

Prayer

Hold before our eyes, Almighty God and Saviour, the visions of Your glory given to us in Your Word. We praise You for the glorious future You have already revealed which is Your plan for our future. May we never yield to any temptation to turn aside from the faith You have placed within us, and may we find more of its truth as we live for You now. All praise to You: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Strengths and Weaknesses

Pray for the community of God's people, the church, within your own country. Pray that it might assess its strengths and weaknesses in a Godly manner, using the Gospel and God's Word rather than the ways of the world. In this way, pray that the church will address the important issues of its weaknesses, and building on the true strengths it has in Christ and Him alone.

Meditation

Speak to us in words of prophecy, Lord God
And may we discern the truth of Your Word
Speak to us in words of challenge and vision
And may we be willing to be tested to our limits
Speak to us in words of love and comfort
And may we be empowered by them for action
Speak to us in words of wisdom and revelation
And may we be fed by them, day and night
Speak to us in words of faith and sound teaching
And may we accept the Bible's truth and honesty
Speak to us in words used by the Lord to bless the crowds
And may we use them again to bless our troubled world
Speak to us in words which change all things for good
And may we grasp them now, not let them go ... for ever.

Bible Study - Exodus 9:13-10:29

¹³ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Get up early ... confront Pharaoh, and say, "The LORD says: Let my people go to worship me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues upon you personally ¹⁵ I could have ... struck you and your people with plagues and swept you off the earth. ¹⁶ But I have spared you in order to show you my power ... ¹⁷ You still think of yourself as greater than my people and prevent them from leaving. ¹⁸ Therefore, at this time tomorrow, I will rain down the heaviest hail that has ever fallen ... ¹⁹ So go and order your livestock to be taken to safety; everything that is exposed will die.'" ²⁰ Those who feared the word of the LORD ensured their servants and livestock took shelter. ²¹ Those that had no regard for the Word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock outside.

²² Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand so that hail falls on all Egypt' ²³ Then the LORD sent thunder, hail and lightning ²⁵ The hail struck down everything that was in the open ... ²⁶ However, where the Israelites lived in the land of Goshen, there was no hail.

²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent for 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 Pray to the LORD! ... I will let you go' ²⁹ Moses said to him, 'As soon as I leave the city, I will pray; the thunder will stop, and there will be no more hail, and you will learn that the earth is the LORD'S. ³⁰ But I know that you and your officials still do not yet fear the LORD God.' ... ³³ So Moses left Pharaoh ... and the thunder and the hail ceased ... ³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw this ... he hardened his heart, both he and his officials.

^{10:1} Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh ... so that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and so that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and performed signs among them. This is how you will know that I am the LORD.'

³ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and said to him ... 'How long will you refuse to submit to me? Let my people go to worship me. ⁴ For if you refuse, I will bring locusts into

your country tomorrow! ⁵ They will cover the ground; they will devour what is left to you after the hail ... ⁶ They shall fill the houses of all the Egyptians.” Then Moses turned and left.

⁷ Pharaoh's officials said to him, 'How long will this man be a menace to us? Let the people go ... do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?' ⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said, 'Go and worship the LORD your God, but explain who is going?'

⁹ Moses said, 'We will go with our young and our old, our sons and daughters and our flocks and herds, because we have the LORD's festival to celebrate.' ¹⁰ He said to them, 'The LORD help you indeed if ever I let your children go with you! Obviously, you have devised some evil plan. ¹¹ No, never! Your men may go and worship the LORD.' And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

¹² Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over Egypt, so that the locusts may swarm over it ...' ¹³ So the LORD brought an east wind upon the land ... which brought the locusts. ¹⁴ The locusts settled over the whole land ... a dense swarm of locusts. ¹⁶ Pharaoh hastily sent for Moses and Aaron and said, 'I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. ¹⁷ I beg of you to forgive my sin this once, and pray to the LORD your God that he remove this deadly thing...' ¹⁹ The LORD changed the wind into a strong west wind, which ... drove the locusts into the Red Sea ... ²⁰ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart.

²¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over Egypt that can be felt.' ²² So Moses did this, and there was dense darkness for three days ²³ ... but all the Israelites had light where they lived. ²⁴ Then Pharaoh called Moses, and said, 'Go then and worship the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you.' ²⁵ But Moses said, 'But you must let us have sacrifices to sacrifice to the LORD our God, ²⁶ so our livestock also must go with us ...' ²⁷ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go. ²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, 'Get out of my presence and see to it that you do not see my face again! For on the day you see my face you shall die.' ²⁹ Moses said, 'Just as you say! I will never see your face again.'

