



Exodus - Chapter Ten

I. Exodus 1:1-18:27 - The Exodus of Israel from Egypt (continues)

I.d. Exodus 7:8-15:21 - The Plagues and the Exodus (continues)

Summary of Chapter Ten

The chapter describes the final two plagues before final devastation is wrought on Egypt. Moses and Aaron are sent to Pharaoh to instruct him that it is the Lord he is defying and, because of this, an unprecedented plague of locusts will now come and devour what is left of the land. Pharaoh's officials advised him to let the people go but Pharaoh would only agree to the men going and so Moses brought the plague of locusts upon Egypt. Pharaoh realised his sin and asked Moses to pray to the Lord for forgiveness, which he did and the plague ended, with not a single locust left in the land.

Upon the Lord's instructions, Moses then brought a plague of darkness on the land that lasted for three days so that no Egyptian could see the face of another but the Israelites remained in the light. Pharaoh then agreed that all the people could go out to worship the Lord but they must leave their livestock behind. Moses told Pharaoh that the people and their livestock must be released but Pharaoh refused. He dismissed Moses and told him never to return or face death for doing so.

I.d.ix Exodus 10:1-20 - The Eighth Plague: Locusts

The eighth plague ties together the events and narrative of plagues seven through nine: the locusts of the eighth plague finish off what the hail of the seventh has left behind (9:31-32), and the language describing the effect of the locusts 'covering the face of the land' prefigures the darkness of the ninth (v.21). Where the Lord explained his purposes more explicitly to Pharaoh in the seventh (9:14-

17), here he indicates again to Moses that the plagues are not solely for Egypt but primarily for what they reveal to the people of Israel.

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials, in order that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them – so that you may know that I am the Lord.’

Exodus 10:1-2

I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials. This is only the second plague narrative that begins with a statement about the condition of Pharaoh’s heart; refer also to 7:14. The point is clear: Yahweh governs the events, refer also to 9:34-35. Despite Exodus 9:34 stating that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, hereafter in the plague and exodus narrative it is usually the Lord who is referred to as hardening the heart of Pharaoh.

The Lord instructs Moses to tell Pharaoh several times that the purpose of the plagues is that you may know that I am the Lord; refer to the comment made on 7:5. Here, in the preface to the eighth plague, the Lord addresses these words to Moses and reminds him that this is also his purpose for Israel, refer to 6:7, and that what is signified in the plagues will become a part of the regular celebration in Israel of who the Lord is and what he has done for his people, both then and for the generations to come, i.e. that you may tell your children and grandchildren. This is also reflected in: <<*But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children*>> (Deuteronomy 4:9), <<*You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted insolently against our ancestors. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day*>> (Nehemiah 9:10), <<*We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children*>> (Psalm 78:4-5), and: <<*Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation*>> (Joel 1:3).

³ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me.

⁴ For if you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country. ⁵ They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no

one will be able to see the land. They shall devour the last remnant left you after the hail, and they shall devour every tree of yours that grows in the field. ⁶ They shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your officials and of all the Egyptians – something that neither your parents nor your grandparents have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

Exodus 10:3-6

How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Getting to the heart of the matter, God warned Pharaoh to humble himself or the worst plague of locusts ever seen would come upon Egypt. Pride was at the heart of Pharaoh’s problem; he simply did not want to give into God. It is an important question that God could ask anyone. Those who do will find grace and mercy: <<*Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster on his house*>> (1 Kings 21:29), <<*But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord*>> (2 Kings 22:18-19), <<*When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land*>> (2 Chronicles 7:13-14), <<*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you*>> (James 4:10), and: <<*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time*>> (1 Peter 5:6).

The description of the locusts as covering the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land prefigures the darkness that is to come in the ninth plague (vv.21-23). Although each of the plagues has signified judgement through the threat of disease and/or death in some measure, the seventh through the ninth plagues intensify the warning and prefigure the judgement of death that is to come with the final plague.

From the day they came on earth to this day. Like the hail of the seventh plague, the Lord makes it clear that, although swarms of locusts were not unknown in the history of Egypt, the warning, timing, and extent of this plague indicate that it should not be interpreted as simply a regular and expected part of their normal experience.

⁷ Pharaoh's officials said to him, 'How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?'

Exodus 10:7

Like the magicians in 8:19, some of Pharaoh's officials recognise what the plagues signify and make the bold move to suggest strongly to Pharaoh that he is not acting on behalf of his people as a ruler should.

How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? These men, known as Pharaoh's officials, hardened their hearts before. Yet even they relented in light of the destruction that came upon Egypt; but Pharaoh's heart was harder still! In reality it was not Moses who was a snare but their own gods rather than an acceptance of God: <<*I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her*>> (Ecclesiastes 7:26).

⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, 'Go, worship the Lord your God! But which ones are to go?'

⁹ Moses said, 'We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, because we have the Lord's festival to celebrate.'¹⁰ He said to them, 'The Lord indeed will be with you, if ever I let your little ones go with you! Plainly you have some evil purpose in mind.'¹¹ No, never! Your men may go and worship the Lord, for that is what you are asking.' And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

Exodus 10:8-11

So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. Pharaoh listens to his servants (v.7) and for the first time calls Moses and Aaron back into his presence before the plague has begun (v.8). However, as in his post-plague pleading with Moses, Pharaoh responds to Moses' answer (v.9) with an offer of only qualified obedience to the Lord's command (v.10), and then sends them out in the anger of offended pride (v.11). Contrary to what all of the plagues have indicated, Pharaoh continues to act as if he has unqualified authority over Israel. But which ones are to go? Pharaoh again wanted to bargain with God and Moses. He wanted to allow some to go into the wilderness to worship, but to keep the women and children home as hostages.

Pharaoh offered a compromise in Exodus 8:25-26, suggesting that they could have a day to sacrifice to the Lord while still in Egypt. Moses rejected that compromise, and would reject this one also. God would not make this bargain,

because he did not need to. This time, and every time, God holds all the negotiating leverage.

What Pharaoh wanted is what many people want in the flesh: a way to 'give in' to God, without fully submitting to him. Sometimes they look for a way to bargain with God as an equal, instead of submitting to him as Creator and Lord.

When Moses first came to Pharaoh: <<Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go?''>> (Exodus 5:2a). The fact that Pharaoh still would not submit to the Lord showed that he did not yet know who the Lord was. This was despite the fact that the Lord God had made it clear that he was:

- Greater than the god Khnum (the guardian of the Nile)
- Greater than the god Hapi (the spirit of the Nile)
- Greater than the god Osiris (who had the Nile as his bloodstream)
- Greater than the goddess Heqt (the frog-goddess of fertility)
- Greater than the goddess Hathor (a cow-like mother goddess)
- Greater than the god Imhotep (the god of medicine)
- Greater than Nut (the sky goddess)

God had demonstrated he was able to stop the whole worship of the Egyptian gods with loathsome lice and swarms of insects. Despite all this, Pharaoh showed he still did not know the Lord God. Therefore, God would show him even more.

¹² Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt, so that the locusts may come upon it and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.'¹³ So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts.¹⁴ The locusts came upon all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again.¹⁵ They covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was black; and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left; nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt.

Exodus 10:12-15

The east wind had brought the locusts. The direction of the wind would have brought it across the dry deserts of modern day Saudi Arabia and with it the swarms of locusts looking for green food to eat. Locusts were and remain a devastating pestilence and were often seen as a judgement by God: <<He spoke,

and the locusts came, and young locusts without number; they devoured all the vegetation in their land, and ate up the fruit of their ground>> (Psalm 105:34-35), and: <<I struck you with blight and mildew; I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards; the locust devoured your fig trees and your olive trees; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord>> (Amos 4:9). Yet God knows that man can be an even more devastating plague: <<You increased your merchants more than the stars of the heavens. The locust sheds its skin and flies away>> (Nahum 3:16).

They ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Yahweh showed himself greater than the Egyptian god Set, thought to be the protector of crops.

Nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt. God did for Pharaoh what he will do in the lives of all of his people - expose and topple every false god. When people trust in these gods it hurts to see them fall, but it is always best to have them exposed.

¹⁶ Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. ¹⁷ Do forgive my sin just this once, and pray to the Lord your God that at the least he remove this deadly thing from me.’ ¹⁸ So he went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. ¹⁹ The Lord changed the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. ²⁰ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

Exodus 10:16-20

I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Pharaoh did the same thing in 9:27-28. He said the words of repentance but did not follow through with the actions. His heart was only hardened more after God relented and showed mercy.

When Pharaoh pleads with Moses and Aaron that his sin be forgiven just this once, the Hebrew is similar to his earlier qualified admission: <<*This time I have sinned*>> (Exodus 9:27), and indicates again that he recognises neither the nature of his actions nor the gravity of what the plagues represent.

Remove this deadly thing from me. Pharaoh’s description of the effect of the locusts as ‘death’ is apt because of what has happened to Egypt’s crops and also for the way it foreshadows the death to come in the final plague.

The Red Sea is the Hebrew *Yam Suph*. Some modern scholars interpret *Yam Suph* as ‘Sea of Reeds or Papyrus’ because the term *suph* refers to the reeds growing along the Nile River (2:3). Refer also to the comments made on 13:18.

I.d.x Exodus 10:21-29 - The Ninth Plague: Darkness

The ninth plague is significant both for its immediate effects and for what it represents. The ‘darkness to be felt’ immobilises the inhabitants of Egypt from any normal pattern of living for three full days and is a foreboding warning of the death that waits in the final plague.

²¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand towards heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.’ ²² So Moses stretched out his hand towards heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. ²³ People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived.

Exodus 10:21-23

Stretch out your hand towards heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt. As was the pattern with the previous plagues, the third in this set of three came without warning.

A darkness that can be felt. This was no normal darkness; it had a supernatural element to it that could be felt. Light is not only a physical property; it is an aspect of God’s character: <<*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all*>> (1 John 1:5). In judgement, God can withdraw his presence so significantly that the void remaining is darkness which may even be felt. Seemingly, God did not even allow artificial light sources to work. The Egyptians attempted to use candles and lamps but were unable to produce light. This was dramatic show of greatness over the prominent Egyptian god Ra, thought to be the sun god.

God would inflict darkness on the land to signify his anger at the death of his Son: <<*From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon*>> (Matthew 27:45). This too was not a natural darkness: <<*I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things*>> (Isaiah 45:7). God will produce such darkness again as the time for final judgement approaches: <<*The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony, and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds*>> (Revelation 16:10-11).

After the locusts of the eighth plague are described as covering <<**the surface of the land**>> so that no one could ‘see the land’ (v.5) because it was black (v.15), the plague of darkness now has the effect that the people of Egypt **could not see one another**. The extended night that Egypt endures **for three days** prefigures the death to come, both in the way that darkness was often associated with the realm of death and for how the final plague will come at midnight (11:4 and 12:29).

Some commentators link these three days of darkness with the time between the death and resurrection of Christ.

All the Israelites had light where they lived. It cannot be determined whether this was because God spared them the plague or because God granted them his unique presence, bringing a supernatural light.

²⁴ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, ‘Go, worship the Lord. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you.’ ²⁵ But Moses said, ‘You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt-offerings to sacrifice to the Lord our God. ²⁶ Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the Lord our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the Lord until we arrive there.’

Exodus 10:24-26

Pharaoh once again offers a qualification to what the Lord has asked in order to have some way of still tethering Israel to Egypt as his labour force. He has told them to go and sacrifice <<**within the land**>> (8:25b), without <<**your little ones**>> (vv.9-11), and then here without **your flocks and your herds**. The Lord’s words to Pharaoh have always framed Israel’s going out as having the purpose <<**that they may worship me**>> (7:16 etc.). Pharaoh stands in continual defiance of what the Lord is calling Israel to do in terms of the location, people, and provisions for serving him. Undoubtedly, Pharaoh felt God drove a hard bargain and made the best deal for himself that he could. Pharaoh still saw things as someone who thought he could bargain with the Creator. This shows that he still did not really know who the Lord God was, because he still had not submitted to him.

Not a hoof shall be left behind. The Lord God, and the prophet Moses representing him, were absolutely unwilling to compromise on these points. God wanted deliverance for all of Israel and for all that belonged to Israel, and was not willing to deal on the point. This reflects the response of God to every attempt a believer makes to surrender less than everything to him, or to willingly leave some things in bondage.

²⁷ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was unwilling to let them go. ²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, ‘Get away from me! Take care

that you do not see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.’²⁹ Moses said, ‘Just as you say! I will never see your face again.’

Exodus 10:27-29

The narrative of each plague ends with either a description like this on the state of Pharaoh’s heart (8:32, 9:7 and v.20), or a declaration that events had transpired according to the word of the Lord, and once with a reference to the time elapsed (7:25). The interchange between Pharaoh and Moses in v.28 may indicate that the warning of the tenth plague (11:4-8) comes while Moses is still in Pharaoh’s presence. The threefold reference to Pharaoh’s face plays on the description of the darkening of the land by the locusts and on the effects of the thick darkness on the people of Egypt (vv.21-23) and, as Moses’ final statement makes clear, forewarns of the finality of the plague to come: I will never see your face again.

This ends the account of the nine plagues, and though there is one yet to come, the plague upon the firstborn, it is so unique that it must be considered by itself.

The Bible reveals that there were several reasons why God sent these plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt:

- To answer Pharaoh’s question, Who is the Lord? (Exodus 5:2). In the plagues, God showed himself greater than any of the false gods of Egypt.
- To show the power of God through Moses (Exodus 9:16).
- To give a testimony to the children of Israel for future generations (Exodus 10:2).
- To judge the false gods - demons, really - of Egypt (Exodus 12:12 and Numbers 33:4).
- To warn the nations - more than 400 years later, the Philistines remembered the Lord God of Israel as the one who plagued the Egyptians (1 Samuel 4:8).

The plagues were delivered as a testimony of the greatness of God to Israel: <<Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders?>> (Exodus 15:11), and: <<Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?>> (Deuteronomy 4:34).