

CHAPTER 9

In this chapter we have an account of three more of the plagues of Egypt.

- I. Murrain among the cattle, which was fatal to them (v. 1-7).
- II. Boils upon man and beast (v. 8-12).
- III. Hail, with thunder and lightning.
 1. Warning is given of this plague (v. 13-21).
 2. It is inflicted, to their great terror (v. 22-26).
 3. Pharaoh, in a fright, renews his treaty with Moses, but instantly breaks his word (v. 27, etc.).

EXODUS 9:1-7

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

Here is,

I. Warning given of another plague, namely, the murrain of beasts. When Pharaoh's heart was hardened, after he had seemed to relent under the former plague, then Moses is sent to tell him there is another coming, to try what that would do towards reviving the impressions of the former plagues. Thus is the wrath of God revealed from heaven, both in his word and in his works, *against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*

1. Moses puts Pharaoh in a very fair way to prevent it: *Let my people go*, v. 1. This was still the demand. God will have Israel released; Pharaoh opposes it, and the trial is, *whose word shall stand*. See how jealous God is for his people. When *the year of his redeemed has come*, he will give *Egypt for their ransom*; that kingdom shall be ruined, rather than Israel shall not be delivered. See how reasonable God's demands are. Whatever he calls for, it is but *his own*: They are my people, therefore let them go.
2. He describes the plague that should come, if he refused, v. 2, 3. *The hand of the Lord* immediately, without the stretching out of Aaron's hand, *is upon the cattle*, many of which, some of all kinds, should die by a sort

of pestilence. This was greatly to the loss of the owners: they had made Israel poor, and now God would make them poor. Note, The hand of God is to be acknowledged even in the sickness and death of cattle, or other damage sustained in them; for a *sparrow falls not to the ground without our Father*.

3. As an evidence of the special hand of God in it, and of his particular favour to his own people, he foretels that none of their cattle should die, though they breathed in the same air and drank of the same water with the Egyptians' cattle: *The Lord shall sever*, v. 4. Note, When God's judgments are abroad, though they may fall both on the righteous and the wicked, yet God makes such a distinction that they are not the same to the one that they are to the other. See ^{<297>}Isaiah 27:7. The providence of God is to be acknowledged with thankfulness in the life of the cattle, for he preserveth man and beast, ^{<386>}Psalms 36:6.

4. To make the warning the more remarkable, the time is fixed (v. 5): *To-morrow* it shall be done. We know not what any day will bring forth, and therefore we cannot say what we will do to-morrow, but it is not so with God.

II. The plague itself inflicted. The cattle died, v. 6. Note, The creature is made subject to vanity by the sin of man, being liable, according to its capacity, both to serve his wickedness and to share in his punishment, as in the universal deluge. ^{<480>}Romans 8:20, 22. Pharaoh and the Egyptians sinned; but the *sheep, what had they done?* Yet they are plagued. See ^{<406>}Jeremiah 12:4, For the *wickedness of the land, the beasts are consumed*. The Egyptians afterwards, and (some think) now, worshipped their cattle; it was among them that the Israelites learned to make a god of a calf: in this therefore the plague here spoken of meets with them. Note, What we make an idol of it is just with God to remove from us, or embitter to us. See ^{<291>}Isaiah 19:1.

III. The distinction put between the cattle of the Egyptians and the Israelites' cattle, according to the word of God: *Not one of the cattle of the Israelites died*, v. 6, 7. Does God take care of oxen? Yes, he does; his providence extends itself to the meanest of his creatures. But it is written also for our sakes, that, trusting in God, and making him our refuge, we may not be *afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darkness*, no, not though *thousands fall at our side*, ^{<396>}Psalms 91:6, 7. Pharaoh sent to see if

the cattle of the Israelites were infected, not to satisfy his conscience, but only to gratify his curiosity, or with design, by way of reprisal, to repair his own losses out of their stocks; and, having no good design in the enquiry, the report brought to him made no impression upon him, but, on the contrary, his heart was hardened. Note, To those that are wilfully blind, even those methods of conviction which are ordained to life prove a savour of death unto death.

