

UNIT 18: THE EIGHTH BLOW THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS (Exodus 10:1-20)

INTRODUCTION

Text and Textual Notes¹

10:1 Yahweh said² to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, in order that I might display³ these my signs before him,⁴ **10:2** in order that⁵ you might tell⁶ your son, and your grandson how I

¹ Egyptians dreaded locusts like every other ancient civilization. They had particular gods to whom they looked for help in such catastrophes. The locust-scaring deities of Greece and Asia were probably looked to in Egypt as well (especially in view of the origins in Egypt of so many of those religious ideas). But Yahweh, who gathers the winds in His fists, gathers the locusts together to plague Egypt severely.

The announcement of the plague falls into the now-familiar pattern. God tells Moses to go and speak to Pharaoh, but reminds him that He has hardened his heart. Yahweh explains that He has done this so that He might show his power, that they might declare His name from generation to generation. This point is stressed so often that it must not be minimized. God was laying the foundation of the faith for Israel--the sovereignty of Yahweh.

² Literally, “and Yahweh said”

³ The verb is *shiti*, “I have put”; it is used here as a synonym for the verb *sim*. The expression means that Yahweh set or placed the signs in his midst.

⁴ Literally, “in his midst”

⁵ Literally, “and in order that”

⁶ The expression is unusual: *t^esapper b^e’ozne*, “[that] you may declare in the ears of.” The clause explains an additional reason for God’s hardening the heart of Pharaoh, namely, that they can tell (final imperfect showing purpose) their children of God’s great wonders. The expression though is highly poetic, and intense—like Psalm 44:1, which says, “we have heard with our ears.” The emphasis would be on the clear teaching, orally, from one generation to another.

made a fool⁷ of Egypt, and about⁸ my signs that I displayed⁹ among them, and in order that you might know¹⁰ that I am Yahweh.”

10:3 So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse¹¹ to humble yourself before me?’¹² Release My people that they may serve Me. **10:4** But if you refuse to release my people, I am going to bring¹³ locusts¹⁴ into your region¹⁵ tomorrow.

⁷ The verb *hith'allalti*) is a bold anthropomorphism. The word means to occupy oneself at another's expense, to toy with someone, which may be paraphrased with “mock.” The whole point is that God is shaming and disgracing Egypt, making them look foolish in their arrogance and stubbornness (Kaiser, pp. 366,7). Some prefer to translate it as “I have dealt ruthlessly” with Egypt (see Cassuto, p. 123).

⁸ “about” is supplied to clarify this as another object of the verb “declare.”

⁹ Literally, “put” or “placed”

¹⁰ The form is the perfect tense with the *waw* consecutive, *wida'tem*, “that you might know.” This provides another purpose for God's dealings with Egypt in the way that He was doing. The form is equal to the imperfect tense with the *waw* prefixed; it thus parallels the final imperfect that began verse 2—“that you might tell.”

¹¹ The verb in this case is *me'anta*, a *piel* perfect form. After “how long,” the form should be classified as present perfect, for it describes actions and conditions begun or acquired previously (long ago) but have the effects continuing. It means here, “How long have you already been refusing (and refuse still)”--which really amounts to “how long will you refuse?” (See GKC, par. 106h).

¹² The entire clause is built on the use of the infinitive construct to express the direct object of the verb--it answers the question of what Pharaoh was refusing to do. The infinitive construct of the *niphal* (note the elision of the *h* after the preposition [see GKC, par. 51 l]) is from the verb *'anah*. The verb in this stem would mean “humble oneself.” The question is somewhat rhetorical, because since God was not yet through humbling Pharaoh, he would not then humble himself. Shortly, Pharaoh would surrender his stubborn will and release Israel.

¹³ The word *hin'ni* before the active participle *mebi'* is the imminent future construction again: “I am about to bring” or “I am going to bring”--precisely, “here I am bringing.”

¹⁴ This is one of the words for “locusts” in the Bible is this word *'arbeh*, which comes from the word *rabah*, “to be much, many.” The word was used for locusts because of their immense numbers.

