

Exodus 10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 March 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Exodus chapter 10 Then the Lord said to Moses, Go into Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, 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.

So Moses and Aaron went into 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 country, 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, 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. 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?

[1 : 1 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? Moses said, We will go with our young and our old.

We will go with our sons and our daughters, and with our flocks and herds. For we must hold a feast to the Lord. But he said to them, The Lord be with you if I ever let you and your little ones go.

Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. 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.

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.

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.

[2 : 1 6] 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 has never been before, nor ever will be again.

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 had been left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore forgive my sin, please only this once, and plead with the Lord your God only to remove this death from me.

So he went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the Lord. 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.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go. 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.

[3 : 2 5] So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. 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. 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.

But Moses said, You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also must go with us. Not a hoof 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.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. 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.

Moses said, As you say, I will not see your face again. In Exodus chapter 10, we reach the final two plagues in the third cycle of the plagues.

[4 : 32] The eighth and the ninth. The plague of the locusts, and the plague of the darkness. At this point, the plagues have a greater finality to them. They are no longer warnings to Pharaoh, so much as they are final judgments, destruction being brought upon the land.

God now declares that he is doing this so that the Israelites will recount his signs performed upon the Egyptians in the future to their sons and their grandsons, so that they might know that he is the Lord as they look back upon his humiliation of the Egyptians and their power.

A plague of locusts could completely ravage a region, devouring everything in sight. And the locusts that come here would completely cover the eye of the land, so that no one would be able to see the land.

They darken the entire surface of the land. There's playing upon the notion of sight here, covering the eye of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They're darkening the land.

The failure of sight seems to be particularly important in these final two plagues of this cycle. At this point, Pharaoh's courtiers get involved and try to get Pharaoh to compromise and negotiate with Moses and Aaron.

[5 : 40] They see that the land of Egypt is being completely destroyed as a result of the stubbornness of Pharaoh and they want to try and get some sort of deal negotiated.

Pharaoh wants to ensure that the Israelites return and for this purpose, he wants the children and the women to stay behind because if they stay behind, then they can be sure that the Israelite men will come back for them.

They're hostages to some degree. The locusts are brought in by a strong east wind. They settle on the entire land of Egypt and consume all of its vegetation, darkening the whole land.

Again, Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron to ask them to plead for the removal of the locusts. He describes the locusts as this death. It is something that has completely ravaged the land and is associated in Pharaoh's mind with death itself.

God removes the locusts from the land at Moses' request and there's not a single one left. They're blown away by a strong sea wind and blown into the Red Sea.

[6 : 45] But then the Lord strengthens the heart of Pharaoh once more. So once more, when the pressure is off, he resists the command to let the people go. We are told that not a single locust remained in all the land of Egypt.

And as we look through this plague, we can probably recognise some similarities with other things in the story of the Exodus. Not least the experience of Israel.

We've first encountered a strong east wind with the blighting east wind in the dream of Pharaoh concerning the years of famine. It was that wind that brought in the Israelites to the land and they multiplied and grew strong within the land, covering the whole surface of the land.

The locusts are described as the Abbe and that is language that maybe plays upon the description of God's multiplication of the people in places like Genesis chapter 22 verse 17.

And when the locusts are removed, they are removed by a wind to the Red Sea. Perhaps we are to see in all of this that the locusts represent the people of Israel.

[7 : 49] They are going to be removed from the land, but they're going to be removed at Pharaoh's request. The locusts devouring the land is just one of 10 plagues, but the Israelites devouring the land, as long as they're not being sent away, is the whole story of the plagues.

This is something that Pharaoh needs to deal with if the locusts of Israel are supposed to go. Now comparing Israel to locusts, in part, I think, arises from the Egyptians' own conception of the Israelites.

They think of the Israelites as insects that devour the land, that multiply in swarms. They think of them as vermin, like the frogs, and all these sorts of creatures that are undesirable and destructive. They're also like flies that cause defilement. And until the Egyptians will send the Israelites out, they will be afflicted by these creatures, these creatures that represent what they regard the Israelites to be.

And when they finally send out the Israelites, they'll find they're blown into the Red Sea. There's a strong wind that enables them to cross the sea, and they never see them again.

[8 : 56] They're completely removed. There's not one left in the land. And so maybe we're supposed to see Israel within this. But there's another way of seeing it. We could also see it as representing the Egyptians themselves.

They are, as a result of their own unfaithfulness, destroying their land. It's being absolutely ravaged because of their sin. And they will ultimately be blown into the Red Sea, and they'll all drown there. That is going to be their fate. And the presence of the wind in the opening up of the sea and then the closing of the sea suggests maybe that there is such a connection here.

We might also notice that when the Egyptians are destroyed, in chapter 14, verse 28, we are told that not one of them remained. So there's a similarity between the Israelites and the locusts, but also some similarities between the Egyptians and the locusts.

The plague that follows is a plague of darkness. Now this doesn't seem to have caused much destruction, but symbolically it was incredibly powerful, turning the lights off over the entirety of Egypt, a victory against the greatest god of all in the Pantheon, the god that represented the sun itself, and his victory over darkness, now being repealed.

[10 : 10] This is a return to the state of the original creation before light was created. And in that respect, it's the completion of a decreation process, an event of devastating symbolic import.

This plague was almost certainly the result of a great sandstorm, that the darkness could be felt, would be all these different particles and other things in the air that made the darkness itself tangible.

It lasted for three days, once again three days appearing within the stories of Genesis and Exodus. We've seen this number occurring on a number of occasions to this point, and it seems to be a number of some significance.

Three days on the journey to Mount Moriah, three days before the chief baker and the chief cupbearer would be restored to office or killed, three days the brothers were placed in prison, and three days was also the period of time that they asked to travel into the wilderness.

So there seems to be, first of all, a significant number here, three days, but beyond that more general significance, there's the more particular significance of the way that it parallels the three days that they had requested.

[11 : 21] As they had asked to worship the Lord, and that had been denied, now there will be three days in which the heavens themselves are blocked out. They have no communion with their great God.

Perhaps there's some sort of poetic justice in this particular judgment. Pharaoh summons Moses at this point, and he says that they can go and serve the Lord.

They just have to leave their livestock behind. He's made a great concession at this point. He's going to allow them to take the women and the children. They just have to leave the livestock. But Moses refuses.

They have to take the livestock with them. And indeed, Pharaoh has to give them sacrifices to take too. It's not enough that Pharaoh will allow them to take their own livestock. They have to take some livestock of the Egyptians as well.

But God strengthens Pharaoh's heart once more, and he will not let them go. And then, Pharaoh dismisses them completely. Pharaoh is not going to allow them to see his face again.

[12 : 20] And Moses confirms that this will indeed be the case. Pharaoh might think that this is some sort of judgment against Moses. But really, the fact that Moses will no longer come to him with warnings is a sign of judgment upon him, the finality of that judgment.

No longer will there be a heads up that God is about to judge. Rather, the great judgment to come will fall, and it will be catastrophic and final, and Pharaoh will not be prepared for it.

A question to consider. There is an event in the New Testament that closely parallels the plague of darkness. What event is that, and how can we fill out the significance of the parallels between

them?

