

“THE SERVANT OF THE LORD” – A Study of the Life of Moses**“Preaching Plagues – Part Three” (Exodus 9:1-35)****PLAGUE FIVE – LIVESTOCK SLAIN BY PESTILENCE**

Then the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if thou refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still, Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain. And the LORD shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all that is the children's of Israel. And the LORD appointed a set time, saying, To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land. (v1-5)

As Pharaoh refused to submit, the Lord continued to deal with him with a fifth plague of pestilence. In grace the Lord warned Pharaoh of the consequences, “*For if thou refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still, Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain.*” This disease would only affect the cattle of the Egyptians.

The Lord revealed the exact timing, “*To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land.*” This was another testimony to His sovereignty. God is sovereign and will be known as such. It is God who decides the plague, the timing of it, and the extent of it. Pharaoh was powerless to resist God’s power. Only Jehovah reigned in Egypt. The Lord wanted not just the Egyptians to grasp this reality but Israel. All the details were written down so that we also can reflect in the awesome power of our sovereign God. There are no circumstances over which He does not rule. That is equally true today as in Moses’ day.

This loss of their livestock by this devastating epidemic was an economic blow to the nation. There was also a religious significance in the plague. The Egyptians worshipped many of these animals as sacred deities. Cattle were particularly important as objects of worship. Later in Exodus 32 the Israelites made a golden calf to worship.

And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one. And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go. (v6-7)

Exactly as the Lord predicted, the consequences followed, “*on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.*” The three promised signs of the fifth plague were fulfilled to the very latter. God proves His sovereign power can even discriminate between people. The Lord does not always absolve His people from suffering. Ligon Duncan observes,

Sometimes He makes distinctions that spare His people from pain. Other times He makes distinctions that allow them to go through that pain, and yet to do so for their benefit. But He is the sovereign God of heaven and earth.

Not all the livestock of the Egyptians was destroyed but those “*in the field*” (v3). The fact that some were spared was grace that Pharaoh and his people did not deserve. Indeed, if any had

faith in the Word of God they could have brought their animals in from the field and saved them. Even at this time of judgment God was graciously extending mercy to the Egyptians. Pharaoh checked every detail and found that it was so. That is all the power he has. He cannot prevent Jehovah ruling in power over his country. Despite the clear evidence the king refused to submit to the Lord's authority and word, "*And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.*"

PLAGUE SIX – BOILS

And the LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt. And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses. (v8-12)

The Lord did not give Pharaoh any prior warnings for the sixth plague. That should remind us that God does not always serve notice of the timing of His judgments for our sin. There are times that He graciously repeatedly warns us that He will act but there are times that He may not do so.

We can only but imagine what agony the Egyptians were going through with their whole bodies covered in these boils. Sleep and work would have been impossible. Infants would have been inconsolable. Spiritually this had great significance, as the Egyptians worshipped gods that they believed had power over diseases. Ironically, the magicians' power is seen to be so impotent here that they cannot even stand before Moses let alone imitate the plague. Jehovah's power is truly greater than all the powers of the Egyptian gods. We do not read of these magicians in the OT again. They have been totally defeated by Jehovah. The devil cannot protect his servants; only God can protect His people.

The text then tells us, "*And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.*" When we interpret this verse, we should always bear in mind that Pharaoh had first hardened his heart and then God subsequently hardened his heart as a reaction to that. So what the Lord appeared to be doing was simply allowing Pharaoh to go deeper in his rebellion (that was already present) by removing His gracious restraints. This was, effectively, giving Pharaoh over to his sin. In a sense God gave Pharaoh enough rope to hang himself.

Such a judicial and sovereign act is the worst possible judgment in this life by the Lord. This is a sobering verse as it reveals that when we harden our hearts, the Lord can allow us to go deeper into rebellion for His own glory and purposes. Like Pharaoh, this can end in our destruction.

PLAGUE SEVEN – HAIL

And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time

send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go? Behold, to morrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now. Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die. (v13-19)

This next plague began the third and final trilogy of plagues leading up to the ultimate plague of death. In grace the Lord sent Moses to give Pharaoh an extended warning of what He was doing and would do. The Egyptians had 24 hours to act in faith upon this coming judgment, which would not come until “to morrow about this time.” Ligon Duncan points out,

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.

