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The First Nine Plagues of Egypt

Exodus 7:1 to 10:29

Part 3 — 9:13-10:29, Plagues 7-9

Introduction

This section contains the third and final cycle of three plagues delivered by Moses and Aaron. The tenth and last plague stands alone. It is the most forceful, and the one that will secure their release. These three plagues are delivered by Moses and continue the demonstration against the gods of Egypt.

The Seventh Plague: Hail and Fire, 9:13-35

There is no set pattern for the accounts of the various plague reports by Moses. As already noted, the first nine plague accounts fall into three sets of three. If there is any pattern, the accounts are long-long-short in the first cycle; long-short-short in the second cycle; and long-long-short in the third cycle. The seventh and eighth plague accounts are the longest two of the entire group, see Stuart, *Exodus*, pp. 230-31.

The Warning, 9:13-17

Verses 13-17. It is clear in this plague account that God is taking things to a higher level. The opening announcement is another morning meeting with Pharaoh with the demand to let the Hebrews go to serve Him, v. 13. But as Kaiser states it, "Moses was prompted by God to preface His latest announcement of divine judgment with a long message filled with instructions (vv. 13-10). This unprecedented message was calculated to move Pharaoh and his subjects from rebellion to belief in the God of the Hebrews. Its ominous contents included the following:

1. An announcement that God would vent the 'full force' (v. 14; i.e. 'all the remaining plagues'); cf 29:12 . . . of His plagues on Egypt so that no one would doubt that there was anyone like this God in all the earth.
2. A reminder that previous pestilences and plagues might well have swept both king and people off the face of the earth had not God deliberately and purposely spared them for one very important reason: that God's power and name would be heralded throughout the earth by means of Pharaoh's stupidity vv. 15-16.
3. In his denying the release of Israel, Pharaoh acted as an obstructionist against almighty God Himself and would be punished, v. 17.

4. God would make good on His threat that Egypt would experience the worst hailstorm it had ever seen in its history, v. 18.
5. An extraordinary feature was provided for those Egyptians who believed. **Their obedience to the words of Moses were a means of escape from the effects of the storm v. 19),” Kaiser, *Exodus*, p. 361.**

Verses 14-17. Note also this additional word on these verses. The expectation of the results of the seventh plague was not the same as in the first six plagues. The expectation was that it could result in the blessing of belief and trust in order that the Egyptian people “may know that there is none like Me in all the earth,” v. 14b. Kaiser believes that the plagues started in early February and lasted for eight weeks, one plague per week, up to the ninth plague. These doubtless were eight of the most dreadful weeks in the life of Pharaoh Thutmose III, Kaiser, *Exodus*, p. 361. The first six plagues had been severe but restrained responses. The next three and the fourth to follow would be unprecedented in power, intensity, and severity.

The word אֶרֶץ, *ha'arets*, “the earth,” appears in 9:14, 15, and 16 where its use is very significant in the context of this message. Here “the earth” means “the entire planet” and “all nations.” As such, it is a call to the whole world, even though it is addressed to Pharaoh. What *Yahweh* was about to do would stand as a testimony not only to the Egyptians, but also to the whole world that *God* was in control of all things. He has all power and is the only one who can save. Because of these demonstrations, His name would be proclaimed among all the people of the earth.

Lessons

1. Before *God* initiates judgment, He always gives ample, clear warning. The Old Testament prophets were a spiritual early warning system as they called the Hebrews to repent and warned of impending judgment. They were careful to declare that men and nations who disobey *God* and disregard His word were liable to judgment, vv. 13ff.
2. Moses was *God's* prophet. His warnings were the prelude to judgment that *God* sent against sinful men and nations, including Egypt, who disregarded the wrath of *God* against sin, vv. 14-16.
3. *God* offers to individuals and nations, including Egypt and Pharaoh, the opportunity to know Him by faith and obedience to His Word. He declares that all who reject His Word and His commands will know Him in judgment, v. 19.
4. *God's* purpose in judgment in this life is redemptive. His judgment after this life is over is purely and eternally punitive.

The Announcement, 9:18-21

Verses 18-19. *God* has been more than patient in His attempt to get Pharaoh to comply. Each ray of truth that has been revealed only served to harden the heart

of the king of Egypt. Prior to unleashing the fury of this next plague, God gave Moses the awesome announcement to reveal what was about to happen this time in Egypt. Reference to Egypt "since its founding until now," was a reminder that the Egyptians were extremely proud of their history that stretched back more than 1700 years before the time of Moses. The first Pharaoh was Narmer, who brought the northern and southern kingdoms [lower and upper Egypt] together as one nation in 3100 BC. He took the throne name of Menes I and was the head of Egypt's first dynasty that included eight kings who ruled from 3100 to 2850 BC. To say that something had never happened in all those 1700 years would certainly grab the attention of all who heard it. Moses described a hailstorm of catastrophic proportions. Not only would it be the worst on record, but the hail would kill every man or animal in the field, v. 19.

