

CHAPTERS NINE AND TEN
(The Fifth through Ninth Plagues)

Four plagues, each one worse than the one before it, have been inflicted on the people of Egypt. Through it all, a pattern has been established: Moses and Aaron go before the Pharaoh, deliver God's message to let His people go, in most cases describe to the Pharaoh what will happen if he does not, then bring on the plague exactly as described and wait for him to make his false promise to release the Israelites. Their water was turned to blood; the land was overrun with frogs, and then infested with lice. Through each of these miracles, God's greatness was on full display. Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate the first two plagues to some extent, so maybe at first he assumed Aaron and Moses were just a couple of sorcerers themselves, much like his own. But when his magicians were unable to recreate the third plague of lice, and they themselves said "***This is the finger of God,***" he still hardened his heart, dug in his heels and refused to let the people go. Then came the swarm of insects: Imagine a cloud of wasps, hornets and flies so massive it must have darkened the heavens when it appeared over the homes of the Egyptians – yet in the land of Goshen, there was nothing but clear blue sky. What a message from the Almighty God: These are My people and I will care for them. Meanwhile, the Pharaoh's heart turns to granite.

There's a very obvious reason why the Egyptian ruler would have a "hard heart" toward the Israelites. After all, why would any ruler in his right mind give permission for his entire workforce to walk out of the country? He could never replace them. But, we must remember God's purpose for hardening his heart: to show His power and sovereignty over all earthly things. As each plague has occurred, God has continued to demonstrate in increasing degrees how fully He reigns over all creation, the elements of nature and, as they will see in the tenth plague, even death itself.

THE PLAGUE ON THE LIVESTOCK – (Exodus 9:1-7)

In this plague, there was no waving of Aaron's rod or striking the ground, Jehovah merely set a time: Moses said, "***Tomorrow the LORD will do this in the land.***" And the next

day, all the livestock of the Egyptians that had been left in the field were dead, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. I'm sure Pharaoh "couldn't believe his ears" when reports came to him that all the Israelites' animals were alive and well. Notice that he even sent investigators into Goshen to verify that it was so.

THE PLAGUE OF BOILS – (Exodus 9:8 – 12)

If you read back over the description of the third plague, you may notice that the scripture does not record Moses and Aaron warning the Pharaoh before Aaron "***struck the dust and it became lice.***" The same is true of this, the sixth plague – no forewarning. The Lord tells Moses and Aaron to "***take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh...***" They did as they were told and stood before the Pharaoh where Moses, apparently without preamble, tossed the ashes into the air and immediately festering boils broke out on people and animals. Interestingly, the magicians – absent during the fourth and fifth plagues – are back again for this sixth one, but they "***could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians.***" This, of course, must have included the Pharaoh himself, since he too was Egyptian, even though some commentators take the position that he was not afflicted by the plagues along with his subjects.

There is some disagreement concerning the Pharaoh's personal involvement in the plagues. Some believe that after the water turned to blood and the frogs, he was an observer of the suffering of his people, not a participant in it – and his refusal to listen to Moses showed just how little compassion he had for his subjects. We don't know if that is true or not, but the text of the 4th plague does say, "***I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants, on your people and into your houses.***" So, with language like that, and the wording of this plague telling us the boils were "***on all the Egyptians,***" we are led to believe he was at least affected by these two as well.

THE PLAGUE OF HAIL (Exodus 9:13 – 35)

Here in this seventh plague, things seem to intensify. It begins very much like the others, with the Lord saying to Moses, *“Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh...”* But notice the new message Moses is told to deliver: *“for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth.* “ Sounds personal, doesn’t it? That could be because, *“As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go.”* In other words... you can expect *“the full force”* of My plagues – a new level of devastation. It is time you learned to respect Me and realize that it is I, not you, who is actually in control. As Moses tells the Pharaoh, God could have already waved his Mighty hand and wiped the Egyptian people from the face of the earth, but He didn’t. *“But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”*

Then comes the warning: *“Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now. Therefore send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.”* Isn’t it interesting that the people are given an opportunity to save their servants and livestock before the hail begins.

Let’s take a moment to discuss a supposed discrepancy that skeptics want to call out at this point in the narrative. Back in Exodus 9:6, when the sickness came over the livestock, it is stated *“...and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one died.”* If **all** of the livestock in that country died from the disease in the 5th plague, how is it we read in verse 19 of people being told to gather their livestock to save them from the hail? Didn’t they all already die?

The problem stems from not carefully reading the earlier text. Verse 3 says, *“behold, the hand of the Lord will be on your cattle in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the oxen, and on the sheep—a very severe pestilence.”* The Hebrew word translated “field” in this text is **“sadeh”** meaning *“country, field, land.”* So, the livestock that was “put

up” – in sheltered pens, barns, stables, etc. – were not affected by the disease (called “murrain” in some translations).

Now back to the text. After the people are warned to protect their property, a very interesting thing happens in verse 20: ***“He who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses.”***

Apparently some of Pharaoh’s officials were quite a bit smarter – and less prideful – than their sovereign king! These men had evidently seen enough in the first six plagues to convince them that the Israelites’ God was “the real deal.” He was a powerful adversary, and He always did exactly what He said He would. So, if He said there was going to be hail... let’s run for cover!

