

# The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 6: Plagues of Hail, Locusts, and Darkness

Exodus 9:8–10:29

### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is at stake in these chapters is the supremacy and self-revelation of the one true God over every rival. Egypt did not merely have a king; it had a crowded heaven of deities governing sky, weather, harvest, and sun. The hail, the locusts, and the darkness are not random calamities but targeted acts of judgment that put each of those gods on trial and find them powerless. The hinge text is 9:14–16, where God states His own purpose plainly: He has raised Pharaoh up to display His power and to proclaim His name in all the earth. Help your class see that the goal of the plagues is not merely Israel's escape but the knowledge of God, a name so glorified that Paul will still be quoting this very verse in Romans 9 to teach the church about the justice and freedom of God.

The hardening of Pharaoh must be handled with care, because it is among the most abused passages in Scripture. The text deliberately holds two truths together: Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart. The right reading does not collapse these but lets them stand, picturing a God who, after long patience and overwhelming revelation, gives a willful rebel over to the hardness he has insisted on choosing, exactly as Paul describes in Romans 1. Resist every temptation to read Calvinistic unconditional election or an irresistible decree into this. Ezekiel 18:20 and the whole tenor of Scripture insist that the gospel call is real and universal and that people are genuinely able to respond. Pharaoh is not God's puppet; he is a tyrant who enslaved a nation and resisted clear signs until God confirmed him in the rebellion he loved.

Finally, this lesson aims squarely at the formation of your students. Pharaoh's twice-repeated I have sinned is one of Scripture's clearest portraits of counterfeit repentance, sorrow for consequences rather than turning from sin, and it holds a mirror to every believer who has confessed under pressure and forgotten under relief. The partial obedience he offers in chapter ten, go and worship but leave your livestock, exposes the modern temptation to negotiate with God and keep back a portion of our lives. Use Moses' answer, not a hoof shall be left behind, to press home that the Lord asks for all of us, and that the lamps God kept burning in Goshen are a promise of His tender, faithful care for those who give Him everything.

### Question 1

#### Student Question:

*Read Exodus 9:13–16. God tells Pharaoh that He could have struck him from the earth but raised him up for a purpose, to show His power and proclaim His name in all the earth. What does this*

*reveal about why God acts in judgment, and how does it shape the way we understand God's dealings with proud and rebellious people?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

By the time we reach 9:13–16, the plagues have escalated and so has God's commentary on them. He sends Moses to confront Pharaoh again in the morning and delivers a stunning statement of purpose. God says He could have stretched out His hand and struck Pharaoh and his people with pestilence so severe they would have been wiped from the earth. The point is that Pharaoh is still alive only by God's restraint. Every breath the tyrant draws is a gift he is squandering.

Then comes the heart of it in verse 16: But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you My power, so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth. God is doing something larger than the immediate contest. He is making a name for Himself that will outlast Egypt, a name that will be sung in Israel's psalms, recited at every Passover, and quoted by the apostle Paul more than a millennium later. The judgment on Pharaoh is, at the same time, a sermon to all the earth about who God is.

This reveals that God's acts of judgment are never merely punitive; they are revelatory. He is teaching, declaring, proclaiming. The same event that ruins a hardened oppressor publishes the glory of God to the watching nations. For the class, this guards us against a small view of God's justice. He does not lash out; He reveals. Even His severity serves His mission to be known and worshiped rightly.

Romans 9:17 takes hold of this very verse to teach the church about the sovereignty and justice of God. Paul's point is not that God arbitrarily dooms people, but that God is free and righteous in how He deals with hardened hearts and that He bends even the rebellion of His enemies to the proclamation of His name. Help your students hear the awe in this without sliding into fatalism.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God acts in judgment not on impulse but to reveal His power and proclaim His name in all the earth.
- Pharaoh's continued existence is a mercy of divine restraint, not a sign of his strength.
- God's judgments are revelatory as well as punitive; they teach the watching world who He is.
- Romans 9:17 uses this verse to display God's sovereignty and justice, not to teach that He dooms people apart from their own choices.
- Even the rebellion of God's enemies is made to serve the spread of His name.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does God pause in the middle of the plagues to explain His larger purpose to Pharaoh?

