

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 8:20-32

To understand more about the fourth plague, the flies.

Read the Text:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. 21 Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. 22 But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. 23 Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.”” 24 And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants’ houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies. 25 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.” 26 But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? 27 We must go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us.” 28 So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me.” 29 Then Moses said, “Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” 30 So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. 31 And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. 32 But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.” (Exodus 8:20-32, ESV)

Study the Text:

Plague #4: Flies

Every plague escalates in severity. The first plague affected the water in Egypt, but presumably the royal family was still able to obtain water from wells dug outside of Egypt. The second plague of frogs affected every person including the royal family. The third plague not only affected the people in Egypt, but also the livestock. Now, the fourth plague will intensify even further. Below is a breakdown of some of the key details and concepts in this passage.

THE CONFRONTATION

Verse 20 begins with the LORD telling Moses to “rise early in the morning” and meet Pharaoh “as he goes out to the water.” This is presumably the same place where Moses found Pharaoh just prior to the first plague. As was previously noted, Pharaoh would have likely enjoyed bathing in the Nile as a kind of royal privilege. It would be there, where Moses expected to find him, that Moses would deliver a message yet again to the wicked ruler. The repetition of message (“Let my people go!”) at the same place (the Nile) is likely intended to bring a sense of dread over Pharaoh. Every time he sees Moses approaching, he’d be thinking: “Oh, no! Not again!”¹ Moses presents to Pharaoh yet again the opportunity to do the right thing and let the Hebrew people

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 214.

go although he was likely fairly confident at this point that Pharaoh would not budge; the LORD had made it clear that he would not, and his repeated stubbornness and dishonesty has only solidified that. Still, it's important to note that though the LORD had made it clear that Pharaoh would continue to harden his heart and not obey, he is still given multiple opportunities regardless. Though the LORD knows the extent of our wickedness, He still extends a merciful opportunity to repent.

THE FLYING INSECTS

Like the third plague, the fourth plague includes a swarm of larger flying insects, and this time in apparent greater numbers. The third plague of gnats would swarm on “man and beast” (Ex. 8:18); this fourth plague affected even the living spaces of the people in Egypt: “And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand” (Ex. 8:21). This could be understood as, “There will be so many flies that you'll step on many of them with every step you take.” They also apparently bit the Egyptians. This is not a detail included in this passage, but it is noted in Psalm 78:45: “He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them.” With that in mind, some translators have argued that these were mosquitos, while others have argued that they were horseflies. Stuart adds, “A translation such as ‘various kinds of annoying biting and nonbiting insects in huge swarms,’ cumbersome though it would be, might actually give a somewhat clearer sense of the threat to the Egyptians.”² Moreover, “the land was ruined by the swarms of flies” as well (Ex. 8:24). The flies were not only a nuisance but negatively impacted the land and by extension the economy as well. Whatever they were, the infestation was so bad that for the first time, God separated His own people away in an effort to prevent them from being affected by it.

A SEPARATED PEOPLE

Verses 22 and 23 read: “But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.” This is an important detail that has eschatological implications. The LORD does not remove the people of God from the kingdom of Egypt prior to continuing the plagues, but merely protects them *while they are still there*. Because *Exodus* serves as a type of judgement that anticipates a future judgment and is ultimately fulfilled in *Revelation*, it can be reasoned that God is capable of bringing tribulation upon a wicked people in judgment while His people remain in their midst, and yet protect them from the fallout of such judgment. Thus *Exodus* foreshadows the events of *Revelation*: The people of God (the church) are burdened by the people of the world (the kingdom of the beast). The people of the world (the kingdom of the beast) experience the judgment of God (tribulation), and yet the people of God (the church) are protected by God from it. *Exodus* demonstrates that a post-tribulational second-coming is not only possible, but predicted.

BARTERING

This plague, like the second one, is enough to bring Pharaoh to a point of desperation. He relents in verse 25: “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.” It's important to note that unlike his response after the second plague, which was far more generalized, this is a more clearly defined and thus “real” offer. It's also important to note that up to this point Moses and Aaron had been bartering as well, although it may not be as clear to the modern reader. Their language (“three days' journey,” “into the wilderness,” etc.) would have been understood as a bartering towards leaving Egypt *for good*. For the first time, Pharaoh is bartering back. This illustrates that he has begun to weaken as a result of the severity of the fourth plague.

