

# UNIT 17: THE SEVENTH BLOW

## THE PLAGUE OF HAIL

(Exodus 9:13-35)

### INTRODUCTION <sup>1</sup>

#### Text and Textual Notes

**9:13** Yahweh said<sup>2</sup> to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and stand<sup>3</sup> before Pharaoh, and say to him, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, ‘Release my people so that they may serve me. **9:14** For this time I will send all my plagues<sup>4</sup> to your heart,<sup>5</sup> and upon your servants, and upon your people, so that you may know there is no one like me in all the earth. **9:15** For by now I could have

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<sup>1</sup> With the seventh plague there is more explanation of what God is doing to Pharaoh. God has demonstrated his power to this king, but now declares the truth of the matter so that Pharaoh would not miss the point. This plague begins with an extended lesson (vv. 13-21).

Rain was almost unknown in Egypt, and hail and lightning were harmless. The Egyptians were fascinated by all these, though, and looked on them as portentous. Herodotus describes how they studied such things and wrote them down (1. 2. c 38). If ordinary rainstorms were ominous, what must fire and hail have been? The Egyptians had denominated fire *Hephaistos*, considering it to be a mighty deity (cf. Diodorus, 1. 1. c. 1). Porphry says that at the opening of the temple of Serapis the Egyptians worship with water and fire. If these connections were clearly understood, then these elements in the plague were thought to be deities that came down upon their own people with death and destruction.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, “and Yahweh said”

<sup>3</sup> Or, “take your stand”

<sup>4</sup> The expression “all my plagues” points to the rest of the plagues and anticipates the proper outcome. Another view is to take the expression to mean the full brunt of the attack on the Egyptian people.

<sup>5</sup> The expression is unusual; but it may be an allusion to the hard heartedness of Pharaoh--his stubbornness and blindness (Jacob, *Exodus*, p. 274).

stretched out<sup>6</sup> my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been destroyed<sup>7</sup> from the earth. **9:16** But<sup>8</sup> for this purpose I have caused you to stand<sup>9</sup> in order to show you<sup>10</sup> my strength, and in order that my name be declared<sup>11</sup> in all the earth. **9:17** You are still exalting<sup>12</sup> yourself against my people by<sup>13</sup> not releasing them. **9:18** I am going to cause it to rain<sup>14</sup> a very severe hail about this time tomorrow, the likes of which<sup>15</sup> has not been in Egypt

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<sup>6</sup> The verb is the *qal* perfect *shalakhti* ; but a past tense, or completed action translation does not fit the context at all. Gesenius lists this reference as an example of the use of the perfect to express actions and facts, whose accomplishment is to be represented not as actual but only as possible. He offers this for Exodus 9:15: "I had almost put forth" (GKC, par. 106p). Cassuto suggests, "I should have stretched out my hand." Others add the potential nuance instead, and render it as "I could have . . . ."

<sup>7</sup> The verb *kakhad* means "to hide, efface"; and in the *niphal* it has the idea of "be effaced, ruined, destroyed." Here it will carry the nuance of the result of the preceding verbs: "I could have stretched out my hand . . . and struck you . . . and (as a result) you would have been destroyed."

<sup>8</sup> The first word is a very strong adversative, which, in general, can be translated "but, howbeit"; BDB suggest for this passage "but in very deed."

<sup>9</sup> The form *he'emadtika* is the *hiphil* perfect of *'amad* . It would normally mean "I caused you to stand." But that seems to have one or two different connotations. Driver says that it means "maintain you alive." The causative of this verb means "continue," according to him (Driver, p. 73). The LXX has the same basic sense--"you were preserved." But Paul by-passes the Greek and writes "he raised you up" to show God's absolute sovereignty over Pharaoh. Both renderings show God's sovereign control over Pharaoh.

<sup>10</sup> The *hiphil* infinitive construct *har'oteka* is the purpose of God's making Pharaoh come to power in the first place. The idea of making someone see is to cause someone to understand, to experience God's power.

