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PURSUING PERFECTION (Part I)

We are in the day of the Lord's *epiphaneia* ('bright shining'), in which 'persons, principles, and things' are exposed on daily basis, usually in an unfavourable light. It should not, therefore, surprise us that many of those things which we as Christians have taken for granted as true are now fair game for sceptical inquiry. The two-edged sword cuts both ways.

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Q&A

All citations are to the King James (Authorised) Version, unless noted otherwise.

Question: Exodus 9: 6, 19:

6: '[O]n the morrow . . . all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.'

19: 'Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle . . . hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.'

According to verse 6, all of the cattle in Egypt died under the fifth plague. Why then are Egyptian cattle mentioned in verse 19, in connection with the seventh plague, if there were none left?

Answer: To put these events into context, we quote Exodus 9: 3-7. Pharaoh is here addressed as the head of the Egyptians:

3 Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain [*pestilence – Ed.*].

4 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's of Israel.

5 And the LORD appointed a set time, saying, To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land.

6 And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.

7 And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

The Hebrew word for 'cattle' in verse 3 is *miqneh*, and signifies livestock in general. In this verse, livestock is enumerated as horses, asses, camels, oxen (including beef cattle), and sheep. The word 'cattle' (*miqneh*) in verses 4, 6, and 7, also denotes livestock. We will use 'livestock' instead of 'cattle' throughout this article.

When the pestilence was over, Pharaoh sent agents to enquire about the effects in Goshen, where the Israelites lived. He learned that none of their stock had died, just as God had promised they would not (v. 4). But, according to verse 6, 'all the [livestock] of Egypt died'. Since verse 19 asserts that there were livestock still present in Egypt after the event, the statement of verse 4 – that they 'all' died – might appear to be an error, as critics of the Bible assert, as though the narrator had 'lost the plot' in the meantime.

The explanation for the discrepancy is that the statement, 'all the livestock of Egypt died', is directed at *own-*

ership. Of both groups of livestock – Israelitish and Egyptian – *only* those owned by the Egyptians were affected. To express it another way in a paraphrase: ‘*all the livestock that died were of Egypt*: but of the livestock of the children of Israel died not one.’

That is, of Israel, *no* livestock were killed; of Egypt, *some* livestock were killed.

This permutation allows for the presence of ‘livestock’ (*miqneh*) and ‘beasts’ (*bhemah*, large quadrupeds) in Egypt during the sixth plague (vs. 9, 10) and the seventh plague (vs. 19-25).

Psalm 78: 48 recounts the Egyptians’ experience in a parallelism: ‘He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts.’

‘Cattle’ is here the translation of the Hebrew word, *b’iyar*, and can also be rendered ‘beast’. The word ‘flocks’ refers to ‘livestock’. ‘Hot thunderbolts’ convey in the Hebrew the idea of lightning, figurative ‘burning coals’.

An Alternative Explanation

Another proposed solution which has some credence is that ‘all’ the Egyptian livestock which died (v. 6), were *all* those ‘in the field’ (v. 3), and that those in stalls or houses were not affected.

However, there are at least three difficulties with this approach.

First, verse 19 instructs the Egyptian farmers to

‘gather thy [livestock], and all *that thou hast in the field*; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field *and shall not be brought home*, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die.’ (*Italics added – Ed.*)

Now, if we assume that all the animals ‘in the field’ were killed by the murrain in plague number five, and then an unknown number of animals (and men) were afflicted with boils in plague number six, we would have to suppose that shortly after these double catastrophes the Egyptian farmers, under the ‘business as normal’ approach, turned out all their sheltered animals into the field (a smaller number by now, surely), apparently not having learned anything from the previous onslaughts.

Second, since Jehovah here graciously issues notice to the Egyptian farmers before launching plague number seven – He did not issue such notice on the previous two occasions – there is at least a hint that He will now step up the pressure. The implication is that the coming plague of fiery hail would be more devastating than the previous two pestilences. In other words, ‘you will now lose *all* your animals, unless . . .’ etc.

