

EXODUS 9

INTRODUCTION

Just over a year ago we had the awful disease of foot and mouth. It devastated our farming communities and those pictures of black belching smoke coming from the pyres of carcasses will be ones that will stick in our memory for a very long time. During that time God was clearly speaking to us as a nation. He was telling us that He is God, that He is in control and that we ought to listen to him. Did we listen?

No we did not and perhaps when we think about it now we can identify with the situation that we find in Exodus. God is sending plague after plague but Pharaoh will not listen and this morning we have three more plagues that we want to look at and try to learn the lessons that God wants us to learn.

1. PLAGUE ON THE LIVESTOCK (vs. 1-7)

Moses is sent to the king again with the threat of further plagues upon the land. This one would fall upon the domestic animals, but God still gives Pharaoh a way out, all he has to do is to obey God and let the people go. As with the plague of flies God is going to make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt. When the plague came on the land no animal belonging to the Israelites would die (9:4).

The Lord instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh that the plague would not begin until the next day. This was to allow Pharaoh time to repent and to show clearly that this plague was from the Lord, this was not bad luck or anger from one of the Egyptian gods but this was from the sovereign Lord, the creator of this universe. Pharaoh did not listen and the plague came. Pharaoh sent men to Goshen to find out if any of the Israelite cattle did die (v 7).

Again Pharaoh simply does not believe the Lord he had no need to send men out to see if God had kept his word, for he should have learnt by now that what the Lord has said he will do. Even the news that none of the Israelite animals had been harmed seemed to have no effect upon Pharaoh, his heart was hardened against the Lord, and it seems it never occurred to him why the Egyptians were facing plagues whereas the Israelites were unharmed.

Pharaoh's heart was unyielding it would not give an inch and therefore God's people stayed in slavery and the Egyptians faced the plague. The plague of these animals was once again an attack on the gods of Egypt. A large number of cows were considered sacred in Egypt. We know from many of the Egyptian paintings that bulls and cows represented many gods. One such god was called 'Hathor' it was known as the goddess of love, beauty and joy.

This god was depicted as a woman with a cow's head, it is said that 'Hathor' gave the king divine nourishment. Many of the other animals that were affected by the plague would also have been representatives of Egyptian gods. So again the Lord is showing just how feeble the Egyptian gods were, they were powerless to prevent God's judgement upon the Egyptians.

Now Pharaoh is like so many unbelievers today. In spite of many warnings of which as I said at the beginning the foot and mouth disease was a clear one, unbelievers prefer to continue in their own wicked ways rather than serve the one true living God. They refuse to obey the voice of God because they do not want to submit to the Lord God of heaven. They will not humble themselves to admit that the Lord is God and all the other gods that they have been trusting in are a feeble excuse for a god.

Some unbelievers who do know genuine Christians are jealous of the peace and contentment which they see shining through the life of godly believers, yet they stubbornly refuse to listen to God's word or follow His ways. They do not acknowledge his voice as he speaks to them through his providences and they go on their own merry way.

Unbelievers do not trust God's word even though they have no reason to doubt it. Has God ever not kept one of his promises? Of course not and anyone who is serious about looking at the Bible will discover that God does keep his word. Now this is very important for it is this that is behind the 'all go to heaven theology.' Does God say that in the bible? No! He does not. God says those who trust in Jesus go to heaven and those who do not trust in Jesus go to hell.

But because we do not trust God's word we somehow or other believe that God does not mean what he says or if He does He does not really mean that everyone is a sinner and deserves hell. What He means they tell us is that we are all basically good and there are only a few really bad people, people like murders and rapist who deserve hell. But that is not what God says and God always keeps his word. Pharaoh was slow to learn this lesson but are we just as slow to learn it?

If you are still an unbeliever then please do heed his word, look at the warnings He has given us as a nation, foot and mouth, floods and even a minor earthquake. As a nation and as individuals we deserve God's wrath, therefore heed his warnings submit to his authority and obey his word. Otherwise we are in danger of experiencing his wrath and judgement upon us.

2. THE PLAGUE OF BOILS (vs. 8-12)

Pharaoh is given no warning about this sixth plague. We are told that that Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh and that they took handfuls of soot from a furnace and tossed it into the air. Now we are not told what the furnace that the soot came from was used for, but it could have been used for sacrifices to the Egyptian gods and if that is the case then the Lord could be showing the Egyptians that the after effects of these pagan offerings would bring only trouble upon the land.

It could be that the soot from the furnace could be a type of poetic justice if the furnace was a kiln that was used for making bricks. The furnace was a symbol of the oppression of the Hebrews, the sweat and tears they were shedding to make bricks for the Egyptians. Thus the very soot made by the enslaved people was now to inflict punishment on their oppressors. The soot became fine dust, which brought boils on the people.

These boils, which inflicted both people and animals, must have been extremely painful. Just in passing it is worth noting that there has been much written about the type of disease that caused these boils. It has to be said that the disease is unknown for certain but some commentators think that it could have been Anthrax others think it could be smallpox both these have been very much in the news lately as we now fear terrorists' attacks using these viruses.

Now we are given a small glimpse of the effect of these boils. It concerns the magicians. These were the men who had tried to show that the power of God was nothing special by copying the plagues themselves. But the boils affected them so much that they could not even stand upright (v 11). With all their powers they could not resist the boils coming upon them. But Pharaoh would not listen just as the Lord had said and the Lord hardened his heart. Pharaoh persisted to refuse to listen so the Lord responded by hardening his heart so that he would not listen.

