

Exodus 10:1-20

Introduction

Last week we asked the question, “Why is God taking so long?” Why is God hardening Pharaoh’s heart and causing Pharaoh to stand in stubborn opposition to His own word? Why are we still here for round three, plague number seven?

And last week, God Himself answered this question. It’s so that Pharaoh will come to *know* by *full experience*, and be forced to confess *with his own mouth*, the supremacy and incomparability of Yahweh. God’s zeal for His own glory requires that *even the wicked* should *know* and *confess* in the end that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth.

But now this morning as we come to the eighth plague (or the second plague in round three), we’ll find a second reason that God is taking so long.

I. Exodus 10:1–2 — Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to 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 made a fool of¹ the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”

Now last week, when God was speaking *to Pharaoh*, He specifically referred to “all My *plagues*” – “For this time I will send all My *plagues* to your heart...” (9:14) But now, when He’s speaking *only to Moses*, He says, “these *signs* of mine” – “that I may show these **signs** of mine among them.” Last week we saw that God’s reason for multiplying His “*plagues*” was not redemptive, but rather that even the wicked should know and be forced to confess against their will that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. But now we see that the *same* plagues which bring God glory through the death and destruction of the Egyptians are to have a very *different* purpose *as signs* for the people of Israel.²

God says to Moses: “That you³ may *tell* in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have made a fool of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them.” Why did God harden Pharaoh’s heart and multiply His signs in Egypt? Why is God taking so long? The answer is so that fathers and mothers will have *more* to tell their children and grandchildren, so that these children and grandchildren can, in turn, have *more* to tell their children and grandchildren after them. In other words, God isn’t just giving His people a story of *deliverance* to pass on to their children, but a story of how, *in the process* of delivering His people, He made a complete and total “fool” out of the Egyptians. Here are some other suggested translations: “how I made a mockery of the Egyptians,” (NASB; NLT) “how I made a spectacle of the Egyptians,” “how I

¹ Cf. NET; NRSV; The ESV translates, “dealt harshly” (cf. HCSB; NIV; NCV), but see the comments in Stuart and Hamilton. See also Num. 22:29; Judges 19:25; 1 Sam. 31:4; Jer. 38:19; cf. 1 Sam. 6:6; 1 Chron. 10:4

² Five different Hebrew words are used only five different times to describe the nature of these events as *plagues*. (cf. Exod. 9:14; 11:1; 12:13; 1 Sam. 4:8; Amos 4:10) But eighteen different times, in six different books of the Bible, they’re actually called *signs* – using the same Hebrew word every single time. (cf. Exod. 7:3; 8:23; 10:1-2, Num. 14:22; Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 11:3; 26:8; 29:3; 34:11; Neh. 9:10; Psalm 78:43; 105:27; 135:9; Jer. 32:20-21)

³ “You” is masculine singular, addressing Moses as representative of all the Israelites (cf. the masculine plural “you” at the end of verse 2; see also Keil)

humiliated the Egyptians,” (Stuart) “how I made sport of the Egyptians,” “how I made toys of the Egyptians.” (cf. Kaiser; Durham; Hamilton; Currid; Stuart; BDB)

Why does Yahweh harden Pharaoh’s heart and prolong His plagues just so His people can see how thoroughly and how completely He humiliates the Egyptians? The answer is this: God wants His people to see in the *strongest, most vivid, most unforgettable way possible* how completely impotent and powerless is all the might of Egypt. God wants to give His people *abundant* material—*all the material they could possibly need*—for passing on to their children how ridiculously powerless were all of Egypt’s gods before His own almighty power and sovereignty. That’s *why* God hardens Pharaoh’s heart. That’s *why* God is taking so long.

“That you may know that I am the LORD.” This time the purpose is not that Pharaoh or all the Egyptians may “*know*,” but “that *you* [the people of Israel]⁴ may *know* that I am the LORD.” This “knowing” of the people of Israel is to be a very different thing from the “knowing” of Pharaoh and the Egyptians that we saw last week. Pharaoh will know that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth, and he will know this to his destruction. The people of Israel will also know that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth, but they will know this to the end that they might have *life* – that they might *worship* Yahweh *as their God*, *rejoicing* in Him, and *trusting* in Him. This difference between the Egyptian “knowing” and the Israelite “knowing” was already put very simply in chapter six:

✓ Exodus 6:7 — I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD *your God*.⁵