Third, the reason the animals had to be brought in from the field is that the mechanical damage caused by the hailstones could be protected against *only* by sheltering them (and the herdsman). This was not the case with the pestilences of plagues five and six, which, like most diseases, strike at random, and are rarely total in their effects.

It is worth noting that Jehovah condescended to warn the Egyptian farmers to protect their livestock by hurrying them indoors, and that some had sufficient regard for the warning as to heed it (vs. 20, 21).

MUSINGS

‘I like to think that I would spare no sacrifice in the name of Christ. That if called upon to suffer and die for

His Name that, yes, while it might be difficult, 'I am willing, Lord'. Yet I cannot help but wonder on this point each time I pick up my Bible to read, and peek at the following page to see how long is the chapter. See how it goes on . . . and so many verses! And so many byways branching off from each one! Or when I consult a word in the concordance and marvel at the large number of entries there are – do I really want to look at every one of them? Yet this is merely a matter of time and convenience. And, perhaps, the expenditure of a little mental energy. But if I balk at such an exercise in a warm room, sitting on a comfortable chair, with a cup of sweet tea at hand, I do question how real is my conviction that I would suffer for the Master in the cold and the dark, and in the harsh reality of persecution.' – *WR*

IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR: ELIZABETH I, 1558

'For centuries past many different forces had been slowly drawing the English towards a national or patriotic conception of man's duty to society, in place of that obedience to cosmopolitan orders and corporations which had been inculcated by the Catholic Church and the feudal obligation. Among the forces creative of the sense of nationhood were the English Common Law; the King's Peace and the King's Courts; the frequent intercourse of the representatives of distant shires and boroughs in the national council of Parliament; the new clothing industry based on national rather than municipal organization; the new literature and the new language common to all England. Finally, the action of the Tudor monarchy had abolished or depreciated all loyalties that intervened between the individual and the state, much as Protestantism purported to eliminate all that stood between the individual and God. The Elizabethan age is at once intensely national and intensely individualistic. . . .

' . . . Elizabeth in the first year of her reign re-established the supremacy of the national, laic State, with a national Church engaged as its servant upon honourable terms. The rest of her long life was spent in cautiously adapting the habits of the whole people to this new settlement, and defending it against internal malcontents and foreign aggressors. For many years the dangers seemed greater than the chances of success, until a new generation had grown up under the influence of the Bible, the Prayer Book and loyalty to the Queen. The contest finally resolved itself into a maritime war against Spain as the head of the Catholic reaction in Europe and the monopolist of the ocean routes to the New World. In the heat of that struggle English civilization was fused into its modern form, at once insular and oceanic, distinct from the continental civilization of which the Norman Conquest had once made it part.

'Not only was modern England created, but the future of Great Britain was mapped out. The exigencies of the struggle for island independence against the Catholic powers of the continent put an end to the long hostility between the peoples of Scotland and England, while the same causes dictated the ruthless and ill-fated conquest of Catholic Ireland.

'Amongst the Elizabethan English, by land and by sea, individualism became the ally of nationalism on free and equal terms, for the national State could not afford to pay for an army and a bureaucracy to bend the individual to its will, like the France and Prussia of later days. The poverty of the Elizabethan State explains many of its worst features and meanest shifts, and not a few also of its greatest merits and noblest attitudes. A Queen whose revenue in war time did not reach half a million pounds a year must needs be "niggardly"; but since her subjects would not be taxed to give her adequate supply, she was fain to appeal to their free loyalty to fight her battles and to wear themselves out in her service for love. They gave her their lives and affections more readily than their cash. For the rest, her great object, as defined in a political poem she herself wrote, was "to teach still peace to grow," till men treasured the life of their Queen because it meant for them peace and prosperity at home while the neighbour nations were ablaze with religious war. Many who disliked her ecclesiastical compromise as being too Protestant, or not Protestant enough, accepted it as the condition of tranquil government, which in an age of rival fanaticisms seemed, and perhaps was, a miracle of statecraft.'

George Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co.; 1931; pp. 323-325).

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