

them turned them completely away from what they had done so many times to others at the behest of the scribes and Pharisees. It is a truly remarkable example of how Jesus was able to melt the hearts of even the hardest of men.

Consider now the heartwarming occasion in a crowded house in Capernaum where “one sick of the palsy” had been let down through the roof and lay on his bed in the presence of Jesus. He was a person stricken with paralysis and, in our modern terminology, terminally ill. It was a close, intimate situation, and every eye in the house was upon Jesus, who then said with the clear voice of authority and power: “Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house” (Mk. 2:11). In spite of the presence among the people of some of the carping scribes, ever watching Jesus and seeking to find fault with him, the people in the house reacted with incredulity and astonishment at what happened next: “And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion” (v. 12).

They were amazed at the authority with which Jesus said, “Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house”, and at the power of

Jesus to heal that enabled the bedridden man to stand up, completely cured of his paralysis, moving freely, and then with great relief and joy take his leave of all the astounded onlookers. The marvel of it all was that all those in the house saw with their own eyes the incredible, never-to-be-forgotten miracle in which a person with a dread, crippling disease was healed in a moment, and then walked away unassisted to his own home. There are many other examples in the absorbing Gospel accounts that also convey wonderfully the way in which so many people came to believe in him.

In these momentous last days, when the clouds of spiritual darkness and the spectre of war hang ominously over a troubled world, with “the sea and the waves roaring” (Lk. 21:25), we have had the privilege and joy of being enlightened and strengthened by the authority and power of the incomparable teachings and life of our Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ has shown us “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jno. 14:6), and we journey together towards the Kingdom with his words of love and encouragement ever ringing in our hearts: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (8:12).



## Exposition

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# The Exodus

## A commentary on Exodus 1–15

### F. The first nine plagues (Exodus 7–10)

#### Part 5: The third three plagues – Exodus 9:13–10:29 (ii)

Mark Vincent

**T**HIS ARTICLE concludes the consideration of the final cycle of three plagues, looking at plagues eight and nine, the plagues of locusts and of darkness.

#### Plague 8: Locusts

10:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart,

and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these My signs before him:

10:2 And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, [what things I have wrought](#)<sup>1</sup> in Egypt, and My [signs which I have done](#)<sup>2</sup> among them; that ye may know how that I am the LORD.

10:3 And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the

### The format of the commentary

*The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.*

*Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.*

- LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to [humble thyself](#)<sup>3</sup> before Me? let My people go, that they may serve Me.
- 10:4 Else, if thou refuse to let My people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast:
- 10:5 And they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field:
- 10:6 And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh.
- 10:7 And Pharaoh's servants said unto him, [How long](#)<sup>4</sup> shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: [knowest thou not yet](#)<sup>5</sup> that Egypt is destroyed?
- 10:8 And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the LORD your God: but who are they that shall go?
- 10:9 And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the LORD.
- 10:10 And he said unto them, [Let the LORD be](#)

- [so with you](#).<sup>6</sup> as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; [for evil is before you](#).<sup>7</sup>
- 10:11 Not so: go now ye that are [men](#).<sup>8</sup> and serve the LORD; for that ye did desire. And they were [driven out from Pharaoh's presence](#).<sup>9</sup>
- 10:12 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left.
- 10:13 And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.
- 10:14 And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such.
- 10:15 For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.
- 10:16 Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you.
- 10:17 Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only.
- 10:18 And he went out from Pharaoh, and intreated the LORD.
- 10:19 And the LORD turned a mighty strong west wind, which [took away the locusts](#).<sup>10</sup> and cast them into the Red sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt.
- 10:20 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go.

### Comment

The import of the plagues is to be appreciated not only by Pharaoh and the Egyptians (as previous plagues have made clear), but by subsequent generations of Israelites as well. God is performing these wonders and signs so that Israelite posterity—specifically children and grandchildren (v. 2)—might know of His ways. The locusts that will come will surpass anything that

previous generations of Egyptians have seen. As if to correspond with what the earlier verse had said about the Israelites, the text singles out two specific generations of Egyptians in its description, namely, parents and grandparents (v. 6). Two generations are mentioned for the Israelites, and two for the Egyptians, the only difference being that the generations go in opposite directions, ancestors and descendants.

The point seems to be that Egypt will look back and find nothing in her past with which to correlate what God has now done; Israel will look forward and find her future forever redefined by God's historic self-revelation. Egypt's past is empty as she searches for meaning in this experience; Israel's past and future will be forever full because of it.

Like the plague of frogs, and like the waters in Genesis, the locusts will cover the face of the earth; they will eat whatever still remains alive from the previous plagues. In his commentary Nahum Sarna refers to the devastation that a locust plague can bring. An area of one square kilometre can contain fifty million locusts; in a single night they can devour as much as one hundred thousand tons of vegetation. The impact of this plague, both in terms of sentiment and economics, is not to be underestimated.

Pharaoh having been warned and knowing full well what a locust plague can mean, Moses turns on his heel and departs without a response from the king (this is the usual pattern for the second plague of the three). Despite the hardening recorded in 9:34 and 10:1, Pharaoh's servants plead with him to be sensible. Does he not know that he is beaten? He is like a boxer on the ropes trying to stagger to his feet again when he is punch drunk, endangering no one but himself.

Surprisingly enough, Pharaoh listens to them and attempts to bargain with Moses (10:8). Who is it exactly that will go? If it is just the men, then perhaps that would be acceptable, he concedes, but when Moses refuses this compromise they are driven from his presence with only the men having permission (v. 11). And so the locusts "come up"; God uses the natural process of a particular east wind rather than a spontaneous act of creation to bring about the plague, and, following another lengthy and desperate scene of repentance from Pharaoh, it is an opposite west wind which takes the locusts away and deposits them in the Red Sea.

In Pharaoh's words of confession, so effusive and apparently contrite, we might be able to

recognise ourselves more than we would wish. Pharaoh calls Moses in haste to make his repentance; there is an urgency in his actions which may bespeak both sincerity towards God and frustration with himself. His words are comprehensive:

I have sinned against the LORD your God,  
and against you (v. 16)

forgive . . . my sin only this once (v. 17)

intreat the LORD your God (v. 17)

take away from me this death only (v. 17).

Although Pharaoh's words may just be words of convenience, a sham, it is also possible that they are the temporarily felt, genuine words of a compulsive megalomaniac. In any case, it is worth reflecting on the face value of what he says ("forgive . . . my sin only this once") and what these words would mean if they were genuine. They would be the words of someone who knows he has gone one step too far; someone who has done it again, making the same stupid mistake for which he now must pay. This is the desperation of repeated sinners who know they have gone back when they vowed they never would. Yet no sooner is the Lord entreated than they return to their old ways again.

Who has not been there, feeling that cold sweat and desperation of having done again that which ought not to have been done? The question is whether anyone is strong enough to say, 'Forgive my sin only this once', and whether such words indicate rather too much reliance on human ability to control itself than on God's power to forgive. It takes quite some spiritual maturity to realise that we may be back in the same compromised position all too soon. The sentiment, 'I won't ever do it again', is a good one in principle, and one which we must strive to fulfil; but the number of people who have said those words must be far greater than the number who have put them into practice.

In an interesting sense God did take Pharaoh at his word; his sin with this plague may well have been forgiven, but the next rebellion with the plague of darkness was not overlooked, and presaged instead the death of the firstborn, from which there was no turning back.

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## Plague 9: Darkness

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10:21 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt.

- 10:22 And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt [three days](#):<sup>11</sup>
- 10:23 They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.
- 10:24 And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you.
- 10:25 And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God.
- 10:26 Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither.
- 10:27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.
- 10:28 And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die.
- 10:29 And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.

#### Comment

Sun worship was pervasive in the official palace ritual of Egypt; Re, the sun god, was one of the most significant of Egyptian deities. Now God switches off the sun for the land of Egypt, to teach them that light shines only at His command.

It was a darkness which could be felt, more the oppressive darkness of going down a mine and extinguishing all light than the darkness of a midnight walk. This is a darkness to which the eyes never grow accustomed, in which there are no chinks of light and which even artificial light seems unable to quench. The description does seem to fit the suggestion that there may have been a suspension of matter in the air which prevented the passing of light.\*

Looking for Scriptural echoes, we might think of Abraham's horror of great darkness and of the three-hour darkness while our Lord was on the cross. The language could not be more apt to describe a death. There was total isolation, no one saw another, and none rose up from his place. Each is alone with his Maker, and the presence of God along with the total absence of anything else is menacing and oppressive.

Though we make our bed in the lowest hell (Ps. 139:8), as Pharaoh seems eager to do, yet God is there and there is no escape. Paradoxically He is there even when everything else is gone, for only He can take everything away. This oppressive absence/presence must have been both astonishing and devastating to experience; to realise just how abandoned and yet enclosed it is possible to be; to realise that there is only God; to be totally alone with our Maker and to feel after Him in that emptiness when all else is gone and there is nothing to distract.

It must have given rise to a feeling of intense foreboding (the Egyptians knowing what they had done to God's people). It would have been a true horror, an absence more frightening than any image an artist or film director might concoct. It was more than Pharaoh could handle.

And so he calls for Moses (v. 24)—a lone voice calling out into the darkness—but by the time the two come together to converse it would seem that the plague has ceased (see, for example, verse 28). Again there is an attempt at negotiation; now Pharaoh is prepared to allow all the people to leave (including children), but the object of debate is the animals. Most of Egypt's animals have already been slaughtered by this point in the previous plagues, so it is understandable that Pharaoh should want to keep Israel's. But this is not good enough. Not even a hoof shall remain, Moses states; though when he claims that they do not know what they will have to offer until they arrive it is not certain whether he is being sincere or whether he is mocking Pharaoh by sounding as pathetic as he!

The negotiations ultimately break down, however. Moses is sent out and told that he will die if he ever comes into Pharaoh's presence again, and Moses seems to agree (vv. 28,29). This creates a difficulty if read too literally, since the two do indeed meet again in subsequent chapters. Pharaoh may indeed mean what he says (in the sense of, "Get out! And don't ever let me see your face again—on pain of death!"), but Moses' reply is best taken in the (admittedly colloquial) sense of, "You're too right I won't see you again. I'm not planning to stay around here (in case you hadn't noticed, that's what these discussions have been about all along). I'll be long gone". Moses is referring to the time when the Israelites

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\* See the Introduction to these plagues, [Jun. 2002, p. 215](#).

will have left Egypt behind, and, even though he is being banished by Pharaoh, he manages to get the last word.

And with that statement—the assertion that Egypt is very soon to be a thing of the past—the cycle of the nine plagues upon Egypt is brought to an end.

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1. **v. 2 what things I have wrought.** The JPS (Jewish Publication Society) translation reads as follows: “That you may recount . . . *how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them*”. This seems to be nearer the mark in representing the meaning of the Hebrew expression, which is also found in Numbers 22:29; Judges 19:25; 1 Samuel 6:6; 31:4; 1 Chronicles 10:4; and Jeremiah 38:19.
  2. **v. 2 signs which I have done.** The verb ‘done’, Hebrew *siym*, is literally ‘put’. This same verb used here to describe God’s ‘putting’ signs among the Egyptians is also used for Pharaoh’s ‘putting’ or ‘setting’ taskmasters over the Israelites (1:11).
  3. **v. 3 humble thyself.** The word used to describe the *humbling* which must take place within Pharaoh (*anah*) is the very word used to describe the *suffering* Pharaoh inflicted upon the Israelites (1:11,12, translated ‘afflicted’). As he humbled others, so he must now be humbled. For the time being he refuses this process, but God’s will will prevail over his own.
  4. **v. 7 How long . . . ?** The question of Pharaoh’s servants picks up Moses’ own ‘How long?’ question recorded in verse 3. Both Moses, and Pharaoh’s own servants, are now asking Pharaoh how long he will continue to behave in this obtuse way. Ironically, in reality the “this man” referred to by Pharaoh’s servants in verse 7 was not in fact Moses; it was Pharaoh himself, their own master, who was the real snare!
  5. **v. 7 knowest thou not yet . . . ?** The servants’ question about what Pharaoh knows or does not know (he does not even know the severity of the destruction that has befallen his own country!) picks up Pharaoh’s arrogant boast in 5:2, “I *know not* the LORD”. According to his servants, it is high time he started finding out, not only about the Lord, but even about the state of his own country.
  6. **v. 10 Let the LORD be so with you.** The RSV tries to capture the sense with, “I would just as soon wish God’s blessing on you as to let your children go with you!”. The AV translates the phrase literally enough, and in doing so correctly echoes God’s “I will be with thee” promise in 3:12, a promise enshrined in His covenant Name (v. 14). It is highly ironic that Pharaoh should say, ‘The LORD be with you (if you go with your little ones)’, because of course God had said that He would be, and Pharaoh is now confirming God’s promise! In fact, Pharaoh intends the words in the quite different sense of ‘God help you if you go!’. God would indeed help them, and deliver them from Pharaoh’s hand, as He does in chapter 14, drowning the Egyptians in the sea. In trying to threaten them, Pharaoh is only confirming the blessing that God has already promised!
  7. **v. 10 evil is before you.** What Pharaoh means by this expression is unclear; he may mean you have evil intentions (of not returning), or he may mean you are doomed to disaster (compare 32:12). Other less likely alternatives have also been proposed. Moffatt’s translation of verses 10,11 seems to capture the spirit of the passage even though it is difficult: “‘Well,’ said the Pharaoh, ‘may the Eternal be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Let you go? Plainly you are out for some mischief. No, no! But your males may go and worship the Eternal, since that is what you want!’ And with that they were driven out of the Pharaoh’s presence”.
  8. **v. 11 men.** The use of the Hebrew *gibbor* would seem to suggest Pharaoh is permitting adult males/potential warriors (mighty men) to go, but that everyone else would have to remain behind.
  9. **v. 11 driven out of Pharaoh’s presence.** This is another link in a chain of references involving the root *garash*, ‘to drive out’. Moses was effectively driven out of the presence of Pharaoh’s predecessor when he slew the Egyptian (though the word is not used there), and he named his own son *Gershon*, perhaps partially as an echo of this. Now he is driven out again, but ultimately it will be all the Israelites whom Pharaoh will drive out of his land, only too anxious that they be gone (6:1; 11:1; 12:39; cf. also 2:17).
  10. **v. 19 took away the locusts.** The verb ‘took away’ is the same one used by Pharaoh when he pleads “*forgive . . . my sin*” in verse 17. It is because of Pharaoh’s sinfulness that the locusts have been sent.
  11. **v. 22 three days.** This time period corresponds with the three days’ journey which Pharaoh had refused to allow the Israelites to make into the wilderness (8:27).