

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 10:1-20

To understand more about the eighth plague, locusts.

Read the Text:

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, 2 and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD." 3 So Moses and Aaron went in 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, that they may serve me. 4 For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, 5 and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land. And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field, 6 and they shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.'" Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh. 7 Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?" 8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. And he said to them, "Go, serve 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, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." 10 But he said to them, "The LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. 11 No! Go, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you are asking." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence. 12 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt 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 it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. 14 The locusts came up over 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 will be again. 15 They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt. 16 Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. 17 Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the LORD your God only to remove this death from me." 18 So he went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the LORD. 19 And the LORD turned 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 did not let the people of Israel go." (Exodus 10:1-20, ESV)

Study the Text:

Plague #8: Locusts

The eighth plague has some marked differences from the previous plagues. As anticipated, the harshness of the plague is elevated as each of the past ones have been in comparison to the one prior. Moreover, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart begins to set him apart even from those around him in Egypt. While the servants of Pharaoh have been moved into submission, Pharaoh himself will serve as an object lesson for the rest of the world for generations to come because of His stubbornness. Below is a breakdown of some of the key details of this passage.

A CHANGE OF TARGET

The eighth plague begins similarly to plague two (Ex. 7:26) and plague five (Ex. 9:1), with God saying, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him," indicating that Pharaoh was likely inside, in the courts of Pharaoh, along with his

servants and advisors. However, in the second and fifth plagues, God's message to Pharaoh was for the benefit of *Pharaoh*. The message was intended to serve as an opportunity for genuine repentance. This time, however, the message is not intended for Pharaoh, but for "the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD" (Ex. 10:2). The events of the Exodus are important, not only for us to understand how Israel ends up in Canaan (the promised land), but for the Israelites themselves to remember the faithfulness of God for generations to come as they faithfully serve and obey the LORD (Ex. 20:6).

Also note the familiar verbiage in verse 1: "For I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants." It is important to point out that while the first instances of this term "hardened" (Heb. ḥāzaq) means something like "to strengthen," there is also an interchangeable usage of a different word that is also translated as "hardened" (Heb. kāḇēd), meaning something like "to be heavy or dull." In this case in Exodus 10:1, it is the latter term. God is not strengthening Pharaoh's heart, but dulling him. Again, this should not be seen as an injustice towards Pharaoh. God is only doing to Pharaoh's heart what Pharaoh himself is doing to his own heart. God is giving them up to "the lusts of their hearts" because "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature [Pharaoh] rather than the Creator [the LORD]" (Rom. 1:24-25). Douglas Stuart says it this way: "When people do not acknowledge the one true God as their own Lord, however, they are in rebellion against their very nature and eventually must be forcibly taught who is boss."¹ Both Pharaoh and his servants are explicitly in rebellion, and they will be forcibly taught who is boss.

A NOTE ON LOCUSTS

The eighth plague is then explicated to Pharaoh: Locusts. And not just any regular amount of locusts; it is a number that "shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land. And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field, and they shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day" (Ex. 10:5-6). This is a massive infestation that will serve as a one-two punch after the seventh plague of hail: "And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail" (Ex. 10:5). The remaining vegetation that survived the seventh plague will be totally taken out by this eighth plague.

This is the first and certainly not the last time that locusts will be used as a judgment from God. This Exodus story serves as a "type" of judgment that will recur throughout the Old Testament. In King Solomon's inaugural prayer after the Temple is completed, he prays that the LORD will "hear in heaven" the prayers of His people when they pray concerning famines or pestilence or blight, which includes "locusts" (1 Kg. 8:33-39). The Midianites were raised up against the Israelites because of their rebellion and were seen as locusts: "For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number" (Jg. 6:5). The Psalmist remembers the locusts of Egypt as a warning to the people of God for judgment against rebellion (Ps. 78:46). The Assyrians are raised up against the rebellion of Israel and their invasion is seen as a swarm of locusts (Is. 33:4). The king of the Medes is sent out against Babylon in act of judgment against the Babylonians for their wickedness, and the Medes are seen as locusts (Jer. 51:4). The minor prophets Joel, Amos, and Nahum all use the locust as an imagery of judgment as well (Joel 1:4; 2:25, Amos 4:9, Nah. 3:15-17).

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), 245.

The presence of locusts in Egypt is unique for this time in that there has not yet been an act of judgment quite like this one. However, it will serve as a standard for judgment for centuries to come after. Much like the signs of the LORD against Egypt will provide stories for the coming generations of the people of God, so too will these signs be “types” of judgment that will serve as standards for generations to come.

THE WISDOM OF THE SERVANT

One interesting detail about this particular passage is that the servants’ hearts are hardened in the same way that Pharaoh’s heart is hardened (Ex. 10:1), and yet after the warning from Aaron and Moses concerning the impending plague of locusts they are the first to implore Pharaoh to reconsider his stronghold over the Israelites: “Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” (Ex. 10:7). This is an important text for a couple of reasons. For one, it demonstrates that Pharaoh had not only Israelite voices, but Egyptian voices warning him of his error. It’s one thing to stubbornly combat the enemy; it’s another thing to stubbornly ignore those who are intended to speak wisdom to you. Pharaoh rejects the wisdom of his servants. Secondly, it also demonstrates that reason can be seen even with a hardened heart. People often think that because God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, he was unable to do the right thing, almost as if God was preventing him from doing the right thing. However, if that were the case then we would expect the servants of Pharaoh to act similarly, and they don’t.

THE CONCLUSION

The plague of locusts was devastating: “They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt” (Ex. 10:15). This made Pharaoh “hastily” call Moses and Aaron back to him to beg him to ask God to forgive him and to “remove this death from me” (Ex. 10:17). He even confesses to sinning “against the LORD your God” (Ex. 10:16). And God, predictably, was gracious and kind to do so: “Not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt” (Ex. 10:19). And Pharaoh, predictably, “did not let the people of Israel go” (Ex. 10:20).

What About Now?

One takeaway is that God’s actions towards people always have His own glory in mind. God uses Pharaoh for the purpose of unveiling His power and glory which will be talked about for generations to come. God takes His glory very seriously. We often emphasize the fact that “all have sinned” according to Romans 3:23 and fail to mention that in sinning, we “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sometimes God allows things to happen in the world for the purpose of displaying His glory to those watching. Another takeaway is that people with hardened hearts can still see reason. The servants of Pharaoh have their hearts hardened just like Pharaoh himself, and yet they implore him to recant. Though we may have hard hearts, we are never truly without hope of repentance as long as we are alive.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 10:1-2. What did the LORD say to Moses? What is the purpose for which the following plagues will occur? How is this different from previous plagues?

- 2. Read Exodus 10:3-6. What did Moses and Aaron say to Pharaoh? What are the terms they ask for? What will happen if Pharaoh fails to comply? How will the eighth plague impact Egypt?

Day Two

- 1. Read Exodus 10:7. What do the servants of Pharaoh say in response to Moses' and Aaron's warning?

- 2. Read Exodus 10:8-11. What question did Pharaoh ask Moses and Aaron? What was their response? Who all would go to worship the LORD in the wilderness? How did Pharaoh react to this?

Day Three

- 1. Read Exodus 10:12-13. What did the LORD say to Moses? What did Moses do? What was the result?

- 2. Read Exodus 10:14-15. What resulted from the plague of locusts?

Day Four

- 1. Read Exodus 10:16-18. How did Pharaoh respond to this plague? What did he do? What did he say to Moses and Aaron? What did he ask of them? How did they respond?

- 2. Read Exodus 10:19-20. What did the LORD do in response to Moses' and Aaron's pleas? What did the LORD do to Pharaoh? What did Pharaoh do after this?

Discuss the Text!

Week 22 Discussion: Words of Wisdom

The servants of Pharaoh in Exodus 10:7 implore him to reconsider his stronghold over the Israelites in light of the increasing damage that came from plague after plague. Though their hearts were hardened like Pharaoh's (Ex. 10:1), they were still able to see reason and use wisdom. Pharaoh, however, would not hear it. Talk as a group about the importance of the voice of wisdom in your life, especially when you are in error, and the importance of being a voice of wisdom for others as well.

1. Icebreaker: What's the best practical advice you've received lately?
2. Has anyone ever given you wisdom when you are in error? How did you respond?
3. Is it easy to hear wisdom when you are in error? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever been the voice of wisdom for someone else who was in error? How did they respond?
5. Through what medium do you hear wisdom most clearly (e.g. a friend, a sermon, a podcast, personal study, etc.)?
6. How does being in church help increase your chances of hearing wisdom more regularly? How does missing church decrease your chances of hearing wisdom more regularly?

Takeaways:

1. The eighth plague of locusts is a follow-up plague from the seventh plague of hail.
2. Pharaoh again will not listen to Moses and Aaron, even though his servants ask him to reconsider.
3. Egypt is further destroyed by the locusts, leading Pharaoh to beg for forgiveness.
4. Pharaoh's heart is hardened yet again and he still does not let the Israelites go.