

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 6: Plagues of Hail, Locusts, and Darkness -- Exodus 9:8–10:29

There is a moment, somewhere in the middle of these chapters, when the air itself turns against Egypt. Moses tosses a handful of soot from a furnace toward the sky, and boils break out on man and beast. Then the heavens crack open with thunder and fire and hail such as Egypt has never seen. Then a wind from the east carries in a living blanket of locusts that eats every green thing the hail left standing. And then the most terrible thing of all happens, which is almost nothing at all: the sun goes out. For three days a darkness so thick you could feel it presses down on the proudest civilization on earth. We are watching a kingdom that worshiped the sun discover that even the sun answers to Someone else.

It would be easy to read these plagues as a parade of disasters and miss the courtroom drama underneath them. This is a trial, and the gods of Egypt are in the dock. The sky god, the storm, the harvest, the great sun itself, each was an Egyptian deity, and one by one the LORD calls them to the stand and finds them powerless. He even says it out loud in chapter nine: I could have wiped you off the earth, 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 not merely punishing Pharaoh. He is making a name for Himself that will still be ringing in the pages of Paul's letter to the Romans more than a thousand years later.

And yet, watch Pharaoh. After the hail he calls for Moses and says the words that should have changed everything: I have sinned. The LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. For one trembling moment it sounds like surrender. But the rain stops, the danger passes, and his heart sets like cooling iron all over again. He says the same hollow words after the locusts. Here is one of the most sobering portraits in all of Scripture, a man who can say I have sinned and never once mean it. These chapters hold a mirror up to every one of us who has confessed under pressure and forgotten under relief, and they ask a piercing question. Is your repentance the real thing, or only the weather talking?

But do not miss the line of light running through all this darkness. When the hail falls, the land of Goshen is spared. When the darkness covers Egypt so thickly that no one can see his neighbor, the text says all the people of Israel had light in their dwellings. The same God who was dismantling Egypt was quietly keeping the lamps lit in the homes of His people. That is the God we are coming to know in Exodus, fierce against every proud thing that enslaves and tender toward every soul that belongs to Him. As you study these plagues, watch the gods of Egypt fall, watch Pharaoh harden, and then go home and check the light in your own dwelling. Whose are you, and does He keep your lamp burning even now?

Group Discussion: These plagues were aimed at the gods Egypt trusted for sky, harvest, and sunlight. What are the things our culture quietly treats as god, the powers we assume will always keep the lights on, and how might God expose them as powerless before Him?

Personal Reflection: Pharaoh said I have sinned twice and meant it neither time. Where in your own life have you confessed something to God under pressure and then quietly returned to it once the pressure lifted?

Read Exodus 9:8–10:29

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 105:26–36, a hymn that retells the plagues as God’s faithful acts on behalf of His covenant people; Romans 9:17, Paul’s quotation of Exodus 9:16 to show that God justly displays His power and name through hardened Pharaoh; Ezekiel 18:20, the principle that each soul bears the guilt of its own sin, guarding against any idea that some are condemned apart from their own choices; 2 Corinthians 7:10, the contrast between godly sorrow that leads to repentance and worldly sorrow that only regrets the pain; Hebrews 3:12–15, the warning to God’s people not to harden their hearts today if they hear His voice.

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