

Dominion Over Darkened Skies Exodus 9:13 – 10:29

Understanding why anyone might worship a piece of wood, or a metal object, or a god who looks like a frog is beyond me. I realize that it is partly due to my cultural norms and mores, and more. But I agree with Andrew Wilson in his book *God of All Things* as to why people, ancients or otherwise, might be drawn to express some kind of reverence to the sun. God has taught us that worship for the sun or anything under it is idolatry, but perhaps we can relate to the instinct. It's the most impressive luminary in the sky, the primary source of light, heat, and until recent, deep ocean discoveries, it was thought that nothing could live with its light or heat.¹ This improper admiration for the sun would dog Isreal for generations.² But when this blazing source of heat and life is shut out from a world in real time, documented for us throughout scripture, we are meant to see beyond its pseudo-supremacy. When the blinds are pulled unnaturally on it, we're meant to see Who pulled those blinds.

As the plagues continued to pierce the Egyptian populace, God intended for them to grow progressively worse. They began with pesky annoyances and terrible inconveniences—blood, frogs, biting insects. On the whole, those aren't by their nature life-threatening. However, the intensity certainly picked up from last week's text—flies brought *ruin*; livestock perished, and with it, livelihoods shriveled; boils, being the first direct assault on the Egyptians lives, brought misery.³ Today's three plagues are ramping up in the life-threatening department. They all involved the darkening of the skies: storms, another swarm of creatures, and both giving way to a crippling, abject darkness.

I. The Seventh Wonder: Devastating Hailstorm

At this juncture in Exodus, we have many of the same rhythms and emphases as in the other triad of plagues. The very same demand stands: To release God's people from enslavement that they might serve the true God. This is the third set of destructive wonders unleashed on Egypt and her cobra-king. Notice what God says in 9:14, ***For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people...*** Yes, God continued to make distinctions. He is so precise in His command of the natural order that He states His target and by an all-wise and all-powerful providence will indeed justly hit His mark. From this point forward, the plagues will be directly affecting the very viability of Egyptian life. The dangers are amassing with each new wonder. And by now we know the basic reason. Verse 14, ***so that you, Pharoah, may know that there is none like me in all the earth.*** This God, working out His decree, is solitary, standing alone in all of His otherness and perfections.

And then we come to verse 15. It addresses something that perhaps many of you have mulled over in your minds through your time reading this story. Couldn't the LORD have simply ended this thing from the gun? ***For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth.*** From day one this could have been a wrap! Why tell Pharoah this? To humble him, to be sure. Those who believes they've always called the shots need clearly defined truth pins to deflate their ballooned self-importance. "If not

¹ Andrew Wilson, *The God of All Things*, 98-99.

² Deuteronomy 17:2-5, Jeremiah 8:2, Ezekiel 8:16

³ Jeffrey Leonard, *The Preacher's Hebrew Companion Series, Exodus 1:1-15:21*, .

for my purpose, you and your people would have been dead by now, Pharaoh.” And God’s purpose in dealing deliberately with Egypt and the head of the snake is expressed 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.*** The globalization of God’s glory is, in essence, put into effect here in a demonstrative way. Yahweh is exposing the weakness of this world power, and again, showing His superiority to him and his people’s gods. In this particular case of a generational storm with destructive powers, the LORD would cut the legs from under their god named *Set*, who was thought to rule winds and storms.⁴

Verse 23-24 tells us the fearsome storm which unfolded, ***Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven...the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth...such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.*** An unprecedented, record hailstorm falls from heaven by heaven. And not just that, God pairs up elements that naturally oppose one another in their substances—ice and fire. In Hebrew thought the presentation of opposites pictures totality.⁵ The descriptions here show us that the LORD brings widespread destruction. The very heavy hail struck man, beast, plants, and Moses records the size of those pieces of falling ice by conveying that the hail ***broke every tree of the field.*** Small pieces of ice a month ago inflicted damage enough. Can you imagine being in this? Again, God is not to be trifled with, Pharaoh, Egyptians, peoples of the earth.