<sup>11</sup> The clause simply reads, "in order to declare my name." Since there is no expressed subject, this may be given a passive translation.

<sup>12</sup> *mistolel* is a *hithpael* participle, from the root which means "raise up, obstruct." So in the *hithpael* it means to "raise oneself up," "elevate oneself," or "be an obstructionist." See Kaiser, p. 363; Cassuto, p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> The infinitive construct with the *lamed* here expresses the epexegetical use; it explains how Pharaoh has exalted himself--"by not releasing the people."

<sup>14</sup> *hin<sup>e</sup>ni mamtir* is the *futur instans* construction, giving an imminent future translation: "Here--I am about to cause it to rain."

<sup>15</sup> The clause literally reads: "which was not like it in Egypt." The pronoun suffix

from the day it was founded<sup>16</sup> until now. **9:19** So now, send instruction<sup>17</sup> to gather<sup>18</sup> your livestock and all your possessions that are in the fields; every person<sup>19</sup> and beast who may be found<sup>20</sup> in the field and not gathered to the house--the hail shall come down upon him, and he shall die. **9:20** Those<sup>21</sup> who feared the word of Yahweh among the servants of Pharaoh, hurried to bring their<sup>22</sup> servants and livestock into the house, **9:21** but those<sup>23</sup> who did not take<sup>24</sup> the word of Yahweh to heart, left their servants and their cattle<sup>25</sup> in the field.

**9:22** Then Yahweh said to Moses, Stretch out your hand to the heavens, that there may be<sup>26</sup> hail in all the land of Egypt, upon people and upon animals,<sup>27</sup> and upon everything that grows<sup>28</sup> in the field in the land of Egypt **9:23** When Moses

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serves as the resumptive pronoun for the relative particle: “which . . . like it” becomes “the likes of which.”

<sup>16</sup> *hiwwas<sup>e</sup>dah* is a rare *niphal* perfect and not an infinitive.

<sup>17</sup> “instruction” added to clarify

<sup>18</sup> *ha‘ez* is the *hiphil* imperative from ‘uz, “to bring into safety.” Although there is no *waw* linking the two imperatives, the second could be subordinated by virtue of the meanings. “Send to bring to safety.”

<sup>19</sup> Literally, “man”

<sup>20</sup> The verb can be the imperfect of possibility: “may be found”

<sup>21</sup> The text has “the one who fears”

<sup>22</sup> Literally, “his”

<sup>23</sup> The text again has the singular.

<sup>24</sup> Literally, “put on his heart”

<sup>25</sup> Literally, “his servants and his cattle”

<sup>26</sup> The jussive with the conjunction ( *wihi* ) coming after the imperative shows the emphasis on purpose or result.

<sup>27</sup> Literally, “upon man and upon beast”

<sup>28</sup> The noun refers primarily to cultivated grains that grow in the fields. But in this passage it seems to be the general heading for anything that grows from the ground, all vegetation and plant life, as opposed to what grows on the trees.

stretched forth<sup>29</sup> his rod toward the heavens, then Yahweh<sup>30</sup> sent thunder<sup>31</sup> and hail, and fire ran along the ground;<sup>32</sup> so Yahweh caused it to rain hail upon the land of Egypt. **9:24** So hail fell,<sup>33</sup> and fire mingled<sup>34</sup> with hail; the storm<sup>35</sup> was very severe, the likes of which<sup>36</sup> had not happened in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. **9:25** And the hail struck throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both<sup>37</sup> people and animals; and everything that grows<sup>38</sup> in the field the hail struck, and it broke in pieces all the trees of the field. **9:26** Only in the land of Goshen where the Israelites were was there no hail.

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<sup>29</sup> The preterite with the *waw* consecutive is here subordinated to the next clause because of the consecutive.

