

How Long Will You Refuse To Humble Yourself?

Exodus 9-10

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Intro: A Plague Amid A Pandemic

I could not believe what I was reading. As I was preparing this sermon, I happened to open up my NewsFeed app on my phone, and one of the first articles that I saw was titled: "A Plague Amid A Pandemic: East Africa, West Asia Combat Surging Locust Outbreak."¹ In the opening paragraph, a Kenyan farmer described the scene when the skies darkened over his farm with millions of desert locusts: "It was like a storm, it was like hail. They covered everywhere... there was no sun." That was back in March and the experts were warning that the locusts will migrate this summer and cause havoc all over again threatening some of the poorest countries in the world. A swarm of insects covering 1 mile can consume as much food as 35,000 people in a single day! The article went on to say: "A perfect storm of favorable weather, poor monitoring... and challenges in getting access to resources and regions because of the coronavirus has sparked the crisis, allowing locusts to reach a scale unseen in decades, experts said." The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has killed 450 billion insects since the beginning of the year to save farmland and lives, and the World Bank is going to give \$500 million in aid. But it's a long fight and they're predicting hundreds of thousands of human deaths every day by the end of the year due to starvation.

In today's text, Exodus chapters 9-10, we return to the plagues that God is sending to Egypt as Pharaoh, the king, remains stubborn in refusing to obey God's command to stop enslaving the Hebrew people and let them leave. And we're going to see a devastating plague of locusts, as well as boils and hail and all kinds of other problems. We've already read and talked through the first four plagues, today we'll be getting through the next five, which will leave the last one, the big one, for next week. As we are studying the plagues, it's important to remember the reasons God sends them. They're not just acts of vengeance. I made up 4 E's to explain them: Expose, Establish, Encourage, and Escalate. (*Repeat*)

1) **Expose counterfeits:** The Egyptians were some of the most polytheistic people (meaning they worshiped many gods) in the ancient world. Scholars are not even sure how many gods they worshipped, perhaps as many as 80.² The plagues were directed at undermining the false gods. On the church's FB page, we posted a chart of the 10 plagues and which corresponding Egyptian gods they were direct attacks on, and I've been pointing them out as we work through the text. The true God, Yahweh, is showing His power as greater than any false god.

2) **Establish God's identity and power** – Pharaoh had asked in 5:2, "*Who is Yahweh that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?*" So God says, "*By this you shall know that I am the Lord.*" And it's not only Egypt who finds out how great God is; hundreds of year later the Philistines said, "*Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.*" (1 Samuel 4:8) They didn't get the memo that there was only one God, but they did hear the stories of the defeat of Egypt.

3) **Encourage the faithful** – The Israelites had complained that God wasn't doing anything to free them, each plague will be visual evidence of God's work.

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/plague-amid-pandemic-east-africa-west-asia-combat-surging-locust-n1231669>

² John J. Davies, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus* (Winona Lake, IN:BMH, 2011), p. 94.

4) **Escalate** – It's not so much that the plagues are cumulative in that they start small and get bigger – the first one with the Nile turning to blood is one of the worst. But they escalate because they push Pharaoh to the edge – his heart keeps getting harder but the despair must be mounting through the first 9 plagues; just as they get relief from one plague, a new one gets sent. It will all build to a climax where Pharaoh is broken and finally relents.

Rather than read through both chapters first, in the interest of time I'm just going to read each plague description by itself, skimming at times. This will not be my typical 3 point sermon either. My main idea/thesis statement is: "Just as God exposed Egypt's idols and false gods as worthless, so God still exposes our idols as worthless, and shows us the only true object of worship."

Plague 5: Pestilence Upon the Livestock (9:1-7)

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ² For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, ³ behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴ But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.'" ⁵ And the Lord set a time, saying, "Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land." ⁶ And the next day the Lord did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. ⁷ And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

All the Egyptian cattle died, none of the Israelite cattle died. Just like in the fourth plague (and going forward), God made a distinction and spared His people. I read that this pestilence was possibly mad cow disease, but that takes a while to bring its victims to death. Perhaps it was anthrax, which works much quicker. Whatever it was, it killed the animals immediately. The Egyptians had a bull god named Apis and in the Egyptian city of Memphis they kept a live bull in a temple, worshipping it as a symbol of fertility. God is saying, essentially "That's the great power that you're worshipping? It took me one day to take away all your livestock and prove that gods fashioned after beasts of burden are worthless." It's most likely that when the Israelites made the golden calf in the wilderness that they were modeling it after the gods of Egypt, despite God's defeating them here.³

Plague 6: Boils (9:8-12)

⁸ And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹ It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt." ¹⁰ So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. ¹¹ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. ¹² But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

The soot that Moses threw in the air became fine dust that turned into boils on all the Egyptians, including the magicians, who never appear again in the story. John Currid points out the irony of the soot that Moses threw into the air: "The type of furnace spoken of here was probably a kiln for burning bricks. The furnace, then, was a symbol of the oppression of the Hebrews... thus the very soot made by the enslaved people was now to inflict punishment on their oppressors."⁴

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), p. 263.

