

EXODUS 8:20-9:12-THE HARDENING OF A HEART II

THE SECOND SERIES OF THE PLAGUES #4-#6

God is at war everyday with the disobedient and defiant sinners. God is patient and longsuffering and He is also a God of wrath and judgment. There comes a time when He no longer tolerates the arrogance of sinners. The judgment against Pharaoh and the Egyptians is a picture of how God puts on display His wrath to some, and at the same time His mercy to others.

God, in His great plan to show His power and glory, declared war against the ruler of Egypt and the gods of Egypt. He sent painful and destructive plagues one after another. Most of them, He warned of their coming but the Pharaoh never took heed. We witness the awful depravity of man exhibited in this leader and how he deteriorates steadily as he is hardened by God. In His nature he would not submit to God and he paid the utmost price for his rebellion. He was not interested in the will of God, for his own will was what he wanted. The “free leader” who had always thought he had free will over all his nation and his nation of slaves, is the one who turns out to be a slave himself operating under the One who has total free will in everything he does, the sovereign God of the universe.

As we look at this true story, we should examine our own hearts to learn if we are responding to the will of God. That, after all, is truly what matters.

1. THE PLAGUE OF INSECTS 8:20-32

We continue with the second set of plagues after observing the waters turned to blood, the frogs invading the land, and the swarms of stinging gnats irritating the people severely.

A. GOD’S WARNING 20-21

God gave a warning for the first two plagues and then on the third one He took action without a warning. On the next two plagues, He again, gives warnings and then on the third one He acts without warning.

Pharaoh went to the Nile River that morning. It could be that it was for sacred rituals, for there were certain times of the year the Pharaoh would go to the Nile River early in the morning to observe certain religious rites. That could be the

case. Whatever, standing right there waiting for him is Moses and Aaron. These are not the people he wanted to see. They had become national nuisances. This is not the way he wanted to start the day after all the other catastrophes had happened. Pharaoh should have known that these disasters came from the one true God who controlled these events. He could not submit, however, and now he is going to encounter another flurry of judgments.

God gives the instructions to Moses for warning Pharaoh. He tells him to stand before him, or stand in his way. Literally it means to position yourself.

God was using a play on words here. When He said "You let my people go" it correlates with verse 21 "I will send swarming flies. Let go and send are the play on words. If Pharaoh will not send, Yahweh will send.

The flies is an indefinite term according to the Greek translation of the OT. It was translated as a dog fly which was a biting insect. It was a blood sucker. This had to be an intense and distressful plague that God ordered up.

The fly is a connection with another Egyptian deity. The Egyptians held the fly in high esteem for it seemed it had the power to bring life out of death. Maggots crawl out of the rotting flesh, then fly away. This showed a power over death that the people liked, for they were so consumed with life after death. That was how they got their comfort. God, once again is going to demonstrate that He is the only God and He defeats all other gods. He is the giver of life and makes possible the resurrection of life. Beelzebub is the lord of the flies, but here it is shown that God prevails over his kingdom.

The flies would be so innumerable that they would cover the ground.

That is where the Egyptians live.

God even told when and how the plague would occur.

If Pharaoh didn't listen, he would engage with an army of flies.

B. GOD'S GRACE

22-23

Goshen was the land where the Israelites lived.

Israel would not be touched as God would bring on judgment.

That was the way it was going to be from here on out.

God makes it very clear that the Israelites are His people and the Egyptians are not. This distinction is made for the rest of the plagues except for the locusts. God uses His power for His people's sake but destruction for Egypt. He shows His power

not to just save the Israelites but to display that power to the Egyptians. Verse 22 says “that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land.” This is not a hope that Egypt would repent and turn to Him. It is that God is no stranger to the land of Egypt, and he will do what He desires. It not just to display His glory, but His election of Israel as His special people. This certainly demonstrates His grace. He set them apart for Himself.

C. GOD’S WRATH 24

God is a gracious God to some and to others, He is a God of wrath. Here we see with the flies, He corrupted the land. The flies bring destruction to the land. This has not been mentioned before. Yahweh intends to destroy the land. This plague is stronger than the others before it. This keeps on escalating throughout the plagues.

D. MAN BARGAINING WITH GOD 25-28

Pharaoh is very concerned, for this is effecting every Egyptian as well as himself. The plague had been unleashed, now he has to be fast on his feet. The people can go, but just to worship, and then come back.

Pharaoh wanted to keep Israel in bondage while they worshipped. Actually it was just a lie, so the flies would go away. He was willing to say this to get the pressure off, but when the plague was taken off, then he would go back to the way it always was.

God’s people face similar compromises. The enemy tells us we don’t have to be separated from sin because we can serve God “in the land”.

1. You don’t have to be separate

Yes you can have your religion, but don’t let it interfere with me.

