

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 9:13-35

To understand more about the seventh plague, hail.

Read the Text:

“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, that they may serve me. 14 For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. 16 But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. 17 You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. 18 Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.”” 20 Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, 21 but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field. 22 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt.” 23 Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. 24 There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail. 27 Then Pharaoh sent and called 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 Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” 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 servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” 31 (The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.) 33 So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the LORD, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. 35 So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.” (Exodus 9:13-35, ESV)

Study the Text:

Plague #7: Hail

The seventh plague is laid out in a lengthier passage than most of the other plagues, and for a couple of reasons. As the plagues grow in intensity, a bit more is usually said of them (although the sixth plague was relatively sparse in description). Moreover, there are some additional notes that describe certain contextual details that take up space. Beyond that, God has some extra things to say that help us understand the purpose of the plagues overall. The seventh plague is carried out by God’s hand but by means of the weather. God strikes Egypt with hail, “such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now” (Ex. 9:18). Below is a breakdown of some of the key details in this passage.

THE ROMANS CONNECTION

We have already made note of the various connections to Pharaoh and the book of Romans thus far, but in the seventh plague God explicates His purpose in bringing about the plagues upon Egypt in a manner that is explicitly connected to Paul's words in Romans 9:17: "But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Ex. 9:16). The point of this is simple. Pharaoh is, at this moment in history, seen as the most powerful human being on the earth, at least in the ancient near Eastern context. Egyptians viewed their Pharaohs as gods or at least vessels of the gods. To challenge Pharaoh is to challenge a divine being in the mind of an ancient Egyptian. It is for this purpose that God chooses Pharaoh. If Pharaoh is challenged and brutally bullied and brought into submission, it will be clear to the ancient person who is actually in charge and who is actually God. This is why the plagues are drawn out. God even assures Pharaoh: "For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth" (Ex. 9:14). God could have ended the Egyptians whenever He chose, but He continued to draw out the plagues in order to make an example out of Pharaoh for generations to come.

FEAR OF THE LORD

Another fascinating detail in this passage is that God provides a way for non-Israelite people to be spared from the devastation of the imminent hail. He tells them to run and take shelter both for themselves and their livestock because the hail will kill anyone caught in it, and then verses 20 and 21 say: "Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, 21 but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field." That means that there were some contingency of people in Egypt, "servants of Pharaoh," who actually feared the word of the LORD and took shelter and were spared. This is an important detail that will come to the surface in later chapters just after the final plague of the angel of death. Of course, the Israelites did not have to take any action at all: "Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail" (Ex. 9:26). God has already more than once spared His own people from the devastating effects of His judgments against Pharaoh and Egypt. Though the people of God are in the midst of the wicked kingdom that receives judgment after judgment, the people of God are spared by God's mercy. This is a pattern woven throughout Scripture and prevalent in the book of Revelation as well.

THE REVELATION CONNECTION

We have already seen some connections to the book of Revelation thus far in our study. Revelation patterns itself after Exodus in a number of ways. Both include a kingdom of people who persecute and enslave the people of God and are judged accordingly for it. Both include the judgments of God being poured out onto the wicked kingdom ("Egypt" in Exodus and "the kingdom the Beast" in Revelation) while the people of God are protected from the judgments in each of them. Exodus 9:13-35 presents perhaps the most explicit connection of all. Hail is the seventh plague in the book of Exodus, and it reemerges as "the seventh bowl" in the book of Revelation as well. The hail in Exodus is worse than had ever been seen in the history of the kingdom of Egypt. It is described with horror in Revelation 16:21: "And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe." Like in Exodus where Pharaoh does not repent despite the brutal nature of the seventh plague, the people in Revelation do not repent but instead curse God in light of this "plague." The plague in Exodus, while bad, is not the finale; nor will it be in Revelation, either.