<sup>30</sup> By the construction of a *waw* disjunctive with the name *wa+YHWH* the text is certainly stressing Yahweh alone

<sup>31</sup> The expression *natan qolot* literally means “gives voices” (also “voice.”). This is a poetic expression for sender the thundering. Psalm 29 talks about the “voice of Yahweh”--the God of glory thunders!

<sup>32</sup> This clause has been variously interpreted. It probably means that fire went along the ground from the pounding hail. Here fire and water were brought together in the judgment,.

<sup>33</sup> The verb is the common preterite (*wayhi*), which is normally translated “and there was” if it is translated at all. The verb *hayah*, however, can mean “be, become, befall, fall, fall out, happen.” Here it could be simply translated “there was hail . . . ,” but the more active “hail fell” fits the point of the sequence better.

<sup>34</sup> The form *mitlaqqakhat* is the *hithpael* participle; the clause would read “fire taking hold of itself in the midst of the hail.” This probably refers to lightning flashing back and forth, or as kaiser says, zig-zagging. See also Ezek. 1:4. God created a great storm with the flashing fire connected to it.

<sup>35</sup> “the storm” added

<sup>36</sup> The literal reading of the clause would be: “which there was nothing like it in all the land of Egypt . . . .” The relative pronoun must be joined to the resumptive pronoun to put the clause into a clear translation--“which like it (like which) there had not been . . . .”

<sup>37</sup> The exact expression is “from man even to beast.” Williams lists this as an example of the inclusive use of the preposition *min* to be rendered “both . . . and” (see *Hebrew Syntax*, par. 327).

<sup>38</sup> Literally, “all the cultivated grain of”

**9:27** So Pharaoh sent and summoned Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time!<sup>39</sup> Yahweh is righteous, and I and my people are guilty.<sup>40</sup> **9:28** Pray to Yahweh, for the mighty<sup>41</sup> thunderings and hail are enough;<sup>42</sup> and I will release you and you shall stay no longer.<sup>43</sup> **9:29** And Moses said to him, “When I leave the city<sup>44</sup> I will spread my hands to Yahweh; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth belongs to Yahweh.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The Pharaoh now is struck by the judgment and acknowledges that he is at fault. But the context shows that this penitence was not long-lived. What exactly he meant by this confession is uncertain. On the surface his words seem to represent a recognition that he was in the wrong and Yahweh right.

<sup>40</sup> The word *rasha*‘ can mean “ungodly, wicked, guilty, criminal.” Pharaoh here is saying that Yahweh is right, and they are not--so they are at fault, guilty. Driver says the words are used in their forensic sense and not in their ethical sense: in the right and in the wrong (p. 75).

<sup>41</sup> The text has literally, “the voices of God.” The divine epithet, like the divine name, can be used to express the superlative.

<sup>42</sup> The expression *w<sup>e</sup>rab mihyot* , “[the mighty thunder and hail] is much from being”--more than enough. This indicates that the storm was too much, or, as one would say, “it is enough.”

<sup>43</sup> The last clause uses a verbal hendiadys: “you shall not add to stand,” meaning “you shall no longer stay.”

<sup>44</sup> *k<sup>e</sup>tse’ti* is the *qal* infinitive construct of *yatsa’*; it functions here as the temporal clause before the statement about prayer.

There has been a good deal of speculation as to why Moses had to leave the city before praying. Rashi said he did not want to pray where there were so many idols. It may also be as the Midrash (Ex R 12:5) says that most of the devastation of this plague had been outside in the fields, and that was where Moses wished to go and hold up the rod as he prayed--although he says spread his palms.

<sup>45</sup> This clause provides the purpose/result of Moses’ intention: he will pray to Yahweh and the storms will cease “that you might know . . . .” It was not enough to pray and have the plague stop. Pharaoh must “know” that Yahweh is the sovereign Lord over the earth. Here was that purpose of knowing through experience.

This clause provides the key for the exposition of this plague: God demonstrated His power over the forces of nature to show His sovereignty--the earth is the Yahweh’s. He can destroy it. He can preserve it. If people sin by ignoring His word and not fearing him, He can bring judgment on them. If any fear Yahweh and obey His instructions, they will be spared. A positive way to express the expositional point of the chapter is:

But as for you<sup>46</sup> and your servants, I know that you do not fear<sup>47</sup> Yahweh God.”

