

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 9:8-12

To understand more about the sixth plague, the boils.

Read the Text:

“And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. 9 It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” 10 So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. 11 And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. 12 But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.” (Exodus 9:8-12, ESV)

Study the Text:

Plague #6: Boils

The sixth plague involves the transformation of one substance into another, soot into dust that turns into boils “on man and beast” (Ex. 9:9). Again, this plague is brief in description but loaded with important details. Below is a breakdown of some of the key details in this passage.

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

This plague, a transformation of soot into dust that causes boils, harkens back to the initial demonstration of power that God provides for Moses prior to the first confrontation with Pharaoh, as well as the first plague. In Exodus 4:1-8, God transformed Moses’ staff into a serpent, and then transformed Moses’ hand from healthy to leprous and then back to healthy. It was also the first plague in Exodus 7:14-25 that included turning the water in the Nile into blood. Now, in the sixth plague, Moses and Aaron once again perform a plague that includes a transformation from one substance into another, and there are a couple of aspects of transformation that take place.

The “soot from the kiln” turns into a dust that causes boils “on man and beast throughout the land of Egypt” (Ex. 9:8-9). The “kiln” or “furnace” may have been some kind of forge for making glass, pottery, or smelting. Whatever it was, it produced ash as a result of the burning which provided Moses and Aaron what they needed to perform this plague. There is perhaps some irony (or creativity) in using ash for a plague that will result in boils given that boils are often connected to burns and ash comes as the result of wood or coal burning. The ash was thrown heavenward, probably no more than a cup full in total, and spread out into the sky and then settled back down.

Some scholars have argued that this was merely a symbolic act and that the soot did not turn to dust that caused the boils. This argument stems from trying to calculate how a small cupful of ash could possibly spread across the entirety of Egypt. However, if God can transform regular ash into a boil-causing dust, can

He also not multiply it? Herein lies the complexity of the sixth plague. It is not simply that God turned one thing into another, but also that He greatly multiplied it to affect all of the kingdom of Egypt.

THE MAGICIANS

One interesting detail in this passage is the re-appearance of the court magicians. They were last seen in Exodus 8:19, at the end of the third plague of gnats, when they finally admitted that the power of Moses and Aaron was truly “the finger of God.” They have not been seen or mentioned since. However, in this sixth plague they re-emerge once more. Why? Several suggestions have been made, but two stand out as highly likely. For one, that they are present suggests that they have continued to consult with Pharaoh as he weighs his options against Moses and Aaron. Being that they were magicians, they were “experts” in the fields of healing, magic, and supernatural activity. Douglas Stuart notes, “To the Egyptians the magical, the medicinal, and the miraculous were all closely linked.”¹ Moreover, that they are affected by this plague of boils suggests that they are just as vulnerable to threat of Yahweh’s power as anyone else. Up to this point they could sometimes mimic the power given to Moses and Aaron but they could never undo it. This time, they succumb to its threat. This would render them as useless and weak in the sight of Pharaoh and the Egyptian crowds.

HARDENED HEART

Up to this point, Pharaoh has continually hardened his heart. As discussed in previous study guides, the hardening of heart doesn’t necessarily mean that the heart is being prevented from relenting. Rather, it’s a word that means “to strengthen.” The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is the strengthening of it to continue to do what Pharaoh desires or wills to do. That God, here, “hardened the heart of Pharaoh,” simply means that God is strengthening or bolstering Pharaoh to continue with his desired plan in light of the obvious power of God to which he was vulnerable.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Pharaoh’s obstinance must have been shocking to not only the court magicians but also the Egyptian citizens. It certainly seems shocking to the reader. But notice that verse 12 ends by telling us: “And he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.” One thing to remember throughout the entirety of Scripture is the foreknowledge of God. God not only knows exactly what will transpire but has also already prepared the next move in light of our actions. God is the only one who can “declare the end from the beginning” (Is. 46:10). Psalm 139:4 says, “Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.” The apostle John declared of God, “he knows everything” (1 Jn. 3:20).

God has over and over again thus far throughout the book of Exodus demonstrated His ability to know exactly what will transpire and in the exact manner it will happen. He has reiterated to Moses and Aaron that Pharaoh will not relent even in the face of devastating plagues over which he has no control. Why? So that God may display His power through Pharaoh to the world (Rom. 9:17). So now, after the sixth plague has come to pass, the court magicians have been silenced, and the people and livestock of Egypt are suffering from boils, and yet Pharaoh is still unmoved by any of it seems wildly improbable, and yet it is unsurprising because God has been saying this would happen all along.

What About Now?

One takeaway is the creativity in which God chooses to bring about judgments on the kingdom of Egypt. Using the ash from a kiln to produce a dust that will cause boils (which are usually connected to burns) is a

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 229.

creative touch. It's almost as if this is a judgment of fire only without the actual flames. Either way, God is a God of order and this ordering can be seen even in His judgments. Another takeaway is the simple reminder of the sovereignty of God. God is never taken by surprise by anyone. He knows all things and can "declare the end from the beginning" (Is. 46:10). Even the most improbable and unbelievable outcomes that we might experience are totally known in the heart of God before they happen. While things may seem especially difficult, we can take comfort in knowing that we have a good God who is fully prepared for everything that takes us by surprise.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 9:8. What did God tell Moses and Aaron to take and throw into the sky?

2. Read Exodus 9:8. According to the notes, to what was this kiln probably a reference?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 9:9. What would the ashes become? How is this similar to previous acts of God through Moses and/or Aaron in Exodus?

2. Read Exodus 9:9. What is ironic (or creative) about the ash turning into dust that will become boils?

Day Three

3. Read Exodus 9:10. What did Moses and Aaron do? What was the result of it? Who did it affect?

4. What is the immediate biblical story you think of when you hear the term "boils?"

Day Four

1. Read Exodus 9:11. Who could not stand before Moses and Aaron? Why?

2. Read Exodus 9:12. What did the Lord do to Pharaoh? What does this actually mean? Did this take Aaron and Moses by surprise? Why or why not?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 20 Discussion: No Surprises

In Exodus 9:8-12, Moses and Aaron perform the sixth plague which results in boils breaking out on all of the people and livestock in Egypt. While it might seem totally improbable that Pharaoh would remain steadfast in his hardness of heart and be unwilling to let the Israelites leave Egypt, it did not take Moses or Aaron by surprise because God had been telling them this would happen from the beginning. Nothing that happens takes God by surprise. Talk as a group about how there is great comfort in knowing that nothing surprises God, and how we might better trust Him in moments of uncertainty since He is sovereign over all things.

1. Icebreaker: What's the most surprising thing that has happened to you in the last 6 months?
2. Does the doctrine of God's sovereignty make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
3. Does knowing that God is surprised by nothing bring you peace? Why or why not?
4. How does God's sovereignty impact our moment by moment faith in times of trouble?
5. Imagine a world in which God is surprised by human choices. How does that make you feel?
6. How can the sovereignty of God be used in the context of the church to minister to one another through seasons of difficulty?

Takeaways:

1. The sixth plague brings boils upon all of the people and livestock in Egypt.
2. Pharaoh does not repent, just as God predicted.