

Fourth judgement – the plague of flies

• Announced a day ahead

• Pharaoh begins to yield

• Convinced of the reality – but will not submit

• Knowledge but no relationship

• Backs away when the pressure removed

Fifth judgement – the plague on the livestock

Sixth judgement – the plague of boils

• No imitation

• Pharaoh handed over to his own desires

The fourth judgement was the plague of flies^{☒1}. God was steadily producing more and more evidence of the truth of His word and the greatness of His power. Now God made it clear that Israel was special to Him, for Israel did not suffer from the plague of flies^{☒2}.

Pharaoh had been forced to know God's name, God's power and God's uniqueness. Now he will know that Yahweh specially cares for His people. This judgement is again announced a day ahead.

It happens as Moses says and for the first time Pharaoh is willing to take steps towards yielding towards God's demand. But it is an obedience that is forced out of him and he is only partially willing to do as God says. He says he will allow the Israelites to sacrifice to Yahweh while they remain in Egypt^{☒1}. Moses refuses the offer^{☒2}. Pharaoh concedes even more. They may go to the desert 'but not very far'^{☒3}. He now even asks for prayer. Here we have a man who is convinced of God's reality and even of the power of prayer – and yet he is not willing to put his trust in God and submit to Him. He believes the truth about God and yet believes a lie at the same time. He believes God but not in the sense of trusting God to be good to him personally.

The unbeliever is able to have considerable knowledge 'about' God and yet have no relationship to God. Soon Pharaoh gets further confirmation of God's word to him^{☒1}, but as soon as there is no great pressure for him to acknowledge God, he backs away from his promises and will not let Israel go^{☒2}.

It is a very striking illustration of how much a person may know that God is real and yet be unwilling to have the kind of faith that will wholeheartedly surrender to God.

The fifth judgement was the plague on the livestock of Egypt^{☒1}. Moses was sent to tell Pharaoh that if he would not release Israel a plague would come upon Egypt's domestic animals^{☒2}. The Hebrews would be spared, so it would be plain that God was treating His people in a distinct way^{☒3}. Again the timing was specified; it would be clear that this was an act of God^{☒4}. On the next day it happened as Moses had forewarned^{☒5}. This time Pharaoh specially sent investigators to find out what had happened in the area of the Israelites. But no amount of plain evidence that God is at work is enough to change Pharaoh's heart. Again he refuses Moses' request^{☒6}.

The sixth judgement was the plague of boils^{☒1}. Moses must throw the soot from a furnace into the air. It will become fine dust and will spread boils on the people of Egypt and upon their animals^{☒2}. This is what happens^{☒3}. This time the magicians were affected. Earlier, the magicians had imitated the miracles done through Moses. Then they had found that there were miracles they could not imitate. Now the miraculous judgement affects them^{☒4}.

'Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh'^{☒1}. It may be noticed that the expression changes here. Before it had been said that Pharaoh's heart was hard, or that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Now it is said 'Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh'. Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God did anything. When God hardened the heart of Pharaoh He was not **creating** hardness of heart. He was simply

☒1 8:20-32

☒2 8:20-23

☒1 8:24-25

☒2 8:26-27

☒3 8:28

☒1 8:29-31

☒2 8:32

☒1 9:1-7

☒2 9:1-3

☒3 9:4

☒4 9:5

☒5 9:6-7

☒6 9:7

☒1 9:8-12

☒2 9:8-9

☒3 9:10

☒4 9:11

☒1 9:12

handing Pharaoh over to his own desires. God was not forcing Pharaoh to sin; He was allowing Pharaoh to have his own way.

• He resisted the pressure of truth on his heart

The 'heart' is the inner personality. It is the place where we allow God to speak to us within. It is 'with the heart' that 'a person believes'¹. It is the heart that can become 'an evil heart of unbelief'². Pharaoh knew in his heart that these things that Moses was saying were true. Yet he resisted the pressure of the truth upon his heart.

¹ Rom 10:9-10

² Heb 3-12

• God uses sin that is already there for His own purpose

God hardens Pharaoh's heart by letting him have his own way and by drawing out and intensifying the wickedness that was already in him. God can do this. If we rebel against God – and we are all born rebels – He can hand us over to our own rebelliousness. Faith and repentance are gifts of God, and He does not have to give them! 'They could not believe', says John 12:39, '...He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart...'. This does not mean that God creates sin, but He can use the sin that is already there for His own purpose. He can withdraw all restraining influences. God can hand a person over to Satan. He can take the sinner and make all the wickedness that is in him show itself. Then when sin has done its worst, God steps in and reveals the greatness of His power.

• He withdraws all restraining influences

• God can control the heart, even of the wicked

God often does this in the history of the world. He does not only work in individuals. He also works in great movements of history. Here is mighty Egypt, the most powerful kingdom in the world at the time we are considering. And within mighty Egypt is a little persecuted tribe. But the little persecuted tribe is chosen by God, and God has a purpose to use them. He lets Pharaoh do his worst. He actually brings out the greatness of Pharaoh's wickedness and malice against Israel. He rouses Pharaoh to a high pitch of hatred. God is not creating anything; He is simply drawing out what is already there. God can control the heart, even of the wicked. Why does God do this? To show the greatness of His power. He wants His people to see the pagans and their gods at the very worst, and then see that He is greater! Mighty kings and mighty nations are just a 'drop from a bucket ... a speck of dust on the scales'¹.

¹ Isaiah 40:15

• God wants His people to see the pagans and their gods at the very worst



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