

The Sixth and Seventh Plagues: Boils and Hail

Exodus 9:8-35

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April 22, 2001

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with to Exodus, chapter 9. We've worked through the first five plagues now, and it may be good to pause and review some of the themes we've seen so far. First of all, we've emphasized on a number of occasions that the plague represents God's redemptive work of destruction. That is, as He works to redeem us from our enemies, from Satan and from sin from the power of the flesh and the world, He also tears down the strongholds which are arrayed against us, and we see that foreshadowed in the Exodus itself. As the people of Israel are being redeemed out of Egypt, it means judgment against Egypt itself.

We've also seen, as we work through the plagues, a clear manifestation of the Lordship of God. From the very beginning of the stories about what God is doing in the plagues that has been stressed. One of God's purposes is so that Israel and that Egypt will know that He is the Lord. That is clearly one of the great purposes of this contest between God and Pharaoh. You remember back in Exodus 7, verse 5, we were told explicitly that God would do this in order that the Egyptians would know that "I am the Lord."

We've also noticed a number of patterns developing in the plagues. For instance, in the first two plagues, and in that initial encounter between Moses and Aaron and the magicians with regard to the staff and the snakes, the magicians managed to reproduce the signs which Moses and Aaron displayed. But in the third plague, the magicians admit that they are unable to reproduce the sign and acknowledge that what Moses and Aaron have done is indeed the result of God's power. You remember they say this is the "finger of God." Now that's significant because there are three cycles of three plagues. The first three plagues, the second three 4 through 6, and then the third, 7 through 9. We're going to look at the last of the second cycle tonight, and the first of the third. And it's interesting that in the last of the second cycle of plagues, we see again the magicians of Pharaoh's court facing defeat, just like we did in the last of the first three plagues. At any rate, in the first three plagues in each case, Aaron's staff is used. But his staff does not appear in the second set of three plagues, and yet in the third set of three plagues it will reappear again and be used.

Pharaoh's heart is hardened in the first five plagues. It's either said that his heart was hardened, it's just been announced that it was hardened, or it is said that he hardened his own heart. That's going to change tonight when we look at Exodus, chapter 9, and the sixth plague. We're going to hear something a little different. So tonight we approach the sixth and seventh plagues in Exodus, chapter 9, beginning in verse 8. Let's hear God's Word.

Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh, and it will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt." So they took soot from a kiln and stood before Pharaoh and Moses threw it toward the sky and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils. For the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them just as the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, let My people go that they may serve Me.' For this time I will send all my plagues on you and your servants, and your people so that you may know there is no one like me in all the earth. For if by now I had put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would have then been cut off from the earth. But indeed for this cause, I have allowed you to remain in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go. Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Now, therefore, send, bring your livestock and whatever you have in the fields to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home when the hail comes down on them will die." The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord made his servant and his livestock flee into the houses. But he who paid no regard to the word of the Lord left his servants and his livestock in the field. Now the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand to the sky that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field throughout the land of Egypt." And Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt so there was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail. Then pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I have

sinned this time, the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the Lord for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail, and I will let you go and you shall stay no longer." And Moses said to Him, "As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord Go." Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and spelt were not ruined, for they ripen late. So Moses went out of the city from pharaoh and spread out his hands to the Lord and the thunder and the hail ceased. And rain no longer poured on the earth, but, when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

Amen, this is God's Word. May He add His blessing to It. Let's pray.

Lord, we bow before You, and we ask that we would see Your might displayed in Your word, and that we would humble ourselves before You. We would not exalt ourselves over Your Word and Your purposes, that as we profess to be Yours, we would indeed bow the knee before You, before Your word, acknowledging Your majesty, Your sovereignty, Your rule in our life. As we see You deliver us from our enemies, lead us then to love you as we ought. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

The sixth and the seventh plagues form the end of the second cycle of three plagues, and the beginning of the third and last cycle of three plagues. Through this culmination of three, three and three, in the first nine plagues, we see a growing intensification of judgment by the sovereign God of Israel against Egypt. There will be a pause, and then a horrendous break when the tenth plague comes. But though these cycles of plagues, we see God's judgment increasing. And I'd like to walk through each of these plagues with you tonight separately.

First, let's direct our attention to Exodus 9, just verses 8 through 12 where the plague of the boils is recorded. Let's look at three things in this passage. Verses 8 and 9. Here we see soot from the kiln thrown in the air. And then suddenly sores appearing on the bodies of the Egyptians. Then look at verses 10 and 11; here is the implementation of the plague. We are told what the plague is going to be in 8 and 9, then it's implemented in verses 10 and 11. And then, we see the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in verse 12. Three things I'd like you to see in this passage.