Let’s try putting it this way: God hardens the heart of Pharaoh, multiplying His *plagues*, so the *Egyptians* will *know* and be *forced* to confess that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. But God also hardens the heart of Pharaoh, multiplying His plagues *as signs*, so that the *Israelites* will *know* and *gladly, willingly* confess that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. In every Jewish household to all generations, fathers were to tell their children these signs that Yahweh had done among the Egyptians. Not just so their children could learn of Yahweh’s love for Israel; not just so their children could know that Yahweh had redeemed them; but very specifically so that their children would see how Yahweh had made *a fool* of Egypt and all its gods. And so that in seeing *this*, their children might come to confess Yahweh—and Yahweh *alone*—as *their God* – fearing Him, trusting Him, loving Him, and obeying Him *alone*. (cf. Deut. 4:34-40)

What is the picture of God that we have in our own minds? And maybe even more telling, what is the picture of God that we are passing on to our children or to our grandchildren? Is it the God who makes a fool of the Egyptians, and a total mockery of all Egypt’s gods? Are we communicating to our children and grandchildren a picture of the one true God that causes them to fear Him and tremble before Him, *so that* they are also able to *trust* Him and rest secure in Him even “though the earth gives way, [and] though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea”? (Ps. 46:2) I wonder if we are not fully equipping our children to live faithfully and courageously in this world because we are giving them only half the picture. We tell them about

⁴ The “you” here is masculine plural

⁵ Cf. Exod. 16:12; 29:45–46; 31:13; 1 Kings 20:13, 28; Josh. 4:24; Joel 2:27; 3:17

a God who loves and redeems, but how often do we tell them about a God who, *in the process* of redeeming Israel, makes a “toy” of Pharaoh, and a mockery of all the “gods” of Egypt? What a marvelous thing to be able to tell our children! How *big* is the picture of God that we are passing on to the next generation? And what does this say about our own understanding of who Yahweh is?

Let’s imagine a father recounting the story of the eighth plague to his children:

II. Exodus 10:3–6 — 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. 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.

Remember that in the last plague, “The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field.” (9:25) The only crops not destroyed were the wheat and the emmer because they were late in coming up. (cf. 9:31-32) But Yahweh was only saving the last two crops for the next plague, the plague of locusts.

Now we already know that Egypt worshiped a whole multitude of different gods. And we’ve already seen how some of the plagues have singled out specific gods to make a mockery of them and show how powerless they really are. In this plague, it’s possible that Yahweh is singling out a somewhat insignificant god in Egypt called Senehem. Senehem was apparently so insignificant that I couldn’t find any images of him on the internet, but I’ve read that he was pictured as having a locust for a head and he was worshiped as one who was supposed to protect the land from locusts. (Motyer; Currid) But why would God bother with mocking such a small and insignificant god in Egypt? One commentator suggests: “Perhaps protecting against grasshopper attack was the function not merely of one god, but of the gods in general. A hint of that possibility appears in [one archaeological find] which speaks of ‘a fine field, which the gods protected against grasshoppers.’” (Currid) This helps us see that not every plague has to be assigned to a *specific* god. I’ve seen charts that very neatly line up the plagues in one column, and the Egyptian gods in the other, but as I’ve read about the Egyptian gods, *sometimes* the *connections* really seem to be a stretch. The reality is that every nation’s gods were supposed to provide protection and blessing for the people. The more blessed and successful a nation was, whether in war or in peace, the more powerful that nation’s gods were supposed to be. And yet here in Exodus Yahweh attacks Egypt repeatedly, time, after time, after time, after time, and the gods of Egypt are powerless to do *anything* about it. So when God announces the tenth plague, He says:

✓ Exodus 12:12 (cf. Num. 33:3-4) — I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... and on *all* the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am Yahweh.

We might imagine a Jewish father telling his children, “The gods of Egypt could not deliver their own people from Yahweh’s hand. When he brought this supernatural plague of locusts on the Egyptians, He held up all the Egyptian gods to mockery and scorn. So then, why should we trust any other god but Yahweh, the one true God? Why should we seek after gods who are powerless to deliver from Yahweh’s hand? (cf. 2 Chron. 25:14-15; 2 Kings 16:5-16) Children, Yahweh is my God from the land of Egypt; I know no God but Him, and besides Him there is no savior.” (cf. Hos. 13:4) Are these the kinds of things that we say to our children? Are these the kinds of things that our children will grow up to say to their children?

Let’s listen in, again, as the father continues telling the story to his children:

III. Exodus 10:7–11 — 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?” 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 daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.” But he said to them, “The LORD will be with you, if ever I 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.

