

UNIT 19: THE NINTH BLOW THE PLAGUE OF DARKNESS (Exodus 10:21-29)

INTRODUCTION

Text and Textual Notes¹

10:21 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be² darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt.”³

10:22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was a thick darkness⁴ in all the land of Egypt for three days.⁵ **10:23** No one⁶ could see⁷

¹ The ninth plague is that darkness fell on all the land--except on Israel. This plague is comparable to the silence in Heaven, just prior to the last and terrible plague. Here Yahweh is destroying Egypt's main religious belief as well as portraying what lay before them. Throughout the Bible darkness is the symbol of evil, chaos, and judgment. Blindness is one of its manifestations (see Deut. 28:27-29). But the plague here is not blindness, or even spiritual blindness, but an awesome darkness from outside (see Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15). Here the plague is particularly significant in that Egypt's high god was the Sun God. Lord Sun was now being shut down by Lord Yahweh. If Egypt would not let Israel go to worship their God, then Egypt's god would be darkness.

The structure should be familiar by now for the plagues: the plague, now unannounced (21-23) and then the confrontation with Pharaoh (24-27).

² The verb form is the jussive with the sequential *waw--wihi khoshek*. Jacob points out that only here we have “let there be darkness” (although it is subordinated as a purpose clause). Isaiah 45:7 referred to this by saying, “who created light and darkness” (Jacob, p. 286).

³ The word *mush* means “to feel.” The literal rendering would be “so that one may feel darkness.” The image portrays an oppressive darkness; it was sufficiently thick to possess the appearance of substance, although it was just air (Jacob, p. 286).

⁴ The construction is a variation of the superlative genitive: one substantive in the construct state is connected to a noun of the same meaning (see GKC, par. 133i).

⁵ Not surprisingly, Driver says, “The darkness was no doubt occasioned really by a *sand-storm*, produced by the hot electrical wind . . . which blows in intermittently . . .

another person, and no one could rise from his place for three days. But the Israelites had light in their dwellings.

10:24 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, “Go, serve Yahweh--only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even, your women and your children⁸ may go with you.” **10:25** But Moses said, “Will you also⁹ provide us¹⁰ with sacrifices and burnt offerings that we may present them¹¹ to Yahweh our God. **10:26** Our livestock must¹² also go with us. Not a hoof is to be left behind. For

(pp. 82,83). This is another application of the old liberal approach to these texts. Kaiser buys into this interpretation to say that “no doubt” God used this seasonal wind that darkens the sky (p. 367). The text, however, is probably describing something that was not a seasonal wind, or Pharaoh would not have been intimidated. If it coincided with that season, then what is described here is so different and so powerful that the Egyptians would have known the difference rather easily. The danger in interpreting the miraculous by means of phenomena of nature is that it seeks to explain supernatural things with natural things, and that is a dangerous course to follow, for it will have implications as to how one interprets the resurrection . It diminishes the value and purpose of the miracle. Pharaoh here would have had to have been impressed that this was something very different, and that his god was powerless. Besides, there was light in all the dwellings of the Israelites.

⁶ Literally, “a man . . . his brother”

⁷ The perfect tense in this context requires the somewhat rare classification of a potential perfect.

⁸ The text has “your little ones,” but as mentioned before, this expression in these passages means women and children, not just toddlers. Pharaoh will now let them all go, but he will detain the cattle for security against their return.

⁹ Jacob shows that the intent of Moses in using *gam* is to make an emphatic rhetorical question. He cites other samples of the usage in Num. 22:33; 1 Sam. 17:36; 2 Sam. 12:14, and others. The point is that if Pharaoh told them to go and serve Yahweh, they had to have animals to sacrifice. If Pharaoh was holding the animals back, he would have to make some provision (Jacob, p. 287).

¹⁰ Literally, “give into our hand”

¹¹ The form here is *w^easinu*, the *qal* perfect with a *waw* consecutive--“and we will do.” But the verb means “do” in the sacrificial sense--prepare them, offer them. The verb form is to be subordinated here to form a purpose or result clause.

¹² This is the obligatory imperfect nuance. They were obliged to take the animals if they were going to sacrifice; but more than that, since they were not coming back, they had to take everything.

we must take¹³ these¹⁴ to serve Yahweh our God. And we do not know with what we must serve Yahweh until we arrive there.”¹⁵

10:27 But Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to release them. **10:28** And Pharaoh said to him, “Go from me;¹⁶ take heed to yourself; do not see¹⁷ my face again,¹⁸ for when¹⁹ you see my face you shall die.” **10:29** And Moses said, “Thus you have spoken! I will not see your face again.”²⁰

EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

The ninth plague is that of darkness in all the land of Egypt. it is comparable to the silence in heaven in Revelation just prior to the last and terrible plague. Here the LORD is destroying Egypt's main religious beliefs as well as portraying what lay before them in his judgment.

Throughout the Bible the image of darkness is a form of judgment. Blindness is often the way that God inflicts this judgment. The men of Sodom were blinded in their wicked pursuit. The great host that came to take Elisha was smitten with blindness. Moses reminds Israel of the punishments that God brought on

¹³ The same modal nuance applies to this verb.

