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THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

– EXOD. 11:1-10. – DEC. 8. –

"The angel of his presence saved them." – Isa. 63:9.

HE WHO SEES, in the narrative of the ten plagues upon Egypt, and Israel's deliverance thereby, nothing beyond what is contained in the simple story recognizes only the shell, and not the kernel of the lesson. In the type it was typical Israel alone that was delivered by Moses and the first-born; in the antitype it will be "the groaning creation" that will be delivered – all such who will accept deliverance, under the leadership of the antitypical Moses, Christ, and his Royal Priesthood, – the elect Church of this Gospel age. In the type it was Pharaoh and his coadjutors that were first chastened by the plagues and subsequently destroyed in the Red Sea. Their antitype is Satan and all his coadjutors, – all who profit by evil; and in the beginning this will include many who unwittingly are under his blinding influence; but ultimately it will include only such as are wilful and deliberate servants of sin and lovers of unrighteousness – injustice, etc.

A previous lesson showed us Moses, receiving instruction and encouragement from the Lord respecting his future work as the deliverer. We saw him at the burning bush, and noted his reverence for the Lord and yet his need of being thoroughly convinced [R2910 : page 362] that God, with his infinite power would go with him, if he would again go to his countrymen, and essay to be their deliverer from bondage. We noted that the Lord gave him, as a sign or evidence of his commission, the miracle of his rod or walking stick turning into a serpent, and being changed back to a stick; and another sign in respect to leprosy coming upon his hand, and being instantly healed by putting it again into his bosom. When Moses had been himself convinced

he enquired of the Lord by what means he should convince the Israelites of his authority as their leader, and that the Lord would now deliver them. He was commissioned to introduce himself to the Israelites by these same signs by which he himself had been convinced of the divine authority and backing for his undertaking; and if either or both of these evidences were insufficient Moses was commissioned to take water from the Nile river, in sight of his countrymen, and to pour it upon the dry land, where it would become blood, the Lord assuring him that by means of some or all of these signs the people would be convinced and accept his leadership.

These three signs, which were so convincing to the Israelites, doubtless signified certain truths which, in the present time, will be convincing to the Lord's true people at the proper time; and demonstrate to them that there is to be a great deliverance of all who trust in the Lord, from the power of Satan and the bondage of sin and death. Time and space forbid a thorough examination of the antitypical significance of these signs here; but in our next issue we hope to show that we are now living in the time when the antitypes of these signs are due to antitypical Israel, as proofs of the presence of the Deliverer and the imminence of the deliverance. We expect to show that the antitypes of these signs are now being given, and of what they consist.

Moses' next mission, with Aaron, was to go before Pharaoh and make a demand that the Israelites might be permitted to go a three-days' journey into the wilderness to worship God and do sacrifice to him. Nothing was said respecting their non-intention of returning, nor was it necessary to do so. They were not in a just sense bondmen; they had not forfeited their liberties, either through war or debt; they had the same right to depart that they had to come into Egypt; and, if their request for a temporary absence were granted, they could later determine whether or not

they would return to Goshen. The request in this form made the trial of Pharaoh the less severe; nevertheless, his refusal to grant the holiday proved conclusively that he would have refused to grant them full liberty. Instead, Pharaoh sent forth instructions to the task-makers to increase the burdens upon the Hebrews, declaring that if they were worked hard enough they would have no time to think, and speculate about holidays, etc. It was at this time that the Israelites were required to turn out their full quota of brick per day, without having a straw furnished them, as had previously been the custom – straw being then used as a binder for bricks, which were sun-dried, instead of being burned hard, as at the present time. This stage of the Israelitish bondage is fully corroborated by certain recent excavations in Egypt, which show some structures built of brick, with straw binder; some with brick with binders of reeds and rushes, and some, finally, with practically no binders at all, and therefore that much the more difficult to handle in the making.

The effect of this move was at first to discourage the Hebrews and to lead them to complain to Moses, [R2911 : page 362] through their elders, that instead of being a deliverer and a helper he was bringing increased miseries. And so, likely, it will be with many of the groaning creation, in the near future. Their first efforts and aspirations toward the deliverance which the Lord has promised them will be resented by "the powers that be," and for a time their efforts at attainment of coveted blessing will seem to work disadvantageously. Nevertheless, the effect in the end will be to the more deeply impress upon all the evils of the present reign of sin and selfishness, and to make all the more appreciative of the Millennial blessings and liberties of righteousness, when they shall be attained; and the more determined that they will follow the leadings of the Lord, and be obedient to him, that they may attain that liberty.

PHARAOH'S HEART HARDENED.

Under the Lord's instructions Moses presented himself before Pharaoh, and made formal demand that the people be let go. Nevertheless, the Lord said to him, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." "But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies and my people, the Children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt, by great judgments; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."

This is perhaps as appropriate a place as any to consider the sense in which the Lord "hardened" Pharaoh's heart. And we may here also consider the Apostle's expression on the subject, saying: "The Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.' Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." (Rom. 9:17,18.) The Lord had raised up to the throne of Egypt a man of iron will and perverse spirit, who would not readily yield, and upon whom, therefore, repeated and severe judgments would be necessary, which would demonstrate divine power on behalf of Israel. Secondly, these would incidentally constitute a retribution against the whole people of Egypt, as participators in the unjust oppression exercised toward Israel. In a word, divine power would be better shown, and retributive justice better rendered, and a lesson for all time better written, by the raising up to the throne of Egypt of this man, than by raising up to the throne any of the others who might have been heirs, had they lived, or had he not lived.