So for the first time, Pharaoh tries to find a way out before the plague comes. He does this because now not only have his magicians admitted defeat, but also his own servants and advisors. Everyone around the king appears ready to give in. But as we’re about to see, Yahweh isn’t finished quite yet.

Notice what Pharaoh’s servants say to him: “Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” Now I think Pharaoh’s servants are being sincere. First of all, Moses has only ever demanded that Israel be allowed to take a three day journey into the wilderness so they can sacrifice to Yahweh. (cf. 3:18; 5:1–3; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3) Notice how Pharaoh responded in the beginning:

✓ Exodus 5:17 (cf. 5:8) — You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, “Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.”

Pharaoh seems to be honestly assuming that all Moses is demanding is a brief break to go and hold a feast to Yahweh in the wilderness. And this seems to be what Pharaoh assumes throughout all the plagues even up until the time that Israel is leaving Egypt.⁶ *Because* Moses has

⁶ I think this assumption is the only way to explain Pharaoh’s fake surrender in the second plague:

Exodus 8:8 — Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

I doubt Pharaoh would have even pretended a surrender if he had in mind anything more than a brief time away.

This also seems to be the only way to explain the dialogue between Pharaoh and Moses in the fourth plague:

Exodus 8:25–29 — Pharaoh... said [to Moses and Aaron]... “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.” But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians... We must go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us.” So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go

only demanded a three-day journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Yahweh, therefore Pharaoh assumes it will only be the *men* who need to go, and maybe not even *all* the men at that. In Egypt, apparently, the worship of the gods was mainly the domain of the men. So in light of this we hear Pharaoh saying to Moses: “Go, serve the LORD your God. But which ones are to go?”⁷ Calvin writes:

“[God] was bound by no necessity to lay open his whole counsel to [Pharaoh]... God had no desire that his people should use any deceit, he only concealed from the tyrant (as He had a perfect right to do) what He was about ultimately to effect; and in this way He detected and brought to light his obstinacy.”⁸

But not only did this initial request *detect and bring to light* Pharaoh’s obstinacy, it also *paved the way* for Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened even further according to God’s sovereign plan. (cf. Enns) Let’s listen in again as a father sits with his children, and tells them the story of Yahweh’s signs that He did among the Egyptians. We could imagine him saying something like this:

very far away. Plead for me.” Then Moses said, “...Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

Cf. 10:24-26; 12:31-32; 14:5

⁷ The *reason* God told Moses to ask only for a three-day journey into the wilderness is because He knew (as none of us ever could) that Pharaoh would *never* agree even to this “small” request. (3:19) And the reason God knows this is because He Himself will harden Pharaoh’s heart. (cf. 4:21) Whatever Pharaoh may say, the fact is that Moses is explicitly clear about what God demands, and so Pharaoh is rightly held accountable only for his refusal to do exactly *as much* as God has commanded him. *If* Pharaoh had ever given permission for Israel to leave *in true sincerity* (contra 8:28, 32) so long as it was agreed that they come back, then we can assume that God would have made clear that Israel was not ever to return. But Pharaoh never did obey. And as things turn out, not even Pharaoh could accuse Moses of failing to keep his word when he didn’t bring the Israelites back to Egypt. (Exod. 14)

⁸ The following explanations seem to me not to do full justice to the text (either grammatically or theologically) – and also unnecessary in light of the legitimacy of Calvin’s comments.

“Was it the case, then, that the delegates were ‘to deceive the king,’ as *Knobel* affirms? By no means. God knew the hard heart of Pharaoh, and therefore directed that no more should be asked at first than he must either grant, or display the hardness of his heart. Had he consented, God would then have made known to him His whole design, and demanded that His people should be allowed to depart altogether. But when Pharaoh scornfully refused the first and smaller request (chap. V.), Moses was instructed to demand the entire departure of Israel from the land (vi. 10).” (Keil; cf. Currid) There is much in Keil’s explanation that I would agree with, but the closing reference to Exodus 6:10 seems contrived.

