

The Eighth Plague: Locusts

Exodus 10:1-20

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April 29, 2001

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus 10. We come tonight to the eighth of the ten plagues. As we do, you know that we are already in the last triad. There are three three's in the plagues. Plagues one through three, four through six, and seven through nine bear certain similarities. And seem to be attached in three distinctive cycles. So this is the middle of the last cycle of plagues. We've already observed an intensification of the plagues, and especially in the seventh plague, we saw the reintroduction of Aaron's staff into the manifestation of God's power in the plague, used to bring the plague upon. We'll see the same thing again in this plague tonight. And let's give attention then to God's Holy Word. Exodus, chapter 10, beginning in verse 1:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants. That I may perform these signs of mine among them. And that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I made a mockery of the Egyptians. And how I performed my signs among them. That you may know that I am the Lord. And 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, that they may serve Me. For if you refuse to let My people go, behold tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory, and they shall cover the surface of the land so that no one shall be able to see the land. They shall also eat the rest of what has escaped, what is left to you from the hail, and they shall eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field. Then your houses shall be filled, and the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians, something which neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen from the day they came upon the earth until this day." And he turned and went out from Pharaoh. And Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" So, Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, serve the Lord your God. Who are the ones that are going?" And Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old, with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks, with our

flocks and our hers, we will go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord." Then he said to them, "Thus may the Lord be with you if I ever let you, and your little ones go. Take heed, for evil is in your mind. Not so! Go now, the men among you and serve the Lord, for that is what you desire." So they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat up every plant of the land, even all that the hail has left." So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night and when it was morning the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt. They were very numerous. There had never been so many locusts, nor would there so many again. For they covered the surface of the whole land so that the land was darkened. And they ate every plant of the land, and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus, nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now, therefore, please forgive my sin only this once and make supplication to the Lord your God that He would only remove this death from me." And he went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the Lord. And so the Lord shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.

Amen, this is God's Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Oh Lord, You are awesome and we are before Your awesome throne. You reveal yourself in Your word, and we pray that we would set aside our own preconceptions, and that we would be instructed by You as to who You are. At the same time we pray that we would respond in such a way that we humble ourselves before You, that we acknowledge Your rule, and that we seek to do Your bidding while praising You for Your sovereign mercy. All these things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

We've emphasized over and over that the Exodus is a contest between God and Pharaoh. Pharaoh who was thought to be incarnation of Ra, the god of the sun, the chief god of Egyptians verses the one true god, the god of the Hebrews. We knew that this contest was going to ensue from the very beginning of the book, and we certainly knew that it was going to take place when Pharaoh said, "I don't even know who your God is. What was his name? I've never heard it before." We knew then that God was going to vindicate His name. And it's interesting that in this passage we have, in the first two verses a pause, in which yet another theological introduction is given to the plague.

You remember in the seventh plague, Moses pauses and gives a long theological introduction to the plague. Well now, we have another introduction. It's much shorter. It's only two verses, but it is packed full of truth, because once again Moses is explaining to you what is happening in the Exodus, and especially what is happening in the plagues. The main point of all this great story is that God is sovereign. God is teaching you about Himself.

The first point of application throughout this passage is: what does this passage teach me about my God? It's radically God-centered, God-focused. That doesn't mean that there aren't other legitimate applications in the passage. It just means the beginning of understanding this passage is what it teaches you about God. I'd like you to see four or five sections in this passage, and we'll see if we can get through each of these sections pointing out some of the rich things that they reveal about God.

First, if you look at verses 1 and 2, you get this introduction that I was talking about. If you then look to verses 3 through 6, you see Moses and Aaron in the court of Pharaoh delivering yet another warning. God in His mercy gives a warning to Pharaoh. The land has just been wiped out by hail. The people are recovering from a serious plague, perhaps of anthrax, which was the previous plague to the plague of hail. Now, a warning is given. This plague will really finish them off, and we'll see how in just a moment a moment. But a warning is given in God's mercy. We see that in three through six. Then, thirdly, in verses 7 through 11, we see dissent breaking out in Pharaoh's court. Now we already had hints of that back in the seventh plague. If you turn back to chapter 9, and look at verse 20, you already see some of Pharaoh's servants listening to what Moses said, despite the fact that Pharaoh himself refused to bring his servants and animals in from the field. So you have some servants listening to Moses and other servants not. Now in this plague, the dissent will be so great that Pharaoh will dare to disagree with his policy. You are seeing the sovereignty of God revealed in this way. Then in verses 12 through 15, Pharaoh having shown himself to be recalcitrant and hard-hearted, God visits the plague upon him. And then the plague of locusts is commanded and described in verses 12 through 15. And then finally, in verses 16 through 20 we see this superficial confession on Pharaoh's part and once again this plague concludes with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, as all the plagues prior to it have. So let's look at these five things together tonight and see what the Lord would teach us about Himself.