**9:31** Now the<sup>48</sup> flax and the barley were struck,<sup>49</sup> for the barley was in the ear, and the flax<sup>50</sup> was in bud. **9:32** But the wheat and the spelt<sup>51</sup> were not struck, for they are later crops.<sup>52</sup> **9:33** So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and he spread out his hands to Yahweh, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain was not poured out on the earth. **9:34** When Pharaoh saw<sup>53</sup> that the rain and the

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those who fear Yahweh and obey His word shall escape the powerful destruction He has prepared for those who sinfully disregard His word.

<sup>46</sup> The verse begins with the disjunctive *waw* to mark a strong contrastive clause to what was said before this.

<sup>47</sup> The adverb *terem*, “before,” occurs with the imperfect tense to give the sense of the English present tense to the verb negated by it (GKC, par. 107c). Moses is saying that he knew that Pharaoh did not really stand in awe of God, so as to grant Israel’s release, i.e., fear not in the religious sense but “be afraid of” God--fear “before” Him (Driver, *Exodus*, p. 76).

<sup>48</sup> The disjunctive *waw* introduces the two verses that provide parenthetical information to the reader. Gesenius notes that the boldness of such clauses is often indicated by the repetition of nouns at the beginning (see GKC, par. 141d). Some have concluded that because they have been put here rather than back after v. 25 or 26, they form part of Moses’ speech to Pharaoh, explaining that the crops that were necessary for humans were spared, but those for other things were destroyed. This would also mean that Moses was saying there is more that God can destroy (see Jacob, p. 279).

<sup>49</sup> The forms *nukkatah* and *nukku* are probably to be taken as old *qal* passives rather than *pual* forms, as the passive of *piel* is not attested. The form was used as the passive of the *hiphil* of this verb, but was not considered as a *hophal*. There would be no appreciable difference in the meaning, unless it was given the translation “was ruined” rather than struck (the normal *hiphil* meaning of this verb).

<sup>50</sup> Flax was used for making linen; the area around Tanis was ideal for producing flax. Barley was used for bread for the poor people, as well as beer and animal feed. These crops would be coming up early in spring, after the severe or heavy winter rains. Rains in the spring of the strength described here would be very unlikely.

<sup>51</sup> *kussemet* is translated “spelt”; the word occurs only here and in Isaiah 28:25 and Ezekiel 4:9. Spelt is a cereal closely allied to wheat. Other suggestions have been brought forward from the study of Egyptian crops (see a brief summary in Kaiser, pp 363,4).

<sup>52</sup> Literally, “for they are late”

hail and the thunder ceased, he sinned again,<sup>54</sup> and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. **9:35** So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened,<sup>55</sup> and he did not release the Israelites, as Yahweh had spoken by the hand of Moses.

## EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

With the seventh plague there appears to be more explanation to Pharaoh of what God is doing. God has demonstrated his power to this king, and will continue to do so, but now declares the truth of the matter so that Pharaoh would not miss the point. This plague of hail begins with such an extended lesson.

The announcement to Pharaoh declares the purpose of the plagues (9:13-21). The beginning speech makes great use of the verb *shallakh*, “ending” all the plagues on Pharaoh, and that now he will “send (stretch)” out his hand and strike him so that he will be eventually cut off. This all follows the familiar demand, “send out” my people.

What is interesting, though, is the explanation based on the absolute sovereignty of God. He declares that he had raised up Pharaoh. Daniel (chapter 2) also declares that God sets up and removes kings from the Earth. Pharaoh is on the throne only because the LORD God of Israel put him there. The purpose of raising him up in this manner is “to show my strength that my name be declared”. God, in short, put Pharaoh in power so that he could reveal his own strength by destroying this powerful king, and give his people cause for praise and trust for generations to

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<sup>53</sup> The clause beginning with the preterite and *waw* consecutive is here subordinated to the next, and main clause--that he hardened his heart again.

