

May 21st, 2023

The Seventh Plague: Stones From the Sky

Exodus 9:18-35

What humans need most

Last time we learned the most precious truth in Exodus: *God could have freed Israel from Pharaoh on day one, but He delayed.* Why? Because the Exodus was *mainly* about showing God. What we need more than anything else—more than water, food, air, sex, shelter—is *to see God*. Seeing His glory is the very substance of our lives, it is our wealth our treasure, our food, our dwelling place, our crown, our everlasting honor and joy. The Ten Plagues are a display of the justice, mercy, and sovereignty of God; the power, wisdom and grace of God. Had Israel been released immediately, it would have been to their ruin, because more than anything else, their hearts needed to full of praise and awe of Him. Had Israel been released immediately, humanity would have been impoverished, because seeing God and praising God is the need of every man, woman and child. The Exodus was not mainly about freeing Israel, but about proclaiming God's name in all the earth. This seventh plague is no different. The main thing on display in these verses, is God Himself.

★ The Seeker

★ The Sovereign

★ The Stormbreaker

I. The Seeker

The threat

Please look at v.18. Yahweh, through Moses, speaks to Pharaoh “Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.” That’s the threat. ‘*Tomorrow, at this very hour* (a prediction so precise that no modern weather man can duplicate) stones will fall from the sky and it will be historic.’ Egypt had been a nation since 3100 BC, so this storm will be bigger than any storm for nearly two millennia.

“Egypt my people”

With this threat comes something new. v.19 “Now therefore *send, get...*” This is a double imperative, a double command—SEND! GET! “Now therefore *send, get* your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.”” God is not instructing Israel here. They are safe in Goshen (v.26). He’s issuing a double command to the Egyptians themselves that they might be spared from His judgment. Simply amazing! This is another reason God delayed Israel’s release—*He wanted to save Egyptians*. He wanted to save some of the very villains that had imprisoned His people. And God’s love for the Egyptians is seen elsewhere in Scripture. Isaiah 19:21 And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering.”¹ Turn to Exodus 12:37-38. This happened when Israel left Egypt. “And the people of Israel journeyed from

¹ Also cf. Jeremiah 46:26; Ezekiel 29:13-16; Isaiah 19:19-25.

Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸ *A mixed multitude also went up with them....*” Who was this mixed multitude that accompanied Israel? Those Egyptians and other foreigners who believed in the LORD. Here in 9:19 God is commanding *them* to take cover, to bring themselves and their animals inside because nothing in the field will survive.

Some feared the LORD

Look at v.20 “Then whoever *feared the word of the LORD* among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, ²¹ but whoever *did not pay attention to the word of the LORD* left his slaves and his livestock in the field.” The first group *feared* the word of the LORD. The Hebrew word for *fear* here often means reverence, respect, worship.² The second group *did not pay attention*. The Hebrew means that *they did not take it to heart*.³ The first group obeyed God. The second group did not. The first group escaped this judgment. The second group did not.

Who sees any difference?

It's vital to ask here: what made *the difference* between these two groups? Why did the first group *fear the LORD*? Someone might say “They chose to believe God, the other group chose not to believe.” Fair enough. But *why* did the first group *choose* to believe? Was it because they were more righteous, or more intelligent, or more humble than their neighbors? Is that why you are a believer

² John D. Currid, *Exodus Vol. 1: Chapters 1-18*, (Auburn, MA.: Evangelical Press, 2000), pg. 204. Also see Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service Vol. 3*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1994), pg.291

³ Same Hebrew word is used in 2 Samuel 13:20 where Absalom told Tamar not to take to heart what Amnon had done to her.

and your neighbor is not? Certainly not. The Scripture says “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). These Egyptians believed the Lord because God granted them the grace of salvation. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. *And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8).

Who is the Seeker?

