

Exodus 9:13-35

Introduction

In the account of the very first plague (the water turned to blood), we read:

- ✓ Exodus 7:14–15 — Then the LORD said to Moses, “...Go to Pharaoh *in the morning, as he is going out to the water*. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him.”

Then in the account of the fourth plague (the swarming insects), we read again:

- ✓ Exodus 8:20 — Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early *in the morning* and present yourself to Pharaoh, *as he goes out to the water*.”

And now — after the water turned to blood, the swarms of frogs that covered the land, the gnats which were as many as the dust of the earth, the swarms of insects, the death of livestock, and the festering boils on man and beast — now we read yet again in chapter nine, verse thirteen:

I. Exodus 9:13 — Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me.”’

And so we begin round three. But the fact that we have a “round three” begs two questions. First of all, why is Yahweh (still) taking so long? Either God’s power is limited, or else He is purposefully choosing to take much “longer” than He needs to. And second of all, why is *Pharaoh* taking so long? After the sign of the serpent that “swallowed up” the serpents of his magicians, and then after the blood, and the frogs, and the gnats, and the insects, and the death of livestock, and the festering boils, how are we to explain Pharaoh’s *own* continued refusal to let the people go?

Moses is to continue speaking to Pharaoh with these words:

II. Exodus 9:14–16 — “For this time I will send all my plagues to your heart, and on your servants and on your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have caused you to stand, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

“For this time I will send all my plagues to your heart, and on your servants and your people.” The main point here is pretty simple: Things are about to get much, *much worse*.¹ The point is

¹ This is the only time in the Bible that we have the plural *plagues*. Of course, the point isn’t that God only has ten plagues in His arsenal. As I suggest above, the point is the mounting, collective intensity of the plagues that will ultimately climax in the universal experience of death. “For this time I will send all my plagues *to your heart, and on your servants [their hearts] and on your people [their hearts]*.” Since the plagues prior to this had already been poured out on Pharaoh’s servants, and on his people, it seems that the “new” element here must be the *hearts* of his servants, and the *hearts* of his people. But once again, the point isn’t that the previous plagues were not already an

this mounting, building, collective intensity and carnage of the plagues that will soon lead to death in every family and household in Egypt. Indeed, things are about to get much, *much* worse. But *why*? What is the reason for all of this?

“So that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.” The “you,” here, is singular: “So that you, *Pharaoh*, the ruler of the most powerful nation on earth, might know that I am the supreme, incomparable, only God who rules *in* all the earth, and *over* all the earth.” We’ve seen God’s zeal for this same thing two other times already.

- ✓ Exodus 7:17 — Thus says the LORD, “***By this you [Pharaoh] shall know that I am the LORD***: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.
- ✓ Exodus 8:22 — I will set apart the land of Goshen... ***that you [Pharaoh] may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.***

We’ve also seen how Moses has come to share in God’s zeal that Pharaoh should “*know*.”

- ✓ Exodus 8:10 — Moses said, “Be it as you say [the plague will be removed tomorrow], ***so that you [Pharaoh] may know that there is no one like the LORD our God.***

And when this next plague is to be taken away, Moses will say to Pharaoh:

- ✓ Exodus 9:29 — The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, ***so that you [Pharaoh] may know that the earth is the LORD’s.***

Pharaoh *will know* by painful, personal, firsthand experience that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. God will make sure that Pharaoh cannot possibly escape this knowledge. But we might ask: What’s the point of Pharaoh “*knowing*”? What does it matter if Pharaoh *knows* the supremacy and incomparability of Yahweh if he’s clearly not going to repent? The Lord continues:

“For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth.” So there it is. God Himself says, now, what we’ve all been thinking. He’s purposefully taking much, much longer than He needs to. But *why*? We read in verse sixteen:

“But for this purpose I have caused you to stand...”² Now watch this. Here’s the point: Not only has Yahweh ***not*** cut Pharaoh off from the earth (v. 15), He is, in fact, the one who has ***caused***

assault on the Egyptians’ hearts, but that now the mounting, cumulative intensity of the plagues, culminating in the universal experience of death, will finally break the Egyptians, and any last shreds of their will to resist.

² Cf. NET; ASV; YLT; Currid; Durham. Some translations say: “For this reason I have *allowed* you to remain / *let* you live / *spared* you.” (cf. NASB; NRSV; HCSB; NCV; NLT) But the verb here (“to stand”) actually has the stem that means *causation*. There are three other places where this verb is used with the same (*hifil*) stem.

