

# Exodus 10:1-20

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*In the eighth plague, the LORD used that which was (and still is) a scourge to the Egyptians and others to this day – locusts. These insects were (and still are) voracious eaters of any plant life that they can find.*

The account of the eighth plague has the following outline:

- *The LORD's Instructions to Moses (10:1-6)*
- *Moses Confronts Pharaoh (10:7-11)*
- *The Locusts Destroy Egypt (10:12-15)*
- *Pharaoh is humbled and hardened (10:16-20)*

The account of the eighth plague begins the same way as the previous ones – *Then the Lord said to Moses (7:14; 8:1, 16, 20; 9:1, 8, 13)*. Here in verses 1 – 2, though, the LORD commanded Moses to *go to Pharaoh*. There is no recounting of the LORD's message that Moses was supposed to relay to Pharaoh, although we find out what it was when Moses speaks to Pharaoh. The LORD states His reasons for the plagues. To begin with, He said *I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants*. The hardening had two purposes. The first one was in order *that I may perform these signs of Mine among them*, that is, the Egyptians. The LORD in His grace wanted the Egyptians to believe in Him and fear Him instead of worshipping and fearing their pagan gods and goddesses.

The second reason for the LORD using the plagues was directed toward the Israelites. The LORD wanted them to *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*. Israel also needed to be taught that the LORD was the all-powerful sovereign God over all creation and that no other god was to be worshipped either along side of Him or instead of Him.

It is interesting that God says He *made a mockery of the Egyptians*. The plagues each mock various Egyptian gods. The Egyptian gods are worshipped by the Egyptians, but really they are powers to be manipulated. God demonstrates through the plagues that they are impotent compared to God. The pride of Egyptians to get their way and the pride of Pharaoh to have

his way are both repudiated through mockery. The Egyptian gods are impotent to reign over their supposed sphere of power. The supposedly divine Pharaoh is impotent to reign over Egypt. The LORD God reigns.

We know from numerous passages that the Egyptian lifestyle was warped in many ways. Slavery was forced on the Hebrews based on their race. Their children were ordered to be killed, so infanticide was condoned. Egypt was full of incest and child abuse, as seen in [Leviticus 18](#). God knows what is best for humanity, and seeks them to follow the way that is best. He is giving the Egyptians the offer of a better way by smashing their confidence in themselves and their malleable gods.

Having received this word from the LORD, verses 3 – 6 record what happened when *Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh*. Their message began when they *said to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews*. This once again told Pharaoh the source of the message – it was not something Moses and Aaron were saying, it was the LORD of the Hebrews. The first part of the message is in the form of a question – *How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?* To ask Pharaoh, a self-appointed god, to humble himself before the God of his servants was bold indeed. Pharaoh probably thought that the God of the Hebrews was not all that powerful because, after all, He did not (or could not) prevent the Hebrews from becoming slaves to the Egyptians. This also implied that the Egyptian deities were more powerful. So, for Pharaoh to humble himself before God was unthinkable. But the LORD repeated His command to Pharaoh to *let My people go, that they may serve Me*.

Verses 4 – 6 contain the LORD's warning if Pharaoh does not comply with His commands. *For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory*. As in several prior plagues (8:10, 23; 9:5, 18), this plague was to commence the next day if Pharaoh disobeyed. This seems to be an act of God's grace to Pharaoh. He could have demanded that Pharaoh respond immediately or suffer the consequences, but He allowed Pharaoh time to think about it and make plans.

The result of disobedience in this plague was that the LORD would bring "locusts" to the land of Egypt. Locust swarms were (and still are) dreaded by people living in many parts of the world. They are very destructive to plant life, eating the green parts of every plant they find and even tree bark. This swarm was going to be unprecedented, because *they shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land*. The LORD said that the land-covering locusts *will also eat the rest of what has escaped*, that is, that which

had not been ruined by previous plagues, meaning *what is left to you from the hail—and they will eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field*. In other words, all plant life, even trees, that were not ruined previously would be destroyed in this plague. Thus, in light of all the plant life being consumed by the locusts, the Egyptian people would be in danger of starvation. On top of that, their economy would be ruined.

The locusts would not only affect plant life, they would also make the daily life of the Egyptians miserable. This would be true because their *houses shall be filled and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians*. The plague was going to be the worst locust swarm in recent history, that it was *something which neither your fathers nor you grandfathers have seen, from the day that they came upon the earth until this day*. Instead of waiting for Pharaoh's response as in previous plagues, Moses *turned and went out from Pharaoh*. There was no conversation or negotiation in this plague as in previous plagues, just a pronouncement of what was going to happen if Pharaoh remained stubborn.