Verses 20-21. The plagues of Egypt apparently had made believers among the servants of Pharaoh. They had been there when Moses visited and announced each of the plague judgments. So these servants of Pharaoh passed the word to their own servants and their families to get the livestock out of the fields and into the barns, and to see that all their families and workers remained indoors, v. 20. They believed the demonstrations of Moses, but there is no indication that they confessed *Yahweh* as the one true God. There were others, however, who, like Pharaoh, paid no attention to the words of God delivered by Moses and left their families, servants, and livestock in harm's way.

Lessons

1. The character of God includes His longsuffering. He does not act quickly or impetuously, see Exod 34:6-7. He is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to the knowledge of the truth, 2 Pet 3:9, vv. 18-19.
2. Even the pagans who follow the principles of God's Word and heed His warnings will be delivered by obedience to His commands, vv. 20-21.

The Awesome Event, 9:22-26

Verses 22-24. Moses held his hands in the air with the staff that signaled the beginning of this plague and called forth the devastation on the land of Egypt, exclusive of the land of Goshen. So God sent thunder and hail, mingled with fire. The "fire" probably refers to lightening. Accompanying the devastating hailstorm was thunder and lightening that struck the ground and then ran along the ground through the giant hailstones, vv. 22-23. The language of verse 24 repeats the declaration of verse 18 and restates that this hailstorm was unlike any in the history of Egypt. Some interpreters take these verses to mean more literally that there was fire on the ground around the hailstones, perhaps a reference to lightening. The hail was sufficiently large enough that no man or animal could survive outdoors. It was very "heavy," which probably refers to its intensity as well as the size of the hailstones, v. 24.

Verses 25-26. While no clue as to the size of the stones is given here, except that they were large enough and in enough quantity that no tree, plant, man or animal could survive, v. 25. In Revelation 16:21, John described a similar event and stated the weight of each hailstone was a "talent," which was 75 pounds, and the royal talent was 150 pounds in weight, see chart in *The Believer's Study Bible*, p. 1324. Any hailstones baseball-size or larger would certainly be deadly to man or beast, especially if they came down in catastrophic proportions. Even in modern times there is no record of such an event.

This dramatic and unprecedented display clearly struck again at the heart of Egyptian theology. There are two prominent gods associated with the air and the sky, Nut and Shu. Also, the god who was the protector of crops was Seth. None of these gods was able to prevent or protect the nation from the devastation it received in the seventh plague. The devastation was evident "throughout the land of Egypt, but not in the land of Goshen," vv. 25-26.

Pharaoh's Answer, Moses' Response, 9:27-35

Verses 27-32. At first look, it seems like Pharaoh was repentant. He said, "I have sinned this time, the Lord [*Yahweh*] is righteous, and my people and I are wicked," v. 27. In addition he says, "it is enough, I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer," v. 28. The talk sounded promising, but Moses was not impressed. He told Pharaoh that when he had left the city, he would call out to *Yahweh* and pray that the plague be stopped. But note that he says, "But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear *Yahweh* God," v. 30. This is the first use of "fear the Lord," in the Bible with 97 other verses in both the Old and New Testaments. The "fear of the Lord" is the foundation and basis for faith, Prov 1:7; 9:10. Moses knew that neither Pharaoh nor his servants had that kind of reverence or faith. The current crops were destroyed, but the wheat that matures by summer's end was spared, vv. 31-32. This removed the current food supply but allowed the hope of the end of summer and fall crops to sustain the Egyptians.

Verses 33-35. Nevertheless, Moses went out and prayed for the Lord to stop the plague and the hail ceased, v. 33. This time Pharaoh confessed his sin, but it is clear that he is making no change in his policy to refuse the Hebrews the right to leave, another step in the hardening process, v. 34. So as he had done six times before, Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews depart, v. 35.

Lessons

1. Some sinners are not sorry for their sin, but they are sorry they were caught in their sin and that they have to face sin's consequences, vv. 27-29.

2. Did the writer of Proverbs 29:1 have Pharaoh in mind when he wrote, "He who is often reprov'd, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy?" This certainly was the condition of the heart of Pharaoh in Exodus 9:27-35. He has been repeatedly warned and has feigned repentance only to continue to defy God, v. 30.
3. God often preserves the lost that have not stubbornly or deliberately rebelled against Him in order to give them a chance to repent, v. 31-33.
4. Insincere repentance is no repentance. Pharaoh's bogus claims to repent served only to harden his heart and prolong inevitable judgment, v. 34.
5. Each time a person disregards the warning of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, his heart becomes hardened to the truth. Eventually one's heart can be hardened beyond any sensitivity to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and he is given over to a reprobate mind, vv. 34-35; see Rom 1:24-32.

