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The Locusts Devoured Everything and Nothing Green Remained in Egypt **10: 1-20**

The locusts devoured everything and nothing green remained in Egypt DIG: Of the many references so far to Pharaoh's hardened heart (see 7:3, 13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34-35), what is new about the way God informs Moses this time? Why do you think God removes the plague each time Pharaoh promises to let the Israelites go, even though Pharaoh changes his mind each time?

REFLECT: Does God often cause people to harden their hearts (see Romans 9:17-18)? For what purpose? Why is it that some people would rather self-destruct than admit they were wrong? How would ADONAI view their dilemma? Which would you rather be, strong and self-sufficient, or humble and dependent upon God? Why is this choice so difficult? Where does each eventually end up? Who was your Moses - the one who forced you to see the need for God in your life? How did you react to this person back then? And now?

Parashah 15: Bo (Go) 10:1-13:16

(see the commentary on Deuteronomy, to see [link clickAf](#) - Parashah)

The Key People are Moshe, Aaron, Pharaoh, Pharaoh's servants, Egyptians, and Israelites (about 600,000 men and about 2 million all together).

The Scene is Egypt, with a journey from Rameses to Sukkot.

The Main Events include the plague of locusts and darkness, affecting Egyptians but not the Israelites; the Egyptian Passover with blood on the doorposts to be observed with yearly with matzah; the death of the Egyptian firstborn, with Pharaoh kicking the Israelites out of Egypt; the Egyptians urging the Israelites to leave and giving away plunder; the Israelites leaving Egypt exactly 430 years after God prophesied that they would be strangers, enslaved and oppressed; and finally, all the Israelite firstborn being set apart for Him.

The **plague** of swarming **locusts** is the second in the third cycle of plagues. They take **God's** judgment to a higher and irreversible level. As a result, there was no chance that **Pharaoh** would change **his heart**. In fact, the eighth **plague** begins by telling us as much: **God hardened Pharaoh's heart**. The outcome of this and the following two encounters was never in doubt. **Pharaoh** was a rag doll in **HYVH's** hands, and he was about to witness the bitter end to his confrontation with **God**. The process was proceeding as **God** had designed it, and **Amenhotep II** was helpless to do anything about it.¹⁷²

The pressure on **Pharaoh** mounted. **Then ADONAI said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of Mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians (see Psalm 78)**. The verb *to deal harshly* carries with it a sense of mockery, and could be translated *how I have made a toy of Egypt*. **How I performed My signs among them, and that you may know that I am ADONAI (10:1-2)**. Why was it necessary for **the Israelites to tell their children and grandchildren** about the **miraculous signs** that **God performed in Egypt**? The common misconception is that there were miracles performed *in abundance* throughout biblical history. That is not true. There are only three periods where miracles were *in abundance*. First is the period of the exodus and the wilderness wanderings. The second period of miracles was that of Elijah and Elisha. The third major period of miracles was the time of Jesus and the apostles. *If miracles were common they would cease to be miracles. Miracles, by their very nature, need to be uncommon.*

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh again and boldly said to him: This is what ADONAI, the God of the Hebrews, says: How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, so that they may worship Me. If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow (10:3-4). According to rabbinic tradition, the ten plagues were spread over twelve months.



The locust is perhaps nature's most awesome example of the collective destructive power of a species. An adult **locust** weighs two grams at most, but its combined destructive force can leave a large area with famine for years. **Locust plagues** were so feared in ancient **Egypt** that the peasants were in the habit of praying to the gods for protection. As the **locusts** blackened the sky they would have prayed to Nut, the goddess of the sky. Bewildered, they would have prayed to Isis and Seth who were the deities of agriculture, with Isis, in particular, being the goddess protector against **locusts**. But no matter how hard they prayed to these deities, they were useless. The **locusts** continued to come, wave after wave.

A locust is capable of eating its own weight daily. One square mile of a swarm will normally contain from 100 million to 200 million of the creatures. It is *unusual*, however, for such plagues to occupy an area of only one square mile. Swarms covering more than four hundred square miles have been recorded. Flying **locusts** have been regarded as marvels of stamina. **They** are able to flap their wings non-stop for seventeen hours, and may be able to fly at a cruising air speed of ten to twenty miles an hour for twenty hours or more. Depending on the wind, collective movements range from a few miles to more than sixty miles per day.

Even with modern technology, a swarm of **locusts** are still a serious problem. Massive numbers of them still breed and move with devastation over parts of South Africa. Reports of such plagues appeared in the *Dallas Times Herald* on Sunday, December 8, 1963. Areas covered by the **locusts** included approximately 30,000 square miles, an area almost as big as the state of Maine. The Department of Agriculture in Cape Province, South Africa, pushed 200 spray trucks into service and more than 1,000 volunteers, but even that wasn't enough. The cost of fighting these small creatures ran about \$30,000 a day in 1963. Just think what it would be today!

If the South Africans are afraid of **locust plagues**, where rain and vegetation are plentiful, one can only imagine the horror and despair that struck **the hearts of the Egyptians** when the last of their crops were destroyed by millions of flying **locusts**. Their agricultural resources were considerably limited and had already suffered major destruction as a result of previous **plagues**. Their herds of cattle had been depleted, and many of the men were incapable of work due to the effects of the plague of boils. It is against this background that **Moses** describes this plague of **locusts**.¹⁷³

The picture of the plague was graphic. **Moses** said: **The locusts will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen.** The text literally says: **The locusts will cover the eye of the land. That is, all that the eye can see, a number that cannot be counted. They will**

devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. Like the frogs and the flies, they will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians, something neither your fathers nor your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land until now (10:5-6). After **Moses** announced the plague, he **and Aaron** simply left **Pharaoh's** presence without giving him any chance to respond. **They** knew what **Pharaoh** had to say.

The time for talking was over.

Pharaoh was the last to catch on. **His magicians** abandoned **him** long ago (**8:19**); now his frantic court **officials** begged him: **How long will this man be a snare to us? The Egyptian officials** scornfully refer to **Moses** as **this man**, or **this** one. They obviously did not fear **God** or **His prophet**. **Let the people go, so that they may worship ADONAI their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is ruined (10:7)?**¹⁷⁴ The patience of **Pharaoh's officials** had come to an end. Because **they** were syncretistic and believed that all paths led to Aaru, or the land of eternity, it was easy for them to include **the God of Moses** into their own religious system. Therefore, **they** began to challenge **Pharaoh's** divine wisdom because of **his** persistent and willful resistance to **YHVH**.

Pharaoh still pretended that **he** was in control. Fearing that they would never return, his **third compromise** was to try to get **Moses** to agree to leave **the women and children** behind as hostages, with **only the men** going off to **worship**. **He** knew that **the men** would not leave without **their** wives and children. **Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh and he said: Go worship ADONAI your God. But just who will be going,** literally *who and who* (**10:8**)? **Moses** responded by rejecting any conditions or limitations set by the king by replying: **We will go with our young and old, with our sons and daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to God (10:9).**

Pharaoh's response was bitter and condescending. **The king** said that the only evidence that such a deity existed would be if **he** personally allowed **them** to leave: **ADONAI be with you - if I let you go, along with your women and children! Clearly you are up to no good and bent on evil (10:10).**¹⁷⁵ The Hebrew word for **evil** is the word *ra*. It is also the name of **the Egyptian god Ra**. So **Pharaoh** wasn't saying **Moses** was bent on **evil**; **he** was really saying that **the king's** god *Ra* was better than **Moses' God**. And because of that, **Pharaoh** had no intention of letting **the women and the children** go. As a result, **Pharaoh** concluded: **No! Have only the men go, and worship ADONAI, since that's what you have been asking for. Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh's**

presence because **he** was confident that this compromise would work (**10:11**). That set the stage for the final showdown.

