

Alef.

1. א

While usually the action is of greater importance than the actor, in this case, it is most curious that there should be among the servants of Pharaoh people of whom it could be said that they were fearful of the Word of HaShem. Consequently it is this strange phenomenon that is placed in first position within the verse in order to highlight it.

ב

Usually “ו” represents the conjunction “and.” However, in this case, it would have made more sense to simply state the verb “עזב” without a conjunction in front of it. The conjunction suggests that this is an independent phrase that stands separate from the subject in the first part of the phrase.

In Shemot 18:23, the “ו” in front of the word “וּיְכַלְתֶּם” is superfluous and could be misconstrued as separating this phrase from what preceded it, when in fact only the combination of Moshe’s act and God’s Acquiescence will result in Moshe’s being able to properly administer the people.

In VaYikra 25:33, the “ו” in front of “וּיִצְא” might appear to separate it from the original phrase and constitute an additional category of houses, when in fact it is the result of the original phrase, i.e., houses in walled cities that are redeemed/bought from the Levi’im, unlike houses purchased from non-Levi’im, will be effected by Yovel, i.e., will be returned to their original owners, the Levi’im, since whatever was given to the Levi’im was permanently owned by them.

ג

“Now therefore send, hasten in thy cattle and all that thou hast in the field; for every man and beast that shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.’

“He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses.”

When HaShem Gives the Command, He is not Affected by any particular emotion, and therefore can “dispassionately” State that the animals and slaves should simply be sent elsewhere. However the property owners who have already seen the massive destruction that has been brought about by the plagues, panic and forcibly make their possessions seek shelter out of the deep fear that everything will be destroyed and they will be left penniless.

2. א

And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down unto the earth; and the LORD caused to hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing up amidst the hail, very grievous, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail.

Devices used to increase the intimidation:

- a) By Moshe initiating the plague, it appears as if he can control the Heavens.
- b) The accompaniment of thunder with the hail engendered additional fear.
- c) The addition of supernatural fire (the implication being that this was not merely lightning) certainly added to the affect.
- d) The fire was within the hail, a supernatural affect, since ice and fire should not naturally co-exist.
- e) In addition to the quality of the hail, there was also an inordinate quantity, leading to the evaluation "very grievous."
- f) A historically unique situation for the land of Egypt.
- g) The hail was deadly, killing people, animals and plants.
- h) The fact that the area covered by hail was selective, and that specifically the area where the bulk of the Jews lived was spared, reflected God's Involvement in this otherwise "natural" meteorological phenomenon.

ב

Perhaps the employment of the future with a "ו" reflects the general process, whereas a strict past form of the verb refers to a specific, finite act.

שמות פרק ט

(לג) ויצא משה מעם פרעה את העיר ויפרש כפיו אל יקוק ויחדלו הקלות והברד ומטר לא נתך ארצה:

(לד) וירא פרעה כי חדל המטר והברד והקלות ויסף לחטא ויכבד לבו הוא ועבדיו:

Beit.

1. It would appear that beginning with Shemot 9:13, the verses are dedicated to the plague of hail. Yet the language in 9:14 suggests that the coming plague will be the most severe and in effect include and surpass all other plagues. However, aside from hail, locusts, darkness and the plague of the firstborn are still to come. Furthermore, if any of the plagues are to be considered the ultimate one, it would appear from 4:23, where the only plague specifically mentioned to Moshe prior to his journeying to Egypt (the sign of water turning to blood is independent of the plague of all the waterways in Egypt turning to blood, the nature of the initial plague) is the plague of the firstborn.
2. The idea that the entire crop that ripens earliest, i.e., the barley should be referred to as a form of "Bikurim" (first fruits) is unlike the usage of the term in all other contexts. A firstborn, or the firstborn animals or first fruits are the earliest of a particular crop, brood, number of children, etc. as opposed to an entire group/species as compared to other groups and species.
3. It is possible to group the plagues into three groups, indicated by the third of the first two groups not being preceded by a warning to Pharaoh, and relating to different portions of the environment.

Group 1: Blood, Frogs, Lice.