2 Cor 6:14-18, Ps 26:4-5

Moses was not about to stay in the land to worship. He knew he had to get totally away. The Egyptians would not like the sacrifices the Israelites would do. They would be highly offended.

2. Don’t go too far

Don’t surrender all the way. People will think you are a fanatic.

James 1:27, 4:4

We are to give Him everything. We are not to negotiate the will of God. We can get close to the world and when we do we are in a dangerous position. We are not to stay close to Egypt. The Christian life is a narrow one. A true Christian is a life that is changed.

Moses shot back with the fact that the compromise would not work.

E. INTERCESSION 28-31

Begging for help 8:8, 9:28, 10:16-17

Changing the mind 8:15, 32, 9:34-35, 10:20

Moses entreats the Lord Moses seems to have taken some pity on the enemy. He promised he would pray for him and the plague would be removed tomorrow. Pharaoh knew it was Yahweh who actually did the miracles. He wanted these flies removed.

Once again, God restores order.

F. HARDENED HEART 32

As soon as the pain was gone and he went back to his old ways, he reasserted his authority. The loss of that authority would be a pain greater than all the plagues combined. He wanted to be in sole charge of his life. This is why the evidence is never enough for him.

2. THE PLAGUE OF LIVESTOCK 9:1-7

A. GOD'S WARNING 1-3

This second plague of the second series is similar to plague 2 and 8 Unless Pharaoh released the Israelites in 24 hours, the livestock in the fields of Egypt would be objects of God's power. Some of the gods of Egypt were associated with bulls, cows, rams, and other livestock, this judgment was another attack on the Egyptian religion. Apis, the black bull was worshipped in Egypt. The second largest temple in Egypt was in Memphis and was for the worship of Apis. When it died it was embalmed and buried in Memphis. A new Apis was to be born out of the death of the old. What idolatry they had. Yahweh is the God of life. The hand of the Lord was about to happen this time instead of the finger of God.

B. GOD'S GRACE 4

God's sovereign grace is once again seen. Daniel reports of another ruler who had to learn the hard way. Daniel 4:28-33
As with the previous plague, there is a distinction made between Israel and Egypt. Not one of the Israelite's animals were killed.
All those Egyptian animals died while there were no animals of Israel touched. This was no accident.

Gen 45:10, 47:1, 50:8 Exodus 12:37-38

C. GOD'S WRATH 5-6

Jeremiah 12:4

The plague moves quickly from the announcement to the judgment. God had already removed the supply of fish, and for a time the supply of water. Now there was no red meat or milk. Think of the bloated carcasses all across the land. It made the heaps of frogs look like nothing compared to this.

D. HARDENED HEART

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Pharaoh still doesn't give in. Stubbornness rules again.

This is an absolute refusal to admit he is not in charge of his life.

Proverbs 28:14, 9:10 Eph 4:18

3. THE PLAGUE OF BOILS

9:8-12

A. GOD'S COMMAND/NO WARNING 8-9

This is like the third plague in that there is no warning to let the people

go. This time it is not the animals which suffer but the Egyptians. The

magicians even suffered. They could have no power over this plague.

The Egyptians are now being shown that their lives are in danger. Humans are starting to bear the judgment.

The priests could not stand before Yahweh.

The soot from the brick kiln gives some irony because that is where the

Hebrew slaves toiled. The Egyptians now get what they deserve.

B. GOD'S WRATH 10-11

Festering boils were very uncomfortable and painful.

Hebrew language describes the boils as inflamed eruptions breaking forth

into skin pustules. They were deep ulcers that broke open with pus that

ran on the skin. Think of the anguish with sores behind the knees and joints, under the arms, and around the waist. You could not sleep, sit, or relax.

This was something what Job experienced as he scraped himself with a shard of pottery. The pain had to be intolerable.

This could be another attack on their religion because skin diseases meant

ritual impurity. They were obsessed with cleanliness. The sores would make

it hard to take baths. The thousand temples in Memphis probably were closed because the priests could not minister.

C. HARDENED HEART 12

The people were being devastated and suffering great pain, but Pharaoh fails to heed. He had boils too, how hard can a heart get?

The Lord hardened the heart 4:21, 7:3

This is now seen in this plague that it came from God.

"Now God justly gave him up to his own heart's lusts, to a reprobate mind, and strong delusions, permitting him to be blinded and hardened, and ordering everything to make him more obstinate. Wilful hardness is commonly punished with judicial hardening. When 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 this side of hell." Matthew Henry

Proverbs 29:1

Are you responding to God's will? That is the question we all have to ask.

This is a striking reminder of what God has been teaching Moses and Israel since the beginning of the Exodus episode. He is in complete control. Yahweh hardens Pharaoh's heart. It is best to allow the tension of the text to remain. That Pharaoh might have reacted given the chance is not in the discussion. He is not given that chance. Peter Enns