



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

F. The first nine plagues (Exodus 7–10)

Part 5: The third three plagues – Exodus 9:13–10:29 (i)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

Introduction

THE THIRD and final cycle of three plagues seems to bring to the fore the Creation echoes that have been alluded to in the earlier plagues. In plagues 7 and 8 Genesis Creation language is used with particular intensity and deliberation. This then leads into plague 9, in which the first Creation edict, "Let there be light", is reversed in the plague of darkness.

Two other aspects that are characteristic of this plague cycle should also be mentioned. The first is the mental instability of Pharaoh as God now targets His plagues at Pharaoh's heart (this will be commented on this month under plague

7). The second is the repentance of Pharaoh which takes place in plagues 7 and 8, along with an increased eagerness to bargain. The repentance is then reversed most strikingly in plague 9, in which Pharaoh vows that Moses will die if he ever sees his face again.

Plague 7: Hail

- 9:13 And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let My people go, that they may serve Me.
- 9:14 For I will at this time send all My plagues upon thine heart,¹ and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like Me in all the earth.
- 9:15 For now I will stretch out My hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth.
- 9:16 And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up,² for to shew in thee My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth.
- 9:17 As yet exaltest thou thyself against My people, that thou wilt not let them go?
- 9:18 Behold, to morrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now.
- 9:19 Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home,

- the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.
- 9:20 He that feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses:
- 9:21 And he that regarded not the word of the LORD left his servants and his cattle in the field.
- 9:22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.
- 9:23 And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt.
- 9:24 So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.
- 9:25 And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field.
- 9:26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail.
- 9:27 And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time:³ the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.
- 9:28 Intreat the LORD (for it is enough⁴) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer.⁵
- 9:29 And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands⁶ unto the LORD; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD'S.⁷
- 9:30 But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the LORD God.
- 9:31 And the flax and the barley was smitten: for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was balled.
- 9:32 But the wheat and the rie were not smitten: for they were not grown up.⁸
- 9:33 And Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread abroad his hands unto the LORD: and the thunders and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured upon the earth.
- 9:34 And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and

the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.

- 9:35 And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses.

Comment

The final round of plagues begins in the usual way with Moses meeting Pharaoh at the river early in the morning. Yet things are not quite the same as they have been previously. This time the plague is coming, 'ready or not', and the only option the Egyptians have is to minimise its effect by bringing their men and beasts inside to shelter from the wrath and judgements of God (v. 19).

A new intensity enters the picture with this plague. Whereas in earlier plagues Moses or Aaron were commanded to smite the dust or the rivers, this plague speaks of smiting Pharaoh himself. There is a new directness in the language with respect to Pharaoh as a target for God's action. This comes out in verses 14-16 in particular:

The plague will come . . .
 upon thine heart
 upon thy servants
 upon thy people
 Its purpose will be . . .
 that thou mayest know
 that I may smite thee and thy people
 And the final result . . .
 thou shalt be cut off
 for to shew in thee My power.

This emphasis on the implications for 'thee' (Pharaoh) contrasts with the references to 'Me' (God) in verses 13-16:

Let My people go
 that they may serve Me
 there is none like Me
 to shew in thee My power
 that My name may be declared throughout all the earth.

The plagues are all about a declaration of God and Who He is. The object of the plagues is God; they are concerned with declaring His righteousness and right to judge. Pharaoh is but a container, a vessel for God's power. Ultimately that power shatters him and spills over for all to see. To use another figure, God raises Pharaoh up or makes him stand and then knocks him down. Paul quotes this passage in Romans 9, not to tone it down as some commentators have

attempted, but to emphasise the very point that the passage is making: that it is God's prerogative and right as the Potter to do this. Whatever He does will of necessity be the right thing to do.*

The continual play on the verb 'to send' throughout the plague narratives has been pointed out at a number of junctures in the footnotes. It is particularly dominant in this plague, and it is worth stopping to quote all the examples:

"Let My people **go** [= **send** My people], that they may serve Me" (v. 13);

"I will **stretch** out My hand [= **send** My hand], that I may smite thee" (v. 15);

"that thou wilt not let them **go** [= **send** them]" (v. 17);

"**Send** therefore now, and gather thy cattle" (v. 19);

"And Pharaoh **sent**, and called for Moses and Aaron [Pharaoh is beginning to move along the right lines: at least he is 'sending' now; maybe he will soon realise he really does have to 'send' the Israelites as well!]" (v. 27);

"Intreat the LORD . . . and I will let you **go** [= **send** you]" (v. 28).

With the plague of hail God is prepared to make a distinction, not only between the Israelites and the Egyptians, but also between those who fear the word of the Lord within Egypt and those who do not (vv. 20,21). Egypt as a whole is not automatically excluded from protection, and even the very servants of Pharaoh are now divided between those who set their hearts to God's word and those who do not.

There is total devastation in the land as it is attacked from above and beneath. The hail lashes down from on high and flames of fire lick the ground from below—the two polarities of fire and water which would normally cancel one another out working together at God's behest. Together they smite the land, not only the animals and men who are outside, but every herb and tree of the field also. The account deliberately picks up the language of the various elements of Creation in Genesis 1 as the wasted land is described. Meanwhile, the thunders of God's judgements roll on.