⁴ John Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus, Volume 1* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press USA, 2000), p. 196.

Additionally, the Egyptians had various gods - like the goddess Sekhmet who was supposed to protect them from disease and Imhotep, the god of medicine – that were useless as they suffered from boils and sores that broke out all over their skin.

There's a Psalm of David that describes some time in his life when he was sick or wounded or diseased: Psalm 38:5, 13-14 – *“My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness... But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear... I have become like a man who does not hear”*? That sounds like a description of Pharaoh, where verse 12 says that God hardened his heart and he did not listen despite being covered in sores. But David goes on to say in v. 18 – *“I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin... Do not forsake me, O Lord! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation.”* David did what Pharaoh was unwilling to do: repent and turn to the Lord for deliverance and salvation.

Plague 7: Hail (9:13-35)

¹³ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. ¹⁵ For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶ But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. ¹⁷ You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. ¹⁸ Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.

-we're going to skip down to v. 27; essentially the hail came with thunder and lightning striking everything that was in the field; but again, only on the Egyptians not the Israelites-

²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.²⁸ Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.”

-skip to verse 33

³³ So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the Lord, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. ³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. ³⁵ So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

Have you ever been stuck in a hail storm? My freshman year of college, we had such a bad hail storm that every car that was not in the parking garage had dents and broken windows. It was the first time I had encountered what they called “golf ball sized hail.” Tremendously destructive. Imagine this hail coming while you were out in the fields. “Nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide” if you hadn't already sought shelter.

Pharaoh actually expresses remorse– he calls himself a sinner! He and his people are wicked, the Lord is righteous. But there's a difference between remorse and repentance, and this is not true, lasting repentance. Remorse is sadness in the face of suffering, and can be a helpful step towards repentance. But listen to how James Bruckner describes this: Pharaoh “sounds like he is convinced and convicted, and yet the words “in the right” and “in the wrong” are legal admissions, not moral confessions. In spite of the penitent words, his admission of guilt was under duress... he simply

wanted the... storm to stop.”⁵ Moses sees through it: “*I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God.*” He ends that plague as requested, but he knows Pharaoh won’t let the people go, as he continues the predictable cycle of breaking his promises.

Plague 8: Locusts (10:1-20) – we’ll start at verse 3

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.

(So God sent the locusts and they ate every plant and tree– skip to v. 16)

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.

After Moses announced this plague but before the Lord sent it, Pharaoh’s servants begged him (v. 7), “Just let them go! Egypt is being destroyed.” So Pharaoh brought the brothers in and started his bargaining again: “If I let you go, who would that include?” Moses says, “Everybody.” “No chance, just the men. Get out!” So God sent the locusts; they covered the earth so completely that the land was darkened. And they devoured everything left over after the hail damage.

The Egyptian gods Min, (god of crops), Nepri (god of grain), and Anubis (guardian of the fields)⁶ were shown to be impotent in the face of God’s plans of destruction. And Pharaoh pretended to repent again but once more does not let the Israelites go after God took the locusts away.

Plague 9: Darkness (10:21-29)

²¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” ²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. ²³ They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived. ²⁴ Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, “Go, serve the Lord; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.” ²⁵ But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. ²⁶ Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof

⁵ James K. Bruckner, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp. 91-92.

⁶ Ryken, p. 280.

shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there.”²⁷ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.”²⁹ Moses said, “As you say! I will not see your face again.”

The Egyptian sun god's name was Ra and Pharaoh believed that he was the embodiment of that god. After God's assaults on the Nile gods and all of the gods “protecting” the Egyptian people and their animals, “this is the crowning insult for Pharaoh,” that God could make the sun go away for three days.⁷ This is a darkness that could be felt, that even lighting lanterns and fires does not push back against it much. Of course, the Israelites have light. How stark a picture that God's people live in the light while God's enemies grope around in the dark. Proverbs 4:19a says, “*the way of the wicked is like deep darkness.*”

So Pharaoh says that all the Hebrew people can go but they have to leave their flocks and herds behind. This is giving away more at the bargaining table: before it was “you can worship without leaving town,” then it was “just the men can go,” now it's “just the humans can leave, not the animals.” But Moses says, no, we're taking those too. So Pharaoh is so angry that Moses won't take his deal that he just spits out, “*Get away from me! Next time I see you, you'll die.*” And Moses says, “As you wish.”

