

Plagues that Preach Part 3

Text: Exodus 9:1-35

Introduction:

1. We have studied 5 plagues so far as follows:
 - The Nile River turned to blood (Ex. 7:14-25).
 - The plague of frogs (Ex. 8:1-15)
 - The plague of lice (Ex. 8:16-19)
 - The plague of flies (Ex. 8:20-32)
2. The plagues increase in ferocity as they progress.
3. We will now study the next three plagues (plagues 5-7) as recorded in Exodus 9 and the lessons they teach us.

I. THE PLAGUE UPON LIVESTOCK (Plague # 5) (VS. 1-7)

A. The Warning before the Plague (Vs. 1-4)

God again instructs Moses to confront Pharaoh with the Word of the Living God.

1. The Authoritativeness of the Message (Vs. 1a). Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh again with a Divine “thus saith the LORD” message.
2. The Unchangeableness of the Message (Vs. 1b). God’s Word to Pharaoh had not changed despite his rebellion and stubbornness. He was to release God’s people so they could serve Him.
3. The Seriousness of the Message (Vs. 2-4). The message again contained a clear warning of judgment to Pharaoh. If he refused, God would send a pestilence upon the cattle of Egypt.
 - a. The word ‘murrain’ means “a pestilence” (Strong).
 - b. It comes from the Hebrew root “a destroying”.

B. The Timing of the Plague (Vs. 5)

1. God ‘appointed’ not only the kind of the judgment that would be poured out but its timing. The exact timing of the plague would further highlight its miraculous character.
2. The one-day delay also demonstrates God’s grace to Pharaoh. He was giving him an opportunity to repent before the judgment came.

C. The Outpouring of the Plague (Vs. 6)

1. The fulfilment of it (Vs. 6a) – God did exactly what He said He would do exactly when He said he would do it. God says what He means and means what He says. That means that exactly what God’s Word says about the future judgment of the unrepentant WILL be fulfilled in exact detail. The Bible’s warnings about hell fire for the unsaved are not fairy tales. They are sober realities. The future lake of fire is real.
2. The devastation of it (Vs. 6b) – All the cattle of the Egyptians were affected. This was another blow to the false gods of Egypt as the Egyptians held many animals as sacred (Ex. 8:26).
 - a. John J. Davis explains the devastation of this plague: “Such a plague would have had grave economic consequences in the land of Egypt. Oxen were depended upon for heavy labour in

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agriculture. Camels, asses and horses were used largely for transportation. Cattle not only provided milk but were very much an integral part of worship in the land of Egypt. The economic losses on this occasion must have affected Pharaoh greatly because he kept large numbers of cattle under his control.” (Ryken)

- b. “The symbolism of the fifth plague is especially potent because many of Egypt’s gods and goddesses were depicted as livestock. Some Egyptians worshiped the bull, which they viewed as “a fertility figure, the great inseminator imbued with the potency and vitality of life.” Cults dedicated to the bull were common throughout Egypt. There was Buchis, the sacred bull of Hermonthis, and Mnevis, who was worshiped as Heliopolis. The chief bull god was Apis. At the temple in Memphis, priests maintained a sacred enclosure where they kept a live bull considered to be the incarnation of Apis. When the venerable bull died, he was given an elaborate burial. Archaeologists have discovered funeral niches for hundreds of these bulls near Memphis.” (Ryken)
 - c. “There were also goddesses. Isis, the queen of the gods, was generally depicted with cow horns on her head. Similarly, the goddess Hathor was represented with the head of a cow, sometimes with the sun between her two horns. Hathor was the goddess of love and beauty, motherhood and fertility. One of her sacred functions was to protect Pharaoh, and on occasion she was depicted as a cow suckling the king for nourishment.” (Ryken)
 - d. We see further evidence of this in Exodus 32 as when the Israelites rebelled against God and returned to the gods of Egypt, they made a golden calf.
3. The sparing from it (Vs. 6c) – As with the previous plague (flies), God again made a distinction between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. God’s people were spared.

