

Exodus – Lesson 8

The Plagues on Egypt – Part 2

Read Exodus 9:1-10:29

1. (a) List the *fifth* through *ninth* plagues recorded in these two chapters.

The fifth plague: the death of livestock. The sixth plague: boils. The seventh plague: hail and fire. The eighth plague: locusts. The ninth plague: darkness.

(b) *Compare* the events of plague four (8:20-24) to the events of plague five. What *distinction* does God make in these plagues? *Why* does he do this?

The distinction is that these plagues would not affect the Israelites living in Goshen; they would not be plagued by flies and their cattle would be spared. The distinction does at least the following: 1) it demonstrates that these plagues are not *naturally occurring* events, but are *supernatural* in origin. Obviously, a natural swarm of flies would affect *everyone* and would not distinguish between one people group and another, 2) it would point to the *validity* of Moses statements that these things are done by a God who has a *special concern* for the Hebrews, 3) it will leave Pharaoh with the impression that it is *only* he who stands between the will of God as a representative of the Egyptian people.

(c) What is different about the *severity* of the fifth plague as compared to the three prior ones?

The prior plagues can be classified, primarily, as nuisances, whereas the fifth plague now begins to affect life itself. True, the poisoning of the Nile would lead to great hardship for the people, but it probably had little effect upon life; very few people directly perished from that plague or from the frogs or from the gnats or flies. However, once these plagues passed, the remaining plagues all affect life and limb, both of animals and of human beings. It is possible that the fifth plague *is a direct consequence of the previous ones*: the death of the livestock and the boils could be traced to the diseases that the frogs, gnats and flies brought in the previous ones. If that is the case (and it is debatable), it does *not* reduce the *power* of the symbolism or the threat against Pharaoh.

2. What happens to the heart of Pharaoh as a result of fifth and sixth plagues?

Again, Pharaoh's heart is hardened, and he refuses to let the Hebrews go. It is clear that Pharaoh is beginning to "dig in" his position, refusing to be swayed by events around him; he is standing on his "principles" and will not budge. But this is *precisely* what God intends: as Pharaoh becomes harder and harder in his refusal, his judgment (in the end) becomes more *clear* and more *painful*. His own stubbornness, against an *obvious* set of circumstances, forces him to a place where there is no escape from what God *ultimately* brings against him. In other words, this is part of the *process*, and Pharaoh is doomed to judgment by his own rebellion.

3. (a) What is the significant *difference* between the seventh plague (see 9:13-25) and the previous ones (see vv. 23-24)? *Why* is this *important*?

The previous plagues could be said to be *naturally occurring* events (other than the first). The bloody nature of the Nile might have spawned large swarms of frogs and insects which, in turn, could have produced diseases that killed livestock and brought boils to humans. The seventh plague, however, is uniquely *supernatural* in that *both* hail and fire fell from heaven. This plague would send a very clear message to Pharaoh that these things were happening by the hand of God, and Pharaoh would have no choice but to understand it in that way.

(b) In what way do verses 9:20-21 exhibit the *mercy* of God? How does Jesus make a similar *connection* in Matthew 5:43-47?

Those in Egypt who believed Moses and who believed that these events were taking place by the hand of God were given the opportunity to move their livestock into safety, away from the falling hail. God had given the people, through Moses, due warning, and those who heeded his warning by believing what he said were spared. Jesus says that God makes the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust; God's mercy (in common grace) extends to all human beings and he offers his *natural* blessings to everyone, regardless. In special grace, God extends *special* blessings to his elect by offering them a level of mercy *higher* than what he offers the human race as a whole, but in common grace, God offers life and protections as a normal part of his created order.

4. (a) Why does Moses believe, according to 9:30-32, that Pharaoh is not yet *convinced*?

The hail of the seventh plague has struck down those crops that have already come up and are preparing to produce their fruit (the flax and barley). However, there were still two crops (i.e. the wheat and emmer) that had not yet come up and were spared. Moses predicted that Pharaoh would not be turned by this plague because he still had crops *to fall back on*, crops that had not be destroyed and would serve as food later.

(b) *Compare* God's statement of 10:1-2 with his statement in Exodus 20:1-3. What *eventual* purpose did God have for these plagues, other than freeing the Hebrews from Egypt?

The eventual purpose of the plagues (for the Israelites) would be to act as *powerful reminders* of what God had done in order to secure their freedom. Passed down from generation to generation would be tales of how God had brought disasters upon the Egyptians, all for the sake of freeing the Israelites. These tales would serve as reminders of the power of God and of his expectation of obedience and loyalty. As the people were taught the law, they would be reminded that the law was a body of morality that grew out of the relationship of God to the people as promised to Abraham and demonstrated in the plagues.

(c) How should this lesson affect Christians and their relationship to the *law* (see Matthew 5:17-20)?

Our response to the morality of the Ten Commandments (and all of the injunctions of obedience given in the New Testament) *must* flow out of a genuine respect for the *proactive* work of God to release us from the slavery of sin and place us in the promises of God. We keep the moral law not because we are trying to justify ourselves before God, but because we *know* that such morality is the *proper* response of gratitude to a God who took the *initiative* to save us from sin. In Jesus' teaching, the *perfection* required in the law can *never be attained* (and he knows it). But, he does not shrink back from demanding that perfection before any human being can come to God. Therefore, such perfection *must* be a gift from God wrought by the completed work of Christ in his life and death *proactively* applied to us. We then, by virtue of the *gravity* of what we have received, take up a life of radical obedience to him as the natural response of gratitude.

5. (a) What *compromise* does Pharaoh attempt to make before the eighth plague (see 10:7-11)? *Why* would Pharaoh make such an offer and place such restrictions?

Pharaoh offers to let *only* the men go out to sacrifice to the Lord, but for the women and children. Pharaoh believes that Moses has some "evil purpose" in mind in taking *everyone* out of Egypt, and he is correct (from his perspective). So, he offers to Moses the chance for just the men to go out knowing that the men will never abandon their families.

(b) How does Pharaoh *respond* to the eighth plague (see 10:16-18)? Is this a *genuine* example of repentance? Why or why not?

Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and “confesses” that he has sinned against God and begs for forgiveness (and the removal of the locusts). However, his act of “confession” is not real repentance because it is *not followed up* with a genuine change of heart and actions. Pharaoh has *remorse* over the situation, but he does not have genuine repentance. Like Judas, he feels guilty over what he has done, but (unlike Peter) he never truly changes his *thinking* about God’s requirements.

6. (c) What *compromise* does Pharaoh make after the ninth plague (see 10:24)? Why such restrictions?

Again, Pharaoh offers the option to the Israelites that a *portion* of them may leave and go out and worship God in the wilderness, but he restricts them from taking their cattle with them. This is exactly the same compromise he has made before: an attempt to *force* them to return because they have left something behind.