

The Plagues

Sabbath Afternoon, July 19

The Lord directed Moses to go again to the people and repeat the promise of deliverance, with a fresh assurance of divine favor. He went as he was commanded; but they would not listen. Says the Scripture, "They hearkened not. . . for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." Again the divine message came to Moses, "Go in, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land." In discouragement he replied, "Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me?" He was told to take Aaron with him and go before Pharaoh, and again demand "that he send the children of Israel out of his land."

He was informed that the monarch would not yield until God should visit judgments upon Egypt and bring out Israel by the signal manifestation of His power. Before the infliction of each plague, Moses was to describe its nature and effects, that the king might save himself from it if he chose. Every punishment rejected would be followed by one more severe, until his proud heart would be humbled, and he would acknowledge the Maker of heaven and earth as the true and living God. The Lord would give the Egyptians an opportunity to see how vain was the wisdom of their mighty men, how feeble the power of their gods, when opposed to the commands of Jehovah. He would punish the people of Egypt for their idolatry and silence their boasting of the blessings received from their senseless deities. God would glorify His own name, that other nations might hear of His power and tremble at His mighty acts, and that His people might be led to turn from their idolatry and render Him pure worship. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 260, 263.

I was directed to the power of God manifested through Moses, when the Lord sent him in before Pharaoh. Satan understood his business, and was upon the ground. He well knew that Moses was chosen of God to break the yoke of bondage upon the children of Israel; and that he in his work prefigured Christ's first advent to break Satan's power over the human family, and deliver those who were made captives by his power. Satan knew that when Christ should appear, mighty works and miracles would be wrought by him, that the world might know that the Father had sent him. He trembled for his power. He consults with his angels to accomplish a work which shall answer a two-fold purpose: 1. To destroy the influence of the work wrought by God through his servant Moses, by working through his agents, and thus counterfeiting the true work of God. 2. The influence of his work through the magicians would reach down through all ages, and would destroy in the minds of many, true faith in the mighty miracles and works of Christ, which would be performed by him when he should come to this world. He knew that his kingdom would suffer, for the power which he held over mankind would be subject to Christ. It was no human influence or power Moses possessed, which wrought on the minds, that produced those miracles before Pharaoh. It was the power of God. These signs and wonders were wrought through Moses, to convince Pharaoh that the great "I am" sent him to command Pharaoh to let Israel go, that they might serve him. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4, p. 81.

Sunday, July 20

God vs. gods

The magicians seemed to perform several things with their enchantments similar to those things which God wrought by the hand of Moses and Aaron. They did not really cause their rods to become serpents, but by magic, aided by the great deceiver, made them to appear like serpents, to counterfeit the work of God. Satan assisted his servants to resist the work of the Most High, in order to deceive the people, and encourage them in their rebellion. Pharaoh would grasp at the least evidence he could obtain to justify himself in resisting the work of God, performed by Moses and Aaron. He told these servants of God that his magicians could do all these wonders. The difference between the work of God and that of the magicians was, one was of God, the other of Satan. One was true, the other false. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 205, 206.

The elders of Israel endeavored to sustain the sinking faith of their brethren by repeating the promises made to their fathers, and the prophetic words of Joseph before his death, foretelling their deliverance from Egypt. Some would listen and believe. Others, looking at the circumstances that surrounded them, refused to hope. The Egyptians, being informed of what was reported among their bondmen, derided their expectations and scornfully denied the power of their God. They pointed to their situation as a nation of slaves, and tauntingly said, "If your God is just and merciful, and possesses power above that of the Egyptian gods, why does He not make you a free people?" They called attention to their own condition. They worshiped deities termed by the Israelites false gods, yet they were a rich and powerful nation. They declared that their gods had blessed them with prosperity, and had given them the Israelites as servants, and they gloried in their power to oppress and destroy the worshipers of Jehovah. Pharaoh himself boasted that the God of the Hebrews could not deliver them from his hand.