D. The Hardening after the Plague (Vs. 7)

1. Pharaoh again chooses obstinance over repentance. And this was in the face of the clear fulfilment of prophecy.
2. It is a sobering reminder that an individual can make a choice to harden his heart even in the face of overwhelming evidence of the existence of the One True God. Miracles do not automatically lead a sinner to repentance as unbelief is a sinful choice of the heart!

II. THE PLAGUE OF BOILS (Plague # 6) (VS. 8-12)

This plague is released without any warning to Pharaoh. To push past God’s grace and longsuffering is very wicked and comes with serious consequences.

A. The Sign of the Plague (Vs. 8-9)

1. The significance of the sign (Vs. 8)
 - a. The ashes were to be drawn from the ‘furnace’. These furnaces in Egypt were connected with the brickkilns operated by the Hebrew slaves. The significance of this would not have been

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lost on Pharaoh and would be a direct rebuke to him for his evil treatment of the people of God. It represents the principle of sowing and reaping.

- i. “The furnaces were limekilns or metal smelting furnaces used to produce the ornaments and buildings of Egypt. These were at the forefront of Egyptian technology and would be the source of great pride to the nation. It was from them that some of the glory of Egypt came, and now they would learn that even this could be touched by the hand of Jehovah. There was no part of society which was not under His control.” (J. Grant)
 - ii. “The site of the plague’s beginning is a lesson in sowing and reaping. The Egyptians had used these furnaces to make the Israelites suffer, now God will use these same furnaces to make the Egyptians suffer.” (Butler)
 - b. The ashes were to be sprinkled towards heaven, symbolizing the Divine origin of the plague. It would be poured out by the God of heaven. “The act of sprinkling ashes towards heaven conveyed to the watching king that it was the power of heaven which would visit this further plague upon them. The ashes were carried as dust over the land and became boils upon man and beast.” (Grant)
 - c. “To understand how completely God humiliated Pharaoh’s magicians, it helps to know that by throwing ashes into the air, Moses was doing something that the Egyptian priests often did. It was customary for Pharaoh’s priests to take sacrificial ashes and cast them into the air as a sign of blessing. But God took that ritual act and turned it into a curse. This was a matter of justice, because the soot may well have come from a furnace for making bricks.” (Ryken)
2. The supernatural use of the sign (Vs. 9). God would miraculously turn that handful of ashes into a dust that would cover the land of Egypt and bring about the horrific plague of boils upon both man and beast.

B. The Smiting of the Plague (Vs. 10-11)

1. Moses and Aaron did exactly as God had commanded them and the plague was fulfilled just as God had said.
2. The word ‘blain’ refers to “a pustule; a botch, a blister” (Webster). These would be bursting boils. If you have ever experienced a boil, you can imagine how this would have felt. Imagine nasty boils all over your whole body! Illustration: Pastor Josh Warneke’s description of a nasty Fiji boil.
3. The magicians are specifically noted as not being able to “stand before Moses because of the boils”. This is the last mention of the Egyptian magicians. Their inability to stand before Moses symbolised their total defeat before the mighty God of Israel. What a picture of the sinner having no standing before God because of the disease of sin. Sin covers us all like a plague and without God’s cleansing, we cannot stand in His presence.

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4. Ryken notes, “Like the first five blows that God struck against the Egyptians, the sixth plague had three results: first, Pharaoh’s gods were humbled; second, Pharaoh’s magicians were humiliated; and third, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.”
5. “The Egyptians – who were well-known for their interest in medicine – looked to their religion for healing. Thoth was worshiped as the god of the healing arts. Others worshiped Imotep as the god of medicine. The most common deity for dealing with disease was Sekhmet, whose priests formed one of the oldest medical fraternities in antiquity. The plague of boils was an attack on all the gods and goddesses that the Egyptians trusted for healing.”
(Ryken)

C. The Sentence after the Plague (Vs. 12)

1. This is the first time in the Exodus account where it is stated specifically that God “hardened the heart of Pharaoh”. We need to remember the context to this. God did not just arbitrarily harden Pharaoh’s heart. Pharaoh had repeatedly hardened his heart against God up to this point so this was a judicial hardening.
2. Matthew Henry writes, “If men shut their eyes against the light, it is just with God to close their eyes. Let us dread this as the sorest judgment a man can be under on this side of hell.”
3. It is a sober reminder that while God is gracious and longsuffering, there comes a point where a sinner can push past the point of no return. God is not obligated to give unlimited opportunities for the sinner to repent. He is God!
4. Illustration: The invisible line in the sinner’s life.

