

Text: Exodus 10:1-20

Title: "Plague 8: Locusts eat away Pharaoh's lies"

Time: 8/23/20 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I was born in October of 1963. In December of that year, reports surfaced of a swarm of locust in South Africa that covered 30,000 square miles, a region about the size of the state of Maine. With 200 spray trucks, 1000 volunteers, and \$30,000 a day, South Africa did what it could to stem the tide of destruction that these insects were causing [Davis, 130].

In January of this year, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article titled, "Africa's Worst Locust Plague in Decades Threatens Millions: U.N. sounds alarm as swarms consume crops in five countries and threaten to spread further." The report said that in Kenya police had to fight the locust by firing machine guns and using tear gas to protect their crops. Another article I saw from March warned of the next generation of locusts and described how the U.N. is responding to help with the spraying that is required.

The average swarm of locusts contains 150 million bugs, each with the capacity of eating its body weight in vegetation each day. My math tells me that is about 660,000 lbs of vegetation every day. A swarm can travel up to 100 miles a day to get its daily dose. One African swarm active in the 1920s and 30s devastated five million square miles of the continent.

Locusts need to be taken seriously. In our passage, the Lord sends Moses to tell Pharaoh that the eighth plague is going to feature locusts that will strip away any eatable vegetation Egypt has left from the hail of the previous plague (vv.

4-6). Pharaoh once again is given a day to decide (“tomorrow”). It would be a day and a night of a very strong and foreboding wind from the east. Still sadly, Pharaoh was unable to see this reality and avoid this judgment.

How can that be? How is it that the Word of God is not believed? How could His mercy and grace possibly be rejected? The Bible tells us that the answer must be found in the ability of the father of lies to be believed by sinners like Pharaoh and like you and me. The Lord is not sending locusts to Egypt merely to eat vegetation. He is sending them there to eat away at the lies that were causing Pharaoh to reject His request for worship. These same lies can keep us from properly worshipping the Lord as well.

Locusts eat away at Pharaoh’s lies in the eighth plague, and I want to point out three of these powerful yet destructive lies, which Pharaoh harmfully believed in this passage.

I. Pharaoh believed the lie that he need not bow (vv. 1-7).

Illustration: British royal protocols are evidently pretty strict about some things, like touching the queen. When Michele Obama was our First Lady, she got into some hot water for the kind gesture of giving the queen a hug while the two were enjoying a reception together.

The queen never objects, but the British press goes crazy over these breaches of etiquette. When the Australian Prime Minister put his arm around the queen in 1992, one newspaper called him, “The Lizard of Oz” [Philip Sopher, “Rules for Touching British Royals,” *The Atlantic* (December 10, 2014); accessed online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/12/the-rules-for-touching-british-royals/383616/>; 8/21/20].

Application: The message that Moses brings to Pharaoh this time focuses on a great breach of spiritual protocol (v. 3). Pharaoh fails to bow in humility before the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, and he fails to do so because he believes the lie that he is free not to.

Whatever possesses us to think that we need not bow in humility before the God of heaven? It is fascinating that we live in a world in which an uproar in the news media can be caused by failing to bow appropriately to the British monarch, but few believe that is necessary to humbly bow in worship to the God of the Bible Sunday after Sunday.

In our own lives, a mighty work of saving grace was necessary to save us from that lie – the lie that says we have the option of not bowing in humble submission to our Mighty Creator, Holy Lawgiver, and Righteous Judge and King. Have you and I been deceived at times to this lie?

I want us to see two specific things about this lie from our passage this morning.

1. The one who believes he need not humble himself before the Lord finds God's signs to be instruments of God's hardening his heart (vv. 1, 7).

Notice that in verse 1 we are told that the Lord would harden both Pharaoh and his servants, but in verse 7 we see that his servants have a very different reaction than Pharaoh does to this hardening. Both Pharaoh and the servants are hardened by the Lord, but the hardened servants want to let the people go to worship the Lord, while Pharaoh does not (*men* in v. 7 is a different word than *men* in v. 11, where it refers only to grown young men; in verse 7 the servants ask that the request of Moses be granted).

There is great mystery in what it means for the Lord to harden the heart, but we can conclude from this passage that at least in this context this hardening had a different effect on Pharaoh than it does on his servants.

What exactly was the difference? Pharaoh's response to the signs of God was stubborn pride. The servants' response to the signs of God was humble submission. The signs hardened the hearts of both, but their reactions are different. That difference is determined not by the hardening, which they both received, but by the refusal of Pharaoh to humble himself. He believed the lie that he did not have to bow in worship before the God of the Hebrews.

We must not believe that same lie. We have freedom of religion as Americans, but as creatures of the Creator, we are not free to fail to bow before the true God of heaven and worship Him as He ought to be worshipped. As Americans we have been taught that we can worship whomever and whenever we want. But that defines our relationship to the state, not to the God of heaven. Consequences for failure to worship Him are eternally tragic. There is no freedom from those consequences. The one who believes he need not humble himself before the Lord finds God's signs to be instruments of God's hardening his heart.