I. The purpose of the plagues and God's sovereign providence explained.

In verses 1 and 2 we have a theological introduction not simply to this plague, but really explaining every thing that is going on in the plague. We are given here basically a general framework for how to interpret what God is doing in the plagues and interestingly, Moses is directly and singularly given instruction on how to educate the generations to come in what God was teaching him and them

in this passage. The purpose of the plagues and the purpose of God's sovereign providence is explained in verses 1 and 2 so let's hear it again, it's so important. The Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of mine among them. And that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I made a mockery of the magicians and how I performed my signs upon them that you may know that I am the Lord."

This plague account, begins with an astonishing directive. Look at verse 1. "Go to Pharaoh, because I have hardened his heart. This is the worst news that any preacher could ever hear. Go to Pharaoh, he's not going to listen to a thing that you say. Go to that congregation, they're not going to listen to a thing that you say. But that's how this particular passage begins. And notice the connection, go to Pharaoh because I have hardened his heart. It is precisely because I am sovereign, and I am in control that I am sending you to Pharaoh.

Notice how God's sovereignty does not undercut Moses responsibility. Rather, it establishes Moses' responsibility. Go, precisely because I have sovereignly hardened him. By the way, that's exactly what our *Confession of Faith* says. In chapter 3, section 1. Take your hymnals out and look at page 850. It says it in exactly the same way that the Scriptures right there in Exodus, chapter 10, verse 1. On page 850, in the very opening section of the chapter on the decree, God's eternal plan, we read this. God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his free will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass. Yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." In other words God ordains it, but He's not responsible for sin, nor is the will of His creature forced, nor is there action unimportant or unreal, but it is established.

Well there you see it right here in Exodus, chapter 10, verse 1. God is sovereign. He has a decree. That decree impacts Pharaoh. Moses nevertheless is to go to God. God is not responsible for Pharaoh's sin, Pharaoh is. Moses is to go to Pharaoh, even though Pharaoh's heart is hard, and the liberty and contingency of both Moses' and Pharaoh's actions are not undercut by God's sovereignty. Here we see a beautiful example of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

Notice also in verse 1 that it's not only Pharaoh's heart that's hardened. Pharaoh and his servants. The impact of God's plan is widening in the court of Pharaoh. He is in complete control, and Moses is to there to show yet more signs.

Notice also if you look at verse 2, the going and showing is to be done in order for three reasons. First, Moses is to go and show these signs in order that the next generation may be told of the wonders of the Lord. And God says this to Moses in an amazing way. He says that, "You, (singular), may tell in the hearing of your Son (singular), and of your grandson how I made a mockery of the

Egyptians." It's as if Moses is standing in as a singular representative for the whole people of Israel. The point is, of course, that God wants all of the children of Israel to tell all their children, and all their grandchildren about the glorious wonders that He performed in the Exodus. But that's not how he says it. He says, "Moses, I'm doing this so that you will tell your son and your grandson." Moses almost stands in as a representative for the whole people of God here. You know, it's almost like he's a mediator. It's almost like he's a representative in one person for the whole of the people. Well, you know isn't that what he ends up doing in Exodus 32 and 33? And Moses is a type of Christ to come. Read II Corinthians, chapter 3: who is greater in glory than Moses as mediator for the people of God? God is even, in the way that he speaks to Moses, pointing out to us that he is the mediator which He has appointed for the people of God. At any rate, he's to go and he's to show these things in order that the next generation may know the wonders of the Lord.

