

CRAZY RUMOURS OF

HAIL

BY
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Kheti inspected his elbow. Boils had left scars all over his body, but the one on his elbow had not healed properly. He squeezed puss from the wound, and winced as he pasted a revolting mixture of honey, grease and mouldy bread into the crater caused by the boil. Tears stung his eyes as he wrapped the bandage back around.

Meren appeared in the doorway. She too was poked with scars from boils, but hers had all healed. “It’s going to happen again.”

“What?”

“Another plague from the Hebrew God. Moses says it will be hail. Tomorrow.”

Kheti laughed. “Never. This season we get nothing but sunshine and the occasional light shower. It’s hot. Frogs, flies, gnats and boils happen every once in a while, but hail – that’s impossible. Moses is lying.”

“Listen Kheti, all the plagues have been from the God of the Hebrews. Moses has been right every time. This morning he told Pharaoh there would be a plague of hail tomorrow. You need to believe. You probably need to shelter your cattle.”

“Ha,” Kheti scoffed, “You’re not a believer too now, are you?”

Later that evening Kheti was tired and in a foul mood. Meren had persuaded him to bring in his cattle. Twenty-three cows were tied up around his house. He had scythed armfuls of grass for them; he had built them shelters on the sides of his house. His neighbours had laughed at him. Kheti felt like a fool who had fallen for the biggest hoax in history. Not even the Hebrews had brought their cattle inside.

His black mood deepened by lunchtime the next day as the hot sun shone down to mock him. Restless cattle fuelled his irritation. Suddenly Kheti's frustration burst. He loosed his animals and drove them into the field. The crazy rumours of hail were wrong.

Cow poo and half chewed grass littered the house. With unbridled indignation Kheti shovelled and swept.

Knock, knock, knock. Kheti looked around. There it was again. Heavier this time. Then the loudest clap of thunder he had ever heard broke above him. He jumped. The colour drained from Kheti's face. It was happening! The heavens opened and hail pelted from the cloudless sky. Lightning flashed. Hailstones the size of his fist landed all around him. They pierced through his roof. They broke his shelters. Kheti rushed for safety. Rain and hail flooded his house in the most destructive storm Egypt had ever seen.

Hours later the storm abruptly stopped. Kheti stepped cautiously outside. The destruction was obvious but there was no sign of the storm in the cloudless sky. Crops were decimated; the cows lay still on their sides, dead and bleeding from the hail; and houses were destroyed, but there had been no hail where the Hebrews lived.

Kheti looked up at the cloudless sky again. The God of the Hebrews was destroying his land. But maybe Meren was right. Perhaps he should listen to the God of the Hebrews, even if only to save his own skin.

Based on the seventh plague on Egypt, found in Exodus chapter 9 in the Bible.

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Kheti felt humiliated and angry when he planned ahead for a predicted hailstorm even though the sun shone in a cloudless sky. They were crazy rumours of hail in a hot, dry land. But when the cows mucked in his yard and the neighbours mocked him, Kheti decided to take matters into his own hands...