*Compare Satan's reasoning then with his reasoning today. Satan argues, in effect that a holy, separated life is good enough for adults, but the young people should be left in the world to enjoy themselves and sow their wild oats, and then, when they get older they can attend to spiritual things. But young people today desperately need **God**. The community of believers needs them, and nothing is so encouraging as to see young people in these dark days coming out and taking a firm stand for **God**.*¹⁷⁶

But the compromise did not work and because of **Pharaoh's** stubbornness, **ADONAI** said to Moses, "**Stretch out your hand over Egypt so that locusts will swarm over the land of Egypt and devour everything growing in the fields, everything left by the hail**" (**10:12**). Measure for measure, the punishment began. Through **the hand of Moses**, the staff of judgment was raised.¹⁷⁷ **So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and ADONAI made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts (10:13)**. This was a direct attack against the Egyptian god Seth, the god of storms and disorder.

They invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers, literally *very heavy*. The same Hebrew word, *kabed*, is used throughout the ten plagues. Once again, the severity of **the plague** reflects the state of **Pharaoh's heart**. **Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. They covered all the ground until it was black, as the last three plagues produced increasing degrees of darkness. They devoured all that was left after the hail - everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt (10:14-15)**. Referring to this **plague**, the psalmist said: **ADONAI spoke, and the locusts came, grasshoppers without number; they ate up every green thing in their land; ate up the produce of their soil (105:34-35)**.

This disaster brought **Pharaoh** to his knees. Growing desperate, **he** quickly summoned **Moses and Aaron** and blurted out: **I have sinned against God and against you. The king's** admittance of **sin** was shocking. **The Egyptians** believed **him** to be a sinless god while alive, and no need of judgment after death. **They** thought **he** was changed into the god Osiris, who had authority over judgment and death. But here **he** is pictured as one deserving of facing judgment and death. Nevertheless, **he** was still up to **his** old tricks, and asked for another chance and pleaded: **Now forgive my sin once more and pray to**

ADONAI your God to take this deadly plague, this death, **away from me**. This sudden relapse into **sin** revealed **his** insincerity all along. **Moses** then left **Pharaoh** and prayed to **God**, but it made no difference (**10:16-18**). It was a matter of too little, too late.

*There is an interesting introversion here with the third **plague**. Here, **Pharaoh** said: **I have sinned against God**; however, in the third **plague the magicians** were forced to admit that **the finger of God** was against **them**.*

The prevailing winds in **Egypt** came from the east, from **the Red Sea**. **But ADONAI changed the wind to a very strong west wind**, literally, *a sea wind*, meaning that it came from the Mediterranean Sea, **which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea**. In other words, **God** reversed the normal **wind** pattern and compelled the forces of nature to obey **His** sovereign will (**Ex 14:21-22, Mt 8:23-27**). Not a **locust** was left anywhere in **Egypt** (**10:19**). While this **plague** had ended, the effects of this **plague** and the previous ones meant famine for **the land of Egypt**, and famine meant widespread robbery and social unrest. The economic, political, social and religious implications of these disasters were very obvious to the average **Egyptian**.¹⁷⁸

But God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go (10:20).

The drama of **Exodus** was reaching a fever pitch. Both the beginning and ending verses of this section remind us of the hardness of **Pharaoh's heart**. **He** and **his officials** were unyielding in **their** hatred of **the God of the Hebrews**. It didn't seem to matter to them that **Egypt** was falling apart around them; **they** didn't understand the spiritual implications of what was happening. This is true of the ungodly of all ages. **They** do not realize that a sovereign **God** is in control. **Their hearts** were **hardened** toward **Him**.

Locust plagues are used by **God** to mete out judgment in the Scriptures (**Deuteronomy 28:38; First Kings 8:37; Second Chronicles 7:13**). This is especially true in the end times (see the commentary on **Revelation Cz - The Fifth Trumpet: Demonic Locusts**). So, once again, **the plague of locusts** in **Exodus** was just a mere foretaste of the final **plague of locusts** during the Great Tribulation.