It should be noticed that neither here nor elsewhere does God interfere with the freedom of the will of any individual, whether amongst those who profess obedience to him, or others. As respects the hardening of Pharaoh's heart: as we look carefully into the narrative we find that it was accomplished through God's *mercy* only, and hence that no charge could

be [R2911 : page 363] laid against divine justice on this account. It was because of Pharaoh's repenting that the Lord stayed one and another of the plagues brought upon him, and the nation which he represented. But this goodness and mercy of God, which should have led him to repentance, led him in an opposite direction, to greater hardness of heart. And so it is with the world in general today: when the judgments of the Lord fall severely upon the world there is a tendency to contrition, humility and repentance; but when the Lord's blessings abound there is the greater likelihood amongst those who are rebellious of heart to become hardened and unappreciative. So it was with Pharaoh, and so it will be with "the powers that be" in the end of this age; but so it must not be with those who are truly the children of God. To all these God's mercies and blessings, favor upon favor, should and do lead to greater appreciation, thankfulness and loving obedience, because they are his.

It has been surmised that these ten plagues upon Egypt began about July 1st, and lasted until the following April, – in all about nine months. This surmise is based upon the character of the different plagues, and what is known of the climate and usual conditions of Egypt favorable to the plagues. The first three, the waters changed to blood, the frogs, and the lice (insects), appear to have been common to the Israelites as well as to the Egyptians, the land of Goshen being spared from the remaining seven plagues – flies or winged pests; murrain, or cattle disease; bairns, or smallpox; hail and fire; locusts; darkness; and finally the death of the first-born. During this series of plagues Pharaoh relented a little occasionally to the extent that he agreed that the males of the Hebrews should go forth, as requested, to sacrifice in the wilderness, the females and children being held as hostages for their return. But this brought out the answer that when they would go it must be all of them, including their cattle and herds, and to this Pharaoh would not hear, until Egypt was smitten with the tenth plague, and all the

first-born of Egypt (humanity and animals) died; then he urged them to go. The chastisement was sufficient. So it will be in the end of the time of trouble that is approaching, and which is figuratively represented by these plagues, especially "the seven last plagues." – Rev. 15:

When the last plague has been poured out, as a vial of divine wrath, "the powers that be" will realize that it is useless to fight against God. And as Pharaoh and his people received a severe retributive punishment for every evil they had inflicted upon the Israelites, and as their first-born became retributive representatives of the Israelitish babes they had caused to be drowned in the Nile, so their flocks and herds, and the crops that were destroyed by the locusts and insects, etc., and all the troubles upon them, were retributive punishments, for the unjust exactions made of the Israelites. So we may suppose that the great troubles and losses which will come upon "the powers that be" of the present time, in the approaching trouble, will, in some sense or degree, be a retributive requirement, – an offset for a not sufficiently benevolent and just treatment of many under their control in the present time, when the blessings and inventions of our day should be accruing more generally to the benefit of the masses.

Objection has been found by some to the statement that the Lord, through Moses, instructed the Israelites to "borrow" of their Egyptian neighbors jewels of silver and gold, etc., and that they did so, and thus "spoiled the Egyptians" – took away a great spoil or trophy of valuables, when they went. Two answers may be made to this objection. The first is that our Common Version translation is very inaccurate, and thus gives ground for the thought of a deception; the word in the original signifies asked, requested, or begged for, and should not be rendered "borrowed." The Revised Version renders this properly, "asked for." The Hebrew word is the same as when Solomon "asked"

wisdom, and did not "ask" long life; neither "asked" he riches; neither "asked" he the life of his enemies. (1 Kings 3:11.) As it would be improper to render the word "borrow" in Solomon's case, it is equally inappropriate in the case of the Israelites. Similarly the word rendered "lent" should be "gave." The fact is that the Egyptians were thoroughly sore of heart under the repeated castigations given them by the Lord, during the nine months of the plagues. They were glad to learn that their representative and king had finally ordered the people to leave the country. They felt themselves like hastening them out, lest some further visitation should come upon them; or lest Pharaoh should again change his mind. Hence, when the Israelites importuned them for jewels and fine garments, etc., they gave them freely, hoping to be rid of them the quicker. The other answer to the argument is that in all justice the Egyptians owed the Hebrews the value of these jewels, and more too, for the onerous services they had compelled them to render; and hence the Israelites were not asking an alms for which they had given no equivalent, but were really asking for their back pay.

Our Golden Text seems to be wholly misapplied. It seems to have no reference to Israel in Egyptian bondage; neither does it fully and completely apply to their antitype – those who will be delivered from the power of Satan, sin and death during the Millennial age. It applies merely to the overcoming Church, the "Church of the First-born," which was represented only by Moses and the first-born of Israel, spared during the night of the Passover. The Lord is specially with this class, the "little flock," the "elect," "the body of Christ," who shortly shall lead the people out of bondage into the liberty of the sons of God. As many as obey the voice and follow the leading of this great Prophet, Priest and King, of which Jesus is the Head, and his elect Church the members in particular of the body, will be fully delivered from the power of Satan, represented by Pharaoh.

A general lesson, applicable to all persons and at all times, is that justice should be done; that none should be oppressed; that the Lord cherishes the cause of the oppressed, especially if they be his people; and that he will deliver them and will permit the wrath of man to work out retributive justice and punishment upon all oppressors.