I. God is God and His sovereignty is seen in the intensification of judgment in the plagues.

First of all, God is God, and His sovereignty is seen in the intensification of judgment in the plagues. These plagues become progressively worse and more dangerous. This is the last plague in the second triad. It is unannounced, there is no prior warning given for it, just like we saw in the third plague. So in the end of the first three plagues, we see a plague that comes unannounced. At the end of the second three plagues we see a plague that comes unannounced. This plague impacts and impels human life. The last plague, the fifth plague, had been against the livestock. This plague, however, explicitly is against man and beast. Why is kiln soot thrown into the air? To indicate the coming of this plague. Well, there are a number of different speculations as to the reason for that. It may well have indicated the rapid spread of this disease by throwing this very light dust into the air. The slightest wind would have spread it quickly, and it may have indicated that this plague is going to spread like wild fire. It may have indicated what the plague itself would look like on the skin of Egyptians, and the animals as they were affected, perhaps lot of black splotches resembling this black soot from the kilns manifested itself on the Egyptians. Or, this may be God's ironic rejoinder to the oppression of Pharaoh. You see the people of Israel knew a little bit about brick soot and kilns. They had been forced in hard labor to produce bricks. Now, the soot from those kilns symbolizes God's judgment against Pharaoh. And so we may see God here again showing His sovereignty in responding to Pharaoh's own methods of oppressing the children of Israel.

We're told explicitly, if you look at the end of verse 8, that this is to be done in Pharaoh's sight. Why? So that once again he will know for certain that this is a miracle. This is not just a natural occurrence, it's not just a natural sequence of events that flows from some particular natural phenomenon in Egypt, it is something, which God had brought about. And as this judgment touches man and beast, we see God intensifying the trials and judgments against Egypt. You remember in the story of Job, when Satan desires to intensify the trial of Job, he moves from attacking his family, and his possessions, his household had his property to attacking his body. Here you see God moving from attacking the possessions and the household of Egypt to attacking the bodies of the Egyptians. If lesser judgments do not work, God will send greater ones. So we see an intensification of God's judgment in the plagues.

II. God is God and His sovereignty is seen in His triumph over magic and occult power.

Secondly, if you look at verses 10 through 11 we learn some interesting things even in the way this plague is implemented in some of the things that happen in connection with it. God is God, and His sovereignty is seen in His triumph over magic, and the occult powers of the Egyptian magicians. We're not given a specific description of this disease. We're told that it came upon with boils breaking out, with sores on man and beast in verse 10. What was the disease?

We don't know. It may have been an anthrax that impacted both animals and people. It may have been some sort of boils or leprosy or smallpox or Nile scabs, but whatever it was, it became preverbal. It was dangerous. You never threaten someone with something that's not dangerous. In the days after the Napoleonic wars between England and France, we are told that English nannies would threaten children, "If you don't go to bed, Napoleon Bonaparte is going to get you." You don't threaten children with something that is not scary. Well, isn't it interesting that when you turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 28, verse 27, Moses says to the children of Israel in his final address to them, that if they are unfaithful to the covenant of God, "The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch from which you cannot be healed." Clearly, whatever this is, it's dangerous. It not only impacts, it imperils human life.

Now in verse 11, we find that the magicians are utterly defeated. Just as in the third plague they had admitted, we can't do this, this is the finger of God. Now, they are unable to stand before Moses. They are themselves victims. Verse 10 tells us that Moses stands before Pharaoh. God causes him to stand before Pharaoh. But now the magicians cannot stand before Moses. And indeed, this is the final mention of the magicians until II Timothy 3:8. They were so defeated that they did not surface again in the Old Testament. God had utterly defeated them, and now the next time you will hear of a plague like this after Deuteronomy will be in Revelation 16. In Revelation 16, you have to think that on John's mind are these great plagues. Because if you look at Revelation 16:1 we read this: "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels. 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God so the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast, and who worshipped the image.'" This plague becomes a sign of God's judgment against those who are opposing His people. And here in the Exodus, at the very least it's a sign of mortality. The vulnerability of our bodies to disease and death. And thus, it is a warning, it is a warning against Pharaoh. God will reckon with those who aid the wicked in wickedness. And he reckons with the magicians, and even they are infected along with the rest of the Egyptians. And it reminds us to that Satan is unable to protect those who are in a league with Him. God protects His people, but Satan is unable to protect his, and the magicians fall before Moses.

III. God is God and His sovereignty is seen in His handing over sinners to addiction/bondage to their own desires.

Finally, in verse 12, we see the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. This is unique in the plague stories. For the very first time, look at the first words of verse 12, for the very first time in the plague narratives, we are told that God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Now what are we to make of that? The first five plagues we are told either that Pharaoh's heart is hardened, or that he hardened his own heart. Now here in the sixth plague, we are told that God hardened his heart. Are we to

assume that actually Pharaoh hardened his own heart and that God's actions were only responsive. Well no, that not right. Before the plague stories started, God told Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart.