III. THE PLAGUE OF HAIL (Plague # 7) (VS. 13-35)

More detail is assigned to the record of this plague than the previous 6. God reveals more of His Divine purposes behind what He was doing in this section. Note 7 points about this plague.

A. The Revelation before the Plague (Vs. 13-16)

Note the revelation of:

1. The Distinction of God’s Person (Vs. 13-15)
These verses reveal:
 - a. God is unchangeable (Vs. 13)
 - i. This is now the 6th time God has directly commanded Pharaoh to let His people go. All of Pharaoh’s rebellion and stubbornness could not alter the Divine decree!
 - ii. God’s Word is eternal, unchangeable and unalterable.
 - b. God is unique (Vs. 14b)
 - i. Through the plagues God was working so that Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt would come to know that “there is none like me in all the earth”.
 - ii. 2 Samuel 7:22 “Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee...”
 - iii. Deut. 4:35 “Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he *is* God; *there is* none else beside him.”

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2. The Demonstration of God's Power (Vs. 16a)
 - a. God reveals that Pharaoh had been placed on the throne by God's in His Sovereignty in order to provide an occasion for God to display His Mighty power.
 - b. We are reminded of the truth of Psalm 76:10 "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."
 - c. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:17 as a defence of God's character in His sovereign dealings with Israel. Mercy is an act of God's sovereign will. God is no man's debtor nor is He under any obligation to always show mercy. He has chosen to show all men His mercy, as Scripture testifies in many places, but if men rebel against Him, He may or may not extend further grace. Pharaoh is an illustration of this.
 - d. The Romans 1 progression also illustrates this truth. As mankind plunges into the depths of depravity, there comes a time when God allows them to go deeper into darkness as an act of judgment. He "gave them up" (Vs. 24), "gave them up" (Vs. 26) and "gave them over" (Vs. 28).
 - e. This truth has been illustrated as "the same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay. The nature of the sun's rays is the same in each case. The difference is found in the nature of the substance on which the sun's rays fall."
 - f. B.H. Carrol explains: "High above human thought, beyond the scope of human sight, of the human mind, the Omnipotence and Omniscience is ruling, and his rule is supreme, and yet nobody is taken by the hair and dragged into hell, and nobody is taken by the hair and dragged into heaven... Those that were vessels of wrath, who voluntarily stand against God, God patiently endured a long time, and His forbearance signified that he was giving them opportunity to repent. The vessels of mercy also had opportunity for salvation, whether they were Jews or Greeks."
 - g. Warning! To treat the opportunity to repent lightly is very dangerous. "...*behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.*" (2 Cor. 6:2)
3. The Declaration of God's Praise (Vs. 16b)
 - a. Through it all God was working to the grand purpose of His Name being declared throughout the whole earth. God was providing light to the ancient world of the reality of His existence as the One True God.
 - b. Ryken notes, "The plagues had global implications. If God had only sent one plague it might have been forgotten, but 10 plagues would make global headlines in the ancient world! Word of the plagues spread far and wide!"
 - c. Illustration: The Gibeonites – Joshua 9:9 "And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: **for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt,**"

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- d. Illustration: The Philistines – 1 Samuel 4:7-8 “And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? **these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.**”

B. The Prediction of the Plague (Vs. 17-18)

1. God warns Pharaoh concerning his pride (Vs. 17). Pharaoh was exalting himself against the people of God and in so doing, against God Himself.
2. God warns Pharaoh that the plague of hail would be like nothing Egypt had ever experienced in its history (Vs. 18). This would be no ordinary hail storm!

C. The Instruction concerning the Plague (Vs. 19-21)

1. God showed mercy not only in giving Pharaoh 24 hours to repent (Vs. 18) but in also giving instructions on how cattle and servants could be spared. It again reveals the compassionate heart of God toward both mankind and the beasts of the field.
2. Some of Pharaoh’s servants feared God’s Word and acted accordingly, others did not.