We understand how devastating hail can be. Here in western Arkansas we have seen hail the size of baseballs – breaking out windows and windshields and damaging roofs. But nothing compares to the devastation of this hailstorm. Remember that God said it was ***“a severe hailstorm such as has not happened in Egypt from the day it was founded until now!”*** It killed animals and people. It beat down every plant growing in the fields, and stripped every tree. Every square inch of Egypt was devastated – except the land of Goshen, where the Israelites continued to reside in safety.

I think we can say with certainty that the Pharaoh himself was impacted by this miracle, because the Ahmose who summoned Moses this time was rather humble. ***“This time I have sinned. The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to the LORD, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don’t have to stay any longer.”*** I find Moses’ response very interesting: ***“When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may know that the earth is the Lord’s – But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the LORD God.”*** All those other times the Pharaoh promised to let the people go, did Moses believe him? I can’t say for certain, but it is obvious that Moses does know the

heart of the Pharaoh now! He will entreat the Lord to make the hail stop...but is under no illusion that this will be the end of the ordeal of the plagues.

There are a few points to be made here before we move on:

First of all, what was the fundamental reason God wanted His people out of Egypt? He answers that question for us repeatedly when He says to the Pharaoh, ***“Let My people go that they may serve Me.”*** Why couldn't they serve Him in Egypt? As we've already mentioned, they could not sacrifice to God because the animals they would use were revered by the Egyptians. Plus, they were practically being worked to death! The load placed on them did not provide time for worship. The Egyptians didn't care if their God was honored. On their own, without the rigors of slavery or the restrictions of animal sacrifice, they would be able to give God the time and the honor He deserved. We will see that shortly after leaving Egypt, the Law will be handed down to Moses, and the details of how they are expected to worship will be explained. In Egypt, the Israelites were surrounded by pagans, and their workload and lifestyle didn't give them the time, energy or resources to focus on their relationship with God. I imagine the “original 70” attempted to maintain their worship practices, but as time went by and the restrictions were heaped upon them, it became difficult if not impossible. This was the goal of the exodus: to get the people away from the evil influence and show them what was expected of them. In the wilderness they would have one job: serve God.

Getting away from evil influences. In the 21st century world, are there evil influences in our lives we need to run away from? Things that are keeping us from honoring God to our full potential, thereby preventing us from creating a meaningful relationship with Him? Maybe our job so consumes our time, our energy and our mind that we have little left for our Creator. Maybe the same could be said of our friendships or past times. Solomon, who had seen it all and done it all tells us in Ecclesiastes 12:13, ***“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.”***

Second, let's not overlook the evidence of God's mercy visible throughout these plagues. Make no mistake about it. God could have simply struck the Pharaoh down and wiped out all those standing in the way of His people's freedom. But He doesn't do that. And this shows us His grace, mercy and patience. Granted, Ahmose does not take advantage of it, but the opportunity is there. Think of all the times God forewarned him about what was going to happen. What about when he gave the people time to get their livestock undercover before the hail started. Our God is not merely a God of justice and holiness – He has compassion and mercy and love. Ten opportunities... God gave the Pharaoh 10 opportunities to let His people go.

The parallel to our own situation shouldn't be lost on us here. Pharaoh had 10 opportunities to do the right thing...how many have we been given over the years? We must remember that even though our God is long suffering, merciful and compassionate, time will run out. His patience will be spent and His justice will be meted out. If we have hardened our hearts...where will that leave us?

And what of Ahmose's confession of sin. He appears almost "broken" by the plague of hail and actually confesses. I take that to mean he recognized the superiority of God, and "owned up" to his disobedience. However, that's as far as it goes. He does nothing beyond admitting sin. If he had truly had a change of heart, he could have spoken with Moses about how to "get right" with God. But, after what he would no doubt later refer to as a "moment of weakness," he hardens his heart and refuses to comply with God's wishes. We might be inclined to read the story of this Pharaoh from our "armchair perspective" and say, "He had Moses standing right in front of him TELLING him what was going to happen! Why didn't he listen?" Or, "He saw miracle after miracle before his very eyes...why was he so stubborn?" Well, we have the Bible right in front of us in digital and paper form. If we never open it and seek out what God's will is for us, what good will it do us? Why don't we listen?

THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS – (Exodus 10:1 – 20)

Pharaoh Ahmose got over his "moment of weakness" after the plague of hail, rescinded his agreement to release the Israelites, and so...here he is again, face to face with Moses and

Aaron, his stubbornness and unbelief about to bring on the 8th plague. The Lord reiterates to Moses how He has hardened his heart, adding *“and the hearts of his servants”* so that He could perform these signs on Egypt. The International Standard Version of the bible renders verse 2 like this: God says, *“...so you may tell your children and your grandchildren how I toyed with the Egyptians and about my miraculous signs that I performed among them, so all of you may know that I am the Lord.”* Of course, “toying with,” used in its normal sense, is not what the Lord was doing – His purpose was far greater than that. The NKJV says: *“and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.”* Now we can add another reason for the plagues: So that the coming generations of the Israelites would know that Jehovah was the Lord! The story of these miracles would survive and continue to strike awe in the hearts of many future generations as they came to understand the limitless power of Jehovah.

