

Study Notes: Exodus 9:1-7
September 13, 2026: “The Plague on Livestock”
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Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: “Let my people go, so that they may worship me.” If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back, the hand of the LORD will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field—on your horses, donkeys and camels and on your cattle, sheep and goats. But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die.”

- The announcement of the fifth plague shares many features with the second and eighth plagues. Moses was sent by YHWH to give Pharaoh a message, to let the Israelites go, and explained what would happen if he did not yield. There is no recorded response from Pharaoh.
- In the announcement to Pharaoh, the phrase, “continue to hold them back” was included. The New American Commentary explains, “In this account v. 2 adds ‘and continue to hold them back,’ a wording that is not found in the other plague accounts but might have been included in almost any of them; it has the effect of reminding Pharaoh—and the reader—that there was an impetus to the Israelite cause that Pharaoh was restraining. He was *holding back* people who belonged somewhere else.”
- In this fifth plague, an actual plague or disease was promised to come on the livestock of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. This plague would cause the livestock of the Egyptians to die, however, like the plague of flies, this would not impact the Israelites.
 - This is the first plague that involved death. Until this point, the other plagues had caused only annoyance and problems.

The LORD set a time and said, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this in the land.”

- Like the plague of flies, Pharaoh was given only a short time to make a decision. Moses announced that the plague would happen the next day.

And the next day the LORD did it: All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died.

- Everything happened just as Moses said. YHWH struck down the livestock of the Egyptians, but kept the livestock of the Israelites safe.
 - The phrase, “all the livestock” is not meant to suggest that every animal died (because later in Exodus 9:20-21 some Egyptian livestock were clearly still alive), but that “all kinds” of the livestock died. The New American Commentary explains, “The Hebrew word *kol*, usually translated ‘all,’ can mean ‘all sorts of’ or ‘from all over’ or ‘all over the place.’ In this verse the better translation of the full expression would be ‘all sorts of Egyptian livestock died’ or ‘Egyptian livestock died all over the place.’”
- The New American Commentary speaks to how devastating the plague would have been, “Domesticated animals were treasured as enormously valuable assets in Bible times (as

in any time prior to the industrial revolution, or any place even today where farming predominates). Moreover, they were seen as closely interrelated to the welfare of humans, a fact reflected even in the Bible's creation accounts. The pantheistic Egyptians revered all animals but birds and livestock more than fish and amphibians. For them to have lost livestock would constitute a serious blow indeed. For them to have lost livestock while the Israelites retained all theirs represented a nationwide humiliation."

Pharaoh investigated and found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died. Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.

- After this plague, Pharaoh sent to find out if what Moses said was true. He knew livestock had died, but had to be sure that the plague only impacted animals owned by the Egyptians.
- Even when Pharaoh saw that the plague happened as YHWH said, and saw the distinction, he was still unyielding. The evidence did nothing to change Pharaoh's heart and mind!
 - The Faithlife Study Bible explains Pharaoh's attitude as "selfish stubbornness born of arrogance."