² Stuart, *Exodus*, 214.

Moses and Aaron would not settle for this, and in typical bartering style again offered various reasons why Pharaoh's suggestion would not suffice. For one, their sacrificial system was abominable to the Egyptians (Ex. 8:26a). The Egyptians had several ram gods (e.g. *Khnum*, *Ba-neb-djedet*, and *Amun*), and so Moses reasoned that by sacrificing rams (common in Jewish sacrifice), it would be offensive to the Egyptian worshippers of such gods. Moreover, their offense could possibly even lead to them stoning the Hebrew people (Ex. 8:26b). Beyond that, God had not commanded them to sacrifice locally within Egypt, but in the wilderness. This is a fascinating portion of the story. Moses and Aaron's negotiating would seem "weak" to some modern fundamentalists; why not just hit Pharaoh with the truth? They are actually demonstrating a far more nuanced and mature response wherein they are able to stand on conviction against the error of Pharaoh and his people in a respectful manner.

Pharaoh eventually relented: "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me" (Ex. 8:28). Moses and Aaron agree, but not before acknowledging Pharaoh's previous agreement that he broke: "Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD" (Ex. 8:29). After praying and pleading with the LORD to end the fourth plague, the LORD "removed the swarms of flies" (Ex. 8:31). And again, this passage ends in a familiar manner: "But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go" (Ex. 8:32).

What About Now?

One takeaway is that the effects of sin and a hardened heart often escalate the longer we wait to repent. Each plague increases in severity. If Pharaoh had only relented and let the people of God go before the first plague, he and his people would never have suffered any of this. Now, as a result of his hardened heart, not only he but many others have been affected by his sin. The same is true for us today. When we hold back from repentance, the consequences of our sin not only gradually increase but also have the potential to impact a larger scope of people as well. Another takeaway is God's willingness to allow His people to be in the land while the plagues are happening, and yet His mercy to protect them as well. God rarely will pull you out of a trial, but He will almost always go with you through it.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 8:20-21. What did the LORD tell Moses to say to Pharaoh? Where was Moses to meet Pharaoh? What would be the consequences of inaction?

2. Read Exodus 8:22-24. What does God promise to do for His people during this fourth plague? How does the fourth plague affect the Egyptians?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 8:25. What compromise did Pharaoh suggest to Moses and Aaron?

2. Read Exodus 8:26-27. How did Moses respond? What were the three reasons he gave Pharaoh for why they needed to travel “three days’ into the wilderness?”
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Day Three

3. Read Exodus 8:28. What is Pharaoh’s response to their bartering?
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4. Read Exodus 8:29. What do Moses and Aaron remind Pharaoh to not do this time?
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Day Four

1. Read Exodus 8:30-31. What do Moses and Aaron do? How did the LORD respond?
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2. Read Exodus 8:32. What did Pharaoh do at the end of this passage?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 18 Discussion: When Sin Gets Bigger

One of the things you immediately notice when you study the plagues is the increasing intensity of each plague. This intensifying of judgment becomes ever more clear when you examine the third and fourth plagues. The third plague of gnats increases to flies. They not only are annoying and everywhere in the third plague, but they are so bad in the fourth plague that God must protect His own people. They bite harder, they destroy things more quickly; they are worse in every way. Such is the case with sin. Sin, when left unchecked, only increases in intensity. Talk as a group about the ways in which you’ve experienced this in your own life.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever left sin unchecked? How did it work out for you?
2. When was the last time you sat down and confessed your sin to someone?
3. Is confession of sin scary? Why or why not?
4. What unnecessary pain have you experienced as a result of not dealing with your sin?
5. If you could go back and deal with one particular sin in your past, what would it be and why?
6. How can the church help you to let go of your secret sin and walk in freedom?

Takeaways:

1. The fourth plague of flies is so bad that God separates the Hebrews from the Egyptians to protect them.
2. Pharaoh pleads with Moses and Aaron and relents to let them go, and then changes his mind.