Why is this so vital to emphasize here? Because what is on display here is *not* these pagan Egyptians but the merciful God who seeks to save lost sinners. The Bible is so clear here. Sinners do not seek after God. It is God who seeks after sinners. Romans 3:10-11 “None is righteous, no, not one; “no one understands; *no one seeks for God.*” No one seeks after God, no not one. But God is the Great Seeker of sinners. Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to *seek* and to save the lost.” These Egyptians escaped this judgment because the LORD *sought* them. This is the beating heart of Reformed Theology: *Salvation belongs to the LORD.*⁴ The LORD commanded in v.19 “Now therefore *send, get...*” and that command created belief in those whom He foreloved.⁵ James 1:18 “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth...” Just as God’s command created the Heavens and the Earth so His command creates fear and faith in lost sinners.

1st Principle: In wrath, God remembers mercy

That brings us to our **first principle**: *Even in judgment, God seeks to save sinners.* The judgment on Egypt was well deserved. They had brutalized, enslaved, and killed God’s people. They sinned against conscience against

⁴ Psalm 3:8

⁵ Philippians 1:29

natural light and against Moses the prophet of God. They didn't deserve any more warnings. Yet God sought to show them mercy in the midst of judgment. And this is how Scripture represents God over and over again.

Why Jonah was mad at God

Consider just one example. Turn to Jonah 3. Children, boys and girls, do you know that sometimes the prophets got mad at God? Jeremiah got mad at God because every time he spoke God's word, he suffered. Once when he had spoken God's word the hearers were so mad they threw him in cistern—a deep well—that was filled with mud and he sank down in the mud. He got mad at God for some of these hardships.⁶ But Jonah was mad at God for a completely different reason. Do you know why Jonah got mad at God? Well Nineveh was a horrible pagan city that killed many of God's people. Jonah preached that in forty days Nineveh would be overthrown (3:5). But then something miraculous happened. The people of Nineveh repented and turned to the LORD. And then we read in v.10 “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.” This is why Jonah was angry. Look at 4:1-2 “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ²And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that *you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*” Jonah was angry

⁶ This example of Jeremiah further makes my point with Jonah. Ultimately Jeremiah was suffering hardship because he was sent to preach in order that Judah would repent and turn towards God.

because God showed mercy to his enemies. That is why he ran away when God initially called him, because he knew that God loved to seek and save sinners.⁷

Consolatory Use

Dear congregation, do you see how much comfort flows from this fountain? Examine your own life. Who are you, who am I that God would ever seek after us? “What is man that you are mindful of him?”⁸ The answer is not in us. We are a drop from a bucket, dust on the scales (Isaiah 40:15); we are as nothing before Him (Psalm 39:5). We were born into this world dead in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1) as His sworn enemies (Romans 5:10). God doesn’t seek us because of something in us. And that should bring *great comfort* to you who always worry about whether you have done enough for God to love you. You haven’t done enough for God to love you. You never will. God didn’t seek you because of something great in you. He sought you because of something great *in Him*.⁹

Exodus 15:11 “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

⁷ Elenctic Use

Someone might object at this point and say “But then *why* does God threaten men with judgment? God here is threatening the Egyptians with death. Why the threat if God is such a merciful God?” Dear friend, His threats are a kindness aimed at preventing their death. God’s aim is not destruction. He says in Ezekiel 33:11 “As I live, declares the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” God threatens sinners with punishment because He wants to destroy them, but because He wants them to turn to Him and live.

⁸ Psalm 8:4

⁹ We are not Christians because we found Jesus. We are Christians because Jesus Christ found us. Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to *seek* and to *save* the lost.”

Micah 7:18 “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression.”

Deuteronomy 33:26 “There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty.”

1 Kings 8:23 “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants...”

Psalm 35:10 All my bones shall say, “O LORD, who is like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him.”

Psalm 89:6 For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD.”

God seeks sinners because He is incomparably great, infinite in love and immutable in His covenant. That’s our **first point**: *Even in judgment, God seeks to save sinners.*

II. The Sovereign

Lord over Heaven

Remember that the plagues are in 3 series of 3 with the 10th plague being set apart all by itself. This 7th plague begins the last series of three. The first six

plagues showed God was Lord over the earth, but these last three show God is Lord over the Heavens. Look at v.22 “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand *toward heaven*, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt.”

The worst plague so far

The terror of this plague cannot be overstated. The sky would have been black with storm clouds. There was deafening thunder. Psalm 29:3 calls thunder the voice of God. There were fiery lightning bolts that exploded upon the earth causing *ground lighting*. “Ground lightning occurs when the electrical discharge from a lightning bolt travels along the surface of the Earth.”¹⁰ There are pictures on the internet where ground lightning has scarred the earth with a blackened spider web of scorch marks. v.23 says “fire ran down on the earth.” This by itself would have cause fear, for the text suggests that the thunder and lightening were happening right on top of each other, one after another after another. v.24 says the “fire [was] flashing *continually*.” It was a lightening storm that so terrified Martin Luther that he committed his life to God. But this was worse than a mere lightening storm. v.24 says there was “very heavy hail.” How big were these stones? Large enough, v.25 says, to flatten “every plant of the field.” v.31 says that all their grain for food that had already budded was destroyed.¹¹ Additionally these stones were so large they “broke every tree of the field” (v.25) and killed “both man and beast.” These stones were large enough to kill cows, horses, camels, mules *and men* right where they stand.

¹⁰ Source: OpenAI. (2021). ChatGPT. Retrieved May 19, 2023, from chat.openai.com

¹¹ v.32 indicates that the latter grain was still yet to bud and had not been struck which is what the locusts ate in the next plague. I do think Calvin is right however in noting that “...that the seeds which grow more slowly were spared. For God desired to give a remnant of hope, which might invite the king and his people to repentance, if only their wickedness were curable.” John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 31

Every living thing that remained outside perished. This was the worst plague so far *because* this plague actually killed Egyptians. The previous plagues robbed them of their comfort and property. But this plague took their very lives.¹²

Pharaoh confesses

So terrible was this plague that for the first time probably ever in his life, this king confessed that he sinned. Look at v.27 Then Pharaoh sent and called 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. Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” Now we know that Pharaoh lied again. When the hail stopped, Pharaoh hardened his heart again (v.34-35). This was a forced confession. He did what many sinners do when they find themselves in a desperate situation: they confess their sin and promise to reform their life, but then when the pressure is off they go back to their wicked ways.¹³

Moses intercedes

Now Moses knew Pharaoh wasn't truly repentant. But that didn't stop him from interceding for him. Look at v.29-30 “Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder

¹² I remember a few years ago I was watching some videos of hurricanes devastating cities with my boys. The fear of God came over them. Not in a superficial way. They were really scared. It was a terror to them.

¹³ "When God filled Egypt with thunder and lightning, and the fire ran along the ground, then Pharaoh is brought to confess his sin with seeming humility, and to have a great resolution to let the people go, [Exod. ix. 27, 28](#). “And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked: entreat the Lord (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer.” So sinners are sometimes by thunders and lightnings, and great terrors of the law, brought to a seeming work of humiliation, and to an appearance of parting with their sins; but are no more thoroughly brought to a disposition to dismiss them, than Pharaoh was to let the people go." Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 319

will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. ³⁰ But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” So here’s the question, *why* did Moses pray for the hail to stop if he knew Pharaoh was faking it? Because, the end of v.25 says, that Moses wanted Pharaoh to “know that the earth is the LORD’s.” Now Moses made similar statements in the previous plagues. And they have all been building on each other. Follow me here.

Exodus 7:17 God did this so that Pharaoh *would know He is Yahweh*

Exodus 8:10 ...that Pharaoh *would know that there is no one like Yahweh*

Exodus 8:22 ...that Pharaoh *would know that He is Yahweh in the midst of the earth.*

Exodus 9:14 ...that Pharaoh *would know that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth.*

And now here in **Exodus 9:29** ...that Pharaoh *would know that the earth is Yahweh’s.*

The very thing in dispute

You see this was *the very thing* that was in dispute. Egypt’s gods were gods only over particular elements. Their gods only had sovereignty over one thing. But here God gives His fullest disclosure. “Moses message to Pharaoh was clear: God owns the world.”¹⁴ One author puts it like this:

"[Egypt's] theology acknowledged the possibility...of a powerful god to challenge Egypt. Any war between states in the ancient world was believed to involve the gods of both nations.¹⁵ The idea that God might own part of the world, or might legitimately has some claim on the Hebrews as a form of

¹⁴ Gary North, *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion Versus Power Religion*, (Tyler, TX.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), pg. 117

¹⁵ Consider 1 Kings 20:23, 28. As we’ve seen in previous plagues, each of these plagues were direct assaults against Egypt’s gods (cf. Numbers 33:4).

his personal property, could be accepted by the Egyptians. What was repugnant to them was the idea that He owned everything..."

That's why Pharaoh was hardened his heart again. He could not accept that God owned him and everything else.

2nd Principle: Original Ownership

That brings us to our **second principle**: *The one idea vile to all sinners is that the LORD God is sovereign over all the earth.* You can believe in a higher power, you can believe in self-autonomy, you can believe in Allah, Buddha, Odin, or Zeus. But the one heresy is to believe that God is Lord over all, and that every knee must bow and every tongue must swear allegiance to Him. This has always been considered vile to the world. Consider what happened when the Apostles preached this message in the book of Acts.

It was vile in Philippi

In Acts 16:20-21 we read that the men of the Philippi "...seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." And then, Paul and Silas were beat and imprisoned. Why? What customs were they advocating that were unlawful? They preached that Jesus Christ was the Most High God.

It was vile in Ephesus

We read of a similar crisis in Ephesus. Acts 19:23-26 "About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴ For a man named

Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, *saying that gods made with hands are not gods.*” And then a riot broke out because of what Paul preached.

Experimental Use

This same message is hated today. And this is where we have to think very carefully loved ones. As Christians we should never let our speech violate Biblical standards.¹⁶ We should not be offensive *like the world is offensive*. But we must realize that if we preach the gospel rightly it will be offensive. The danger is that we can preach the Lord Jesus Christ in such a way where the world is not confronted. Dear friends, I would argue that this is why our culture is in the shape it’s in. The church as a whole—me included—has preached a privatized gospel message. We’ve largely treated Jesus like one of the gods of Egypt, that He is god over just a portion of the earth. Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. Revelation 1:5 says He is ruler of kings of the earth. Are we preaching that?

- Yes He is our Prophet—revealing to us the will of God for our salvation.
- Yes He is our Priest—who offered Himself up as a sacrifice for our sins.
- But is He our King?

¹⁶ I do believe we need to recover a Biblical understanding and practice of satire. See *The Serrated Edge: A Brief Defense of Biblical Satire and Trinitarian Skylarking* by Douglas Wilson

Do we preach Jesus like Moses preached Yahweh? What did he require of Egypt? National repentance and obedience to the One True God.

Dear congregation, this is the message of the Bible. Yes it is offensive to the world. But it is true. The LORD God owns the earth. Pharaoh belonged to God. Egypt belonged to God. America belongs to God. Every human being belongs to God. God has absolute ownership over every human being. Which means that He is sovereign over every sphere of life. This means that mothers and fathers cannot legally murder their babies. Because those are God's babies. Churches cannot embezzle money or worship however they like. Because that is God's money and God's worship. People cannot mutilate their bodies to fit their own ideology. Because those are God's bodies. And civil government cannot make laws that abuse its people. Because all laws and all peoples belong to Him. Our passage shows us what happens to those who deny God's ownership over them. They perish. Only those in Goshen, those who belong to the Lord will be spared. That's our **second point**: *The Lord God owns the world.*

III. The Stormbreaker

The ceasing of the storm

What must look more closely at v.29. Ask the question, what is God drawing attention to in this passage? Look with me. "Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord. *The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail*, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's.'" Do you see it? *The thunder will cease, there will be no more hail, so that*

you may know... It's not the destructive hail storm that God is drawing our attention to, it's the fact that only He can make it stop. Only God can cease the storm.