2 Chronicles 33:8 — “I will no more remove the foot of Israel from the land that I ***appointed*** for [assigned to] your fathers...” God did not simply *allow* the land of Canaan to be the inheritance of His people, He *caused* it to be the inheritance of His people.

Pharaoh to stand in the first place. God has not simply *allowed* Pharaoh to remain (v. 15); He has actively and purposefully *caused* him to stand. (v. 16) But is this just to say that God has *caused* Pharaoh to keep on *existing*? No. The point here isn't just Pharaoh's continued living and breathing, but specifically his living and breathing *in continual, stubborn opposition to God's will*. The Apostle Paul quotes the Greek translation of this verse in Romans nine, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose *I have raised you up*.'"³ (Rom. 9:17) And the point there isn't just Pharaoh's existence, but Pharaoh's existence *as a man who stubbornly resists the will of God*.⁴ We could paraphrase: "For this very purpose I have raised you up [as a man who will stubbornly resist my will]." That's why Paul can go on to draw this conclusion: "So then [God] has mercy on whomever he wills, *and he hardens whomever he wills*." (9:18)

Coming back to Exodus, last week we saw that the word "*stand*" was used twice in a play on words. Moses and Aaron "stood before Pharaoh" with the result that the magicians "could not stand before Moses." (cf. 9:10-11) The point was that the magicians were unable to *oppose* or *stand against* Moses any longer. (cf. 2 Tim. 3:8) And now *here* the point is that if Pharaoh is still standing *against* Yahweh, then this is *because* Yahweh has caused him to do so – "But for this purpose I have caused you to stand..."

Remember our question: "How can Pharaoh possibly be taking so long?" How are we to account for his stubborn resistance? We can talk about Pharaoh's own sinful and wicked heart, and the free and willing choice that he makes each and every single time – and we would be right to do so. In the very next verse (v. 17), God holds Pharaoh accountable for his own actions when He says to Pharaoh: "You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go." At the end of this very plague, in verse thirty-four, the Scriptures will hold Pharaoh accountable again when they say: "[Pharaoh] sinned yet again and hardened his heart."

But we have not got to the very *root of the matter* until we can say that it was God who "*caused* Pharaoh to stand," from beginning to end, in stubborn opposition to His own word of command – without in any way being the author of evil (cf. James 1:13) or undermining the full accountability of Pharaoh. We're reminded again of what the Lord said in Exodus chapter four:

✓ Exodus 4:21 — *I* will harden [Pharaoh's] heart, *so that* he will not let the people go.

Whenever the Scriptures say that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, they're always careful to remind us that this is just as the Lord had said that *He would do* (7:13, 22; 8:15, 19; 9:12, 35) In other words, Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart is ultimately rooted *in some way* in Yahweh's hardening of his heart. As Paul makes clear in Romans, God hardens *not* those sinners who have *already* hardened their own heart; rather, He hardens "*whomever HE wills*." This is a great

Nehemiah 6:1 — "Up to that time I had not *set up* the doors in the gates." Nehemiah did not *allow* the doors to be set up in the gates, he *caused* them to be set up.

Nehemiah 13:19 — "I *stationed* [posted] some of my servants at the gates." Nehemiah did not *allow* his servants to keep watch at the gates, he *caused* his servants to be stationed and posted at the gates.

And so also here in our text, God has not simply *allowed* Pharaoh to stand, He has *caused* Pharaoh to stand.

³ This captures the essence of Exodus 9:16, and so for Paul to use this translation for the point he's making in Romans is completely legitimate. But here *in the context of Exodus*, we miss something very important if we translate like the Septuagint. (cf. ESV; NIV; NKJV; KJV; see sermon)

⁴ "Pharaoh is by Yahweh "caused to stand firm" (hiphil of עמד), both sustained and kept stubborn." (Durham)

mystery; and we must approach it humbly, and with fear and trembling. But each one of us is also called to delight in this mystery, and to cling to it as something beautiful. It's only when we delight in this mystery that we can truly grasp the awesome greatness, and the awesome comfort of God's infinite, breath-taking sovereignty – the God who is also infinitely good, just, and wise.

We ask, how can Pharaoh be taking so long? And God answers, even telling Pharaoh himself: The reason Pharaoh is standing in stubborn opposition to God's word is because God has caused him to stand. So now we have only to answer our first question: Why is **God** taking so long? Why is God hardening Pharaoh's heart and *causing* Pharaoh to stand?