2. We must protect our children from the lie that says we are free not to bow before the God of heaven (v. 2). These plagues are called *signs* by the Lord because He is trying to communicate truth through them in a world of lies. He desires that fathers and sons and grandsons embrace the same truth, namely that the God of the Bible is the Lord. He is who He says He is. He is worthy of the worship of every generation. And parents and grandparents have the special responsibility of telling this truth in the ears of children and grandchildren. May the Lord find us faithful.

The lie that Pharaoh need not humbly bow before the God of the Hebrews ultimately fed his pride but destroyed his life. It will do the same to us and our offspring unless we refuse to believe that lie.

II. Pharaoh believed the lie that he knew best (vv. 7-11).

Illustration: It can be a difficult but helpful thing to be confronted at times with what it is that we do not know. My wife and I read a missionary letter from Jessica Mulder who is on deputation to go to Nicaragua as a missionary. She recommended that we view a program called "The Most Dangerous Trips to School," which featured what the children of two families who lived in the jungles of East Nicaragua have to go through to get to school.

Three little girls, ages 5, 7, and 9, have to row themselves down a crocodile-infested river for miles every morning to get to school. Their canoe is an old hollowed out log that leaks like a sieve, so it is the job of the littlest one to bail out the canoe while the other two paddle. I could not help but think about how I have two beautiful canoes tied up next to the house that seldom get used and what a blessing one of those would be to these girls. Watching that show, I came to know more about what I do not know.

Application: I have begun to ask the Lord to help me know what I do not know. Paul prayed that believers' love would "abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1:9). It is a great blessing to know that we do not know something. The servants are trying to administer that blessing to Pharaoh in this passage (v. 7, "knowest thou not yet"?). Pharaoh's ignorance contrasts sharply with the emphasis in this historical account on the omniscience of the Lord (3:19-22). The Lord knows beforehand; Pharaoh did not even know after the fact.

Unfortunately, Pharaoh did not know what he did not know. He believed the lie that he still knew best, and so he attempts to tell Moses and Aaron how things are going to be, and he does so ultimately to his own destruction.

He thinks it best to meet the Lord halfway, but that is not how business is done with the God of heaven. He needed to know that only full surrender to the Lord's will was acceptable. Do we know that? Would the servants of Pharaoh call to us this morning from beyond the grave, "Knowest thou not yet?" "Is our all on the altar?" asks the hymn.

III. Pharaoh believed the lie that his false repentance could save him (vv. 12-20).

Illustration: I mentioned that in 1963 it took 200 spray trucks, 1000 volunteers, and \$30,000 a day to get rid of the locust plague that South Africa experienced.

Application: It was God's mercy and grace to Pharaoh that he had a far less difficult and expensive way to get rid of his locusts plague – the prayers of Moses and Aaron. I am struck by how quickly salvation from the locusts comes to Egypt through the prayers of these men.

Who shall pray for our land? Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah. Perhaps our city might be spared for a few righteous and their 1 Timothy 2 prayers. Pharaoh believed in the power of the prayers of God's people, and our prayerlessness may mean that he understood something vitally important that we have missed.

But in the end, the false repentance of Pharaoh that moves Moses and Aaron to pray ultimately fails to save Pharaoh from the hardness of a heart that the Lord had hardened.

His “please forgive me” and “remove from me this death” are never accompanied by a subsequent change in life and obedience. Pharaoh wanted to be rescued from the consequences of his sin, but never from his sin itself. When God truly saves, He saves a sinner from sin, not just sin’s consequences.

Conclusion: I have on the resources page of our website a link to an article I have titled, “Do I have saving faith?” I put it there after being struck by something an 18th century Dutch pastor named Alexander Comrie wrote titled *The Correct Faith*. What I read there made me deeply concerned for the salvation of many who have called me “Pastor” over the years.

Here is how Comrie describes saving faith: “Although one may be convinced of his need of Christ as his Savior, yet so long as he does not see and know Him by faith as wonderfully adapted to his person in particular, the affections are not drawn to Him. From which it follows that many, in ordinary soul-trouble, act so undecidedly: today they desire Christ, and tomorrow they do not. This moment they wish to be converted, and the next they do not.

“This is the reason that many who once were touched by Christ’s fitness to their need, and therefore were seekers after Him for a season, go back again and no more ask for Him, simply because they do not think Him so much adapted to their need as to be able for His sake to bear the heat of the day and the cold of the night, or sacrifice all things, to possess Him. And this proves that they never have known His real fitness, that they never have seen it with the eye of faith; otherwise the seed of God would have remained in them.”

Pharaoh asked Moses, “Please forgive me” and “remove this death from me,” but still perished lost in his sins with a heart hardened by the Lord. His heart was too heavy to really change. His life demonstrated this lack of change.

What of ours? Have you gone back away from Christ, no more to ask for him? Be not deceived by the lies that Pharaoh believed. We must humble ourselves to see that our God is worthy of worship. We must put away our deal-making and compromise proposals and confess that only He knows what is best. And through the power of His Holy Spirit, we must trust Him to save us from our sin, not merely from the consequences of our sin.

Only then will the life change. Only then will the hardened heart be moved. Only then will grace much more abound, where sin has abounded.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching