

None Like Me in All the Earth

Exodus 9:13-10:29

The first six plagues expose and humiliate the idols of Egypt, but the last cycle of three absolutely decimates the land. Hail destroys the crops, locusts gobble up anything left, and the darkness of death descends. In the deepest darkness God's mercy shines the brightest—His justice and His mercy rise into sharp relief.

Justice & Mercy

The first set of three plagues come by Aaron's staff, the second three through Moses, and now God says "I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth" (v14). Water is a gift from God to make everything green and abundant, but hail falls on Egypt to destroy the crops. God's work is remarkable in form and severity—falling frozen water affecting "all" and "everything" (vv19, 22, 24, 25). He instructs Pharaoh to take the livestock and all he has indoors (v19). Starting in the fourth plague God distinguishes and spares the land of Goshen from the rest of Egypt, and now that division of mercy comes to every household in Egypt. Those who fear the Lord flee into their houses and are spared, and those who won't, aren't (vv20-21). Notice how simple the fear of the Lord is—get inside. This is not a craven fear: "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments" (Ps. 112:1). Verse 15 could be translated "I should have. . . ." In other words, if justice was God's only concern, Pharaoh and Egypt would have been flattened immediately, just as a quick death would have come to Adam and Eve at the fall. But God was kind to them and uses Pharaoh's rebellion to be kind to many—to declare His name in all the earth (v16). The apostle Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:17 to highlight God's sovereign mercy in salvation: "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. . . . What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (vv18, 22-24). God doesn't owe us salvation, and apart from His mercy we would be like Pharaoh. Instead of condemning all who had previously rejected Him, He endures Pharaoh in order to change hearts—even the hearts of the servants of Pharaoh (v21). God uses Pharaoh and his chosen devastation to save other Egyptians. Pharaoh admits his sin, God's righteousness, his and Egypt's guilt, but he doesn't really repent—and Moses knows it (vv27, 30). It is too bad for Pharaoh that he went this way, but God and His glory are always victorious, even when we don't understand how at the time (cf. Eccles. 3:11). When we don't, we must trust God—He is Yahweh.

Tell the Kids & Grandkids

The seventh plague comes through water, and the eighth comes to the land in swarming, devouring locusts. God wants this story to be told by parents to their children and grandchildren (vv1-2). You fear God if you listen to His command to avoid the plague, and

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also if you tell this story to your descendants: “that *you* may know that I am Yahweh” (v2). God Almighty made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Yahweh remembered and fulfilled them for Moses and us. If Pharaoh won’t humble himself, the ground will be covered with locusts, in all the houses of Egypt (vv3-6). It’s so bad that even Pharaoh’s servants tell him what to do (v7). He tries to keep the Hebrew women and children in Egypt, maintaining some semblance of power, but Moses will have none of it (vv8-11). How will they tell their children what God has done if they’re not with them? The next day locusts eat all the remaining plants and fruit trees (vv13-15). As if God hasn’t spared Pharaoh over and over, he begs for mercy “only this once” for his sin against God and Moses (vv16-17). All the locusts are taken away but Pharaoh’s heart is still hard (vv19-20).

A Felt Darkness

Yahweh has defeated Hapi, Heget, Kheprer, Isis, and the lesser idols, building up to the sun god Amon-Ra, the supreme Egyptian deity. Pharaoh is his personal embodiment and Egyptian children are catechized in school to worship him above the other gods. As with the third and sixth plague, no warning is given to Pharaoh that God will bring “darkness which may even be felt” (v21). Imagine a world where darkness means vulnerability and uncertainty. You can’t flip a switch or use a telephone to call for help. Homes and cities were locked and barred at night in the ancient world because violent criminals were about, hidden by the darkness. We have only brief experiences of inconveniences during power outages, which still cause many to come unhinged. The thick darkness in Egypt lasts three days and applies inside Egyptian dwellings. Robert Alter calls this “the claustrophobic palpability of absolute darkness.” Darkness itself is a good thing, beginning at creation when “darkness was over the face of the deep” (Gen. 1:2). We need not be afraid of the dark because even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the rod and staff of Lord guide and comfort us. Every day He brings us from morning to evening when we receive the gift of sweet sleep, and resurrection morning to follow (Prov. 3:24; Eccles. 5:12). But Pharaoh has rejected God’s life and light, and the de-creation of his realm is almost complete as he descends into total darkness. Even now he covets the flocks and herds of Israel (v24). God doesn’t make deals, so again Moses says not only will they take their own animals with them, but Pharaoh must also give animals Yahweh (vv25-26). He threatens to kill Moses if he sees his face again, which is finally something Moses can agree with (vv27-29). As bad as the darkness is, Pharaoh loves it. Man apart from the grace of God chooses to be this way: “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (Jn. 3:19-21). Jesus is the light that shines, that swallows up all of the darkness that we might have the light of eternal life.