THE FLAX AND BARLEY

Verse 31 seems to come out of nowhere and feels very out of place to the modern reader. However, for the ancient reader, farming was a very common and important trade and because you could more easily move

livestock into cover from the hail, you could not do the same for crops. This would have likely resulted in the ancient readers wondering what crops were impacted by this. Verses 31 and 32 give a helpful note to explain what was probably impacted by this plague and what had not yet sprouted and was therefore still intact.

TAKING GOD AT HIS WORD

Pharaoh once again goes through his typical cycle of asking Moses to plead with God to stop the plague from spreading, agreeing to let the Israelites go, and then hardening his heart (or having his heart hardened), retracting his permission, and reverting back to cruelty. However, this time when Pharaoh pleads with Moses and Aaron, they likely remember the words of the Lord. God had been saying all along that Pharaoh would not repent (Ex. 9:12). This time, they confront Pharaoh with this reality: “But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God” (Ex. 9:30). They knew he would change his mind because he didn’t really fear the LORD, and yet they prayed and asked God to stop the plague anyways. This means that they are now fully aware of what God is doing. This is no longer a negotiation; this is a judgment that is being carried out systematically against Pharaoh for the purposes of generational recognition of Yahweh’s power.

What About Now?

One important takeaway from this passage is the life protecting benefits of fearing the word of the LORD. Those who feared the word of the LORD in Egypt concerning the hail listened and took shelter and were saved from it. Those who disregarded the word of the LORD died as a result of their rebellion. Anytime we heed the wisdom of the word of the LORD it will benefit us and preserve us. Anytime we disregard the word of the LORD, we run the risk of destroying ourselves. Another takeaway is that God can use the evil deeds of people for the purposes of highlighting His divine power and glory. While we tend to focus on the bad things people do, we must remember that God can choose to reveal His power through wicked people as well. He raised Pharaoh up to break him down in front of a global stage so that people would understand who is truly on the throne.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 9:13-15. What did God tell Moses to do? What message did God give Moses for Pharaoh? What does verse 15 indicate about God’s power?

2. Read Exodus 9:16-17. For what purpose has God raised Pharaoh up?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 9:18-21. What did God say He would cause to happen in Egypt? What directions does He give to the Egyptian people? Who fears His words? Who disregards it? What are the consequences for both parties?

2. Read Exodus 9:22-23. What does God direct Moses to do? What will be the result of his action? What did Moses do, and what came from the sky?
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Day Three

3. Read Exodus 9:24-26. How significant was this fire and hail mixture? What did the hail strike down? Who was not affected by this plague?
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4. Read Exodus 9:27-30. What did Pharaoh say to Moses in response to the hail? What did Pharaoh ask Moses to do? What was Moses' response to Pharaoh?
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Day Four

1. Read Exodus 9:31-32. What crops were struck down? What crops were not struck down? Why?
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2. Read Exodus 9:33-35. What did Moses do? What did Pharaoh do when he saw the hail ceased?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 21 Discussion: Fear Leads to Wisdom

In Exodus 9:20-21, there are two groups described: those who feared the word of the LORD and took shelter from the hail and were thus spared, and those who disregarded the word of the Lord and died. The fear of word of the LORD leads to knowledge, instruction, and ultimately life (Prov. 1:7). Talk as a group about how obedience to God's word has benefitted you and how disobedience to it has brought difficulty.

1. Icebreaker: Is the term "commandments" a positive or negative term? How so?
2. How has obedience to the word of God led to blessing in your life? Give a specific example.
3. How has disobedience to the word of God led to difficulty in your life? Give a specific example.
4. Have you ever disobeyed God's word knowing it would likely result in difficulty? How did that work out?
5. How do the commandments of God benefit us? Why are they often viewed negatively?
6. Why are the commandments not able to make us righteous? (Hint: It's the reason we need Jesus)

Takeaways:

1. The seventh plague of hail destroys everyone who did not take shelter and all of the crops.
2. The people of Israel were preserved.
3. The seventh plague of hail mirrors the seventh bowl of judgment (hail) in Revelation.