Review

This is a very long passage of Scripture to ask you to read, and even this is a condensed form of the Scriptural text (click here for the full text). The reason why we are studying the plagues like this is to see the way in which they increase in intensity in groups of three. Looking back over the last two days, you will notice that this third group of three plagues contains a fierce confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. The altercation is so intense there is mention of servants and officials of Pharaoh arguing with him ('do you not understand that Egypt is ruined?' – 10 :7) and even managing to change his mind (see 10:8). Again, all three plagues are repetitious, with the Lord giving Moses specific orders firstly, with Moses or Aaron performing the deed to begin the plague, followed by the record of Pharaoh's reactions, which in this reading, are far more substantial and significant than in any of the other six plagues.

At the beginning of the seventh plague of hail, lightning and thunder, Moses was commanded by the Lord to confront Pharaoh during his morning ritual washing once again (9:13). On the first occasion he did this, before the first plague, Moses demanded the release of the Israelites (7:14f.). On the second occasion, before the fourth plague, Moses demanded the same, but also told Pharaoh that God would separate out and protect His own people (8:20f.) On this third occasion, before the seventh plague (9:13f.) Moses repeated the previous demands and added a further specific threat. God had absolute power to do with Egypt as he wished (9:15), and He challenged Pharaoh to choose to avoid all the consequences of the next plague by protecting everything and everyone indoors. It was a subtle challenge; for if Pharaoh did this, it would show to his courtiers that he feared the Lord, but he preferred to ignore the warning in order to try and fight on. Many of his courtiers, however, were beginning to doubt the wisdom of standing against such acts of power from a mighty God (9:20,21)!

Pharaoh had to accept defeat in this battle of wills when the threatened hail, lightning and thunder came (9:27f.), and the eighth plague (locusts) and the ninth (darkness) continue the same theme, but adding one further highly significant issue. As each plague wore down Pharaoh's resistance and his courtiers attempted to persuade Pharaoh to do what Moses asked (see 10:7f.), Pharaoh eventually agreed to allow the Israelites to go, but asked to know who would go (10:8). When Moses said that everyone had to go, Pharaoh would not have it, and for reasons we will look at later on in the Bible study, he immediately withdrew his permission (10:11)! It was an extraordinary scene. Then, during the last plague of an obscure darkness 'which could be felt' (10:21), Moses and Pharaoh squabbled again about who and what would go, with Moses demanding that all the flocks and cattle should come in order that proper

said to them, 'Go and worship the LORD your God! But explain who is going?'⁹ Moses said, 'We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, because we have the LORD's festival to celebrate.'¹⁰ He said to them, 'The LORD help you indeed if ever I let your children go with you! Obviously, you have devised some evil plan.'¹¹ No, never! Your men may go and worship the LORD, for that is what you have been asking for.' And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

¹² Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt, so that the locusts may swarm over it and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.'¹³ So Moses stretched his staff out over Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts.¹⁴ The locusts came upon all of Egypt and settled over the whole land, such a dense swarm of locusts has never been seen before, nor will ever be seen again.¹⁵ They covered the surface of the whole land, so that it was black; and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Nothing green was left, no tree, no vegetation, throughout all Egypt.

¹⁶ Pharaoh hastily summoned Moses and Aaron and said, 'I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you.'¹⁷ I beg of you to forgive my sin this once, and pray to the LORD your God that he remove this deadly thing from me at least.'¹⁸ So he went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD.¹⁹ The LORD changed the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not a single locust was left throughout the country of Egypt.²⁰ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

²¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.'²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days.²³ People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived.²⁴ Then Pharaoh called Moses, and said, 'Go then and worship the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you.'²⁵ But Moses said, 'But you must let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to the LORD our God,²⁶ so our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the LORD our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the LORD until we arrive there.'²⁷ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go.²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, 'Get out of my presence and see to it that you do not see my face again! For on the day you see my face you shall die.'²⁹ Moses said, 'Just as you say! I will never see your face again.'

sacrifices could be selected. Pharaoh, although rendered virtually powerless by the succession of plagues, and the doubting of his own court, still refused to let the people of Israel go.

But this is exactly what the Lord had predicted. The display of power was one which showed God's power and authority over all earthly kingdoms, and Christian tradition has used these stories to make this point until very recently in history. Only one thing was left for God to do, to complete His own promise and release the people of Israel, not through the permission of Pharaoh, but through His own will and power. This is the only model of God's salvation given at this time by Scripture, and the history of God's people is built upon what comes next.

Going Deeper

Each of the three plagues in this last group has its own horror; hail, locusts and darkness. But the most significant feature of this last group of three plagues is the intense spiritual battle between God and Pharaoh. There is a great deal to be found within the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh. We should also notice that although Aaron was by Moses' side, Moses appears to have overcome his difficulty in speaking. In this passage, he is right in the thick of the debates!