“But for this purpose I have caused you to stand, **to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.**” Now God has no need to “show off” like we might think of showing off. God doesn't need any of Pharaoh's awe or amazement at His power! But God *is* a jealous God, and He would not, He could not, He “should” not and “must” not give the glory that is His own, to any other. (We have no parallel for this among us, because we have not even the tiniest shred of glory that is *our own*.)

- ✓ Exodus 34:14 — You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.
- ✓ Isaiah 42:8 — I am the LORD; that is my name; **my glory** I give to no other, nor **my praise** to carved idols.

And so God has purposed that even the reprobate Pharaoh *must know and confess* at the end of the day that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. In the end, even the mouths of the wicked will testify to the truth that they hate – that Yahweh is God over all the earth. The “motive” here is not redemptive, because God hardens Pharaoh's heart and causes him to stand in stubborn opposition to His word. The driving *reason* and “motive” here is simply the **glory** of God. God will not *allow* Pharaoh to let Israel go until Pharaoh has come to know by *full experience, and so also to confess with his own lips*, the absolute supremacy of the Creator and Ruler of all the ends of the earth. And the point isn't just Pharaoh.

If there is none like Yahweh “*in all the earth,*” (v. 14) then it is *necessary* that Yahweh's name be proclaimed “*in all the earth.*” (v. 16) And once again, the point here is not missions.⁵ That *is* the point in other places, but not *here*. The point here is simply that the fame of God's name might be acknowledged everywhere – **even** by those who hate God's name. So Rahab will say to the Israelite spies:

- ✓ Joshua 2:9–10 — The fear of you has fallen upon us, and... all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt.

⁵ There are five exact parallels (all in the Psalms) to this form of the Hebrew word for “proclaimed.” Four of these references are clearly in the context of worship by the psalmist or the covenant community. (cf. Ps. 26:7; 40:5; 73:28; 102:21) In other words, we must remember that the context in these Psalms is fundamentally different from the context that we see in Exodus. In Exodus, the context is Pharaoh, and the Egyptians (see below), and all the earth. In these four Psalms, the context is the covenant community. However, even in the Psalms this Hebrew form of the word for proclaimed does not always appear in the context of worship. (*see* Psalm 50:16)

And the Gibeonites will say to Joshua:

- ✓ Joshua 9:9 — From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt.

The Gibeonites were lying about where they came from, but apparently it was true that even far distant countries had heard the report of Yahweh's mighty deeds in Egypt. So we're not surprised to find that it's not just Pharaoh, and it's not just the far distant nations who are to know that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. We read at both the beginning of this whole story of the exodus:

- ✓ Exodus 7:5 — *The Egyptians SHALL know that I am the LORD*, when I stretch out my hand *against* Egypt...

Why is God taking so long? Why has God hardened Pharaoh's heart and caused him to stand in opposition to His word? So that even the reprobate Pharaoh might have a *full, experiential* knowledge of Yahweh's glory "in all the earth." So that the Pharaoh who once said, "Who is the Lord?... I do not know the Lord," (cf. 5:2) might be forced to *confess* with his own mouth this glory of the one true God. Why is God taking so long? So that the awesome glory of Yahweh might be known "*in all the earth.*"

So now we can go on to make full sense of all that happens next. The Lord says to Pharaoh:

III. Exodus 9:17–21 — "You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, *such that there has been nothing like it in Egypt from the day it was founded until now*. Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them." Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field.

The first time the word "like" appeared in Exodus was in this plague, in verse fourteen: "so that you may know that there is none *like* me in all the earth/land." And now, in this same plague, we have the second time that the word "like" appears in Exodus: "I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such that there has been nothing *like* it in Egypt from the day it was founded until now." (9:18) When we come to verse twenty-four, we'll find the third time that "like" appears in Exodus: "There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such that there had been nothing *like* it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation." Surely the previous plagues had also been unparalleled in Egyptian history, but it's only here that this theme is finally introduced. Can you guess why this might be? The theme continues in the next plague, where we find the fourth time that the word "like" appears in Exodus:

- ✓ Exodus 10:14 (NET) — There had been no locusts *like* them before, nor will there be such ever again.

And then in the tenth plague, we have the fifth and sixth times that the word "like" appears in Exodus:

- ✓ Exodus 11:6 — There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, *like* there has never been, and *like* there will never be again.

Can you see the message? It's through the *incomparability* of God's acts of judgment that Pharaoh, along with all the Egyptians, will learn the *incomparability* of Yahweh Himself. They will learn—they *must* learn—that there is none *like* Yahweh.