Moses then repeats what he has been told to say: *“This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians—something neither your parents nor your ancestors have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.’”* Notice what happens next: *“And he turned and went out from Pharaoh.”* Moses just leaves! He walks out, not even waiting for a response. The time for listening to false promises had passed.

But it seems that Pharaoh’s own officials are growing impatient with their king. Once the door closes behind Moses, they say: “How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?” This is new information. Once, quite a while ago, the magicians ventured to say “This is the finger of God,” but Pharaoh’s officials had remained stoic; in fact we were told earlier their hearts had been hardened, too. But now...their crops are gone, their livestock has been wiped out; they are no doubt weary of the stress and pain of dealing with frogs, lice, boils and insects.

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Ron Roberts

Lesson 8

They know it's time, so why doesn't the Pharaoh? And by the way, notice that they make this plea before the plague even begins! They were no doubt large landholders, and knew that locusts would be devastating to their livelihood. They were not just fretting over a "what if it happens" scenario. I'm convinced they had come to believe in the power of God. They knew the locusts were coming.

In verse 8 we see that Moses and Aaron are brought back to Pharaoh. We don't know if Ahmose made this decision alone or was convinced by his advisors. Whatever the reason when they arrive, he says ***"Go, worship your God – but tell me exactly who will be going."*** Moses responds in verse 9: ***"We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD."*** In other words, "That's easy – We're ALL going, and we're taking our animals with us."

All along Ahmose has feared that if he lets them go for just 3 days, they'll never come back, and this confirms it. If he lets the entire family go, he knows he can't expect to ever see them again. So in anger he lashes out with ***"The Lord had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you. Not so! Go now, you who are men, and serve the Lord, for that is what you desired. And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence."***

Pharaoh could dismiss Moses, but he is powerless before Jehovah. The Lord then told Moses to ***"Stretch out your hand over Egypt so that locusts swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the fields, everything left by the hail."*** The wind blew all that day and all that night and by morning, locusts had invaded the whole country of Egypt. They ate every plant, every herb and every green tree. The land had already been badly hurt by the hail, but this finished it off. Never before or since has there been such a plague of locusts.

Verses 16-17 tell us of yet another temporary change of heart after-the-fact: ***"I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now forgive my sin once more and pray to the Lord your God to take this deadly plague away from me."*** Moses prayed to the Lord, and

He changed the wind direction to the west, and the locusts were caught up and carried into the Nile River so that not a single one remained anywhere in Egypt. In regard to verse 20, which says, ***“The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart...”*** commentator John Gill writes, *“...for as yet God had not brought all His judgments on the Pharaoh as he designed to bring,”* Why are we going to witness two more plagues? Because God had carefully planned this scenario, fully aware of the Pharaoh’s true heart from the beginning. What He desired to accomplish...hasn’t been finished yet.

THE PLAGUE OF DARKNESS – (Exodus 10:21 – 29)

Like the 3rd and 6th plagues, this 9th plague comes on without warning, most likely following closely behind the locusts. Spence notes that some commentators want to match this plague of darkness with a well known natural phenomenon called *“The Khamsin ”* or *“Wind of the Desert”* which commonly visits Egypt about the time of the vernal equinox. It is said that this wind causes dense clouds of fine sand which block out the sun’s light and produce a weird darkness similar to a bad fog. But the text tells us this darkness lasted 3 days, and it was so dense and black that ***“not one saw another, neither rose any from his place for three days.”*** No one shuffled around in the dark? Why could they not light candles or torches? I think we know the answer: this is more than just a natural phenomenon. I believe there was no light – natural or artificial – in Egypt for those three days! And of course, it would be evident that ***“all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.”***

Here’s an interesting side-note: There is speculation that during the 239 years of captivity, some of the Egyptians moved into Goshen because we’re told of the Israelites “borrowing gold and silver from their neighbors” before leaving Egypt. But, when it came to the plagues, I do believe “Goshen” referred only to the people of God.

I’m sure Moses wasn’t surprised when the summons came to appear before Pharaoh yet again. ***“Go, worship the LORD.”*** he says. ***“Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind.”*** Still...he wants to bargain. Moses replies, ***“You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God. Our***

livestock must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshiping the LORD our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the Lord.”

And for the first time, I believe we see Ahmose’s fury. Yes, he has been angry before, but not to this extent: He tells Moses to **“Get out of my sight and make sure you do not appear before me again, for in the very day you see my face you will die.”** Moses quickly responds, **“You have spoken well, I will never see your face again.”**

According to Spence, it is generally agreed among some scholars that Moses did not leave immediately after saying, **“I will never see your face again.”** It is believed that he lingered and continued to address Pharaoh for a short time, during which he announced the coming of the 10th plague – the death of the firstborn child. Little does the Pharaoh know that soon after, Moses’ face isn’t the only one he will never see again.