D. The Execution of the Plague (Vs. 22-26)

1. The Description of the Hail (Vs. 22-24) This was a fearsome hailstorm! There was:
 - a. Thunder, rain and hail.
 - b. Fire mingled with the hail that also ran along the ground.
2. The Devastation from the Hail (Vs. 25)
 - a. The hail killed both people and animals who were caught in the storm unprotected (in the field).
 - b. The hail smashed the crops and the trees of Egypt.
 - c. Evidently these hailstones were much larger than normal to cause such widespread death and destruction.
 - d. **Hailstone sizes:** Hailstones come in various sizes, and meteorologists use common objects for comparison:¹
 - Pea-sized: About 1/4 inch in diameter
 - Marble-sized: About 1/2 inch in diameter
 - Grapefruit-sized: Around 4 inches in diameter
 - Baseball-sized: Around 2.75 inches in diameter
 - **Record-breakers:** The largest hailstone ever recorded in the US measured 8 inches in diameter and fell in Vivian, South Dakota. Grapefruit-sized hail is not uncommon in severe storms. While basketball-sized hail is incredibly rare, it’s not impossible under extreme conditions.

E. The Confession after the Plague (Vs. 27-28)

Pharaoh summons Moses, confesses his guilt and requests that Moses intercede to God on his behalf for the cessation of the plague.

1. The features of Pharaoh’s confession
 - a. He confesses his own sinfulness – “I have sinned this time”.
 - b. He confesses God’s righteousness – “the LORD is righteous”.

¹ <https://www.iweathernet.com/thunderstorms/record-breaking-hail> - Viewed 6/9/24.

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- c. He confesses that both he and his people are wicked – “I and my people are wicked”
2. The faultiness of Pharaoh’s confession – Pharaoh’s confession, though it appeared good on the surface, did not lead to his salvation. We note several problems with Pharaoh’s confession:
 - a. It represented remorse rather than true repentance. Pharaoh was more concerned about the consequences of his sin than the sin itself – “Intreat the LORD (for it is enough) **that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail**”. Once the plague was removed, Pharaoh quickly hardened his heart again (Vs. 34-35).
 - b. It was limited in its scope. Note the words “this time”. There is no acknowledgement of his past sins. This is not true humility. Pharaoh’s pride is still very much intact. A confession that mentions one sins but forgets all the others is a false confession that falls short of true repentance.” (Ryken)
 - c. It was made without the reverential fear of God (Vs. 30).
 - d. It was made to men rather than to God. Pharaoh confesses to Moses and Aaron and asks them to intreat God on his behalf. There is no desire to personally get right with God and seek his forgiveness.
3. Pharaoh’s example is a sobering reminder that a surface confession/admission of one’s sin will not save unless it is backed by a repentant heart/spirit. It is a warning concerning the deadly danger of a partial/incomplete repentance.

F. The Conclusion of the Plague (Vs. 29-33)

1. Moses agrees to bring the plague to an end (Vs. 29a) but reminds Pharaoh that it will be for ethe purpose “that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD’S.” God’s unlimited authority over his creation would again be highlighted.
2. Moses also discerned the shallowness of Pharaoh’s confession. He knew that Pharaoh and his servants would continue to not “fear the LORD God”.
3. An interesting detail concerning the harvest at that time is included by the Biblical writer. It notes that both the flax and barley were smitten but not the wheat and rye as they were not yet grown up. The note of the flax and barely being grown at the same time in Egypt is confirmed by “paintings from ancient Egypt that show farmers simultaneously harvesting both flax and barley.” (Ryken)

G. The Insubordination after the Plague (Vs. 34-35)

1. As soon as the plague ceased, Pharaoh and his servants hardened their hearts again.
2. What a sobering reminder that even in the face of overwhelming evidence of God’s existence, the sinner can make a choice to continue in his unbelief.

Conclusion: Have you truly repented of your sin and received Christ as your Saviour? Are you hardening your heart against the grace and kindness of God?