Pharaoh has no alternative but to repent, and the three elements of his speech of contrition have the appearance of being genuine, even if they are short-lived:

1 "I have sinned this time [specifically]";

2 "the LORD is righteous";

3 "I and my people are wicked [in general]". He can bear the noise and the hail no longer, and he acknowledges that God is indeed in control (v. 28), appealing to Moses to act as his intercessor.

Though man and beast were struck down if outside, Moses is apparently free to walk about. He is not scared by the climatic tumult taking place around him. He knows that the earth is the Lord's and he walks confidently on that basis, smiling at the storm. Even though he knows Pharaoh will change his mind once again (v. 30), still he spreads his hands to God when he has gone out of the city so that the plague might cease. It is a lesson in the perseverance of showing mercy and praying for others even if we think (rather than know, as is the case for Moses here) that they will soon return to their old ways, or are for some other reason beyond the pale.

* Some comments on the interaction between God's purpose and Pharaoh's free will were made in the second introductory article to the plague accounts, [July 2002, p. 251](#).

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1. **v. 14 send all My plagues upon thine heart.** One possible interpretation of this phrase is that, whereas the other plagues had a (mere) physical effect on various phenomena of nature, now God will increase His activity by causing emotional or mental instability in Pharaoh which will make it harder for him to help himself. Note that this key phrase comes right at the beginning of the account of the final cycle of three plagues in which Pharaoh alternates between (what appears to be genuine) repentance and his old intransigence (in which he repents of his repentance, so to speak). Pharaoh becomes an increasingly pathetic character rather than one to be feared, and what happens to him is perhaps reminiscent of the demise of Saul. There seems to be no doubting Pharaoh's mental instability by this point.
 2. **v. 16 for this cause have I raised thee up.** A quite different way of interpreting this phrase would be to translate it, "for this cause have I spared thee"; God could have wiped Pharaoh out instantly for his stubborn way, but He has chosen to spare him in order further to demonstrate His power. The more usual interpretation is to leave the translation as per the AV; as far as God is concerned this is the only worthwhile purpose in Pharaoh's having existed at

- all—as a receptacle for the demonstration of God’s power.
3. **v. 27 this time.** This may echo God’s “this time” in verse 14.
 4. **v. 28 it is enough.** This is what Jacob had said when his sons reported to him that Joseph was still alive and ruler over the land of Egypt: “and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die” (Gen. 45:28). The words signalled the entrance of the children of Israel into the land of Egypt; now Pharaoh’s use of the phrase (the next occurrence on record) presages the time when Israel will leave Egypt to go back to the land again.
 5. **v. 28 ye shall stay no longer.** By a happy coincidence, the expression ‘no longer’ uses the same root as the word ‘Joseph’! The root *yasaph* means ‘to add’, but Pharaoh did not want to add to or prolong his experience with Joseph and his descendants any longer!
 6. **v. 29 hands.** The word for ‘hands’ here is *kaph*, ‘palms’, rather than the normal word for ‘hand’, as found in verse 22, for example. The act of spreading out the palms before the Lord would speak both of openness before Him and of the desire to receive blessings from His hand. Our hands are empty without the blessings He bestows; the spread palms acknowledge that blessings are showered down from above.
 7. **v. 29 the earth is the LORD’S.** This principle, in which Pharaoh has to be instructed by this plague, is extremely important. It is quoted in Psalm 24:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:26. The principle is demonstrated by the effect the plagues have on the entire creation. This is brought out, for instance, in verse 22 (every herb) and verse 25 (every tree of the field).
 8. **vv. 31,32 flax, barley, wheat, rie.** The information about the crops which were in ear enables us to date this event to approximately January/February.



Principles, Preaching and Problems

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“Do all speak with tongues?” (1)

Malcolm Edwards

SIMON PETER was unsure what to make of it all as he reflected on the strange vision he had just received while praying on the rooftop at noon. He was staying with his namesake, Simon the leather tanner, in the coastal town of Joppa, and the vision showed an assortment of unclean animals let down in a sheet. There was also a voice that invited him to kill and eat. Being a devout Jew he had refused to touch what the Law of Moses prohibited, but he was told not to call unclean what God had cleansed. The vision was repeated twice more, convincing Peter that it was the work of the Lord, but he was still uncertain as to what it could all mean.

The answer was at that very moment approaching the house, in the form of three tired travellers. They were servants of Cornelius, a devout Roman centurion who lived in Caesarea, about fifty kilometres (thirty miles) north of

Joppa. Cornelius had also received a message from God, directing him to send men to Joppa to find Peter, who would instruct him about salvation.

When Peter heard their story, the full meaning of his own vision flooded his mind. He now had no inner doubts about God’s willingness to accept Gentiles for salvation, and he gladly accompanied the messengers to Caesarea to meet with Cornelius. But he was still unprepared for what transpired.

Having met the centurion, and after they had exchanged their remarkable stories, Peter lost no time in preaching the gospel to both him and his family. The record of what followed is dramatically presented in Acts 10:

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy [Spirit] fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Pe-