“Moses and the elders were instructed first to make only a moderate and limited request of Pharaoh for a temporary leave of three days’ absence in order to offer sacrifices to Yahweh their God (v.18b). This was not an example of a part truth (Bush) or a ruse and an attempt to deceive Pharaoh. The appeal to Psalm 18:26—‘To the crooked [Rashi glosses “with Pharaoh”] you [God] show yourself shrewd’—as a policy statement (Greenberg, *Exodus* p. 85) misses the point that a divine judgment never came until Pharaoh had repeatedly rejected all divine aids to acquiesce to God’s plan. The matter is as Augustine and that fifteenth-century Spanish exegete Abarbanel put it: God deliberately graded his requests of Pharaoh from easier (a three-day journey with an understood obligation to return) to more difficult (the total release of the enslaved people) in order to give Pharaoh every possible aid in making an admittedly most difficult political and economic decision. Had Pharaoh complied, Israel could not have exceeded the bounds of this permission but would have then presented another, presumably more difficult, request. Nevertheless, God certainly knew this king of Egypt well enough to know what his reactions would be. Accordingly, he warned Moses just as the principle of Amos 3:7 states: ‘Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan [*sod*] to his servants the prophets.’” (Kaiser) This explanation seems not to account for Yahweh’s stated intention to *harden* Pharaoh’s heart.

Stuart’s view (Pharaoh knew right from the beginning what Moses was really asking for) seems tortuous as he deals with all the passages that more naturally imply something else.

So Pharaoh said to Moses: “Go, serve the LORD your God. But which ones are to go?” Now in Pharaoh’s mind he was giving up the contest so the battle could be over! After seven horrible plagues, and the ruin of all the land of Egypt, He’s finally giving in. Only *we* know that Yahweh still isn’t finished. Before Moses ever left Midian, God had announced the death of all the firstborn in Egypt because of Pharaoh’s refusal to let His own firstborn go. (cf. 4:22-23) And so just at the very moment when Pharaoh is ready to give in, and all that’s left is to work out the details, *that’s* the very moment when Pharaoh is told that it’s not just the men, but all Israel—young and old, sons and daughters, flocks and herds—*all* must go to worship Yahweh in the wilderness! And all of a sudden, just like that, we’re back to square one. In fact, now Pharaoh’s heart is even harder than it ever was before: “[Pharaoh] said to [Moses and Aaron], “The LORD will indeed be with you, if *ever* I 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.” Can you see the perfect wisdom and justice of our God as He goes on making a mockery and a fool of the most powerful man on earth? Pharaoh was freely acting according to his own sinful and stubborn heart, and yet it was Yahweh, the God of Israel, who was ultimately “playing” Pharaoh all along, making him to look, and to *be* in reality, a complete and total *fool*.

IV. Exodus 10:12–20 — 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. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt. There had been no locusts like them before, nor will there be such ever 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 the hail had 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.

Conclusion

God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, multiplying His plagues, so that the Egyptians might know and be forced to confess that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. But God also hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and multiplied His plagues as signs, so that *we* might know and *gladly, willingly* confess that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth. The Egyptians will know the incomparability of Yahweh to their own destruction. But we have come to know the incomparability of Yahweh to the end that we might have life. And so we can sing with Moses and the people of Israel in chapter fifteen:

- ✓ Exodus 15:11 — “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

The Apostle Paul says in Romans:

- ✓ Romans 9:22–24 — God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.

We *all* deserved to “know” only as the Egyptians knew. But because of God’s mercy, He has called us to a different kind of “*knowing*” – a “knowing” that leads to eternal life. Listen to the words of a wise teacher in Israel:

- ✓ Psalm 78:1–8, 42–43 (cf. Psalm 78:44–51; Deut. 29:2–9; Psalm 105:1–5, 23–38) — Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of YAHWEH, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God... They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe, when he performed his signs in Egypt and his marvels in the fields of Zoan.

What is the picture of God that we would pass on to our children or to our grandchildren? Is it the God who makes a *fool* of the Egyptians, and a total *mockery* of all Egypt’s gods? Are we communicating to our children and grandchildren a picture of the one true God that causes them to fear Him and tremble before Him, *so that* they are also able to *trust* Him and rest secure in Him even “though the earth gives way, [and] though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea”? (Ps. 46:2) The God who performed His signs among the Egyptians in the days of our fathers long ago, is *still* the God today who is wholly worthy of our fear and trust. He is *daily* our “refuge and strength, [and] a very present help in trouble.” (Ps. 46:1) *How much more* should we be able to say this in light of what the Apostle Paul says in Colossians:

- ✓ Colossians 2:13–15 — And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Are we faithful to remember God’s *signs* not only in the fields of Zoan, but most of all, on the hill called Golgotha? Are we faithful to remember not only how He made a fool of the

Egyptians, but most of all, how He put even heavenly rulers and authorities to open shame through Christ? Is this the great and awesome God that we would tell our children about? Is this the God whom we are daily *trusting*, and *obeying*?