<sup>54</sup> The verbal construction is another verbal hendiadys: *wayyosep lahato'*, literally rendered “and he added to sin.” The infinitive construct becomes the main verb, and the *hiphil* preterite becomes adverbial. The text is clearly interpreting the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart and his refusal to release Israel as sin. At the least this means that the plagues are his fault; but the expression probably means more than this--he was disobeying Yahweh God.

<sup>55</sup> tn/ The verb used here is **וַיַּחֲזֶק** (*wayyehezaq*), the *qal* preterite: “and it was hardened” or strengthened to resist. This forms the summary statement of this stage in the drama. But the verb that was used in the last clause to report Pharaoh’s response was **וַיַּכְבֵּד** (*wayyakbed*), the *hiphil* preterite: “and he hardened [his heart]” or made it stubborn.

come. The nation of Israel which was about to be formed would need such a powerful display to instill trust and adoration that would sustain them through the centuries. Indeed, when you read the praises of Israel it is clear that they never forgot the deliverance from Egypt.

Because Pharaoh exalted himself, the LORD would bring a grievous hail. Rain was almost unknown in Egypt, and hail and lightning, when it occurred, was harmless. The Egyptians were given to all such happenings in their observations and looked on them as portentous. Herodotus says that “Whenever any unusual circumstance occurs they commit the particulars to writing and mark the events that follow” (1. 2. c. 38). If ordinary rainstorms were ominous, what must the fire and hail have been? The Egyptians, we know, had denominated fire Hephaistos, considering it to be a mighty deity, which contributed largely to the generation and perfection of beings (cf. Diodorus, 1. 1. c. 1). Porphyry says that at the opening of the temple of Serapis the Egyptians worship with fire and water, for they reverence them above all other forces. The point then is that these deities now come down upon the Egyptians with death and destruction. The gods in which they trusted have turned against them—all at the call of the LORD.

This plague is unique in that an invitation of grace is extended. They were to send and bring their cattle in to shelter. The text says that those who feared the LORD obeyed, and those who disregarded his word suffered the consequences.

The plague is discussed in verses 22-26. Moses is commanded to stretch out his hand (he becomes more dominant now). This he does, with the rod in it. and the hail and fire intermingled falls from heaven.

The aftermath of the plague also reveals some interesting dialogue that is important for the theology of the passage (9:27-35). Pharaoh now confesses, “I have sinned this time.” He also confesses that the LORD is “righteous” and he and the people are “guilty.” What he actually meant by these is not certain. We may only assume that the words mean what they normally mean, and that his confession on the surface seems to represent a recognition of who was right and who was wrong. Time will show that his confession was forced by the plague, and that he had not changed. But any study of this passage will have to look very closely at these key theological words.

In response to Pharaoh’s request that Moses entreat the LORD (and that he will send them out), Moses “spreads his palms” to the LORD. But before he does

he makes sure that Pharaoh knows that “the earth is the LORD’s. The LORD is absolutely sovereign over all creation. But Moses also knows that Pharaoh will not “fear”—the LORD had told him that he would not submit.

As expected, Pharaoh “sinned yet more” and refused, because his heart was hardened.

It is clear that this passage is didactic for the plagues. The idea of the plague of hail itself could be stated as follows: God demonstrates his power over the forces of nature to show his sovereignty—the earth is the LORD’s. He can destroy it. He can preserve it. If any wickedly sin by ignoring his word, he can bring destruction on them. If any fear in righteousness, he can preserve them in safety.

The exposition of this portion could be stated in one of two ways, depending on what you want to stress as the subject. 1) Those who fear the LORD and obey his word shall escape the powerful destruction he has prepared for those who sinfully disregard his word. 2) God demonstrates his power by bringing destruction on the sinners who disregard his word while providing safety for those who fear him.