Secondly, look again at verse 1, he's to go because God's glory is going to be served by the mockery of the Egyptians. Does that remind you of anything? Does that remind you a New Testament passage? Does that remind you of something that Paul once said? Why is it that God is hardening the heart of Pharaoh? Why is it that God is hardening the heart of Pharaoh and sending Moses to do wonders? Well, Paul tells you in verse 9. Turn there with me. In Romans, chapter 9, as Paul is explaining God's sovereignty and mercy he says this: "It does not depend on the man who wills, or on the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Now Paul is amplifying a quote that he has taken right out of the Exodus. In fact, it comes right from those important passages of Moses' mediation in Exodus, chapter 33. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." And then Paul explains this by appealing to the way that God dealt with Pharaoh. Look at verse 17. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up to demonstrate my power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth. So then, He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, why does He still find fault; or who resists His will, On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this, will he?'. Or does not the potter have a right over the clay to make from it the same lump, one vessel for honorable use and another for common use. What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience, vessels of wrath prepared for destruction and He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for His glory." It comes right out of Exodus 10:2. God sends Moses to show these signs to the hardened Pharaoh that His glory might be known.

And thirdly, he does it so that Israel might know that He is indeed the Lord. Israel herself still needs to come to grips with the claims of God. And so in this introduction, we are being reminded again that God is sovereign, and His

sovereign providence has specific purposes so that the generations will hear the story of God's dealings, and will love and worship Him, so that His glory would be displayed, and so that His own people would know that He is the Lord. That is the first thing that we see in this great passage.

II. God's mercy revealed in His warning.

Look at verses 3 through 6. Moses and Aaron deliver here another warning, and this is an amazing thing because this warning basically threatens that God is going to de-create, He is literally going to de-construct Egypt. Let me show you what I mean. God's basically is threatening a knockout blow here to Egypt. Moses' opening remarks in verse 3 to Pharaoh, get to the very heart of the contest of the plague stories. Pharaoh must be humbled, and the people must worship. Look at his words, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go that they might serve Me.'" So two things there: You're going to be humbled, Pharaoh, and My people are going to worship." And over and over we have seen those themes through the plague stories.

But notice especially as you look at verses 4 through 7 the nature of the threat. Egypt has already been ravaged by seven plagues. The seventh plague has wiped out much of the vegetation and crops of Egypt. If locusts come upon what is left, Egypt faces a situation of unparalleled difficulty with no way to feed the teeming multitudes that live within her bounds. God is de-creating, He's de-constructing Egypt. God is perfectly consistent in His prophetic pronouncements. The purpose of announcing this warning is to produce repentance and to show His glory, and it also entails the promise that He will bless if the repentance comes. But this particular passage is a threat for a knockout blow. We'll see that carried out in verses 12 through 15.

III. God's sovereignty displayed in the concessionary posture of Pharaoh's courtiers.

Let's look at verses 7 through 11. Dissent now breaks out in Egypt. When the courtiers hear, that having just survived hail, they are now about to face locusts, they go bananas. And they said, "Pharaoh, you have lost your mind. You are destroying the land before our eyes." The plagues are having an effect on them. But their hearts are hard. You remember God had said in verse 1 that their hearts were going to be hardened too. So they're not in a mood to give a total compromise. It's going to be a concessionary contract that they are going to attempt to negotiate in which the men go, but not the rest of the people. You know, you're going to leave the women and the children behind, because that gives some motivation for the men of Israel to come back to the land. But here God's sovereignty is displayed even in the concessionary posture of Pharaoh's

courtiers, and yet Moses will not compromise. God will share His glory and His people with no one. Compromise with the world is not an option. And so this particular plan does not work out.

IV. God 's sovereignty seen in reversing the creation provisions in judgment of Egypt.

Then if you look at verses 12 through 15, the plague of the locusts is commanded and described. Here God's sovereignty in reversing the creation provisions is seen in His judgment of Egypt. Let me give you two examples of this. What's going to happen when the locusts come into the land? Well, the land is going to be defoliated, the greenery is going to be gone, the food is going to be gone, there's going to be nothing to eat. Mass starvation and famine is going to occur. What does that remind you of? First, it reminds you of a time at the beginning of Israel's experience in Egypt when God provided for Egypt food in the time of famine through an Israelite. Now in God's judgment, He is going to remove food from Egypt, and she will starve.

But further, it reminds you of something else that you have to go all the way back to Genesis 2 to remember. In Genesis, chapter 2, you will remember that Moses tells you this. In verse 5, he says, "Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground." Now that passage is not there, as some modern commentators would like to tell you, to explain that God's processes in Genesis, chapter 1, were all ordinary and natural processes. There had to be rain in order for the trees to grow in Genesis, chapter 1. That's not what that verse is there to tell you. That verse is there to tell you that in God's creation, there is a problem. It's not a problem for God, it's a problem for us. The problem is there isn't any food. And without food, humans generally die. And, therefore, God in His mercy, creates a rich garden filled with all kinds of foods in order that man might have life sustained. What's happening in Exodus, chapter 10 is that God is now removing that creational provision and blessing from Egypt. He's de-creating and deconstructing Egypt. In the judgment of God, all the blessings of creation are reversed. Now we're going to see this even more when we get to the ninth and tenth plagues. But when we get to the ninth plague and the plague of darkness, we're going to be taken back not just to Genesis 2, but to Genesis 1 and to a condition that had not existed in the world since God looked down upon it, and said, the world was formless and void and there's no provision for light, it's darkness, it's watery, it's a watery grave. And you see God in His judgment against Egypt taking away creation provision and blessing after creation provision and blessing and leaving her in a position of chaos and emptiness and torment. And that, my friends, is a picture of hell. Chaos, emptiness, darkness, uninhabitable torment. That is God's judgment, the blessings of creation are reversed.

V. God's sovereignty shown in Pharaoh's admission and subsequent dishonesty and hardening.

And then finally, if you look at verses 16 through 20. Pharaoh gives this superficial confession, but once again he lies. He's dishonest, and God hardens his heart. God's sovereignty is shown in that admission. We've said before that Pharaoh was considered to be a god, holy righteous. He was the incarnation of the god Ra. When Pharaoh died, whereas everybody else got judged, Pharaoh was supposedly immediately translated into the realm of the gods. And yet, here's Pharaoh admitting that he had been dishonest. He admitted that he had sinned. In fact, he had not only sinned against God, he had sinned against Moses. Suddenly Pharaoh is being whittled down to size, so that he's not simply a parallel with God, he's now a parallel with God's prophet Moses, and he's admitting that he had sinned against him. But it's a superficial repentance. It's like Esau's repentance. Esau didn't repent, he was remorseful, but Pharaoh's is worse because Pharaoh's repentance is strategic remorsefulness. He's only remorseful because he wants this situation to relent. And the minute that it relents, he goes right back to his former posture. But God is showing His sovereignty in all this. Pharaoh is being humbled before God, step by step, but he is refusing to bow the knee. And so God will break him in showing His sovereignty.

What do we learn from all this? Well, we learn many things, but at least we learn this. In this world, because we do not understand and we do not often get the see verse 1 and 2 of Exodus, chapter 10 for our lives. In other words, God does not usually pull back the veil and say, "Now, these are the reasons why I am doing these things, these are the four reasons why I am doing these things in your life at this time." Because that does not often happen, we often feel as if we are pawns in a world that does not make sense. And God is saying to you again, "Don't ever forget this. I am sovereign. All your enemies, I will bring them to their knees. And everything that I am doing, I am not only doing for My glory, I am doing it for your good. I am capable of being trusted." It is a wise thing to trust Me, even when you don't have a clue what is going on. If you get nothing more than that message tonight, that is enough. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, so many grind their teeth at the doctrine of Your sovereignty. We don't understand that. We wouldn't want to live in a world that was out of control of the hand of our sovereign *and merciful and compassionate and loving God. And we thank You that You are bringing the forces of evil to heal, and that You are de-constructing all those who rail against Your Son, and resist His rule. And we thank You that You are ruling all things so that they work together for the good of those whom You love, and those who are called, according to Your purpose. And we thank You, O God, that those in whom You begin a good work, You will bring it to a completion. And it is more certain that the sun shall rise that we shall be with You, and that You shall be our God, and*

that we shall be Your people. And we thank You for these things. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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