- What does it mean that God raised Pharaoh up to proclaim His name in all the earth, and how is that purpose still being fulfilled in our reading today?
- How does Romans 9:17 use this verse, and how can we read it with awe without sliding into fatalism?

## Question 2

### Student Question:

*God says His purpose was that His name might be proclaimed in all the earth. Where in your own story has God used a hard or humbling event to make His name known to you or through you to others?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes God's stated purpose, that His name be proclaimed in all the earth, and brings it home. The same God who made His name known through the plagues still makes His name known through the events of our lives, often through the hard and humbling ones. The question invites students to look for the place where God turned a difficulty into a declaration.

Many believers can testify that the season they least wanted is the season through which God became most real to them and most visible to others. A diagnosis met with peace, a loss carried with faith, a failure followed by honest repentance, these become sermons to the people watching. God's name gets proclaimed not only from pulpits but from the way His people walk through fire.

Encourage honesty and humility here. The aim is not to glamorize suffering or to claim that every hardship is a divine megaphone, but to help students recognize that God is always at work to be known, and that He often chooses the humbling moment to do it.

Lead the conversation toward gratitude and witness. If God has made His name known to us through something hard, then that story is not ours to hoard. Like the plagues that Israel was to retell to its children, our testimonies of God's faithfulness are meant to be passed on.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God still makes His name known through the events of our lives, especially the humbling ones.
- Difficult seasons can become the clearest declarations of God's character to those watching us.
- Not every hardship is a divine megaphone, but God is always at work to be known.
- Our testimonies of God's faithfulness are meant to be passed on, like Israel's retelling of the plagues.

### Discussion Prompts

- When has a hard or humbling event become the very thing through which God's name was made real to you?
- Who has been watching your life, and what has your walk through difficulty proclaimed to them about God?
- How can you intentionally pass on a story of God's faithfulness to someone younger in the faith?

### Question 3

#### Student Question:

*Read Exodus 9:18–26. The worst hailstorm in Egypt's history falls, yet no hail touches the land of Goshen where Israel lives. Why does God repeatedly draw a visible line between His people and Egypt in the midst of judgment, and what does this teach us about His care for those who are His?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

The hail plague in 9:18–26 is described as the most severe storm in Egypt's history, thunder and fire running down to the earth, hail striking down every man and beast and plant left in the open field. Yet the text pauses to note something deliberate: only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, there was no hail. God draws a visible, geographic line between His people and Egypt.

This is not the first time. The flies were kept from Goshen, the livestock of Israel was spared, and now the hail. The repetition is the point. God is making His distinction unmistakable so that, as He says elsewhere, Egypt may know that He is the LORD who makes a difference between Egypt and Israel. His judgment is precise, not indiscriminate. He knows exactly where His people live.

Notice too the mercy embedded even in the warning. In verse 19 God gives Pharaoh's servants a chance to bring their livestock and slaves under shelter, and those who feared the word of the LORD did so. Even in the storm of judgment, God leaves a door open to anyone who will heed Him. His severity is never without a path of escape for those who will listen.

For the class, this is a portrait of covenant care. The God who shakes the kingdoms of the proud is the same God who keeps His own under the shelter of His hand. This does not promise believers a life untouched by trouble, but it does reveal a God who knows His own by name and never loses track of them, even when the sky is falling.

#### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God draws a real and visible distinction between His people and the world, even in the midst of judgment.