What we are being told here that in God's sovereignty, God's hardening administers a judgment on Pharaoh in which God gives Pharaoh exactly what he wants. Pharaoh's heart is hardened not by pressing him to go against his desires, but in hardening him in the very desires of his heart. This is the sorest judgment this side of hell. When God grants for the wicked to go their own way, and to follow their own pleasure. Pharaoh once again, again look at the second part of verse 12, Pharaoh once again refuses to listen Moses and Aaron. This is the practical manifestation of a hard heart. He won't listen. He won't listen to reason, he won't listen to their appeals. And once again we're told that all happened just like the lord told Moss it would happen. God's foreknowledge and predestination were confirmed in Moses' mind because the Lord had spoken it to Moses. I want you to look at a contrast in verse 12 where we are told it happened just as the Lord had spoken to Moses. Now, turn over to the end of the seventh plague, verse 35. And it happened just as the Lord had spoken through Moses. This plague indicates that God had been faithful in the word, which He had spoken to His servant, the prophet Moses, so that God's prediction had once again come through. Therefore, God is the God who is in control of the future, He is the sovereign God. His sovereignty is seen here in His handing over sinners, into addiction and bondage to their own desires and in events happening just as He said they would.

As we've said, this is the sorest judgment this side of hell. The judicial hardening of God, when God gives us over to our own wicked desires. This is precisely what Paul is speaking of in Romans, chapter 1, when he repeats that horrible phrase God gave them over. God gave them over, God gave them over. Pharaoh gets exactly what he wants, and it ends it being self-destruction. So far the sixth plague.

We move then to the seventh plague. Turn to verses 13, and we'll look to the end of the chapter. In the seventh plague, again I'd like you to see three parts of it. Verses 13 through 21 where we see along introductory message given to Pharaoh. Then in verses 22 through 26 we see the plague itself sent. And then in verses 27 through 35 we see this audience, this debrief between Moses and Pharaoh.

IV. God reveals His twin purposes for the plagues.

In verses 13 through 21 God reveals His twin purposes for the plagues. And, we see His surprisingly, gracious dealings with Pharaoh in at least a couple of ways. This is the beginning of the third set of three plagues. And it's prefaced by a long theological introduction. Here God tells us His purposes in redemption. Look

again at the phrase. "Let My people go that they may serve Me." Here we see the ground of the redemption of Exodus; it's God's people. This is God's people. And here we see the goal of the Exodus. Their purpose is to serve the Lord. Let my people go, so that they may serve the Lord." Notice again that the plague is visited on Pharaoh's heart. This time verse in 14, "I will send all My plagues on your heart and your servants and your people." This is a direct assault on the sovereignty of Pharaoh, and it indicates an intensification of the confrontation. We also see at the end of verse 14, the doxological purpose of the Exodus, "that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth." God tells us in verse 15 that He is in total control. And He reiterates His purpose in the Exodus in verse 16. In order to show you My power and to proclaim My Name in all the earth.

This passage is crucial for our understanding of God's providence. God's providence often has dual purposes. He is often doing several things at once. For instance, in this passage, notice how God's mercy is shown in two ways. God's mercy is shown in that God does not cut off Pharaoh immediately. God could have started the judgment of Egypt by simply wiping Pharaoh out at the very beginning; but He doesn't do that. And thus we see the grace of God's patience, granting to Pharaoh the opportunity to repent. And then we see God's grace in the forewarning of this plague, and the indication at that the livestock ought to be brought in from the field. Isn't it interesting? God is bringing judgment against Egypt, and yet you see His heart of compassion in that He is concerned even about beasts and servants in the field. This God of judgment is not merely a God of justice and holiness, He is a God of compassion and mercy and love. And He even has compassion on the animals of the Egyptians, if they will but harken to His warnings. And indeed those who harken to the word of the Lord, their servants and their animals are spared and those who do not, their servants and their animals are lost.

And so on the one hand, in the Exodus judgments we see God's grace and His mercy and His compassion and His long suffering displayed, and on the other hand, He displays His sovereignty, and there is no one like Him in heaven and earth. On the one hand, He's bringing His people out of bondage; on the other hand He is raining judgment on His enemies. God can do many things with the same action. It's a display of His sovereignty. We are usually unable to kill two birds with one stone. God does it all the time. And we learn here about the dual purposes of His providence. And it's a sign of His sovereignty.

