

The Hardened Heart and the Sovereign Hand

A Study in Exodus Chapter 9

We are continuing our journey through this epic confrontation between the living God and the stubborn pride of man. In chapter 8, Egypt was reeling. But here in chapter 9, the intensity ramps up. We see a God who is patient, yes, but a God who will not be mocked. He is moving to deliver His people, and nothing—not even the most powerful empire on earth—can stay His hand.

The Distinction of Grace

In the first seven verses, the Lord issues His sixth demand to Pharaoh: *"Let My people go, that they may serve Me."* When Pharaoh refuses, a grievous plague falls upon the livestock. But notice something beautiful and profound in verse 4: *"And the LORD will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt."*

The Lord "severed" or set apart His people. While Egypt's fields were filled with mourning, there was peace in Goshen. This wasn't because the Israelites were better people; it was because they were *His* people. It's a picture of God's protective grace.

Now, some get hung up on verse 6 where it says "all" the cattle of Egypt died. Then later, we see cattle being hit by hail. We have to understand the Hebrew expression here—it's generic. It means all classes of livestock were hit, or all that were out in that specific plague. The point isn't a math lesson; the point is that God hit Egypt where it hurt—their economy and their false gods—while shielding His own.

Sovereignty and Responsibility

As we move into the plague of boils and then the devastating hail, we run into a theological "deep end" in verses 15 and 16. God tells Pharaoh, *"For at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart... for indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you."*



1

WATERS TURN TO BLOOD

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



6

UNHEALABLE BOILS

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



2

FROGS

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



7

HAIL

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



3

LICE

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



8

LOCUSTS

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



4

FLIES

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



9

DARKNESS

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



5

DISEASE ON LIVESTOCK

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.



10

DEATH OF FIRSTBORN

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.

Getty Images

This is where we see the Sovereignty of God. God is the Potter; we are the clay. He is in total control of history. Paul actually quotes this in Romans chapter 9. But we must be careful. We don't need to over-systematize God. We don't need to lean so far into a "frozen" sovereignty that we lose human responsibility, nor so far into human "will" that we lose God's enthronement.

God raised up Pharaoh knowing exactly what Pharaoh would do. Pharaoh wasn't a puppet; he was a rebel. He chose to harden his heart, and then, in judgment, God confirmed that hardening. You see, the same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. The difference isn't in the sun; it's in the material. God's Word was shining on Pharaoh, and Pharaoh chose to be clay.

The Warning and the Choice

In the plague of hail, God actually offers a way out! He says in verse 19, *"Send now and gather your livestock... every man and beast which is found in the field... the hail shall come down on them, and they shall die."*

Look at the response in verses 20 and 21:

- **The Wise:** Those who feared the word of the Lord got their servants and cattle into the barns.
- **The Foolish:** Those who "regarded not" the word of the Lord left them in the field.

That is the human condition in a nutshell. The warning is given, and the response is ours. God is sovereign over the storm, but He tells you where the shelter is.

Confession vs. Repentance

When the thunder and fire-mingled hail start falling, Pharaoh finally cracks. He calls Moses and says in verse 27, *"I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked."*

That sounds like a great "altar call" confession, doesn't it? But as soon as the sky cleared, verse 34 tells us he *"sinned yet more"* and hardened his heart. Pharaoh had attrition (fear of punishment) but not repentance (a change of mind and heart). He didn't want God; he just wanted the hail to stop.

Practical Application

Are you like those Egyptian servants who heard the warning and ran for cover? Or are you "regarding not" the Word of God in certain areas of your life? Maybe you're waiting for the "hail" to stop before you get serious with God. Don't wait for a crisis to acknowledge His Lordship.

A Challenge for the Believer

Let us not be "fair-weather" followers. It's easy to say "The Lord is righteous" when things are falling apart, but the real test of our faith is our obedience when the sun is shining. Are you walking in the "Goshen" of His peace, or are you flirting with the world's systems? Trust in His sovereignty, but live out your responsibility to obey Him today.

An Invitation to the Unbeliever

Perhaps you feel like Pharaoh today—stubborn, resisting God, feeling the "hail" of life's consequences. Maybe you've even said, "I've sinned," but you've never actually turned.

Listen, God didn't just send a plague to show His power; He sent His Son to show His love. Jesus Christ didn't just teach us; He saved us when He shed His blood on the cross to pay for your rebellion. And the resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. He is the only true shelter from the judgment to come. Don't harden your heart another day. Come into the shelter of His grace.