- His judgments are precise, not indiscriminate; He knows exactly where His people dwell.
- Even in judgment God leaves a path of escape for any who will heed His word.
- Covenant care does not promise a trouble-free life but a God who never loses track of His own.
- The repeated sparing of Goshen teaches Egypt and Israel alike that the LORD makes a difference.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does God repeatedly spare Goshen, and what is He teaching both Egypt and Israel by doing so?
- How does the warning in verse 19 show mercy even inside the judgment?
- What does the sparing of Goshen reveal about how well God knows and keeps His own people?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*When have you sensed God keeping a kind of Goshen around you, protecting or providing in the middle of a storm that struck everyone else? How did that shape your trust in Him?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question moves from Goshen to the student's own experience. Many believers can point to seasons when they sensed God's protecting hand around them in a way they could not explain, a provision that arrived just in time, a peace that held when everyone around them was unraveling, a danger that somehow passed them by. The aim is to help them recall and name those moments.

Be careful, as a teacher, to keep this honest and not magical. God does not promise His people a charmed life free of every storm, and many faithful believers suffer deeply. The point is not that Christians are exempt from hardship but that God is present with and attentive to His own, even when the wider world is in chaos.

Where students can recall a Goshen moment, lead them to let it build trust rather than entitlement. The purpose of remembering God's past care is to strengthen our confidence in His present and future faithfulness, not to demand that He always shelter us in the same way.

Close by connecting protection to belonging. The reason Goshen was spared was that Israel belonged to God. Our deepest security is not in a guarantee of comfort but in the certainty that we are His, and that nothing can finally separate those who are His from His care.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God is attentive to His own even when the surrounding world is in chaos.

- Covenant protection is not a promise of a trouble-free life; faithful believers do suffer.
- Remembering God's past care should build trust rather than entitlement.
- Our deepest security is not in guaranteed comfort but in belonging to God.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When have you sensed God keeping a kind of Goshen around you in the middle of a wider storm?
- How do you keep such memories from becoming an entitlement that demands God always shelter you?
- How does belonging to God, rather than the promise of comfort, become the ground of real security?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*Read Exodus 9:27–35. After the hail, Pharaoh says, I have sinned this time; the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked, but as soon as the rain stops he hardens his heart again. What is the difference between this kind of confession and the repentance God actually seeks?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The hail plague produces Pharaoh's most religious-sounding moment yet. In 9:27 he summons Moses and says, I have sinned this time; the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. On the surface these are the right words. He confesses sin, vindicates God's justice, and admits his own wickedness. If words were enough, this would be repentance.

But the text exposes the hollowness immediately. Moses knows the truth, telling Pharaoh in verse 30, as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God. And sure enough, verse 34 says that when Pharaoh saw the rain and hail had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart. His confession lasted exactly as long as the storm did.

This is the anatomy of counterfeit repentance. Pharaoh is sorry for the hail, not for his rebellion. He wants the consequence removed, not his heart changed. Scripture draws a sharp line between this worldly sorrow, which merely regrets the pain, and godly sorrow, which produces a real turning that leads to life. Pharaoh's words pass the lips but never reach the will.

For the class, this is among the most practically convicting passages in all of Exodus. Every one of us has prayed a foxhole prayer and forgotten it in the sunshine. The lesson is that the measure of repentance is not the eloquence of our confession but the direction of our lives once the pressure lifts. True repentance keeps its promise after the rain stops.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Saying the right words of confession is not the same as genuine repentance.

- Pharaoh was sorry for the consequence, the hail, not for his sin.
- Scripture distinguishes worldly sorrow, which regrets the pain, from godly sorrow, which turns from sin.
- The true measure of repentance is the direction of life after the pressure lifts, not the eloquence of the confession.
- Counterfeit repentance often vanishes the moment relief arrives.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Pharaoh's words sound right; how does Moses know in verse 30 that they are not real?
- What is the difference between being sorry for the hail and being sorry for the sin?
- How can we tell whether our own confessions are godly sorrow or merely regret over consequences?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*Think honestly about a time your sorrow over sin lasted only as long as the consequences did. What would genuine, lasting repentance have looked like in that situation, and what kept you from it?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question turns Pharaoh's hollow confession into a mirror. Most of us know the pattern from the inside: in the crisis we pray fervently and promise change, and once the danger passes the promises quietly evaporate. The aim is not to manufacture guilt but to expose a real and common spiritual danger.