V. God's sovereignty in the nature and extent of the plague.

Secondly, as you look at verses 22 through 26, you see His sovereignty displayed in the very nature and extent of the plague itself. Look at what is emphasized here. First, you see the staff used again. In verses 23 and 23, Moses stretches the staff, and he stretches it towards the sky. This plague will

come from heaven. This plague is the first of a set of plagues in which it will be made very clear that they are administered by God Himself. There is in no way the possibility that these plagues are simply the natural consequence of something that had happened in plagues. These plagues are utterly unrelated in their working out to the previous plagues. You could have argued at some point that the plague on the Nile resulted in the plague from the frogs, which resulted in the plague of the insects, which resulted in, and so on. But when this plague comes, it's clear that's administered directly from heaven. Notice also the way that the extent of this plague is emphasized, beginning in verse 22: "That hail may fall on all the land of Egypt. On man, on beast, on every plant of the field throughout the land of Egypt." Moses stretches out his hand, and we read at the end of verse 23, that the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt, so there was hail, fire, continually mixed with the hail which had not been in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Egypt became a nation in 3100 B.C. So we're being told here that for 1700 years there had never been a storm like this. That's fairly impressive. We had worshipping with us today a man from a PCA church in Knoxville who is with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and he is here in the Delta region observing some of the flooding. I had seen the pictures on television of the mid-western flooding, but I had no idea that even here in our own state that there had been regions hard hit. He said Lexington had had a five hundred-year flood. That is a flood unmatched in a period of a half of millennium. People's homes and properties were absolutely, irrecoverably wiped out. This is a seventeen hundred-year storm. There had been no storm like this in the history of Egypt in two millennia. It is a sign of the intensity of the judgment.

But he's not finished yet. Look at verse 25. The hail struck all that was in the field throughout all the land of Egypt both man and beast every plant of the field, shattered every tree of the field, only in the land of Goshen. There was no hail." The extent of this judgment is a measure of the intensity of the judgment, and the fact that it is spared in Goshen, is a mark of God's discrimination. And we see God's sovereignty in the nature of the plague and the extent of the plague itself.

VI. God's sovereignty in Pharaoh's confession and failure.

And then finally, if you look at verses 27 through 35 in this audience between Moses and Pharaoh, we see God's sovereignty in Pharaoh's admission of sin, and we see it in his untruthfulness. Pharaoh, in verse 27, does something fairly amazing. He confesses his sin without making any judgment upon his motives. Look at his words. "I have sinned this time. A less than complete confession of sin, since we don't get a confession here of his previous unrighteousness. But Moses wants you to see those words. I confess my sin. I have sinned this time. The Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. You see, Pharaoh was considered a god, and Pharaoh was considered so righteous that when you came into his presence, you had to lick the dust because you were in the presence of the righteous god of Egypt; the one who had administered

justice. Can you imagine the children of Israel sitting around the campfires in the wilderness as the stories were told of the time when they had been under the oppression of Egypt for 400 years, and now been brought out and liberated. They are remembering now that this man was held up as the great and godly one, even though he was the source of their evil oppression, and they're hearing now about how he confessed his sins. There must have surely been some laughter around the camp those nights. And Moses is showing us here how the one who claims to be a god and the one who claims to be righteous, admits his own wickedness. God is sovereign, God is upright, Pharaoh is not. Pharaoh has to ask for prayer again. He has to promise to let them go in order to find relief from the plague.

And Moses responds by saying, "I will pray for you. In verse 29, I will pray for you, but I will pray for you so that you will know that the earth belongs to the Lord." I command the sky because God owns the sky. God is in charge of the world, and the reason that I'm going to pray, is not because I believe what you just said, but because I want you to know that the world belongs to God. The world belongs to the God of Israel. And he goes on to say in verse 30, "I'm not impressed by your confession. I don't believe yet that you fear the Lord God of Israel, but I'm going to pray anyway. And so Moses prays and then Pharaoh lies. Having promised to release the people, he hardens his heart, and he changes his mind, and he lies. And so not only do we have a passage in which the god, the righteous god of Egypt confesses his sin; but we have a passage in which he lies. You see, the God of Israel is mocking the god of Egypt and is showing His sovereignty even in Pharaoh's admission of his sin. God is sovereign over the world, and we see it even here in His command of the sky. He's sovereign over His enemies, He's sovereign in His grace, and He's sovereign in His judgment. Our God rules. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, over and over again You rule, and yet we run into events in our lives which make it very difficult for us to affirm Your rule. We struggle with it. We lose jobs. We lose friends. We face diseases. We face trials. And in the midst of those, some of them are so intense that we begin to doubt Your control, and we begin to doubt the goodness of Your purposes. You are reminding us here, however, that whatever You ordain is right, and it's good in the end for Your people. For in Your providence You often have dual purposes. We find ourselves undone and humbled, and yet even in the undoing we find ourselves exalted because of Your good providences. Help us then to learn the lesson of Your sovereignty, that our God reigns, and He reigns for the good of His people as well as for His own glory. These things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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