Words like these destroyed the hopes of many of the Israelites. The case appeared to them very much as the Egyptians had represented. It was true that they were slaves, and must endure whatever their cruel taskmasters might choose to inflict. Their children had been hunted and slain, and their own lives were a burden. Yet they were worshiping the God of heaven. If Jehovah were indeed above all gods, surely He would not thus leave them in bondage to idolaters. But those who were true to God understood that it was because of Israel's departure from Him—because of their disposition to marry with heathen nations, thus being led into idolatry—that the Lord had permitted them to become bondmen; and they confidently assured their brethren that He would soon break the yoke of the oppressor. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 259, 260.

Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?

Pharaoh declared that Moses and Aaron were impostors, and could accomplish no more than his magicians. Said Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, That Jehovah whom thou pretendest not to know, will convince thee that he is more powerful than all gods. They informed him that God would yet perform greater wonders, which would leave him without excuse, and which would be perpetual monuments of his providence and power in behalf of Israel.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened. He refuseth to let the people go. Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand. And thou shalt say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord. Behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink of the water of the river."

Pharaoh would not listen to Moses and Aaron, but despised their words; yet he had no power to harm them. "And Moses and Aaron did so, as the Lord commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood." For seven days the plague upon the waters continued. Yet the king humbled not himself, but hardened his heart. Moses and Aaron were commanded, first, before bringing the plagues, to faithfully relate to Pharaoh the nature of each plague which was to come, and the effect of the plague, that he might have the privilege of saving himself from it if he chose, by letting the children of Israel go to sacrifice unto God. But if the king should refuse to obey the command of God, then would he still visit him with judgments. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 206, 207.

We are told that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. The repeated refusals of the king to hear the word of the Lord, called forth more direct, more urgent and forcible messages. At each rejection of light, the Lord manifested a more marked display of his power; but the king's obstinacy increased with every new evidence of the power and majesty of the God of heaven, until the last arrow of mercy was exhausted from the divine quiver. Then the man was utterly hardened by his own persistent resistance. Pharaoh sowed obstinacy, and he reaped a harvest of the same in his character. The Lord could do nothing more to convince him, for he was barricaded in obstinacy and prejudice, where the Holy Spirit could not find access to his heart. Pharaoh was given up to his own unbelief and hardness of heart. Infidelity produced infidelity. When Pharaoh hardened his heart on the first exhibition of God's power, he made himself more capable of a second rejection of God's power. Pride and stubbornness held him in bondage, and hindered him from acknowledging the warnings of God. It was contrary to the nature of Pharaoh to change after once having given expression to his purpose not to believe. —"The Measure of Light Given Measures Our Responsibility," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 17, 1891, par. 1.

The First Three Plagues

Although the magicians appeared to produce frogs like Moses and Aaron, they could not remove them. When Pharaoh saw that the magicians could not stay the plague, or remove the frogs, he was somewhat humbled, and would have Moses and Aaron entreat the Lord for him, to remove the plague of the frogs. He was beginning to know something about that God whom he professed to be wholly ignorant of. Moses and Aaron had told Pharaoh that they did not produce the frogs by magic, or by any power they possessed; that God, the living God, had caused them to come by his power, and that he alone could remove them. Previous to this, Pharaoh had exulted over Moses and Aaron, because the magicians could cause the same things to appear with their enchantments. And when he asked Moses to entreat the Lord for him, he reminded him of his former haughty boasting and glorying because of the works performed by his magicians; and he asked Pharaoh where was now his glorying over him, and where was the power of those magicians to remove the plague.

The Lord listened to the entreaties of Moses, and stayed the plague of the frogs. When the king was relieved of his immediate distress, he again stubbornly refused to let Israel go. Moses and Aaron, at the commandment of the Lord, caused the dust of the land to become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh called the magicians to stand before him to do the same with their enchantments, but they could not. Moses and Aaron, the servants of God, at his command, produced the plague of the lice. The magicians, the servants of Satan, at his command tried to produce the same with their enchantments, but could not. The work of God was shown superior to the power of Satan; for the magicians with their enchantments could perform but a few things. When the magicians saw that they could not produce the lice, they said unto Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God. And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said." —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 208, 209.