The honest question is what genuine repentance would have looked like. Not just relief and a quick prayer of thanks, but a durable turning, a kept commitment, a changed habit, a new pattern of obedience that outlasts the emergency. Pharaoh's tragedy was that nothing in him actually changed; the storm changed, and so did his words, but his heart held its course.

Help students name what kept them from real repentance. Usually it is the same thing that gripped Pharaoh: an unwillingness to surrender something he loved, a pride that would not bend, a hope that he could have relief without obedience. Naming the obstacle is the first step toward removing it.

Lead gently toward hope. Unlike Pharaoh at the end of his story, your students are not yet past the point of softening. The very discomfort they feel in remembering a broken promise is the pull of God, and that pull means the door to real repentance is still open today.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Crisis sorrow that fades with the consequences is not yet genuine repentance.

- Real repentance shows itself in kept commitments and changed patterns after the pressure passes.
- The obstacle to repentance is usually an unwillingness to surrender something we love.
- The discomfort of remembering a broken promise is itself the pull of God, and the door is still open.

### Discussion Prompts

- Recall a time your sorrow over sin lasted only as long as the consequences. What happened when the pressure lifted?
- What would genuine, lasting repentance have looked like in that situation?
- What kept you from real repentance, and what would it take to turn back today?

### Question 7

#### Student Question:

*Read Exodus 10:1–2 and 10:21–23. God explains that He has hardened Pharaoh's heart so that His mighty acts may be retold to children and grandchildren, and then He blots out the sun while Israel has light in their dwellings. How do we hold together the truth that Pharaoh hardened his own heart and that God hardened it, without concluding that God forced an unwilling man into sin or that some people are simply doomed and unable to respond to Him?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest question of the lesson, and it gathers two great threads at once: the purpose of the hardening and the tender distinction God keeps drawing around His people. Take it slowly. In 10:1–2 God tells Moses He has hardened Pharaoh's heart so that He may show His signs, and so that Israel may tell its children and grandchildren what the LORD did. The hardening serves a teaching purpose that will echo through generations. Then in 10:21–23 comes the plague of darkness, a darkness so thick it could be felt, three days in which no Egyptian could see his neighbor or rise from his place, yet all the people of Israel had light in their dwellings.

On the hardening, the text deliberately uses both forms of speech across these chapters. Pharaoh hardened his own heart (for example 9:34), and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart (10:1, 10:20, 10:27). Scripture will not let us collapse these into one. The faithful reading holds them together: after long patience and overwhelming revelation, God gave Pharaoh over to the hardness Pharaoh himself had chosen. This is the same dynamic Paul describes in Romans 1, where God hands people over to what they have insisted on wanting. God's hardening is judicial, a confirming of a settled rebellion, not the manufacturing of sin in an unwilling man.

Be explicit with the class about what this does not mean. It does not mean God forced an innocent or willing servant into rebellion. Pharaoh was a tyrant who enslaved a nation and ordered the murder of Hebrew infants long before any hardening language appears. It also does



not teach Calvinistic unconditional election or an irresistible decree that dooms some and saves others apart from their own choices. Ezekiel 18:20 insists that the soul who sins is the one who bears guilt, and the consistent witness of Scripture is that the gospel call is real and universal and that people are genuinely able to respond. The God who hardened Pharaoh is the same God who pleaded with him through plague after plague and gave him every opportunity to relent.

