumes! Come on.. Fire Ice is the third book in the NUMA Files series of books co-written by best-selling author Clive Cussler and Paul Kemprecos, and was published in 2002. The main character of this series is Kurt Austin. In this novel, a Russian businessman with Tsarist ambitions masterminds a plot against America, which involves triggering a set of earthquakes on the ocean floor, creating a number of tsunamis to hit the USA coastline. It is up to Kurt and his team, and some new allies, to stop his plans.