

SPECIAL NOTE: I will catch up tomorrow. I had an opportunity yesterday I could not pass up. I got a call that there was a cancellation at the Oviedo Mall site. It was a hour over and an hour back, but I now have my first Covid 19 vaccine shot. My second will be on March 19. Join me in thanking God for this opportunity.

Bible Study # 16 Exodus 9.13–35 02–25–2021

As the signs continue, the narrative concerning each one is longer than the earlier ones, and no more mention is made of the Egyptian magicians. In this one, humans were subjected to a hailstorm, along with all the country. The very things that sustained life (crops and animals) were directly attacked by this sign. Once more the distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians was maintained, and Goshen had no hail.

On this occasion Moses was told to rise early and take up his position in Pharaoh's presence. Taking up a position in a place means simply to appear before someone. The message of the God of the Hebrews remained the same: 'Send my people away so that they may serve me'.

The accompanying threat was made in the same way as previously (see 8:20-21). If Pharaoh didn't act obediently in sending the people away, then God reserved the right to send his hand against Pharaoh and his people with full destructive force. He would send his plagues to the heart of Pharaoh. This is the only time this word for 'plague' appears here in Exodus.

As part of God's plan for His people, He raised up Pharaoh in order to demonstrate through him, his power. Proclamation of God's name was to be made to the world. Something much more than just the words 'God' or 'Lord' is intended. God's character was to be evident in the events leading up to the exodus, as well as the exodus event itself. 'Name' in a passage such as this represents the nature or attributes of God.

Moses recognized the continuing hostility of Pharaoh. The verb used of Pharaoh's attitude was one often applied to building a roadbed higher than the surrounding terrain (cf. our English word, 'highway', for a similar development).

This could mean that Pharaoh was setting up barriers against messages of the Lord being brought to him, or else it could be a metaphorical use implying that he was exalting himself. The former meaning gives good sense. Pharaoh was placing himself as a barrier in the way of the Israelites serving their God according to His demands.

The next announcement was in the form already used earlier of divine intimation of coming events ('behold I am causing it to rain an exceedingly heavy hailstorm'. The use of the participle in Hebrew conveys both the certainty of the predicted event and also its immanency, and this accords with the indication of time – 'at this time tomorrow.'

On no previous occasion since the foundation of the state of Egypt, had such hail occurred. The warning was that if people and animals did not take shelter, then the hail would kill them.

A sharp contrast is drawn in these verses between two groups in Egyptian society. On one hand, there were those who 'feared the word of the Lord'; on the other hand, those who 'ignored the word of the Lord'. Fearing God in this context is not the same as living a life governed 'by 'the fear of the Lord', as described in Psalms or Proverbs (see, e.g., Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7).

Some realized the danger they were in, and reacted accordingly. With haste, they brought their slaves and cattle inside, while those who had not taken to heart the warning left both out in the fields.

Again Moses performed the task allotted to him. He used his staff in the same way as Aaron had done with some of the previous signs (8:6; 8:17), and thunder, hail and lightning came as the Lord had predicted. On other occasions in the Old Testament, thunder and lightning are presented as part of a theophany (Exod. 20:18; Deut. 5:23-25; 1 Sam. 12:18).

The creator was in control of all the elements, and displayed His power in utilizing them for his own purposes. They were his instruments of judgment, so that everything outside – men, animals, crops, and trees – were all struck down. From the foundation of the nation of Egypt no previous occurrence like this was ever known to have happened. Once more the Goshen region, home to the Israelites, was spared for the moment.

The storm elicited from Pharaoh a grudging admission: ‘This time I have sinned.’ For a third time he promised submission, acknowledging that the Lord was in the right, while he and his people were in the wrong. From the sequel the reader knows that a confession of being guilty did not change his heart and behavior.

The loss of servants, livestock and crops had brought him to this point. He and his people had had enough rain and hail, so he asked for prayer to the Lord. As on previous occasions, he promised that if this divine action ceased, he would let the Israelites go, and in addition there was no need for Moses and Aaron to continue their audience with him.

No indication is given of the location of Pharaoh’s residence. It was simply in ‘the city’, indicating that he had a palace there. It could have been any one of a number of cities. Moses commits himself to spreading out his hands to the Lord. This is one way in which prayerful action is described in the Old Testament (for other instances, see 1 Kings 8:22, 38-39; Ezra 9:5; Ps. 44:20).

The word for ‘hands’ is strictly the palms of the hands, which may show that hands were facing upward when prayer was made, indicating the one praying was seeking to receive blessing from God. The purpose of the prayer on this occasion was to ensure that the rain and hail ceased, and to bring about a true realization that the earth belonged to the Lord.

The wording here is exactly the same as the opening verse of Psalm 24, a declaration that Israel’s Lord was the creator to whom the whole world belonged. Pharaoh was dealing not only with Israel’s God, but the one who had the entire world in His hands. Even though some of the people were earlier said to fear God (v. 20), Moses knew that there was no genuine repentance on the part of Pharaoh or his officials.

These verses form a parenthesis that explains what happened to specific crops when the hail fell. The flax and the barley were destroyed, but the wheat and the rye were not. ‘Flax’ was a well-known crop in Egypt from about 4000 b.c.

After soaking, it went through a long drying process before it could be used to manufacture linen (cf. the account of Rahab hiding the Hebrew spies under the flax on the roof, Josh. 2:6). ‘Barley’ and ‘wheat’ were the two main crops in Egypt, as they were later in Israel.

The Gezer calendar, dated from about 900 b.c., helps by setting out the agricultural year in Israel, and three lines are very apposite to these verses in Exodus. They are: the month of hoeing the flax. The month of reaping barley, and the month of reaping [wheat] and measuring.

The beginning of the year was the flax harvest, which means that the barley crop was gathered in May, while the wheat was a month later in June. Here the point was that the hail destroyed the early crops, but not the two that were late in ripening. While the early crops were destroyed, yet there would be food for the Egyptians from the later ones.

No explanation is given of why Moses had to leave Pharaoh's presence before he prayed. It could be because the impact of the hail was far greater out in the fields rather than in a township location. Moses did as he had already indicated to Pharaoh, and the narrative describes his mode of praying as in verse 29 ('he spread out his hands to the Lord').

The result was that the thunder and hail came to an end, as also the rain that was pouring down on the country. This is the first indication that rain was an associated happening, though the verb for 'rain' was used in verse 23 ('So the Lord rained hail').

The cessation of this particular sign caused another change for Pharaoh. Again his rebelliousness asserted itself, and he sinned once more (for Pharaoh's previous admission of sin, see v. 27). More was needed than a miracle of this nature to change his attitude and influence his actions. Ultimately it would be a work of God's Spirit that would bring him to the point of permitting the exodus to occur (see 12:31-32).

The sin of Pharaoh and his officials was that they hardened their hearts. Sin often provokes reactions like this. With steely resolve Pharaoh refused to countenance any departure of the Israelites, and in so doing fulfilled the word of the Lord delivered through Moses (cf. 4:21; 7:4, 13).

The continued stubbornness of the human heart was demonstrated by a child in a video I was this week. A two or three year old is holding an onion and claiming it is an apple. He goes back and forth with his mother several times and finally mother says, okay, eat it. Video showed him biting into the onion and then making bitter faces as he tastes it, but he continues to eat. Mother says, "He would rather die than admit he was wrong."

We will continue our study with Exodus 10.1–20.