EXODUS 9:8-12

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Observe here, concerning the plague of boils and blains,

I. When they were not wrought upon by the death of their cattle, God sent a plague that seized their own bodies, and touched them to the quick. If less judgments do not do their work, God will send greater. Let us therefore humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and go forth to meet him in the way of his judgments, that his anger may be turned away from us.

II. The signal by which this plague was summoned was the sprinkling of warm ashes from the *furnace, towards heaven* (v. 8, 10), which was to signify the heating of the air with such an infection as should produce in the bodies of the Egyptians sore boils, which would be both noisome and painful. Immediately upon the scattering of the ashes, a scalding dew came down out of the air, which blistered wherever it fell. Note, Sometimes God shows men their sin in their punishment; they had oppressed Israel in the furnaces, and now the ashes of the furnace are made as much a terror to them as ever their task-masters had been to the Israelites.

III. The plague itself was very grievous — a common eruption would be so, especially to the nice and delicate, but these eruptions were inflammations, like Job's. This is afterwards called the *botch of Egypt* (⁴⁵³⁷Deuteronomy 28:27), as if it were some new disease, never heard of before, and known ever after by that name, Note, Sores in the body are to be looked upon as the punishments of sin, and to be hearkened to as calls to repentance.

IV. The magicians themselves were struck with these boils, v. 11.

1. Thus they were punished,

(1.) For helping to harden Pharaoh's heart, as Elymas for seeking to *pervert the right ways of the Lord*; God will severely reckon with those that strengthen the hands of the wicked in their wickedness.

(2.) For pretending to imitate the former plagues, and making themselves and Pharaoh sport with them. Those that would produce lice shall, against their wills, produce boils. Note, It is ill jesting with God's judgments, and more dangerous than playing with fire. *Be you not mockers, lest your bands be made strong.*

2. Thus they were shamed in the presence of their admirers. How weak were their enchantments, which could not so much as secure themselves! The devil can give no protection to those that are in confederacy with him.

3. Thus they were driven from the field. Their power was restrained before (~~CHR~~ Exodus 8:18), but they continued to confront Moses, and confirm Pharaoh in his unbelief, till now, at length, they were forced to retreat, and could not stand before Moses, to which the apostle refers (~~CHR~~ 2 Timothy 3:9) when he says that their *folly was made manifest unto all men.*

V. Pharaoh continued obstinate, for now *the Lord hardened* his heart, v. 12. Before, he had hardened his own heart, and resisted the grace of God; and now God justly gave him up to his own heart's lusts, to a reprobate mind, and strong delusions, permitting Satan to blind and harden him, and ordering every thing, henceforward, so as to make him more and more obstinate. Note, Wilful hardness is commonly punished with judicial hardness. If men shut their eyes against the light, it is just with God to close their eyes. Let us dread this as the sorest judgment a man can be under on this side hell.

~~CHR~~ EXODUS 9:13-21

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

Here is,

I. A general declaration of the wrath of God against Pharaoh for his obstinacy. Though God has hardened his heart (v. 12), yet Moses must repeat his applications to him; God suspends his grace and yet demands obedience, to punish him for requiring bricks of the children of Israel when he denied them straw. God would likewise show forth a pattern of long-suffering, and how he waits to be gracious to a *rebellious and gainsaying people* Six times the demand had been made in vain, yet Moses must make it the seventh time: *Let my people go*, v. 13. A most dreadful message Moses is here ordered to deliver to him, whether he will hear or whether he will forbear.

1. He must tell him that he is marked for ruin, that he now stands as the butt at which God would shoot all the arrows of his wrath, v. 14, 15. “Now I will send *all my plagues*.” Now that no place is found for repentance in Pharaoh, nothing can prevent his utter destruction, for that only would have prevented it. Now that God begins to *harden his heart*, his case is desperate. “I will send my plagues *upon thy heart*, not only temporal plagues upon thy body, but spiritual plagues upon thy soul.” Note, God can send plagues upon thy soul.” Note, God can send plagues upon the heart, either by making it senseless or by making it hopeless — and these are the worst plagues. Pharaoh must now expect no respite, no cessation of arms, but to be followed with plague upon plague, till he is utterly consumed. Note, When God judges he will overcome; none ever hardened his heart against him and prospered.