Now this sixth plague like the previous ones is repeated and intensified in the book of Revelation. In Revelation chapter 16:2 we have a plague just like this one. This is God's bowls of wrath being poured out and they represent God's wrath poured out on mankind in this world during the period of Christ's first and second coming. They are not warnings but punishments to those who have not listened to the Lord.

The Lord is sovereign and all that happens in this world are fulfilling his purposes. Even death itself is God's wrath being poured out. It takes unbelievers from this world and brings them to their judgement in hell. We must not see all that goes on in this world as chance events we must understand that what we see as natural disasters are not as natural as we think. When we see calamities of nature strike such as hurricanes, tornadoes or even diseases of cattle, people almost always see no reason or source behind such events.

They regarded these things as mere chance events. They say that 'Mother Nature' is sometimes fickle and cannot always be trusted in other words there are no purpose or meaning to natural calamities. However the bible teaches that at the very heart of all that happens is the sovereign Lord.

He is the creator of this universe, he is the Master and Lord of all and his will is the cause of all that happens. Everything is being directed by God in order to fulfil his own will and purposes. Of course like the Egyptians we try to find other reasons for calamities and try to explain away what is happening but the bible is clear God is working his purposes out and included in those purposes are his warnings and judgements to sinners.

When we see this we will understand that 9/11 was God's warning and God's wrath being unleashed not just on USA but on the world. Foot and mouth was God's warning to us but have we heeded his warnings. Every sinner that perishes in their sins is God's wrath being poured out on that person for their refusal to heed God's word and repent. Of course Christians face these same calamities too but for Christians they are not God's judgements but his discipline being worked out in our lives for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28).

So the same event might be God's wrath to the unbeliever while that same event is God's refining work in the Christian. Now let's heed God's warnings, let's notice God's wrath being revealed and let's repent and heed those warnings before it is too late.

3. THE PLAGUE OF HAIL (vs. 13-35)

In this seventh plague once again the Lord is gracious to Pharaoh, and He was given one whole day's notice of it. He was also given advice about how to minimise its effects (v 19). Once again the reason for the plague is so that they might know that there was no one like God in all the earth (v 14). God is sovereign over the universe. God has been very patient with Pharaoh and his people, he has sustained Pharaoh's life up to this point, if God had wanted to, Pharaoh and the Egyptians would have perished long ago (v15).

However God has not done so because He is using Pharaoh for his own purposes (v 16). That purpose is clearly stated for us; it is so that God's name might be glorified in all the earth. Through this demonstration of God's power His name might be greatly praised. Now let me apply this. God as sovereign is using everyone for his own purposes. The only reason why we are still alive today is that we are part of his purpose for this universe.

You might be an unbeliever and you have hardened your heart to God's word, well today you might think that God does nothing about your unbelief, but be assured God has a purpose for you to fulfil. That purpose we pray might be that you will be saved and bring honour to his great name through your salvation.

It might be that God is demonstrating his great patience to you and therefore showing something of God's longsuffering towards sinners. Pharaoh was spared because God was using him to fulfil his purpose in this world and that is how it is with us. Over the last two weeks I have known of two of God's people being taken to glory through death. God's purpose for them in this world is now

finished, his purpose for them is that they should go to heaven and enjoy all that heaven means for the Christian.

Both died relevantly young one was 59 and the other in her 60's. We might ask why God took two of his saints and yet many sinners who harden their hearts are still alive. The answer is that God is still working out his purposes and He is doing so through every person who is alive today. That includes you. That is worth thinking about isn't it?

Now back to the narrative. Pharaoh had set himself up against God and as a result hail was going to come.

The Egyptians believed that their gods were personified in the elements of nature. So this plague of hail was making a mockery of the Egyptian gods including 'Nut' who was the god of the sky and 'Tefnut' who was the goddess of moisture. There were some Egyptians who listened to Moses instructions for they obeyed God's word (v 20) however there were many who did not listen to Moses. Their hearts remained hardened to the truth of God's word. God sent the plague and the extent of the destruction was great (v 25).

However it did not hail in the land of Goshen. This plague appears to be too much for Pharaoh. He calls for Moses and Aaron and then makes a grand confession (v 27). But this confession is not true, he might be weakening but he is simply trying to manipulate and twist the situation to his own advantage. His request for prayer is not what it seems either (v 28).

He does not use the name 'Yahweh' here but 'Elohim' which was a name, used for acknowledging some god without specifically calling the Lord, Jehovah God. Pharaoh is simply being deceitful trying to buy his way out of the situation. Moses promises to pray and the hail stops and once again the reason given is so that Pharaoh might know that the earth belongs to God, He is sovereign and in control.

Once again Pharaoh hardens his heart and would not let the people go but this did not surprise Moses for he knew that Pharaoh did not fear God (v 30). Now let me finally apply this before we finish. There are people who profess faith in Jesus Christ but do so for their own reasons. It might be that they are in a tight corner; they know the truth of the gospel and might even think that their situation is linked to their refusal to accept Christ as Saviour. So they pretend to become Christians, they might go along to church and do what Christians do in order to try and get God to change their situation.

They are liars, deceivers and twisters; they are trying to buy their way out of a situation. False professors do not fool God; it is possible the church can be fooled for a time but not God. He reads our hearts he knows where we stand before Him. We all need to examine our own hearts in order to determine whether we are like Pharaoh whose heart is hard but are trying to manipulate the situation for our own ends or whether by the sovereign grace of God we are genuinely saved.

Ultimately Pharaoh's heart attitude to God was exposed by his attitude to God's people. That is how it is with us; to love God means to love his people to oppose God will mean that in our hearts if not openly we will oppose God's people.

May the Lord grant us all discernment to know our own hearts?

Amen