The seventh plague; hail, lightning and thunder

The seventh plague itself is not necessarily as fierce as the pestilence and boils of some of the earlier plagues, everyone could have survived this plague if they had taken the Lord's advice. But this was a battle of the gods, not a battle of reason and logic. It was the effect of the plagues and the way the weather was used which is of importance. From the beginning, we are introduced to the idea that this time, the plague is a demonstration of power by God, and lightning, thunder and hail were regarded as divine events since the earliest of times and in most ancient civilisations, including Egypt. The Egyptians had their own understanding of the gods who controlled these, but the Lord wanted to show them who was really in control!

Having been told by Moses what would happen if Pharaoh continued to fail to release the Israelites, two things happened. Firstly, those courtiers who heard the threat immediately made sure their own property, families and animals were safe from the coming hail. Secondly, the people of Israel were saved by being 'separated out' from the rest of Egypt by the Lord (as in the second group of three plagues, see 8:23 and 9:4). Pharaoh had not been impressed by the evidence of Israel's separation previously, but the effect of the whole incident upon his own court, made up of his own family members, was different. Their protection of family and animals (9:20) meant loss of faith in Pharaoh as 'god-provider' for Egypt. Faced with this, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and confessed his 'sin'. It was difficult for Moses to be sure of the degree of Pharaoh's sincerity at this point, for his language had the appearance of authentic repentance, seeking understanding and prayer (9:28,29). Eventually, Moses perceived that it was all an act; and although he promised to pray for the cessation of the plague, he rounded on Pharaoh and his court for their continued unbelief (9:30).

Moses' own personal boldness in speaking this way was itself an indication of how far he had changed since his initial reluctance to speak (4:10 etc). Moses himself was an example of the power of God at work in a man, and Pharaoh was an example of the opposite!

The eighth plague; locusts

The eighth plague is described in great detail; Moses' instructions first (10:1-2) followed by a confrontation with Pharaoh (10:3f.) before the final plague arrives (10:12f). The extraordinary features of this plague unfold at each of these stages; firstly when the Lord told Moses about how the plagues would be used in future years to teach future generations about the power and authority of God over all His creation (10:2). They were words of encouragement to Moses which may well have been needed, but the Lord had a purpose for them.

The most significant feature of the plague came not with the actual plague of locusts, but after Moses and Aaron threatened Pharaoh with it (10:7f.) Pharaoh's officials, already concerned and split over how to handle the threat from Moses (see above), sought to argue some sense into Pharaoh; they could see that Egypt was being progressively ruined by the plagues, and could not understand why their ruler had to continue his personal battle with Moses and the Lord, if it was to be at the expense of Egypt itself. They suggested the appeasement of Moses (10:7). Pharaoh appears to have reluctantly agreed to this, accepting Moses' request, but refusing to let the children go; a course of action which would have drawn the Israelites straight back to Egypt and slavery. It is doubtful that Pharaoh was concerned for the protection of the children; rather, his motives were to ensure the return of the men. Within the bargaining and bluffing which was undoubtedly going on, a good negotiator did not openly show motive!

It has been suggested that Pharaoh wanted to protect the children because there were tribes living in the desert regions north and East of Egypt who practiced child sacrifice, and he wanted

to ensure that this abomination (as it was regarded even by the Egyptians) was not practiced. If this was his concern, however, he could have easily checked this out.

The ninth plague; darkness

The last and ninth plague of darkness is recorded more briefly than the previous two, as with the third and the sixth plagues. However, it has the feeling of gloom, powerfully encapsulated in the description of the darkness as something 'that can be felt' (10:21). Scripture does not give any real explanation of this phenomenon, and we can only guess at it; suggestions of a total eclipse of the sun do not begin to do justice to what is described here.

In the course of the negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh, Moses asked yet again for the release of the Israelites, and Pharaoh, seeing the favour the Lord showed His people, indicated that he would let the Israelites go. This time, however, he refused to allow the people to take their flocks and cattle. Moses objected on the grounds that they would not be able to perform their sacrifices (10:24,25), but on reflection, this again appears only to have been a ruse of Pharaoh's. How could any large number of people survive in the desert unless they had their flocks and cattle?

In the end, total impasse ensued (10:27,28). Pharaoh dismissed Moses from his presence, and although Moses did not know what God's instructions were for what would happen next, his spirit must have witnessed that this was indeed the end of this power-play game of spiritual politics. The Lord was not interested in manoeuvring. He wanted to free His people, and more radical action was required. In the next chapters of Exodus, we will find out what!

