

“Hail, Jesus, Lord of the Storm”  
Exodus 9:13-35  
Lebanon PCA, Rev. Lane Keister  
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When I was in North Dakota, the favorite topic of conversation was the weather. Weather is always a safe topic for conversation. You can always talk about the weather even if you can't talk about anything else. In fact, it's usually the beginning of most conversations in North Dakota, or indeed, of the entire Midwest. In many cases, weather was the beginning, middle, and end of the conversation! However, as we know, while weather is a safe topic, weather itself is not always safe. And that is because the God who controls weather is not safe. As Mr. Beaver would say in *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*, He's good, but He's not safe. The Egyptians were just about to find out about this very unsafe God. The Egyptians, and particularly Pharaoh himself, were still exalting themselves against the true Lord of the Storms. It was high time that they be forced to bow to the Lord of wind and wave. And it is time also for us to bow down to our Lord Jesus Christ. Hopefully, we will do it without having the serious plague of hail. But we must hail our Lord Jesus, or else hail will come upon us.

As we have been seeing with every plague, the Lord is judging not only the Egyptian people, although He is certainly doing that, but also He is judging the pitifully inadequate gods that the Egyptians were worshiping. This seventh plague, which starts the third cycle of three plagues, is no exception. With the last cycle, we get into some serious weather. The last cycle of three has to do with the weather. The hail comes from the sky, the locusts come from a strong east wind, and the darkness eliminates the sun from helping Egypt. These are far more severe plagues than we have seen so far. We can see that from what the Lord says in verse 14: “I will send all My plagues to your very heart.” When God says “ALL my plagues,” the Lord is saying “you haven't seen anything yet.” Certainly, the last cycle of three plagues is the worst of the three cycles, and is followed by the very worst, the death of all the firstborn of Egypt. The specific gods that the Lord is judging in this plague are Nut, the goddess of the sky; Shu, who was supposed to hold up the heavens, and Tefnut, the goddess of moisture. Even Isis and Set were supposed to take care of the crops. Of course, all the cow gods we saw earlier are being given a double dose of defeat. None of these gods could hold back any of the plagues of the Lord against the Egyptians.

Exodus tells us that this plague will be directed against the heart of Pharaoh, for that is the literal translation of verse 14: “For this time I will send all my plagues against your heart.” The heart of Pharaoh was thought to be the foundation of Egyptian society. The heart of Pharaoh was the heart of Egypt. So for the Lord to strike against the heart of Pharaoh was for the Lord to strike against the very heart and soul of the Egyptian way of

life. Pharaoh's heart was also the offending organ, as it were. So the Lord strikes both at the heart of Pharaoh, and also the heart of Egypt. The judgment of God is always directed against the evil and unbelieving heart of man.

The problem with Pharaoh and Egypt is described for us in further detail in verses 16-17. There is irony here, for the Lord raised up Pharaoh in order to show to the entire world the Lord's power. But then Pharaoh turned around and exalted himself, or raised himself up against God and against God's people. The imagery here is like a besieging army. Pharaoh has locked up the people of God, and is thus exalting Himself against the God of the universe. It is the sin of all humanity, for this is exactly what Adam did in the garden. They wanted to be like God. Even more, they wanted to *be* God. But only God is sovereign. Verse 16 which speaks of God raising up Pharaoh is quoted in Romans 9 to prove that God is sovereign over all things, and over all people. No one should seek to be equal to God. In fact, the solution to man's sin problem is for Jesus Christ to do the very opposite of what Pharaoh did. As Paul says in Philippians 2, Christ did not consider equality with God to be something to use for His own advantage, but rather humbled Himself. As the Scripture says, God will exalt the humble, but humble the exalted. There is no one like God in all the earth, as verse 14 states. Yes, Pharaoh is getting quite the theological education. From saying "I don't know this God of yours," he is getting to know this God quite a bit better than he would have wished. And that is the case with all who exalt themselves against the one and only true God. Notice, incidentally, that Moses shows his knowledge of the history of Egypt in verse 18: only someone who knew the history of Egypt would be able to write about a hailstorm that was unprecedented in Egypt's history.

The book of Revelation tells us that this plague will come again also, just like many of the other plagues. Only it will be far worse in Revelation than it was even here. This plague here in Exodus is said to be the very worst hail-storm ever to afflict the land of Egypt from the time it was founded until the time of the plague. Well, the plague of hail at the end of time will make this plague against Egypt look like a gentle April shower. Revelation 16 tells us about the plague in these words: "Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!' And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a might and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great." A talent, by the way, weighs about 100 pounds. So the hailstones that will fall at the end of time will weight around 100 pounds each. Now, the plague against Egypt was the first plague to kill any humans in the land of Egypt. Verse

25 tells us that any person or animal that was not brought in from the shelter was struck down by the hailstones. But nothing can survive a hundred pound hailstone being dropped on it. The Final Judgment will be far worse than the plagues of Egypt.