¹⁴ Literally, “from it”

¹⁵ Moses gives an angry but firm reply to Pharaoh’s attempt to control Israel; he makes it very clear that he has no intention of leaving any pledge with Pharaoh. When they leave they will take everything that belongs to them.

¹⁶ The expression is *lek me’alay*, “go from upon me,” with the adversative use of the preposition, meaning from being a trouble or a burden to me (Driver, p. 84; Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, par. 288).

¹⁷ The construction uses a verbal hendiadys: “do not add to see” (*’al-tosep r’ot*), meaning “do not see again.”

¹⁸ “see my face” = “come before me”

¹⁹ The construction is *b’yom r’ot’eka*, an adverbial clause of time made up of the preposition(al phrase, the idiom “when”), the infinitive construct, and the suffixed subjective genitive. “In the day of your seeing” is “when you see.”

²⁰ Here too is the verbal hendiadys construction: “I will not add again (to) see.”

Egypt in his warning to them: “The LORD shall smite you with blindness and you shall grope at noonday as the blind grope in the darkness” (Deut. 28:27-29). Blindness was inflicted on Elymas the sorcerer--and these Egyptians were sorcerers. But the plague here is darkness from the outside, not blindness so that the light could not be seen. The effect is the same. They were terrified in their darkness and could not move. Joel speaks of a day of judgment coming that would be a day of thick darkness (Joel 2:2); and Zephaniah uses the same language (1:15). The pillar that went before the Israelites and gave them light was to the Egyptians a dark cloud (14:20). Thus, we can see, that God, who is light without any darkness, frequently prevents the light from shining on those who wickedly refuse his will. The plague on the Egyptians was a clear example of this. They were terrified in their darkness. This was a land that dwelt regularly under the bright sun. But now the sun was blotted out from their vision. Either their chief god had forsaken them, and turned his viceregent upon the earth, or Moses had prevailed over them both. In the darkness the people could not but help think of the brilliant illumination that they had been in the habit of making a part of their worship. The sun god was one of the predominant deities in Egypt. The darkness of night was thought to precede the light in Egyptian mythology, and it was seen as a continual struggle between the two with the cycle of light and darkness. But this was something quite different. Lord Sun would now be controlled by Lord Yahweh. If Egypt would not let Israel go to worship their God, then the LORD God would utterly destroy the religious cycle of the Egyptians, showing in the process his sovereign power over them and their gods.

The Israelites, on the other hand, who had never as a nation bowed the knee to these creatures, nor been attracted by their glory to give them the homage due to the creator of the sun, were filled with light and warmth. The LORD of heaven and earth sent his blessing on his people, singling them out wherever they may be, and making the darkness to be light for them. Looking on the darkness of Egypt, they would better prize the glorious light they enjoyed, and the source of that light. They could compare their humble dwellings in bondage with the fair and lavish palaces of their oppressors--fair no longer now, but dark and desolate. So they would now look to God with gratitude and praise, confessing the security they had in his light.

The first section of the passage records the plague itself, which is also unannounced (as the third and sixth)(21-23). Here again Moses stretches out his hand and covers the land with the severe darkness. The second part records the confrontation with Pharaoh (24-27). The plan now by Pharaoh is another compromise: they should go and worship but leave their animals behind. This, of

course, would do not good for the nation in the wilderness, for they were to sacrifice to the LORD. Pharaoh is eager that these people leave now, but he is desirous that he retain their possessions. But it is the will of the LORD that they go with their animals, and in fact take with them much of the possessions of Egypt. To leave the animals behind would be to relinquish to Pharaoh what rightfully belonged to the LORD God of Israel. God hardens the heart of Pharaoh one time more so that he might bring the last great judgments of death on him.

This plague should show to Egypt the absolute power of the LORD over the gods of Egypt. In bringing this plague on them, God shows that he can control nature and immobilize the nation of Egypt. His people would learn that light and darkness were in his control, for he had created them light to dispel the darkness. The motifs would be used again and again throughout the Bible to show the judgment of God on the one hand, and the deliverance of God on the other. The strength of the pagan's religious beliefs were in the hand of the God of Israel. Such demonstrations should serve to inculcate a deeper faith and obedience in the lives of the people who were going to worship him in the desert. To worship God correctly demands an appreciation of the majesty on high. The experience of the light (whether Israel's literal or the later spiritual) from the LORD as opposed to the darkness of judgment from the LORD is one sure method of realizing the nature of the one to be worshiped.

One way to develop this passage for exposition would be as follows: *Knowing that the sovereign, powerful God can destroy the evil world system, enables the people of God to persevere in their obedient worship.* The thrust of this exposition would be that Israel had seen and continued to see how God crippled Egypt. Now in this plague he struck the heart of their religious worship because they hindered Israel's. What they saw God do enabled them to be bold in confronting Pharaoh about their going to worship.

I would develop the outline to fit both their situation and a comparable one today:

- I. God will powerfully judge those who oppose the obedient worship of his people.
 - A. God enables his faithful servants to demonstrate his power before the world.
 - B. God's power often destroys the "beliefs" of the unbelievers.
- II. God's servants must refuse to compromise their obedient worship of God.

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- A. A commitment to obey God will prevent the world's interference with obedient worship.
- B. A knowledge of God's sovereignty will enable us to persevere in spite of temporary hindrances.