2. He must tell him that he is to remain in history a standing monument of the justice and power of God's wrath (v. 16): “*For this cause have I raised thee up* to the throne at this time, and made thee to stand the shock of the plagues hitherto, to *show in thee my power*.” Providence ordered it so that Moses should have a man of such a fierce and stubborn spirit as he was to deal with; and every thing was so managed in this transaction as to make it a most signal and memorable instance of the power God has to humble and bring down the proudest of his enemies. Every thing concurred to signalize this, that God's name (that is, his incontestable sovereignty, his irresistible power, and his inflexible justice) might be declared throughout all the earth, not only to all places, but through all ages while the earth remains. Note, God sometimes raises up very bad men to honour and power, spares them long, and suffers them to grow insufferably insolent, that he may be so much the more glorified in their destruction at last. See how the neighbouring nations, at that time, improved the ruin of Pharaoh

to the glory of God. Jethro said upon it, *Now know I that the Lord is greater than all gods*, 18:11. The apostle illustrates the doctrine of God's sovereignty with this instance, ^{<BMT>}Romans 9:17. To justify God in these resolutions, Moses is directed to ask him (v. 17), *As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people?* Pharaoh was a great king; God's people were poor shepherds at the best, and now poor slaves; and yet Pharaoh shall be ruined if he exalt himself against them, for it is considered as exalting himself against God. This was not the first time that God reproved kings for their sakes, and let them know that he would not suffer his people to be trampled upon and insulted, no, not by the most powerful of them.

II. A particular prediction of the plague of hail (v. 18), and a gracious advice to Pharaoh and his people to send for their servants and cattle out of the field, that they might be sheltered from the hail, v. 19. Note, When God's justice threatens ruin his mercy, at the same time, shows us a way of escape from it, so unwilling is he that any should perish. See here what care God took, not only to distinguish between Egyptians and Israelites, but between some Egyptians and others. If Pharaoh will not yield, and so prevent the judgment itself, yet an opportunity is given to those that have any dread of God and his word to save themselves from sharing in the judgment. Note, Those that will take warning may take shelter; and those that will not may thank themselves if they fall by the overflowing scourge, and the hail which will *sweep away the refuge of lies*, ^{<BMT>}Isaiah 28:17. See the different effect of this warning.

1. *Some believed the things that were spoken*, and they feared, and housed their servants and cattle (v. 20), like Noah (^{<BMT>}Hebrews 11:7), and it was their wisdom. Even among the servants of Pharaoh there were some that trembled at God's word; and shall not the sons of Israel dread it? But,

2. Others believed not: though, whatever plague Moses had hitherto foretold, the event exactly answered to the prediction; and though, if they had had any reason to question this, it would have been no great damage to them to have kept their cattle in the house for one day, and so, supposing it a doubtful case, to have chosen the surer side; yet they were so foolhardy as in defiance to the truth of Moses, and the power of God (of both which they had already had experience enough, to their cost), to leave their cattle in the field, Pharaoh himself, it is probable, giving them an example of the presumption, v. 21. Note, Obstinate infidelity, which is deaf to the fairest

warnings and the wisest counsels, leaves the blood of those that perish upon their own heads.

~~(112)~~ EXODUS 9:22-35

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The threatened plague of hail is here summoned by the powerful hand and rod of Moses (v. 22, 23), and it obeys the summons, or rather the divine command; for *fire and hail fulfil God's word*, ~~(118)~~ Psalm 148:8. And here we are told,

