NOON BIBLE STUDY: EXODUS 9

Exodus 9:1-7 - 5th Plague: Pestilence Killing Egyptian Livestock

Things are intensifying. From blood to frogs to bugs, the latest plague is pestilence. Pestilence is defined as "a contagious or infectious epidemic disease that is rapid, severe and devastating (Merriam-Webster)." Pestilence is going to affect the livestock of the Egyptians (but not Israel's). And again we read that this was to "make a distinction between Israel and Egypt".

Sure enough, the plague comes and devastation hits Egypt "tomorrow" just as the LORD said through Moses (perhaps an intentional choice since the last plague was lifted "tomorrow" per Pharaoh's request). Pharaoh is a curious character. He is dead set against obeying the LORD, yet is curious to see if the Israelite livestock was indeed spared. But again, rather than acknowledging Yahweh as God, he hardens his heart and does not let the people go.

Before we move on, it's also important to note that this is the first plague that results in death. As we observed before, things are intensifying. The animals of Egypt have died. Previously, the plagues had been a serious nuisance, now they are touching on a deeper level altogether.

Exodus 9:8-12 - 6th Plague: Boils

Boils all over the Egyptians, and their animals! How devastating and painful! The ESV Study Bible observes that this is the first of the plagues to affect the people of Egypt *directly* (as opposed to indirectly through frogs in homes, pestilence killing their animals). Again, things are intensifying.

In this section we read about a specific response to the boils from an interesting source: the magicians. Remember, these magicians, trying to ease Pharaoh's mind, had previously replicated some of the signs, leaving us a little unsettled. But we've seen that every time their "power" was limited and overwhelmed by God's. Now, when the boils afflict the magicians, they run out of Moses' presence! Who's winning this battle now?!

This is a quick glimpse into the way the spiritual battle works sometimes. Sometimes it appears that evil has the upper hand. But one must read to the *end of the story* to know who really wins in the end. Who is left standing when all is said and done is the one who really has the victory, not just the one who scores a few points when the match begins. The magicians were no match for the power of Yahweh, no matter what they appeared to be able to do at the start.

Exodus 9:13-21 - Heavy Hail Foretold

Pharaoh still refuses to let God's people go and so the plagues will continue. Next up: a powerful plague from the skies. While Egypt is still reeling from the boils, Yahweh proclaims that hail will fall on the land. And even as the next judgment is told, Yahweh explains why things continue as they are:

Exodus 9:15-16 (NLT) - By now I could have lifted my hand and struck you and your people with a plague to wipe you off the face of the earth. 16 But I have spared you for a purpose-- to show you my power and to spread my fame throughout the earth.

During this 7th plague, the LORD opens the door for anyone who hears his word to believe:

Exodus 9:19-21 (NLT) - Quick! Order your livestock and servants to come in from the fields to find shelter. Any person or animal left outside will die when the hail falls.'" 20 Some of Pharaoh's officials were afraid because of what the LORD had said. They quickly brought their servants and livestock in from the fields. 21 But those who paid no attention to the word of the LORD left theirs out in the open.

And of course, Pharaoh's pride persists even as some of his subjects learn to fear the LORD.

Exodus 9:22-26 - 7th Plague: Fiery Hail

The skies open up and all hail breaks loose. Hail can be devastating in and of itself. It can injure humans, destroy crops and buildings. But this hail is *mixed with fire*! So when the hail falls, fire consumes the area as well. No one had ever seen something like this before as devastation rains down and spreads through Egypt. And yet, Goshen, where God's people resided, saw none of it.

Exodus 9:27-35 - Pharaoh Asks for Relief

Pharaoh seems to have a genuine moment of heart change here ("I have sinned", Yahweh is the righteous one and we are the sinners" is new for him, **v. 27**). But, as usual, it is short-lived. He's *afraid*, but doesn't *fear*. Moses calls him out for this (**v. 30**) and then prays for the hail to stop. And sure enough, Pharaoh has a change of heart. The battle is not over *yet*.

A closing observation: We may have missed it in the text, but something is happening in the land of Egypt but also in the life of Moses. Remember that Moses was once hesitant and afraid, reluctant to go and represent the people before Pharaoh. We saw the back and forth between him and the LORD when God first called him. The LORD finally agrees to let Aaron, Moses' brother, be the official spokesman of the Israelites.

Up to this point, that is what we have seen. God will come to Moses with a message, Moses will give that message to Aaron and Aaron will speak that message to Pharaoh. It's possible that Moses was in the room as this was happening, but Aaron is the one speaking and perhaps more significantly stretching out his hands to enact the plagues for the LORD.

However, during the 6th plague, something begins to change - and by the end of Exodus 9 we are reading about Moses in a way we never thought we would (or maybe more accurately in a way *he never thought he would*). Let's see the change:

Exodus 7:19 - Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, …that they may become blood;

Exodus 8:5-6 - Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the streams and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'" 6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.

Exodus 8:16-17 - Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.'" 17 They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff…

And now as the boils are to break out in the land:

Exodus 9:8-10 - Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. 9 "It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt." 10 So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast.

And the hail:

Exodus 9:22-23 - Now the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt." 23 Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt.

And by the end of the chapter Moses is telling off and calling out Pharaoh to his face.

Exodus 9:29-30 (NLT) - "All right," Moses replied. "As soon as I leave the city, I will lift my hands and pray to the LORD. Then the thunder and hail will stop, and you will know that the earth belongs to the LORD. 30 But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the LORD God."

Who is *this* guy?! Is that the same Moses who on Mount Horeb said he couldn't speak and was filled with fear? It is the same Moses, but rather than fear, he is now filled with confidence.

What changed? He saw and experienced God working in his life. As Moses walked with God, turned to God in difficult situations, God proved himself faithful to Moses. And in turn, Moses rightly grew in his own confidence and boldness to stand for the LORD. He had learned that Yahweh would be with him, help him and back him up when he stepped out in faith.

This is what growth and maturity look like: gaining confidence where we once lacked it because God has proven himself as trustworthy through experiences in life with him.

This is a really important lesson for us. This is how life with God, the life of faith, is supposed to work. **Faith builds faith.** Here's what I mean:

God works in your life on Monday, and on Tuesday you're different. On Tuesday you are building on the faith of Monday. And when the challenges of Wednesday come, you're more confident. We don't start each day at square 1 – we build on our faith and grow in maturity. This is

a really important reality. If we look at the men and women we want to be, or even need to be for the days ahead, we may feel intimidated by the growth that is required.

Imagine a new runner who looks at a 10-mile run – yikes! 10 miles seems impossible. We can barely run 1 mile, how are we supposed to run 10?! In this scenario, it's clear that the way you run 10 miles one day is by starting with 1 mile today. Over time, strength and endurance are built, which leads to the confidence to run 10 miles. Running 10 miles is still hard, will still lead to pain, but 10 miles is no longer impossible for the one who has been faithful to start running when the distance is shorter.

Moses looked at the call on his life, to face the Egyptian King and rescue God's enslaved people like running 100 miles! He had all of the excuses, many of them reasonable to not respond to God's call. But God's consistent answer to Moses' excuses was "I will be with you."

Yet, Moses' part, like ours, is to obey what God has called us to do. Moses first had to go back to Egypt. Then he had to speak to the leaders of Israel. Then he had to hide behind his brother in Pharaoh's court. Then he had to throw down his staff and pick it up again…and so on…

And now, in Exodus 9, Moses is at mile 7. He hasn't run 10 miles yet, but he also hasn't stayed on the couch out of fear of how intimidating running was.

He had experienced God in his life, and his faith was stronger because of it. The faith he developed during plague 1 became the foundation for the faith he would need during plague 2.

So, to those of us intimidated by what it means to follow Jesus in this evil age, worried about what he may be calling us to address in our lives, or overwhelmed by what he is calling us to do or not do to be a holy people: stop looking at the marathon you feel you're being asked to complete. Look at the first step, the next step – and take it.

Just like Moses, our relationship with God is not marked by flawlessness, or speed, but growth.

And at this point we see Moses has grown a lot. Isn't it interesting that up until now, the story we've been reading has focused on how Pharaoh will respond to God's word, what plague will come next, and the like? Yet, without even noticing it, we've also been reading a story about how Moses is growing.

We have said many times now that the purpose of the plagues was to reveal to Pharaoh, Egypt and the children of Israel that Yahweh is God. But it is also good for us to see and acknowledge what else is happening through these trials - God is raising up Moses too.

So before we think that the challenges we are up against in the world are only so that the world would turn to and acknowledge God, perhaps we can see that maybe the LORD is also using those same events to grow us up as well. Something is happening in the land of Egypt, and something is happening in Moses too.