The Eighth Plague: Locusts, 10:1-20

This is the second longest account of the nine plagues. Locust plagues were not uncommon in the Ancient Near East and were sometimes seen as a judgment from God, see e.g. Deut 28:38; Joel 1:4; 2:25; Amos 4:9; 7:1; and Nahum 3:15-16. There are many species of locust worldwide, but the desert locust is one that is found exclusively in an area bound by the Red Sea between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. A single swarm can cover up to 1200 square kilometers and can contain between 40 and 80 million locusts per square kilometer. The locust can live between three to six months, and there is a ten to sixteenfold increase in locust numbers from one generation to the next.

The desert locust lives a solitary life until it rains, at which time the female lays eggs in sandy soil. The vegetation that comes after rain provides food and shelter until the locust nymphs, as the young are called, develop into winged adults. Under ideal conditions, swarms can develop and invade a country from every border. Locust swarms fly with the speed of the wind and can cover from 60 to 120 miles a day, flying at heights up to 6,000 feet.

The Desert Locust



The Purpose of the Plagues, 10:1-2

Verses 1-2. God makes clear once again that the hardening process has been precipitated by the plagues and by the obstinate will of Pharaoh, of which God is very much aware. The same miracles that have produced increasingly stronger faith in the lives of Moses, Aaron, and the Hebrews, have brought hardness and rebellion to the will of Pharaoh, v. 1. The events of the exodus from Egypt will be legendary examples of God's power and His love for Israel to all future generations. The use of the phrase "brought you out" recurs 71 times in the Old Testament. Many of those references specifically mention the deliverance from Egypt as a sign of God's ability and determination to redeem His people. So, the miracles of Egypt will educate coming generations on how God intervened to free them from Egypt. It also will bring the people to deeper faith in the God they serve. This purpose is especially celebrated in the Psalms, see Ps 77:11-20; 78:43-53; 105:26-38; 106:7-12; 114:1-3; 135:8-9; and 136:10-15.

Lessons

1. The truth will either set free the lost, John 8:31-32, or it will harden the sinner against repentance and faith, v. 1.
2. The same truth that convicts and converts also may harden the will of the unrepentant to reject the commands of God, v. 2.

The Locust Plague Announced, 10:3-6

Events leading up to this plague unfold in rapid-fire succession. Pharaoh hears the demand, gets advice from his servants, and proposes a compromise.

Verses 3-6. Moses announced to Pharaoh the condition that if he did not let the people leave, there would be an enormous locust plague, vv. 3-5. They will eat everything that was left after the devastation of the hailstorm. They also will fill the houses, and it will be a world-class locust infestation that no one on earth has seen until the day this plague takes place, v. 6. Note how the plague is described as the locusts will completely cover the ground, and no one will be able to see the earth beneath their feet. It will be impossible to walk without stepping on locusts. This plague struck at the god, Serapia, who was considered the protector against locust plagues, but who proved to be non-existent as a help against this judgment.

The Servants' Advice and Pharaoh's Response, 10:7-11

Verses 7-8. The immediate advice of Pharaoh's servants was "How long" will you let Moses vex us? Let the men go! The land of Egypt is destroyed! v. 7. So Pharaoh listened to their advice and summoned Moses and Aaron. He inquired as to exactly who would go on this worship excursion, v. 8.

Moses' Answer and Pharaoh's Threat, 10:9-11

Verses 9-11. Pharaoh took the advice of his servants seriously. Moses told him that everyone would go and take all their possessions. The young, old, sons, daughters, and livestock - all of us will go, v. 9. Pharaoh's response was a threatening one. "The Lord had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you!" v. 10. Perhaps even then an evil plan was forming in the mind of Pharaoh. Pharaoh says NO! "Not so," v. 11. You and the men may go, but you leave the rest behind, v. 11.

Lessons

1. Once again, God gave Pharaoh clear and detailed warning about the world-class infestation of locusts. God's warnings of judgment are clear and accurate. God is longsuffering. He has repeatedly warned Pharaoh for eight consecutive times about the devastation to be sent on the land of Egypt. As a reminder, these events probably came in quick succession, one per week for eight weeks.
2. Even the servants of Pharaoh urged him to release the Hebrews. All the previous judgments made them believe that whatever Moses predicted would indeed happen. Even these pagans understood the message of James 4:17, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin."
3. Pharaoh offers to restructure the demand by allowing only the men to go. This would insure their return to Egypt. God does not bargain in matters of sin and judgment to come.