Application

Power is something that people are keen to have, whether in the workplace, or at school, or in academia, and even the church. One thing remains true for all exercise of worldly power, which is that power must be demonstrated if it is to be accepted by others and believed. A headmaster has power to control pupils because he or she can apply the ultimate sanction of removing a pupil from school, for example. However grand someone appears to be, their power collapses if they cannot deliver that power through controlling events. Now, in this Scripture, God is the God of all Creation, and is able to do what He wants with it. This is the secret of His power over Pharaoh. It is no use trying to find natural explanations for each instance of the 'plagues' because if we attempt this, we appear to claim for ourselves what is rightly His! In reality, we can no more do this than Pharaoh could control events, because God is always in control of His universe.

The only way we can have real power in this world, therefore, is to tap into the same power of God made evident in the story of the plagues. It is the same power which brought Jesus back from the dead, and the same power which is at work today in God's Church by the Holy Spirit. Pharaoh was probably not entirely aware of how he was standing in the way of the power of Almighty God at first; but his blindness to it grew and grew. The first thing that we should do is ensure that any worldly power we exercise through leadership or other authority we have through employment or church office, for example, does not stand in the way of the Lord because of what others expect us to do, or oblige us to stand in God's way to protect our own position. If we follow either route, then we become like Pharaoh.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How does God use the hail, lightning and thunder to make headway in his claim to liberate the Israelites?
2. Is it appropriate to tell stories about how God fooled the Egyptians (10:2) at a time when there is a country called Egypt still in existence?
3. What spiritual lessons can be learned from the battle between Moses and Pharaoh?

Discipleship

God has made each of us with an ability to compete. We compete with each other in hundreds of different ways; in relationships, in work, and in politics, for example. Yet in matters of faith, the Lord calls us to stand back from this competitive instinct, because true faith is expressed in the service of God, not in competing either with God or with other Christians. Unfortunately, some feel that the right way to be 'church' is to be highly competitive in church life, with the consequence that many people feel that they are not 'as good as' others. This is not the Lord's way, and it leads to much spiritual pride.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we offer You everything that has happened this day; the good which has inspired us, and the more difficult things that have challenged us. Work through everything with which we are involved to bring about peace and harmony in our lives; not peace and harmony with the world, but peace and harmony with You, our Lord and Saviour: AMEN

¹³ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh, and say to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews says: Let my people go to worship me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues upon you personally, on your officials, and on your people, so that you will come to know that there is no one like me in all the earth. ¹⁵ I could have stretched out my hand by now and struck you and your people with plague and swept you off the earth. ¹⁶ But I have spared you in order to show you my power, and to ensure my name is spoken about through all the earth. ¹⁷ You still think of yourself as greater than my people and prevent them from leaving. ¹⁸ Therefore, at this time tomorrow, I will rain down the heaviest hail that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹ So go and order your livestock and everything you have out in the open to be taken to safety; everything human or animal that is exposed and is not brought to safety when the hail comes, will die.'" ²⁰ Those who feared the word of the LORD from amongst the officials of Pharaoh ensured their servants and livestock took shelter. ²¹ Those that had no regard for the Word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock outside.

²² Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail falls on all Egypt, on humans and animals, and everything growing in the fields of Egypt.' ²³ Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail; lightning flashed down on the earth as the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt, ²⁴ and hail and lightning combined continually in the midst of it. Such heavy hail had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵ The hail struck down everything that was out in the open all over Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the vegetation in the field, and shattered every tree. ²⁶ However, where the Israelites lived in the land of Goshen, there was no hail.

²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent for 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 Pray to the LORD! Enough of God's thunder and hail! I will let you go; you do not need to stay any longer.' ²⁹ Moses said to him, 'As soon as I leave the city, I will extend my hands to the LORD; the thunder will stop, and there will be no more hail, and you will learn that the earth is the LORD's. ³⁰ But I know that you and your officials still do not yet fear the LORD God.' ³¹ (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³² But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they ripen later.) ³³ So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and reached his hands out to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. ³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had stopped, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, both he and his officials. ³⁵ So Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

^{10:1} Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials, so that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and so that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and performed signs among them. This is how you will know that I am the LORD.'

³ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and said to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews says, "How long will you refuse to submit to me? Let my people go to worship me. ⁴ For if you refuse to let my people go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow! ⁵ They will cover the ground, so that you will not be able to see it. They will devour what is left to you after the hail, and they shall devour every tree of yours that grows in the field. ⁶ They shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your officials and of all the Egyptians, something that neither your parents nor your grandparents have seen, from the day they came on earth to this.'" Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh.

⁷ Pharaoh's officials said to him, 'How long will this man be a menace to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?' ⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he