Plagues affecting the ground and that which is on the ground, i.e., waterways. Lice had no warning---see Shemot 8:12-13. Although RaMBaN claims that just because everything is not spelled out each time, that does not mean that

there was no warning, nevertheless, by virtue of the text differentiating between the first two plagues and the third, it is legitimate to group them accordingly.

Group 2: Wild animals, a form of bubonic plague, boils. Plagues that affect those that inhabit the ground. Boils does not have a preceding warning—see Shemot 9:8-10.

Group 3: Since 10 is not divisible into 3, this group is made up of four plagues—hail, locusts, darkness and the plague of the firstborn. They affect the atmosphere and the heavens.

Consequently, the verse in question is not an introduction to hail per se, but rather to the last group of plagues that culminate in the plague of the firstborn.

Gimel.

1. Typically, the “מ” of “מעבדי פרעה” suggests that some of Pharaoh’s own servants were in fact God-fearing and they protected their property by removing it from the fields and bringing it indoors. Meshech Chachma posits that individuals were faced with a choice to either listen to all of Pharaoh’s servants who were urging that Moshe’s threats concerning hail be ignored and that everything be left outside as an act of defiance or to be God-fearing and to take Moshe’s warning seriously. Those that brought their property inside obviously worried more about Moshe’s prediction than Pharaoh’s servants threats.

2. Perhaps Meshech Chachma was influenced by the following two verses:

(כז) וישלח פרעה ויקרא למשה ולאהרן ויאמר אלהם חטאתי הפעם יקוק הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים:
(ל) ואתה ועבדיך ידעתי כי טרם תיראון מפני יקוק אלקים:

First Pharaoh and then Moshe’s reference to “my people” and “your servants” suggests that there was a difference of opinion between those who worked for Pharaoh and the rest of the Egyptians. While the former might have been “true believers” this was not the case of at least a portion of the general populace, and it is the latter about whom Meshech Chachma is writing.

Daled.

1. א

איוב פרק לג פסוק כא

יכל בשרו מראי ושופו עצמותיו לא ראו:

“His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones corrode to unsightliness.”

Ibn Ezra is contended that just as in the word “נכתה־נוכו” the “נ” is part of the root, rather than serving as the passive declension, so too in “ושופו” the “ש” is part of the root of the word.

ב

Although there is a “שורוק” after the “ש”, it is not a passive but rather an active verb, as indicated in the translation “corrode.” Yahel Ohr on Ibn Ezra, #151, refers to the verb as “בנין הכבד הדגוש.”

ג

The “נ”s in “נכתה” and “נוכו” which are part of the root of the word.

ד

The “נ” is a substitute for the “מ” which is part of the true root.

ה

Other words which undergo a similar transformation when used in this manner.

2. א

The question is whether or not 9:31-32 are part of what Moshe actually says to Pharaoh before he goes out to pray for the plague to stop, or are these verses simply describing the state of affairs, i.e., which crops were destroyed and which were not. And if the former is true, what point is Moshe making to Pharaoh by describing the states of the various crops.

ב

Ibn Ezra does not see in these verses anything other than a description of the state of affairs, and were not mentioned by Moshe to Pharaoh. Both RaMBaN and R. Eliezer Ashkenazi consider them part of Moshe’s message to Pharaoh, only differing as to what Moshe intent might have been by including this information.

ג

RaMBaN: Moshe is warning Pharaoh that at this point, at least some of the food that the Egyptians need is still intact and therefore if he complies with the request to free the Jews at this point, he can avert a famine before any more destruction comes about.

R. Eliezer Ashkenazi: Based upon 10:15

(טו) ויכס את עין כל הארץ ותחשך הארץ ויאכל את כל עשב הארץ ואת כל פרי העץ אשר הותיר הברד ולא נותר כל ירק בעץ ובעשב השדה בכל ארץ מצרים:

which this commentator interprets as not necessarily stating that the rest of the grain was destroyed, but only the grasses and the fruits on the trees, he feels that Moshe is not so much threatening Pharaoh with famine, as making a symbolic point about Pharaoh’s rulership style, i.e., the grain that was ripe and therefore stiff/inflexible was destroyed, as opposed to that which was malleable. Similarly, Pharaoh should exercise flexibility in his decision-making rather than being stiff which will only lead to his destruction.

ד

See answer to ג above.