In response to Moses' message, *Pharaoh's servants said to him* in verses 7 – 11, *how long will this man be a snare to us?* To ask "how long" was similar to Moses' question in verse 3. By asking this they seem to be regarding Pharaoh's obstinacy as being irrational at this point. Their advice was somewhat of a compromise. *Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God* seems to imply that the women and children would not be allowed to leave. The idea seems to be to let the men go into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD, but leave behind their women and children as hostages, security to force them to return. Pharaoh's servants tried to open his eyes to the reality by asking him another question – *Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?* The servants were trying to open Pharaoh's eyes that these plagues performed by the LORD were devastating Egypt.

Pharaoh was now ready to respond to Moses' demand, which he did in verses 8-11. 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?"* The reason for asking who would go with Moses to worship the LORD might have been to give himself a reason to deny Moses' request. In his response, *Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord*. In other words, Moses said that every Hebrew man, woman, and child along with their belongings were going to leave Egypt.

This obviously was not what Pharaoh was willing to accept, because *Then he said to them, "Thus may the Lord be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind.* Pharaoh was giving a warning to Moses here. Pharaoh knew that allowing the Israelites to leave to serve the Lord meant that his slaves would not return.

By saying *not so*, Pharaoh is denying Moses' demand that all of the Israelites should leave Egypt to go and sacrifice to the LORD. He then uses the compromise suggested by his servants earlier in verse 7, saying *go now, the men among you, and serve the Lord, for that is what you desire.* Having given his decision, *they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.* This would assure the return. The Hebrew word for "men" is literally "the strong men" and was used here to emphasize to Moses that only males would be allowed to leave. He would keep the women and children essentially as hostages to make sure the men returned.

Verses 12-15 describe the implementation of the plague. To initiate it, *the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt and eat every plant of the land, even all that the hail has left."*

In obedience, *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.* In Egypt, the prevailing winds were from the south, and the locusts that infested Egypt from time to time came from what is now known as Sudan, south of Egypt. For the locusts to come from the east was extremely unusual. An east wind was a desert wind that normally dried up an area and was often used by the LORD for judgment ([Job 27:21](#), [Isaiah 27:8](#), [Jeremiah 18:17](#), [Ezekiel 27:26](#), [Hosea 13:15](#)) but could also be used for deliverance ([Exodus 15:2](#)). In this case, the east wind brought judgment in the form of innumerable locusts.

As the LORD promised, *the locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt.* There was no place in Egypt that was not affected by the locusts, because *they were very numerous.* In fact, *there had never been so many locusts, nor would there be so many again.* The infestation was so comprehensive that *they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened.* Not only did they cover everything, they also ate everything, for *they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left.* The result of the plague of locusts was that *nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt.*

*Then Pharaoh* in verses 16 – 17, having seen the utter devastation of his country by the locusts, *hurriedly called for* (literally “hastened to call for”) *Moses and Aaron*. When they arrived, he expressed complete repentance – *I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you*. Even though Pharaoh used stronger terms in this confession, this will turn out the same as his last repentance. He isn’t actually sorry for his actions, he is sorry he is suffering, and wants the suffering to cease.

Pharaoh then pleads for Moses to *please forgive my sin only this once*. The phrase translated “only this once” literally means “only the time” and might imply the meaning of “this one last time.” This could possibly suggest that Pharaoh was promising that his stubbornness would not happen again. On this basis, Pharaoh asked Moses to *make supplication to the Lord your God, that He would only remove this death from me*. Pharaoh called the locust plague “this death,” implying that the locusts caused enough damage or people to die.

Moses then *went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the Lord*. In His gracious response, *the Lord shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea*. The Red Sea lies east of the land of Egypt, so a “very strong west wind” would drive the locusts to a place outside its borders. Miraculously, *not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt*, which was yet more concrete evidence that only a God who is complete control of nature could have caused this to happen.

As in the plague of boils (9:12), *the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart*, causing him to remain obstinate and stubborn. The result was the same as the previous plagues in that *he did not let the sons of Israel go*.

This plague demonstrated again that the LORD is sovereign over insects, in this case locusts. It also showed that He is in absolute control over the environment. He can direct the winds to come from the east or the west. Again, the Egyptian sky goddess Nut and Osiris, gods of crops and fertility were shown to be unable to do anything to prevent this devastation to Egypt.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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.”

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. <sup>5</sup> They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They will also eat the rest of what has escaped—what is left to you from the hail—and they will eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field. <sup>6</sup> 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 that they came upon the earth until this day.’” And he turned and went out from Pharaoh. <sup>7</sup> 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?”<sup>8</sup> 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?” <sup>9</sup> Moses said, “We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.” <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Thus may the Lord be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt and eat every plant of the land, *even* all that the hail has left.” <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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 be so *many* again. <sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God and

against you. <sup>17</sup> 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.”<sup>18</sup> He went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the Lord. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.