This interaction with Pharaoh was particularly interesting. The Lord revealed a number of purposes in sending the plagues:

- (1) Reveal His Person to Pharaoh, “*For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth.*” Pharaoh had feigned ignorance of Jehovah (cf. Exod. 5:2) but now the Lord would demonstrate whom He was and what He controlled.
- (2) Judge the sins of Pharaoh and his people, “*For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth.*”
- (3) Reveal God’s sovereign power through Pharaoh to the world, “*And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.*” God had permitted Pharaoh’s rebellion to go to such lengths so that the Lord could receive the greatest glory. Although Pharaoh deserved immediate destruction for his rebellion the Lord was forbearing because He was sovereignly using the wickedness of Pharaoh for God’s own purposes.

Particularly interesting is the statement that the Lord sovereignly raised Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, “*And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up.*” We often think that God only raises up believers to serve Him but the Bible reveals He is also sovereign over the raising up of unbelievers.

He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: And he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the

land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt. And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail. (v20-26)

The Egyptians worshipped gods of the atmosphere that they believed controlled the weather. However, they had witnessed God's warnings about plagues of judgment come true on six occasions. This had resulted in the loss of their livestock in the field. This had had an effect on some of them. There was now a division spiritually amongst the Egyptians, "He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: And he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field." These people who now feared the Lord may well have been those who made up the "mixed multitude" in Exodus 12:38. So it is clear that God's gracious dealings with the Egyptians by not immediately destroying them for their sins was now showing some fruit.

The loss of the livestock in the pestilence and the hail as well as the destruction on the plant life must have been devastating for the Egyptians both economically and psychologically. It also would have increased the risk of food shortages. At least for some it also undermined their confidence in the gods of Egypt. The Egyptians were learning that it was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. Intreat the LORD (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer. And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD's. But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God. And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was bolled. But the wheat and the rie were not smitten: for they were not grown up. And Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread abroad his hands unto the LORD: and the thunders and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured upon the earth. And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses. (v27-35)

This is not the first time Pharaoh had summoned Moses to seek the Lord's mercy. But this is the first time he admitted, "I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." Pharaoh confessed:

- (1) He had sinned - "I have sinned this time" and "I and my people are wicked."
- (2) God is holy - "the LORD is righteous."
- (3) He will change his ways, "I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer."

These were the right words to express repentance but true repentance was more than mere words. The subsequent deeds of Pharaoh only revealed that he had not truly repented. All

he was grieved over were the consequences of his sin but not the reality of his sin against the Lord.

TRUE REPENTANCE

Repentance is more than simply apologising or expression of regret. Biblical repentance is defined by the Westminster Standards as,

By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments. (WCF, Chapter XV)

So to “repent” means that the offender recognises he has sinned against God (cf. Psa. 51:4) and also against the offended party (cf. James 5:16). In his repentance, the offender indicates that he recognises the depth of his sin and indicates that it is now a heinous thing to him. He purposes to walk a different path now and, “*Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*” (Matt. 3:8). Sometimes to evidence repentance, as we cannot see the heart of any man, we must await fuller evidence of a changed life before we can accept that repentance has occurred. This is normally proportionate to the seriousness and regularity of the offence.

There are a number of people who admitted they have sinned in the Bible but their subsequent lives prove they never repented - Pharaoh in Exodus 9:27 and 10:16; Balaam in Numbers 22:34; Saul in I Samuel 15:24, 30; Shimei in 2 Samuel 19:20; and Judas in Matthew 27:4. By contrast, David confessed he had sinned in 2 Samuel 12:13 as did the prodigal son in Luke 15:18 and both evidenced true repentance. This is a great reminder to us all that a person’s emotional reaction and mere words when confronted by his or her sin should not lead us to conclude that he or she has truly repented. There are many people who will acknowledge their sin and God’s holiness. They may even promise to try to change but they never repent because deep down they still love their sin and don’t want to give it up.

Moses’ response revealed that he had discerned that Pharaoh’s repentance was far from genuine, “*But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God.*” God had directly confronted and successfully challenged the sovereignty and authority of Pharaoh. He warned Pharaoh that he was bringing this judgment upon him, “*For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart.*” The blows kept raining down upon Pharaoh yet he still stubbornly resisted the Lord, “*And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.*”

The more God extended mercy and demonstrated His sovereign power the more Pharaoh hardened his heart and went deeper into sin. When God sent lesser judgments and they went unheeded, then the Lord sent worse ones. We may marvel at the stubbornness of Pharaoh. But we need to look at our own lives. How often we refuse to give up on our own sins and self-will when God’s word comes to us. Even when the Lord chastises us, we often still stubbornly cling to our own way. The opposite of a hard heart is one that is soft to the Lord’s leading, “*Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief*” (Prov. 28:14).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what way does God harden Pharaoh's heart?

2. What limitations on the power of the devil are seen in this chapter?

3. What examples are there of God's sovereignty in this chapter?

4. What have you learned from this chapter?