There is fair warning that this is coming. The Lord warned Pharaoh about this plague. Verse 19 tells us that the Lord was gracious even towards those who were about to experience judgment. The Lord told Pharaoh to get everything under shelter. Of course, if Pharaoh were to heed that Word from the Lord, he would be acknowledging the power of the Lord, and the sovereignty of the Lord, which is something he never wanted to do. You can see the quandary Pharaoh is in by this point. If he ignores the word of the Lord, then another plague will come upon him, and he knows this in his heart of hearts. However, if he does not ignore the word of the Lord, then he is acknowledging that there is a power greater than his own in this world.

The hail was very heavy, and such hail had never been seen in Egypt before. Egypt was not generally prone to hailstorms. It is a very warm climate, to be sure, but still hail did not normally come there. So this hail was something new to the Egyptians. However, notice that this hail stopped short right at the boundary of the rest of the land of Egypt and the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were. Once again, God shows His grace and mercy to His own people, while at the very same time bringing judgment upon the people of this world. God often brings grace and mercy in the very act of judgment, and nowhere more so than at the cross of Jesus Christ, where judgment fell on Jesus, but grace and mercy came to us in that very act of judgment. As one writer puts it, "If Jesus prays three times that some painful reality might pass, why can Moses not pray three times (or four times) that some other painful reality might pass? The frogs pass. The flies pass. The hailstorm passes. The cup does not pass." Do you understand? The plagues are symbolic of God's judgment, and Jesus took that judgment for us. For Jesus, it did not pass from Him, so that it could pass from us. All we need do to obtain the complete forgiveness of sins, is to repent of our sin and turn to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness.

Pharaoh did not repent. It looks as though he might have done so in verse 27. But notice carefully what he says. Firstly, he qualifies his repentance by implying that he only sinned this one time: "This time I have sinned." Even this, of course, is a startling admission from someone who was regarded by the Egyptians as a person who could do no wrong. But he does not admit that he has sinned at all before this point. So it is not a complete confession of sin. Nor is it a genuine sorrow for sin. The language here is courtroom language. The Lord is judicially in the right, and the Egyptians are judicially in the wrong. However, there is no admission of moral wrong. There is only a judicial plea of "guilty." In other words, Pharaoh is much more concerned simply to get rid of the hail than he is sorry that he has offended the infinitely holy God. So here we can something instructive for us in how NOT to repent of sin: we do not repent of sin by being sorry for sin's consequences. We truly repent out of love for God and a hatred of sin that comes from being born again by the Holy Spirit acting through the Word. When that happens,

we will be sorry that we have offended our God, and we will not worry about what consequences for our sin that God sends. Instead we will mourn that we have offended our Father. True repentance means a turning away from sin. We can only do that when we come in faith to Jesus Christ, who changes what we want and what we fear. Instead of fearing sin's consequences, we fear the Lord and hate sin itself. And that is the main difference between a believer and an unbeliever. The believer hates sin, but doesn't particularly mind sin's consequences, since he knows that they are part of what God is doing, and that God has a good reason for letting us experience those consequences. The unbeliever never hates his sin. He loves sin. He hates sin's consequences. It is exactly the reverse of the believer. Pharaoh and the unbeliever say, "Enough of God's fire and lightning. Enough of God's thunder. Stop talking to us about the law. Stop making us feel bad. Stop showing us our guilt and sin. All I want is for the consequences to be removed." As in Pharaoh's case, as soon as the consequences are removed, the sin comes right back. The unbeliever always thinks he can get away with sin. He even dares God to punish him, for then man thinks he has the ultimate weapon: crying foul, calling God unfair and unloving. What a shock such people will face on Judgment Day! Just as God warned the Egyptians, so also He warns us: get to shelter in Jesus Christ! It is the only way to avoid judgment. We are safe in the arms of Jesus. For Jesus will lead us up out of the Egypt of our sin and death, through the wilderness of this world, and finally into the promised land of the new heavens and the new earth. Hail, Lord Jesus, true Lord of wind and wave. Hail Jesus, the true Lord of the Storm!

Sermon Outline:

I. God is not safe

II. Egyptian gods judged: Nut, Shu, Tefnut, Isis, and Set

III. The arrogant heart of Pharaoh

IV. Foreshadowing the final judgment

V. Jesus' cup does NOT pass

VI. True repentance