The Plague Unfolds, 10:12-15

Verses 12-15. Exactly as Moses had warned, the locusts rode in on a strong east wind that blew all night. God summoned every locust in that part of the world to ride the wind and descend on Egypt, vv. 12-13. As predicted, they covered the land of Egypt. Just as forecast, the infestation was unprecedented, like no one had seen before, v. 14. They covered the ground and consumed all the vegetation through the whole land of Egypt, except for Goshen, v. 15.

Pharaoh Temporarily Repents, 10:16-20

Verses 16-20. As before, Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron, confesses his sin and begs forgiveness, asking that the plague be removed, vv. 16-17. Moses did as requested and asked God to remove the plague, v. 18. So the Lord sent a strong west wind, and that night the locusts rode out of Egypt on it, and by morning there was not one left in all the land of Egypt, v. 19. But once more, Pharaoh repented of his repentance and refused to let the Hebrews depart, v. 20.

The Ninth Plague: Darkness, 10:21-29

Like the third and sixth plague, there was no announcement made to Pharaoh. Moses was commanded to stretch out his hand over the land of Egypt. It is not clear how the darkness was created. Kaiser suggests it may have been one of the *Khamsin* dust storms that come off the desert, and the air is so thick with dust that no one can see for two or three days. F. B. Meyer says that an Arab chronicler, about the end of the eleventh century, records a great storm, accompanied by darkness so intense that it was thought that the end of the world had arrived, Meyer, *Exodus*, p. 125. The darkness was not an eclipse as some have suggested because no eclipse of the sun lasts for three days. We do know this. It was a supernatural occurrence, and God is more than able to absent the land of light whenever He wants and however He chooses to do so. This plague struck at the heart of Egyptian theology in that Amun Ra was the chief god of the pantheon, and he was represented by the sun disk and associated with the light of the sun. **Verses 21-23.** Evil men who choose to live in darkness will get their desire. This plague came without warning. Moses was instructed to stretch forth his hand and bring darkness on the land of Egypt. Moses did so and there was "thick" darkness that could be felt and lasted three days, vv. 21-22. During this time in Egypt, no one could see or move about. The land of Goshen was affected but in a limited way in that they had light in their homes, v. 23. Whatever the explanation of how, we know that this was another unprecedented plague that held Egypt in its grip and allowed no one to see or to move.

Verses 24-26. After the third day, obviously when the light came back, Pharaoh sent for Moses and tried to make another bargain. "Let your little ones also go with you," but leave your livestock here in Egypt, v. 24. Moses reminded him that they had to have the livestock in order to make the sacrifices and offerings that were part of their worship and must be allowed to go with them, vv. 25-26. He also added that not even he knew all that God would require of them when they came to the place of sacrifice. Therefore, everything and everyone must be allowed to leave Egypt.

Verses 27-29. Once again, Pharaoh's will was fixed and hardened, and he would not let the Hebrews depart, v. 27. But then the anger of Pharaoh spilled over, and he told Moses, "Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!" v. 28. Moses' answer was terse and pointed, "You have spoken well. I will never see your face again," v. 29. It is clear that this was a death threat to Moses. It meant that no longer did Moses have any immunity. He had killed an Egyptian 40 years earlier. Perhaps Pharaoh intended to exact the death sentence on Moses as an act of vengeance. Even though Pharaoh had been given eight previous opportunities to conform to the will of God, he had repeatedly and consistently hardened his heart. Pharaoh had identified the Hebrews as a potential threat, 1:10. His desire to silence Moses also was an

attempt to silence the rebellious spirit among all the Hebrews as well, see Stuart, *Exodus*, pp. 260-61. This was the final chance for Pharaoh. There would be no more chances to avoid the tenth and final plague. How ironic that Pharaoh's placement of Moses under threat of death, sealed his own fate and placed all Egypt under threat of death!

Lessons

1. God sent the light of His truth into the world, but the world cannot comprehend spiritual truth on its own, John 1:5. Darkness is used repeatedly in Scripture for the sin of rejecting the truth, Luke 1:79; John 12:46; Col 1:13; Eph 6:12; 1 John 1:5-10; and Jude 1:6.
2. The people of God were exempt from the darkness in that they alone had light in their homes, 10:23. God gives light to His people, and light represents the truth of His Word, Ps 119:105.
3. Many a couple that knows the Lord have been remiss in teaching their children the light of His Word, leaving them in spiritual darkness. Pharaoh's attempt to get the Hebrews to leave their children as security was a failure.
4. We cannot give ourselves to God and leave our possessions in Egypt. God requires that we use what we have to serve Him.
5. Pharaoh became the prophet of his own fate when he said, "You will see my face no more." By his total rejection, he hardened heart and sealed the fate of the firstborn of Egypt as God had warned him, Exod 4:22-23. Once again, he illustrates **Proverbs 29:1**, "He who is often rebuked, *and* hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."