What do storms represent?

Why is this relevant? What do storms represent in Scripture? There are three major storms in Genesis and Exodus.

- In Genesis 7:11 there is a storm that floods the earth. "...on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened...and all flesh died that moved on the earth.¹⁷"
- In Genesis 19:24 there was a storm that burned up two cities. "Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities."
- Here in Exodus 9 we see hailstones that killed every creature that was in the field, man and beast.

All three of these storms caused the death of millions of people. Certainly storms can represent other things elsewhere in Scripture, they can represent trials and afflictions and spiritual warfare. But the Bible begins with storms representing the wrath and judgment of God. And what Moses wanted Pharaoh to see, is that only God Himself could bring propitiate that wrath. No one else on earth could stop that storm.

What sort of man is this?

Please turn with me to Matthew 8:23-27. "And when [Jesus] got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ And behold, there arose *a great storm* on the

¹⁷ v.21

sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” ²⁶ And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷ And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” Two things to pay attention to here. **First**, Jesus did not pray to God to stop the storm. Moses had to intercede lifting his hands to God for the storm to stop. But in v.26, Jesus simply rose and rebuked the winds and the sea and they immediately became calm. **Second**, this illicit a response from the disciples. In v.27 “*What sort of man is this*, that even winds and sea obey him?” They knew the Exodus story. They knew that only the God of Heaven could break the storm.

The God-man owns the world

What sort of man was this? This was the God-man. The wind and the seas belonged to Him. The storm belonged to Him. All the earth belonged to Him. He stopped the storm on that boat so that all the world would know that the earth belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the owner of the world. What an amazing thought! We think it a wonder to be in the presence of great and rich men. I just learned yesterday that Jeff Bezos had to buy a second yacht so that he could have a place to land his helicopter. Bezos is one of the richest men in the world. We might think it wonderful to ride on his yacht. But think of these disciples on this little fishing boat. On the boat with them was the owner of the world. He owns the water that Bezo’s yachts float on. He owns all the atoms that His yachts are made of. He owns the souls of every soul that rides in those yachts.

The God-man came to seek sinners

But there's more. Jesus is not just owner of the world. By stopping the storm, Jesus was pointing to something else. He would be the One who would propitiate the wrath of God on our behalf. To propitiate means to satisfy God's wrath towards sin. Like Pharaoh, like the Egyptians we all deserve the wrath of God. We deserve the greater storm that is to come in the lake of fire. But Jesus Christ the Sovereign Owner of the World, the Great Seeker of Sinners has satisfied God's wrath by crucifixion. And God demonstrated that He was satisfied by raising Him from the dead. And we who believe upon His name will never face the judgment.

Experimental Use

Have you believed upon the Name of Jesus Christ? This is the great promise of Scripture. John 5:24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

Hortatory Use

Dear congregation, this life is *often* full of soul-crushing storms and soul-exasperating afflictions. Like Moses, lift your eyes up to the Heavens. Look to Christ who is owner of Heaven and Earth. Look to Christ who broke the storm of God's wrath towards you with His own body on the tree. Look to Christ who rose from the dead for your victory. Look to Christ who sought you though you were His enemy. Look to Christ who seeks you still though you are daily unfaithful. You do not live in Egypt, you live in Goshen, the place where wrath will never fall. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. The storm has already been broken.