Romans 9:17 quotes Exodus 9:16 from this very narrative to teach that God is sovereign and just in how He deals with hardened hearts, raising Pharaoh up to display His power and proclaim His name. But Paul's point is the freedom and justice of God, not the abolition of human responsibility, which he affirms throughout the same letter. The mystery remains, but it is not a contradiction. A sovereign God justly confirmed a rebel in the rebellion he loved, while never ceasing to be just, and all the while He kept the lamps lit in Israel's homes.

Land the lesson on the darkness and the light. The sun was perhaps Egypt's supreme deity, and God simply turned it off, exposing the helplessness of the thing Egypt worshiped most. Yet Israel had light in their dwellings. The application for us is the warning of Hebrews 3: do not harden your hearts today if you hear His voice. Pharaoh's slow descent into a darkness he could feel is a sober invitation to keep our own hearts soft while there is still light to walk in.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The hardening of Pharaoh served a teaching purpose, that God's mighty acts might be retold to children and grandchildren.
- Scripture says both that Pharaoh hardened his own heart and that God hardened it; faithful teaching holds both together.
- God's hardening is judicial, giving a willful rebel over to the hardness he chose, as in Romans 1, not coercing a willing servant into sin.
- This passage does not teach unconditional election or an irresistible decree; Ezekiel 18:20 affirms personal accountability.
- The gospel call is real and universal, and people are genuinely able to respond; Pharaoh resisted clear signs and was confirmed in his choice.
- The darkness exposed the helplessness of the sun, Egypt's great deity, while Israel had light in their dwellings.
- Hebrews 3:12-15 turns the account into a warning for us: do not harden your hearts today.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How can we hold together the verses that say Pharaoh hardened his heart and that God hardened it without making God the author of sin?
- Why is it important to say that Pharaoh was genuinely able to respond, and how does Ezekiel 18:20 guard against a fatalistic reading?
- What does the plague of darkness reveal about the gods of Egypt, and what does the light in Israel's dwellings reveal about God's care?

## Question 8

### Student Question:

*When God seems to grow quiet or even to let a stubborn area of your life run its course, how do you guard your own heart from hardening under the same pressure that destroyed Pharaoh?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question follows the warning of Pharaoh's hardening into the student's own heart. There are seasons when God seems quiet, when He appears to let a stubborn area of our lives simply run its course without immediate consequence. Those seasons are dangerous precisely because they feel safe. Pharaoh experienced relief between the plagues, and each relief became an occasion for further hardening.

The guard against a hardening heart is not greater willpower but ongoing softness toward God's word. Hebrews 3 ties the two together: take care that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart, but exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today. The hardening of the heart is a daily danger met by daily, honest exposure to God and to one another.

Help students see the warning signs in themselves: confession that has become routine, conviction that no longer moves them, a willingness to live with a sin they once grieved over. These are the early symptoms of a heart cooling toward God, and they call for immediate attention rather than delay.

Lead toward hope and community. The antidote to a hardening heart is found in staying near to God's word, in honest fellowship with believers who will tell us the truth, and in responding promptly to conviction while the heart is still soft. The very fact that a student feels the warning of this passage is evidence that his heart is still tender, and that today is the day to keep it so.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seasons of God's apparent silence are dangerous because they feel safe.
- Relief from consequences can become an occasion for further hardening, as it was for Pharaoh.
- The guard against a hardening heart is daily softness toward God's word and honest fellowship.
- Routine confession and deadened conviction are early signs of a cooling heart.
- Responding promptly to conviction while the heart is still soft is the path of safety.

### Discussion Prompts

- What are the early warning signs that your own heart may be hardening toward God?
- How does daily exposure to God's word and honest fellowship guard against a hardening heart?

- Where right now is God calling you to respond to conviction today rather than delay?

## Question 9

### Student Question:

*Read Exodus 10:24–29. Pharaoh offers a partial obedience, telling Israel to go and worship but to leave their flocks and herds behind, and Moses refuses, insisting that not a hoof shall be left behind. Why will God not accept a divided, negotiated obedience, and what does this teach us about what He requires of us today?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the locusts strip Egypt bare, Pharaoh tries a final maneuver in 10:24. He tells Moses that Israel may go and serve the LORD, but their flocks and herds must stay behind. It is a clever, calculated half-surrender. He concedes the people but keeps a hostage, ensuring Israel would have to return. He will let them worship as long as he can keep a hand on something they need.

