



Exodus - Chapter Nine

I. Exodus 1:1-18:27 - The Exodus of Israel from Egypt (continues)

I.d. Exodus 7:8-15:21 - The Plagues and the Exodus (continues)

Summary of Chapter Nine

This chapter records plagues five, six and seven. Once again it is revealed that it will be the Egyptians and not the Israelites who will suffer the consequences of the plagues.

God once again showed mercy, not just by forewarning Pharaoh of the plagues and their consequences, but before plague seven Pharaoh was told to bring the livestock and slaves into safe shelters to avoid death. Those who took notice of this warning were saved while those who ignored the advice lost their livestock and slaves.

Following the seventh plague Pharaoh confessed his sin, told Moses he could go out to worship God and asked him to pray to God to stop the violent hail storm. When Moses prayed and the hail storm was stopped Pharaoh once again hardened his heart.

I.d.vi Exodus 9:1-7 - The Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased

The fifth plague is the second to make a distinction between Israel and Egypt, refer back to 8:22-23 for the first occasion, and the first to bring about death in Egypt as the specific effect of the plague.

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, and say to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.'

Exodus 9:1

Go to Pharaoh, and say to him. In mercy, God told Moses to give another warning, so that Pharaoh would have opportunity to repent.

The Lord instructs Moses once again to refer to him before Pharaoh as the God of the Hebrews. In light of the distinction between Israel and Egypt in the fourth plague and also here in the fifth, the reference should have begun to hammer home to Pharaoh that Yahweh's identification with Israel indicated his favour on them, and also that this did not mean that God's power and authority were limited to the Hebrew people.

Let my people go, so that they may worship me. In this appeal two things were clear. First, the people of Israel belonged to God, not to Pharaoh. Second, it was clear that God wanted Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go for the sake of the Lord himself rather than for the sake of the children of Israel. Likewise, Pharaoh was responsible to treat Israel well for the sake of the Lord rather than for the sake of Israel. In the same way, Christians are to treat each other well not only for the sake of their fellow brother or sister, but also for the sake of the Lord. They owe it to him even more than they owe it to each other.

² For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, ³ the hand of the Lord will strike with a deadly pestilence your livestock in the field: the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴ But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites.”

Exodus 9:2-4

The reference to the hand of the Lord is another thematic statement in the account of the exodus that makes explicit what the events are meant to show to both Egypt and to Israel: it is the Lord who is at work to bring Israel out of Egypt. Scripture reveals the terror of those who fear that God's hand is against them, including: <<*The hand of the Lord was heavy upon the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and struck them with tumours, both in Ashdod and in its territory*>> (1 Samuel 5:6), <<*Only grant two things to me, then I will not hide myself from your face: withdraw your hand far from me, and do not let dread of you terrify me*>> (Job 13:20-21), <<*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*>> (Psalm 32:4), <<*Remove your stroke from me; I am worn down by the blows of your hand*>> (Psalm 39:10), <<*And now listen – the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.*>> *Immediately mist and*

darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand>> (Acts 13:11).

The Lord will strike with a deadly pestilence your livestock; nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites. Pharaoh was warned that another plague was on the way, one that would severely damage the livestock of Egypt but not the livestock owned by the people of Israel.

⁵ The Lord set a time, saying, ‘Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land.’

Exodus 9:5

Tomorrow. When Pharaoh was asked to set the time of relief for the second plague, he requested that it be done “tomorrow” (8:10). Moses then used the same time frame in his plea for relief from the fourth plague (8:29). Now, the Lord again uses it for the timing of the plague on Egypt’s livestock.

⁶ And on the next day the Lord did so; all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not one died. ⁷ Pharaoh inquired and found that not one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the people go.

Exodus 9:6-7

All the livestock of the Egyptians died. This plague was directed against the Egyptian god Hathor who was thought to be a mother goddess was in the form of a cow. In addition, Egyptian religion considered cattle sacred and the cow was often a symbol of fertility. God shows Pharaoh and all of Egypt that he was mightier than this imagined pagan god, when: *<<He gave over their cattle to the hail, and their flocks to thunderbolts. He let loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels. He made a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague>>* (Psalm 78:48-50).

Pharaoh inquired and found that not one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. The fact that Pharaoh sends someone to check on whether Israel had been spared from this fifth plague, and then responds as he does, both illustrates and contributes further to the hardness of his heart.

I.d.vii Exodus 9:8-12 - The Sixth Plague: Boils

The description of the sixth plague is similar to that of the third in both its brevity and the way it focuses on the magicians of Egypt.

⁸ Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh.

Exodus 9:8

After Aaron performs the initial sign (7:10) and the first three plagues (7:19, 8:3 and 8:16), and the Lord’s agency alone is described in the fourth and fifth (8:24 and v.6), here the Lord commands Moses to be the one to bring about the sign. As the events continue to unfold, the narrative shows Moses maturing in the role that the Lord had called him to at the Burning Bush (3:1-4:17).

⁹ It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt.’ ¹⁰ So they took soot from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals.

Exodus 9:9-10

The boils of the sixth plague are the first effect to impact the inhabitants of Egypt directly. The progression of the plagues continues to grow both in what they show of the Lord’s power and in the proximity of their effects on the lives of Pharaoh and his people.

It shall cause festering boils on humans and animals. As the third plague in this second set of three, this plague came without warning. This time, God chose not to mercifully give Pharaoh a previous opportunity to turn. The idea behind the ancient Hebrew word for boil is ‘to burn.’ It has the idea of a swelling, painful, skin inflammation. These painful boils and sores affected people and animals.

Scripture reveals others who would be afflicted by such boils: <<*The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt, with ulcers, scurvy, and itch, of which you cannot be healed*>> (Deuteronomy 28:27), <<*The Lord will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head*>> (Deuteronomy 28:35), <<*So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head*>> (Job 2:7), and: <<*So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped its image*>> (Revelation 16:2).

¹¹ The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils afflicted the magicians as well as all the Egyptians. ¹² But the

Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

Exodus 9:11-12

Pharaoh originally summons his magicians to contest the significance of the signs performed by Moses and Aaron (7:11). While they are able to reproduce some of the first signs, they could not overpower them (7:12) or reverse their effects (7:24 and 8:8). When the magicians are unable to produce gnats, they confess to Pharaoh what has been signified throughout <<*This is the finger of God*>> (8:19b). In the sixth plague, the effects of the Lord's power are embodied in the magicians themselves who could not stand before Moses because of the boils.

This plague was probably directed against the Egyptian god Imhotep, who was said to be the god of medicine. Even those who were thought to be among the closest to the Egyptian gods, i.e. the court magicians, were stricken with this debilitating plague.

I.d.viii Exodus 9:13-35 - The Seventh Plague: Thunder and Hail

In the progression of the narrative, the seventh plague is highlighted by both the length and content of its description. The extended section of the Lord's words to Pharaoh is particularly significant: it is the first and only time the Lord explicitly explains to Pharaoh the power and purposes of the plagues (vv.14-17), and it is also the first time he offers Pharaoh a way to avoid the effects of the plague (vv.18-19).

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, so that they may worship me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. ¹⁵ For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶ But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth.

Exodus 9:13-16

The repeated reference to the earth in these verses underscores the Lord's message: although Pharaoh considered himself to be a representative of divine power, the plagues have revealed that there is no one like the Lord in all the earth; that it was only by the Lord's mercy that Egypt had not yet been cut off

from the earth; and that Pharaoh was ultimately raised up by the Lord's power and for the proclamation of his name through all the earth. This declaration is also cited by the apostle Paul on the purposes behind God's absolute sovereignty: <<For the scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth'>> (Romans 9:17).

Praise recognising the Lord as the only Almighty God permeates Scripture, including: <<There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God>> (1 Samuel 2:2), <<Therefore you are great, O Lord God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears>> (2 Samuel 7:22), <<He said, 'O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand'>> (1 Kings 8:23-24), <<There is no one like you, O Lord, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears>> (1 Chronicles 17:20), <<Remember this and consider, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfil my intention', calling a bird of prey from the east, the man for my purpose from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have planned, and I will do it>> (Isaiah 46:8-11), <<There is none like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is great in might>> (Jeremiah 10:6), and: <<Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger for ever, because he delights in showing clemency>> (Micah 7:18).

This time. The Lord indicates the increasing intensity and proximity of the effects of this plague, but when Pharaoh uses the same phrase to qualify his repentance it is clear that he has still not taken any of the plagues to heart.

The Hebrew phrase translated upon you yourself is literally 'on your heart' and is likely an intended wordplay with the continued reference to the state of Pharaoh's heart (vv.34-35) and the hearts of his servants (v.34); refer also to vv.20-21.

But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth. In this bold declaration, God told Pharaoh through Moses that his resistance was being used for God's glory. If Pharaoh thought he was accomplishing anything with his resistance against God, he was completely wrong. All his stubborn rebellion merely glorified the Lord even more in the end.

¹⁷ You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. ¹⁸ Tomorrow at this time I will cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹ Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place; every human or animal that is in the open field and is not brought under shelter will die when the hail comes down upon them.”” ²⁰ Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried their slaves and livestock off to a secure place. ²¹ Those who did not regard the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the open field.

Exodus 9:17-21

The heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Several of the plagues involved elements that would have occurred naturally to some degree in the land of Egypt, e.g. frogs, flies, hail, locusts, but in each case the details, as related to the timing, concentration, location, severity, or even the means of relief, were meant to signify that the Lord had supernaturally brought them on Egypt.

A television programme on the Discovery Channel claimed that all the plagues could have occurred naturally as an effect of the Minoan eruption of Thera in the mid 2nd Millennium BC. Even if this were the case, it would not explain the timing of the warnings, why the plagues affected primarily only the Egyptians and why the final plague only killed the first born and was not more indiscriminate as would be expected from a natural disaster.

Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place. God invited Pharaoh and the Egyptians to trust him by recommending precautions before the plague. Some took God’s invitation and spared their livestock, but others did not.

The provision of a way to find a secure place from the hail was a test to indicate who had taken the plagues to heart and thus feared the word of the Lord.

The reference to those who did not regard the word of the Lord draws into focus the wordplay on the state of the heart of Pharaoh and his servants as the Hebrew phrase is literally ‘whoever did not set his heart to the word of the Lord.’

²² The Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand towards heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt.’ ²³ Then Moses stretched out his staff towards heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and

hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; ²⁴ there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵ The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field. ²⁶ Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail.

Exodus 9:22-26

There was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt. This was perhaps the most frightening plague thus far. The Egyptians must have believed that the wrath of God was poured down from heaven in all severity. Hail is a phenomenon that is used to kill and destroy elsewhere: *<<As they fled before Israel, while they were going down the slope of Beth-horon, the Lord threw down huge stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died because of the hailstones than the Israelites killed with the sword>>* (Joshua 10:11), *<<With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgement with him; and I will pour down torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulphur, upon him and his troops and the many peoples that are with him>>* (Ezekiel 38:22), and: *<<I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord>>* (Haggai 2:17).

The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt. This plague was directed against several Egyptian gods. Notable among them was Nut, the sky goddess.

²⁷ Then Pharaoh summoned 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. ²⁸ Pray to the Lord! Enough of God’s thunder and hail! I will let you go; you need stay no longer.’

Exodus 9:27-28

This time I have sinned. Pharaoh’s qualified admission echoes the opening words from the Lord’s explanation of the plague: *<<this time>>* (v.14), but indicates that he has drawn the wrong conclusion, refer also to 10:17. Pharaoh has sinned in response to each plague, refusing to listen to the word of the Lord, and Egypt stands under judgement as a result. Israel would later stand under judgement for its own sins: *<<They rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, ‘Here we are. We will go up to the place that the Lord*

has promised, for we have sinned’>> (Numbers 14:40), and: <<Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I imposed on them. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have acted deceitfully, and they have put them among their own belongings>> (Joshua 7:11).

This confession is one of eight such confessions in Scripture, four sincere and four insincere:

- Pharaoh - a hardened sinner (Exodus 9:27).
- Balaam - a double-minded man (Numbers 22:34).
- Achan - a doubtful penitent (Joshua 7:20).
- Saul - an insincere man (1 Samuel 15:24).
- Judas - the repentance of despair (Matthew 27:4).
- Job - a godly repentance (Job 6:20).
- David - a repentance after a delay (2 Samuel 12:13).
- The Prodigal - the blessed confession of sin (Luke 15:18).

²⁹ Moses said to him, ‘As soon as I have gone out of the city, 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. ³⁰ But as for you and your officials, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God.’

Exodus 9:29-30

I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God. Moses' response to Pharaoh showed that he was starting to learn and to discern. Moses knew the promise to touch Pharaoh's firstborn had not yet been fulfilled, something God had already indicated would occur if Pharaoh did not obey him: <<*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son”*>> (Exodus 4:22-23).

³¹ (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³² But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.)

Exodus 9:31-32

Now the flax and the barley were ruined. The explanation about crops in Egypt indicates that Pharaoh took comfort from what remained in his land rather than acknowledging the destruction that had already come.

³³ So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and stretched out his hands to the Lord; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain

no longer poured down on the earth. ³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and hardened his heart, he and his officials.

Exodus 9:33-34

He sinned once more and hardened his heart, he and his officials. The repetition highlights Pharaoh's responsibility. His defiance leads the way for the defiance of his servants and brings about the destruction of his land. As the plagues progress, some of Pharaoh's servants begin to recognise that he is exercising his rule at their expense rather than in their best interest.

³⁵ So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

Exodus 9:35

The two references to the heart of Pharaoh represent both his responsibility for his actions (v.34) and the sovereign governance over the events by the Lord; refer also to 10:1.