¹⁵ Literally, “within your border”

10:5 And they will cover¹⁶ the face¹⁷ of the earth, so that one¹⁸ will not be able to see the ground; and they shall eat the remainder of what was left,¹⁹ of that which is left over²⁰ for you from the hail; and they will eat every tree which grows to you from the field. **10:6** And they will fill your houses, and the houses of your servants, and the houses of all Egypt, the likes of which²¹ neither²² your fathers have not seen or your grandfathers have seen, ever since they have been²³ upon the land until this day’.” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

10:7 Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long²⁴ will this man be a snare²⁵

¹⁶ The verbs throughout here describing the locusts are in the singular because it is a swarm or plague of locusts. This verb *w^pkissah* is a *piel* perfect with a *waw* consecutive; it carries the same future nuance then as the participle before it. The verbs “and it will eat” to follow likewise are in the perfect tense with a *waw*.

¹⁷ Literally, “eye,” an unusual expression (see v. 15; Num. 22:5, 11)

¹⁸ The text has *w^plo’ yukal lir’ot*, which reads “and he will not be able to see.” The translation must be such as to indicate that there is no expressed subject of the verb. It could, therefore, be given a passive translation: “so that it could not be seen.” And the whole clause is meant to be the result of the previous statement.

¹⁹ More precisely this would say “the remainder of what escaped” the previous plague. The locusts will devour everything, because there will not be much left from the other plagues for them to eat.

²⁰ *hanniss’eret* parallels (by apposition) and adds further emphasis to the preceding two words; it is the *niphal* participle, meaning “that which is left over.”

²¹ The relative pronoun *’asher* is occasionally used as a comparative conjunction (see GKC, par. 161b).

²² Literally, “which your fathers have not seen, nor your fathers’ father.”

²³ The Hebrew construction *miyyom heyotam*, “from the day of their being,” means “as long as they have been here.” The statement essentially says that no one could ever remember seeing a plague of locusts like this. In addition, see Brevard Childs, “A Study of the Formula, ‘Until this Day’,” *JBL* 82 (1963).

²⁴ The question of Pharaoh’s servants reflects the question of Moses--“How long?” Now the servants of Pharaoh are demanding what Moses demanded--“Release the people.” They know that the land is destroyed, and that it is Moses’ doing.

²⁵ The word “snare” is *moqesh*, a word used for catching birds. Here it is a figure for the cause of destroying Egypt.

to us? Release the people that they may serve Yahweh their God. Do you not know²⁶ that Egypt is destroyed?”

10:8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve Yahweh your God. Who all are going with you?”²⁷ **10:9** And Moses said, “We will go with our young and with our old, we will go with our sons and with our daughters, we will go with our sheep and with our cattle, because are to hold²⁸ a pilgrim feast for Yahweh.”

10:10 And he said to them, “Yahweh be with you in this way,²⁹ as I release you and your little ones.³⁰ Watch it.³¹ Trouble is facing³² you.³³ **10:11** No.³⁴ Go

²⁶ With the adverb *terem*, the imperfect tense receives a translation of present tense: “Do you not know?” (See GKC, par. 152r).

²⁷ The question is literally, “who and who are the ones going?” (*mi wami hahofkim*). Pharaoh’s answer to Moses includes this rude question, a question which was intended to say that he would control who went. It carries the force of saying, “Just who are the ones going?” The participle in this clause, then, refers to the future journey.

²⁸ Literally, “we have a pilgrim feast (*khag*) to Yahweh.”

²⁹ Pharaoh is by no means offering a blessing on them in the name of Yahweh. The meaning of his “wish” is connected to the next clause--as he is releasing them, may God help them. Driver says that the irony of these lines means that Yahweh is going to protect them as assuredly as he is going to let them go--not at all (p. 80). He is planning to keep the women and children as hostages to force the men to return. Cassuto paraphrases it this way: “May the help of your God be as far from you as I am from giving you permission to go forth with your little ones.

The real irony, Cassuto observes, is that in the final analysis he will let them go, and Yahweh will be with them (p. 125).

³⁰ The context requires that “the little ones” refer to women and children.

³¹ Literally, “see”

³² Usually translated “before,” the text has “before your face”

³³ The “evil” that is before them could refer to the evil that they are devising--the attempt to escape from Egypt. But that does not make much sense in the sentence--why would he tell them to take heed or look out about that. Cassuto’s suggestion is better. He argues that Pharaoh is saying, “Don’t push me too far.” The evil, then, would be what Pharaoh was going to do if these men kept making demands on him. This fits the fact that he had them driven out of his court immediately. There could also be here an allusion to Pharaoh’s god **Re**, the sun-deity and head of the pantheon; he would be

you men,³⁵ and serve Yahweh for that³⁶ is what you want.”³⁷ Then they were driven³⁸ out of Pharaoh’s presence.

10:12 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for³⁹ the locusts, that they may come up over the land of Egypt, and eat everything that grows⁴⁰ in the ground, all that the hail has left.” **10:13** So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and then Yahweh⁴¹ brought⁴² an east wind on the land all that day, and all night.⁴³ The morning came,⁴⁴ and the east wind had

saying that the power of his god would confront them (see Cassuto, p. 126).

³⁴ Literally, “not thus”

³⁵ The word now is *hagg^ebarim*, “the strong men.” This word is distinctly “men,” unlike the earlier word. He appears to be conceding, but he is holding hostages. Jacob observes that Pharaoh here is furious, because Moses has pre-empted his move (p. 283).

³⁶ The suffix on the sign of the accusative refers in a general sense to the idea contained in the preceding clause (see GKC, par. 135p).

³⁷ Literally, “you are seeking”

³⁸ The verb is the *piel* preterite, 3msg, meaning “and he drove them out.” But “Pharaoh” cannot be the subject of the sentence, for that is the object of the preposition. The subject is not specified, and so the verb can be made passive.

³⁹ The preposition “*b*” is unexpected here. BDB say that in this case it can only be read as “with the locusts,” meaning that the locusts were thought to be implicit in Moses’ lifting up of his hand. However, they prefer to change the preposition to “*l*” (see p. 91, Note).

⁴⁰ As mentioned before, the noun is *‘etseb*, which normally would indicate cultivated grains, but in this context seems to indicate every plant of the ground..

⁴¹ The clause begins *wa’adonay/w^eYahweh*, “Now Yahweh” In contrast to a normal sequence, this beginning focuses attention on Yahweh as the subject of the verb.

⁴² The verb *nahag* means “drive, conduct.” It is used for driving sheep, leading armies, or leading in processions. In the *piel* stem it means “lead” or “guide”; but here and in Psalm 78:26 (the wind that brought the quail) it has the idea of leading or guiding on a wind, or as Jacob says, “make a wind (Ps. 104.4) and provide a way” (p. 283).

⁴³ Literally, “and the night”

brought up⁴⁵ the locusts. **10:14** And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and settled down in all the territory⁴⁶ of Egypt. They were very without number.⁴⁷ There had been no locusts like them before, neither will there be such ever again.⁴⁸ **10:15** They covered⁴⁹ the surface of all the ground, so that the ground became dark.⁵⁰ And they ate all the vegetation of the ground, and all the fruit of the trees, which the hail had left. Nothing green remained in the trees, or in anything that grew in the fields throughout all the land of Egypt.

10:16⁵¹ Then Pharaoh quickly⁵² summoned Moses and Aaron, and he said, “I have sinned⁵³ against Yahweh your God and against you. **10:17** So now, forgive

⁴⁴ The text chose not to use ordinary circumstantial clause constructions; rather, it says literally, “the morning was, and the east wind brought the locusts.” It clearly means “when it was morning”; but the style has chosen a more abrupt beginning to the plague, as if the reader is in the experience--and at morning, the locusts are there!

⁴⁵ The verb here is a past perfect use of the tense, indicating that the locusts had arrived before the day came.

⁴⁶ Literally, “border”

⁴⁷ This is an interpretive translation. The clause simply has *kabed m^e’od*, the stative verb with the adverb--“it was very heavy.” If the plague of locusts was severe, it must mean there were vast numbers of locusts, for the plague is in the numbers.

⁴⁸ Literally, “after them”

⁴⁹ Literally, “and they covered”

⁵⁰ The verb is *wattekhsak*, “and it became dark.” The idea is that the ground was hidden because of the swarms of locusts that covered it.

⁵¹ The third part of the passage now begins, the confrontation that resulted from the onslaught of the plague. Pharaoh goes a step further here--he confesses he has sinned and adds a request for forgiveness. But his acknowledgment does not go far enough, for this is not genuine confession. Since his heart was not yet submissive, his confession was vain.

⁵² The *piel* preterite *waymaher* could be translated “and he hastened”; but here it is joined with the following infinitive construct to form the hendiadys. “He hurried to summon” means “He summoned quickly.”

⁵³ The severity of the plague prompted Pharaoh to confess his sin against Yahweh and them, now in much stronger terms than before. He also wants forgiveness--but in all probability what he wants is relief from the consequences of his sin. He pretended to convey to Moses that this was it, that he was through sinning, so he asked

my sin this time only, and pray to Yahweh your God, that He may take away from me this death⁵⁴ only.”⁵⁵ **10:18** He went out⁵⁶ from Pharaoh, and he prayed to Yahweh. **10:19** And Yahweh turned a very strong sea wind⁵⁷ and it picked up the locusts and cast them into the Sea of Reeds.⁵⁸ Not one locust remained in all the territory of Egypt. **10:20** But Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not release the Israelites.

EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

The Egyptians dreaded plagues like locusts. They had particular gods to whom they looked for help in such catastrophes. The locust-scaring deities of Greece and Asia were probably worshiped at one time in Egypt as well (especially in view of the origins in Egypt of so many religious ideas and powerful leaders). But God, who gathers the winds in his fists, gathers the locusts together to plague this nation severely.

The announcement of the plague falls into the now familiar pattern (10:1-11). God tells Moses to go and speak, but that he has hardened his heart and the heart of his servants. Here too the LORD declares that he has done this so that he might show his power, that they might declare his name from generation to generation, and that they might know that he is the LORD. This theme seems to be

for forgiveness “only this time.”

⁵⁴ “Death” is a metonymy of effect. He means the locusts--but if the locusts are left in the land it will be death to everything that grows.

⁵⁵ Pharaohs’ double emphasis on “only” is meant to deceive. He was trying to give Moses the impression that he had finally come to his senses, and that He would let the people go. But he had not intention of letting them out.

⁵⁶ Literally, “and he went out”

⁵⁷ Or, “west wind”

⁵⁸ The name *Yam Suph*, here with the directive *he’*, was traditionally rendered as the Red Sea. But that would be far too south of the Sinai peninsula. This was the waterway between Egypt and the Sinai--deep enough to drown the entire Egyptian army later (so no shallow swamp land). So God drove all the locusts to their death in the water. He will have the same power with Egypt, for He raised up this powerful empire for a purpose, but soon will drown them in the Sea. God will humble all those who refuse to submit.

presented enough times to ensure that the point of the mighty signs be not missed. it was not a game with the LORD; it was a laying of the foundation of their faith.

Verses 3-6 report the words of Moses to Pharaoh. His question, “How long will you refuse to humble yourself?” is a question he could have answered himself. God was not yet through humbling him, and so he would not humble himself before the total destruction had come. This plague would greatly hasten that day--locusts that would cover the ground and devour whatever was left. The economy of the nation would certainly collapse with this.

The response of the Egyptians is reported in verses 7-11. The servants question, “How long will this man be a snare to us?” mirrors the wording Moses used. Now the servants of Pharaoh are demanding what Moses demanded had. They know that the land is already destroyed. So Moses and Aaron are brought back. But Pharaoh wants to know who is actually going. But his words camouflage another attempted compromise. “Let the LORD be so with you, just as I (who is actually in control?) send you out.” But Pharaoh warns that evil lies before them and so only the men could go. This, of course, would be death to the dreams of a nation in the wilderness. Pharaoh would still hold the future.

The plague is brought on them (10:12-15), and then the expected confrontation ensues (10:16-20). Here too the king confesses that he has sinned, but adds a request for forgiveness for this sin this time. He wants them to take away this death (metonymy for the locusts' effect). The result is that the destructive insects are swept into their death in the Red Sea. Pharaoh's confession does not quite match genuine confession. He still refers to the LORD as “your” God. The fact that he humbles himself before Moses is not sufficient for forgiveness. He will eventually humble himself before God. Since his heart was not yet submissive, his confession was vain.

It is interesting to note here that God can raise up the destroyers (locusts) so that they do his bidding in the land of Egypt, and then drive them to their death in the Red Sea. He will have the same power with Egypt, for he raised up this powerful empire and will drown them in the Sea. Israel would hereby receive another powerful demonstration of the LORD's sovereignty. Nations and kings would be forced to recognize that their God was Lord of all the earth. God will humble those who persistently refuse to submit to his will. That humbling will inevitably lead to death.