Pharaoh called for the magicians to work with their enchantments. They also showed signs and wonders, for Satan came to their aid, to work through them. Yet even here, the work of God was shown superior to the power of Satan, for the magicians could not perform all those miracles God wrought through Moses. Only a few of them could they do. The magicians' rods did become serpents, but Aaron's rod swallowed up theirs. After the magicians sought to produce the lice, and could not, then they were compelled by the power of God to acknowledge even to Pharaoh, saying, "This is the finger of God." Satan wrought through the magicians in a manner calculated to harden the heart of the tyrant Pharaoh against the miraculous manifestations of God's power. Satan thought to stagger the faith of Moses and Aaron in the divine origin of their mission, and then his instruments, the magicians, would prevail. Satan was unwilling to have the people of Israel released from Egyptian servitude, that they might serve God. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4, p. 82.

Flies, Livestock, and Boils

The Egyptians worshiped certain beasts, and they regarded it an unpardonable offense to have one of these beasts slain. And if one of their objects of worship were slain, even accidentally, the person's life alone could answer for the offense. Moses shows Pharaoh the impossibility of their sacrificing to God in the land of Egypt, in the sight of the Egyptians, for they might select for their offering some one of the beasts which they considered sacred.

Moses again proposed to go three days' journey into the wilderness. The king consented while under the chastening hand of God. "And Pharaoh said, I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away. Entreat for me. And Moses said, Behold, I go out from thee, and I will entreat the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow; but let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord. And Moses went from Pharaoh and entreated the Lord. And the Lord did according to the word of Moses; and he removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. There remained not one. And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go."

And the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to go again before Pharaoh and tell him, "Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me." And if he should refuse to let them go, and should hold them still, the plague should be upon their cattle. "And the Lord shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, and there shall nothing die of all that is the children of Israel's." And all the cattle died that were visited with the plague, but not one of the cattle of the Hebrews died. And Pharaoh sent messengers to inquire if any of the cattle of the Israelites were dead. The messenger returned to the king with the word that not one of them had died, neither were they afflicted at all with the plague. Yet his heart was hardened, and he refused to let Israel go. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 211.

The magicians with all their magic, and supposed power, could not, by any of their enchantments, shield themselves from the grievous plague of the boils. They could no longer stand before Moses and Aaron, because of this grievous affliction. The Egyptians were thus permitted to see how useless it would be for them to put their trust in the boasted power of the magicians, when they could not save even their own bodies from the plagues. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, 212.

Hail, Locusts, and Darkness

Those who regarded the word of the Lord gathered their cattle into barns and houses, while those whose hearts were hardened, like Pharaoh's, left their cattle in the field. Here was an opportunity to test the exalted pride of the Egyptians, and to show the number whose hearts were really affected by the wonderful dealings of God with his people, whom they had despised and cruelly entreated. "So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast. And the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail. And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the Lord (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail, and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer. And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the Lord, and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail, that thou mayest know how that the earth is the Lord's. But as for thee and thy servants, I know that ye will not yet fear the Lord God. And the flax and the barley was smitten, for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was balled. But the wheat and the rye were not smitten, for they were not grown up."

After the plague was stayed, the king refused to let Israel go. Rebellion produces rebellion. The king had become so hardened with his continual opposition to the will of God, that his whole being rose in rebellion to the awful exhibitions of his divine power. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 214, 215.

Fear at last wrung from Pharaoh a further concession. At the end of the third day of darkness he summoned Moses, and consented to the departure of the people, provided the flocks and herds were permitted to remain. "There shall not an hoof be left behind," replied the resolute Hebrew. "We know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither." The king's anger burst forth beyond control. "Get thee from me," he cried, "take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die."

The answer was, "Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more."

"The man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people." Moses was regarded with awe by the Egyptians. The king dared not harm him, for the people looked upon him as alone possessing power to remove the plagues. They desired that the Israelites might be permitted to leave Egypt. It was the king and the priests that opposed to the last the demands of Moses. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 272.

Friday, July 25

For Further Reading

"Hardening of the Heart," *Conflict and Courage*, March 24, p. 89.
"Pharaoh Hardens His Heart," in *From Eternity Past*, pp. 182–184.