I. What desolations it made upon the earth. The thunder, and fire from heaven (or lightning), made it both the more dreadful and the more destroying, v. 23, 24. Note, God makes the clouds, not only his store-houses whence he drops fatness on his people, but his magazines whence, when he pleases, he can draw out a most formidable train of artillery, with which to destroy his enemies. He himself speaks of the *treasures of hail which he hath reserved against the day of battle and war*, ~~(132)~~ Job 38:22, 23. Woeful havoc this hail made in the land of Egypt. It killed both men and cattle, and battered down, not only the herbs, but the trees, v. 25. The corn that was above ground was destroyed, and that only preserved which as yet had not come up, v. 31, 32. Note, God has many ways of *taking away the corn in the season thereof* (~~(119)~~ Hosea 2:9), either by a secret blasting, or a noisy hail. In this plague the *hot thunderbolts*, as well as the hail, are said to destroy *their flocks*, ~~(134)~~ Psalm 78:47, 48; and see ~~(135)~~ Psalm 105:32, 33. Perhaps David alludes to this when, describing God's glorious appearances for the discomfiture of his enemies, he speaks of the hailstones and coals of fire he threw among them, ~~(136)~~ Psalm 18:12, 13. And there is a plan reference to it on the pouring out of the seventh vial, ~~(162)~~ Revelation 16:21. Notice is here taken (v. 26) of the land of Goshen's being preserved from receiving any damage by this plague. God has the directing of the pregnant clouds, and causes it to rain or hail on one city and not on another, either in mercy or in judgment.

II. What a consternation it put Pharaoh in. See what effect it had upon him,

1. He humbled himself to Moses in the language of a penitent, v. 27, 28. No man could have spoken better. He owns himself on the wrong side in his contest with the God of the Hebrews: “*I have sinned* in standing it out so long.” He owns the equity of God's proceedings against him: *The Lord is righteous*, and must be justified when he speaks, though he speak in thunder and lightning. He condemns himself and his land: “*I and my people are wicked*, and deserve what is brought upon us.” He begs the prayers of Moses: “*Entreat the Lord* for me, that this direful plague may be removed.” And, *lastly*, he promises to yield up his prisoners: *I will let you go*. What could one desire more? And yet his heart was hardened all this while. Note, The terror of the rod often extorts penitent acknowledgments from those who have no penitent affections; under the surprise and smart of affliction, they start up, and say that which is pertinent enough, not because they are deeply affected, but because they know that they should be and that *it is meet to be said*.

2. Moses, hereupon, becomes an intercessor for him with God. Though he had all the reason in the world to think that he would immediately repent of his repentance, and told him so (v. 30), yet he promises to be this friend in the court of heaven. Note, Even those whom we have little hopes of, yet we should continue to pray for, and to admonish, ~~1~~ 1 Samuel 12:23. Observe,

(1.) The place Moses chose for his intercession. He went *out of the city* (v. 33), not only for privacy in his communion with God, but to show that he durst venture abroad into the field, notwithstanding the hail and lightning which kept Pharaoh and his servants withindoors, knowing that every hail-stone had its direction from his God, who meant him no hurt. Note, Peace with God makes men thunderproof, for thunder is the voice of their Father.

(2.) The gesture: He *spread abroad his hands unto the Lord* — an outward expression of earnest desire and humble expectation. Those that come to God for mercy must stand ready to receive it.

(3.) The end Moses aimed at in interceding for him: *That thou mayest know*, and be convinced, *that the earth is the Lord's* (v. 29), that is, that God has a sovereign dominion over all the creatures, that they all are ruled by him, and therefore that thou oughtest to be so. See what various methods God uses to bring men to their proper senses. Judgments are sent, judgments removed, and all for the same end, to make men know that he Lord reigns.

(4.) The success of it.

[1.] He prevailed with God, v. 33. But,

[2.] He could not prevail with Pharaoh: *He sinned yet more, and hardened his heart*, v. 34, 35. The prayer of Moses opened and shut heaven, like Elias's (^{<3087>}James 5:17, 18), and such is the power of God's two witnesses (^{<616>}Revelation 11:6); yet neither Moses nor Elias, nor those two witnesses, could subdue the hard hearts of men. Pharaoh was frightened into a compliance by the judgment, but, when it was over, his convictions vanished, and his fair promises were forgotten. Note, Little credit is to be given to confessions upon the rack. Note also, Those that are not bettered by judgments and mercies are commonly made worse.