Moses' answer is uncompromising and theologically rich. He insists that the livestock must go too, for they will need them to sacrifice and worship, and then he says it plainly: not a hoof shall be left behind. The worship of God cannot be conducted on the enemy's terms, with a portion held back as collateral. God will not accept a divided allegiance.

This exposes the deep logic of all true obedience. Throughout these chapters Pharaoh has offered partial concessions: go but stay in the land, go but do not go far, go but leave the children, and now go but leave the livestock. Each one is a negotiation designed to keep Israel partly enslaved. God refuses every one of them, because partial obedience to God is simply disobedience with better manners.

For the class, this strikes at the heart of the modern temptation to give God most of our lives while quietly keeping a portion back, a relationship, a habit, a corner of our finances or our future that we will not put on the altar. The lesson of Moses' answer is that the Lord is worthy of all of us. He did not redeem a part of us, and He will not settle for a part of us. Not a hoof shall be left behind.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God will not accept a divided, negotiated obedience that holds part of our lives back.
- Pharaoh's repeated partial concessions were attempts to keep Israel partly enslaved.
- Partial obedience to God is, in truth, disobedience with better manners.
- Worship cannot be conducted on the enemy's terms, with a portion held as collateral.
- The Lord is worthy of all of us; not a hoof shall be left behind.

### Discussion Prompts

- What was Pharaoh really after when he told Israel to leave their livestock behind?

- Why does Moses insist that not a hoof shall be left behind, and what does that teach about worship?
- What portion of your life are you tempted to keep back from God, and why?

## **Question 10**

### **Student Question:**

*Looking back across the hail, the locusts, and the darkness, where is God showing you that He will not settle for a partial surrender, and what is one specific way Jesus is forming you to give Him everything rather than a bargain?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The capstone question gathers the hail, the locusts, and the darkness and presses them toward formation. Across these plagues God has been answering one question over and over: who is Lord here? He is Lord over the sky, the storm, the harvest, the sun, and the hardest human heart. And through Moses' refusal in chapter ten, He has declared that He will not be Lord of only a part. The personal version of that question is unavoidable: where am I still trying to negotiate a partial surrender?

Invite students to name one specific area, not a vague resolution. Perhaps it is a relationship they have kept off the altar, a habit they have been unwilling to release, a resource they have clutched, or a future plan they have refused to hold loosely. The aim is to identify the hoof they have been trying to leave behind.

Then point them to Christ, the true and greater deliverer that Moses only foreshadows. The same God who would not let Israel worship on Pharaoh's terms has, in Jesus, claimed all of us, body and soul, life and future. Jesus did not redeem a portion of us with a portion of Himself; He gave Himself fully, and He calls for a full surrender in return. This is not loss but the exchange of a cruel master for a good and loving Lord.

Close by asking each person to finish a concrete sentence. A heart is surrendered not by good intentions but by specific obedience. The student who can say, this week I will give the Lord \_\_\_\_ that I have been holding back, has let the lesson do its work and has begun to learn what it means that not a hoof shall be left behind.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- These plagues press the question of who is truly Lord over every part of our lives.
- God will not settle for a partial surrender; He claims all of us.
- Jesus, the greater deliverer, gave Himself fully and calls for a full surrender in return.
- Full surrender is not loss but the exchange of a cruel master for a good Lord.
- Formation requires naming one specific area of surrender, not a vague resolution.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Across these plagues, where is God showing you that He will not settle for a partial surrender?
- How does Jesus, who gave Himself fully for us, call for a full surrender from us?
- What is one specific thing you have been holding back that you will give to the Lord this week?