[I had another section in the first draft of the sermon that I took out because it made everything too long, so I'll just mention it as an extra-credit assignment. You can go look it up sometime this week for bonus points: Read Revelation chapter 16 where it lists all of the plagues that the angels unleash on the earth and write down all of the overlapping plagues that you find in Exodus. God is drawing attention to the fact that He is going to have some judgments at the end of time that will rival the plagues of Egypt.]

But there is another time of judgment in the New Testament that the 9th plague reminds me of. These 3 days of darkness remind me of when God darkened the skies at a crucial time in the life of Israel. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, Matthew 27:45 records that a darkness covered the land in the middle of the day. And on the cross, all of the judgment of God, you could say the plagues of God's wrath, came down on Jesus. And He was in the tomb for 3 days. 3 days that, even if they weren't literally dark in the sky, were dark for His followers. But that darkness told the same story as the darkness in Egypt: that Yahweh is the only true God and that He is going to save His people. Jesus was enveloped in darkness for 3 days so that we could have the light of God's love. He took on all the darkness of death that we deserved. And then God raised Him from the dead and set Him at His right hand.

So we are invited to walk in the light of God's love and Christ's forgiveness. Jesus tells us rather succinctly: “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (John 8:12). And 1 John 1:7 says, “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*” The Gospel, the good news, is that Jesus endured the darkness and God's judgment so that we don't have to. We can choose to endure God's wrath and darkness as His enemies, or we can be God's people living in the light, having the darkness and judgment taken out on our substitute. 1 Peter 2:10 says that He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

⁷ Maxie Dunnam, *Exodus* (Waco: Word, 1987), p. 126.

Conclusion:

Romans 1 talks about the natural state of human beings and how they suppress the truth about God and turn to every other thing they can, including worship idols: *“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”* (Romans 1:21-23)

There is irony that the Egyptians were tortured by the very things they had turned into gods to worship. You’ve got a frog god? Frogs will fill every room and every space in the land and make life unpleasant. You worship a bull? All your livestock will get a pestilence and die. You’ve got a sun god? It’s not going to shine for 3 days and you’ll stumble around in darkness. God had to humiliate Egypt’s gods one by one. Your idols may not serve you like you think they will. The things you run to for pleasure may give you peace, happiness, and satisfaction for a time. But they will not fulfill you, and they may just enslave you and bring you pain. Just like the false gods of Egypt

Our idols, our false gods backfire on us as well. Have you ever thought about that? I know that we don’t have little carvings in our houses that we bow down to, but we have idols. Any idol that you bow down to you give power over you. When you set your heart on another person – this or that famous person becomes your latest obsession, you give them the power to disappoint you. When you think you need another person to love you to feel whole, you give them the power to crush you and emotional destroy you. I bow my knee to the idol foot-Baal ever fall and pledge my absolute loyalty to the Pittsburgh Steelers; and I get crushed when they lose. If your idol is your looks, you will obsess over every flaw you think you have and every extra pound that you gain.

Many of the idols that we bow down to can snare us in addiction. Pornography is such a trap; it’s often presented as so harmless, a victimless crime, right? But not only does it destroy the lives of the people who are involved in making the pictures or videos, but it traps the people who watch it. It literally rewires your brain and makes true relationships even harder. Gambling is similar. We think that we can just dip our toes and have a little fun; but gambling ends up hooking a person who keeps thinking that they’ll win the next hand or the next bet. And before they know it they’ve lost their whole paycheck or their whole house. Satan is no dummy – he makes these incredibly destructive things in our lives look fun and harmless.

What are the idols in your life that are so important to you that you would do anything to get them? Have you set your sights on a particular job or level of wealth that you are willing to do anything? Who are you trying to model your life after? Why are you trying to impress and please people? I remember back in my youth ministry days, the Kelly Clarkson song “My Life Would Suck Without You” had just come out. I told my students to put a blank where the word “you” is and then fill it in with whatever they thought would ruin their lives if they didn’t have it. Because that’s a real good indication of what your idols are.

God Himself is the only true object of worship. He is the only one who truly satisfies us. He is our Creator, having designed our hearts and lives to be most fully satisfied in Him. The irony of us running after all of these things that we think will satisfy us is that God stands before us and says, “I am the only One who will truly satisfy you. False gods and idols will always let you down. Come to me and I will give you abundant and eternal life.” Amen.