And so in this plague, for the first and only time, God gives the Egyptians a way to escape. This reason for offering this way of escape isn't necessarily mercy and grace. In the previous six plagues there has been no escape offered, and in the next three plagues there will be no escape offered. The point here is simply to test the Egyptians, to see whether they are coming to truly *know* and *acknowledge* the supremacy of Yahweh. (cf. Enns) Will they "fear" the word of the Lord, or will they "pay no attention" to the word of the Lord? Of course, even those who did fear the word of the Lord were still not *seeking* the Lord, or *trusting* in Him. (cf. 9:30, 34)

IV. Exodus 9:22–26 — Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt." Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such that there had been nothing like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.

If the language of these verses means anything at all, then this is a storm like you and I have never seen or imagined. This is a storm that meteorologists cannot explain. It's a storm that apparently won't ever end until Pharaoh calls for Moses in desperation and asks him to plead with the Lord. This is a *supernatural* storm in which God Himself comes down and rains destruction and death on His enemies. (cf. Josh. 10:11; Jer. 23:19; Isa. 28:2, 17; Ps. 83:15; Job 40:6; Nahum 1:3; Ezek. 1:4; 13:11-13; 38:22; Zech. 9:14) We might think of verses like these:

- ✓ Psalm 18:12–14 (cf. 7-15) — Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.
- ✓ Isaiah 30:30 — The LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones.

V. Exodus 9:27–28 — Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."

Why is God taking so long? Why is God hardening Pharaoh's heart and causing Pharaoh to stand in stubborn opposition to His own word? It's so that Pharaoh will come to know by *full experience*, and be forced to confess *with his own mouth*, the supremacy and incomparability of Yahweh.

And so for the first time in all the plagues, we hear Pharaoh humbling himself before the Lord (though still unwillingly): "This time I have sinned; Yahweh is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong." And then again in the next plague:

- ✓ Exodus 10:16–17 — Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once..."

And finally, after the tenth plague, and the death of all the firstborn in Egypt:

- ✓ Exodus 12:31–32 — Then [Pharaoh] summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up... go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, *and bless me also!*"

We know that it's always the *lesser* who is blessed by the *greater*. (cf. Heb. 7:7) And so in the end, the king and ruler of the most powerful nation on earth will be forced to confess with his own mouth the supremacy and incomparability of Yahweh.

After this, it only remains for God to harden Pharaoh's heart one more time, so that in the moment that the Egyptian armies are looking death in the face, they will *know*, beyond all shadow of a doubt, that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth.

- ✓ Exodus 14:1, 4, 17-18 — The Lord said to Moses... "I will harden Pharaoh's heart... [and] the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after [Israel], and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. *And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.*

So now, coming back to our text here in chapter nine, we read in verses 29-35:

VI. Exodus 9:29–35 — Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city,⁶ I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so 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 God." (The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.) So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the LORD, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and

⁶ Stuart suggests that that the emphasis on Moses praying as soon as he has *gone out of the city* (cf. v. 33) is meant to show Moses' confidence that he would not be harmed by the hail. Yahweh makes a distinction even in this way between the Egyptians and His own people.

hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

Conclusion

So what is the application of all this for us? Last week, we saw that God sends His plagues and hardens Pharaoh's heart in order to pay Egypt back, measure for measure, for their treatment of His people. This week, we see that God sends His plagues and hardens Pharaoh's heart for His own glory – so that even His enemies will be forced to confess that there is none like Him in all the earth. And so, Church, this morning we're reminded that the banner in the back of our sanctuary, "To the ***Glory*** of God Alone," is not just a catch-phrase. Instead, it really is the final ***reason*** for everything that exists – including *even* the ungodly and the wicked. (cf. Rom. 9:22-23) Proverbs says:

- ✓ Proverbs 16:4 — The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

And Paul says in Philippians chapter two: "At the name of Jesus ***every knee [will] bow***, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and ***every tongue confess*** that Jesus Christ is Lord, ***TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER.***" (Phil. 2:10-11) We *need* to ***see***—as few of us ever do—the zeal that our God has for the glory of His own name – a zeal that requires that *even the wicked* should ***know***, and ***confess*** that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth.⁷

And so now we're set up for next week, where we'll see that if this is the destiny even of the wicked, **how much more**(!!!) should ***we*** be living our lives in the continuous, day by day, practical, acknowledgement of the supremacy and incomparability of our God? As we make our day to day choices and decisions, as we live in relationship with others, as we respond to the chaos that we read about in the news, as we set our goals and priorities in life. In all these things, may we show that we have come to joyfully share in the zeal that God has for His own great glory.

⁷ Cf. Psalm 83:13-18 and Calvin's commentary; also, Micah 7:15-17