

UNIT 16: THE SIXTH BLOW THE PLAGUE OF BOILS (Exodus 9:8-12)

INTRODUCTION ¹⁸

Text and Textual Notes

9:8 And Yahweh said to Moses and to Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot¹⁹ from a furnace, and let Moses throw it²⁰ into the air in the sight of Pharaoh. **9:9** And it will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and it will become boils breaking out and festering²¹ upon humans and upon beasts in all the land of Egypt.” **9:10** So they took soot of a furnace and stood before Pharaoh; and

¹⁸ This sixth plague is unannounced. God simply instructs his servants to take handfuls of ashes from the Egyptians’ furnaces and sprinkle them heavenward in the sight of Pharaoh. These ashes would become little particles of dust that would cause boils breaking out and festering on the Egyptians--man and beast. Hort (“Plagues,” pp. 101-103; and Lehrer in *Herzog’s Cyclopedia*, suggest it is skin anthrax, because it is mostly affecting the lower extremities of the body, and because anthrax (anthracite coal) is especially suited for the black coal dust and soot (see Kaiser, p. 359).

The lesson of this plague is that Yahweh has absolute control over the physical health of the people. Physical suffering consequent upon sin comes to all regardless of their position and status. All people are helpless in the face of this. Now God was beginning to touch human life; greater judgments on human wickedness lay ahead.

¹⁹ This word *piyah* is a *hapax legeomenon*, meaning “soot”; it seems to be derived from the verb *puah*, “to breathe, blow.” The “furnace” (*kibshan*) was a special kiln used for making pottery or bricks.

²⁰ The verb *zaraq* means “to throw vigorously,” to “toss.” If Moses tosses the soot into the air, then it will appear that the disease fell from heaven. The next three plagues will be seen to originate in the heavens.

²¹ The word *sh^ekhin*) means “boils.” It may be connected to an Arabic cognate that means “to be hot.” The illness was associated with Job (2:7-8) and Hezekiah (Isa. 38:21); it has also been connected with other skin diseases described especially in the Law. The word connected with it is *’aba’bu’ot* ; this means “blisters, pustules” and is sometimes translated as “festering.” The etymology is debated, whether from a word meaning “to swell up” or “to overflow” (Kaiser, p. 359).

Moses threw it into the air, and it became festering boils breaking out.

9:11 But the magicians were not able to stand before Moses because of the boils, for boils were on the magicians and on all Egyptians. **9:12** And Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, just as Yahweh had spoken to Moses.

EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

The sixth plague is unannounced. God simply instructs his servants to take the handfuls of ashes from the Egyptians' furnaces so that Moses can sprinkle them toward the heavens "in the sight of Pharaoh." These ashes will become little particles of dust that will turn to boils breaking out with blains on the Egyptians.

Verse 10 records the compliance with these instructions. Moses and Aaron "stood before Pharaoh" and did as the LORD commanded. Verses 11 and 12 report the effect. The Egyptians were afflicted with the boils. Notably, the magicians of Egypt were afflicted so that they "were not able . . . to stand before Moses." Moses, therefore, appears as a sovereign before whom the religious men of Pharaoh could not stand. This reverses the normal restrictions of men like Moses and Aaron standing before Pharaoh. But the LORD (now) hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not let Israel free.

The lesson of this plague is that the LORD has absolute power over the physical health of people. Physical suffering consequent upon sin comes on all regardless of their position and status. In the hour of such retributive judgment, all men are helpless. Even Satan's instruments are vanquished by the mighty power of God. Now God was beginning to touch human life, and in so doing he, the LORD, hardens Pharaoh's heart, for greater judgments on wicked men are about to come.