But notice this extension of something we’ve not seen in the plagues to this point—an expression of God’s concern for the welfare of the Egyptians. God’s word to Pharaoh in verse 19, ***Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.*** God was granting His enemies a way to escape His power and judgment! And some did escape the devastation. Exodus 9:20, ***Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses.*** To a few Egyptians, they’d seen enough evidence to believe what Moses and Aaron were prophesying. And though Yahweh once again draws the line between His own people and Egypt reflected here in verse 26, God communicated to these image bearers outside of commonwealth of Israel a way to escape His wrath. That sounds like the heart of our God, doesn’t it? When you look in the mirror, do you see an escapee? On a small scale, God is setting the table for the feast of later realities, such as the delights of Romans 5:10, “...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...” But this occasion for escape in Exodus 9 is also a precursing flag which is waving a warning to all this day: The LORD Jesus, we read in John 5:24, said plainly, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*” The devastation of neglecting this Word goes beyond physical harm to spiritual destruction, from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Apparently, Pharaoh evaded the destructive powers of the storm, saying to Moses and Aaron in 9:28 and following, ***Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer...This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.*** Moses responds, ***As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more***

⁴ John Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the OT*, 95-99.

⁵ Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 124.

hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. [30] But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God. The deliverer-prophet isn't duped by mere words. Moses is given insight that though Pharaoh is saying all the right things, in the end he'll validate this indictment by Moses.

II. The Eighth Wonder: Devouring Locusts

At the beginning of chapter 10, we notice another feature we've yet to see. The LORD offers another aim of the signs and wonders, verse 2, *that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians.* God cares that the recollection of His mercies should flourish⁶ beyond personal experience. The LORD is directing His people to look ahead. Those who will be born in the wilderness, outside of the Nile Delta, will certainly have their challenges. Beyond that, there will be many more enemies that His people will face. They'll all need many reminders as they wander in the desert, or as they fall into captivity, or as they live under Roman oppression. And in a world where Satan is busied with ill-will, where our own hearts either condemn us for not being enough or deceive us into believing that we are, knowing the God of scripture makes all the difference. Knowing that He is faithful, powerful, a defender of the weak, a friend of sinners, and the Lord of glory who was crucified in our place—these truths about this God, who is making Himself known, are to be imparted to every generation.⁷

Another plague now befalls the ruler who refused to humble himself, and his servants are mentioned as co-coldhearted resisters to Yahweh's will. This time, more insects. Moses told Pharaoh, *For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, [5] and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land.* Covering the face, not able to see the land—expressions of darkness. This gloomy “one-two punch” of hail and locusts by Yahweh would ruin the agrarian economy and demoralize the whole populace, a people centered on what grew in and around the fertile delta.⁸ It was no secret in the ancient world that locusts were often emblematic of armies. We see this clearly in prophetic literature. Joel 1-2 might be the prime example. There, Joel likened locusts to warriors who charged forward.⁹ He wrote, *The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them.*¹⁰

But before this insect onslaught appears, and after Pharaoh drives out Moses and Aaron with apparent frustration—the clear-headed complaints of Pharaoh's servants make an appearance. We see them saying in verse 7, *How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?* One commentator points out the irony of Moses being a *snare* to Egypt. Trapped by their opponent Moses, or rather their true Opponent Yahweh, they are now getting a “taste of their own medicine.”¹¹ The enslavers found no freedom from this divine oppression. History has borne out that though it might appear the LORD has been outwitted, He remains the string puller, the calm and collected, controlling-Creator over all His enemies. A Roman cross would one day prove the point with the most potency.

⁶ John Calvin, *Exodus*, 194.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:8

⁸ Douglas Stuart, *NAC: Exodus*, 245.

⁹ Joel 2:7

¹⁰ Joel 2:3, also see Judges 6:5 & Jeremiah 46:23

¹¹ Stuart, 247.

The unleashing of this anti-creation force of locusts had to be breathtakingly terrifying. They showed up in hoards and stripped whatever crops were left after the heavy, heaven-sent ice and fire. It was such a destructive abundance that Moses was sure to convey in 10:6 that no one had ever seen anything like it, hyperbole aside. Locusts can still cause problems in regions like North Africa. In 2019 and 2020, a swarm affected around 20 million peoples in that region.¹² The reason offered for these invasions were large storms and optimal breeding grounds. But here, natural forces were not in the cards. God is conducting the insects' flight patterns, landing spaces, and voracious appetites. In numbers beyond comprehension, this hungry army devoured important crops and continued to eat away at the morale of all the Egyptians.

But God knows how to resolve the chaos He creates. *And the LORD turned the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt.* At least for a few days after this stiff wind, I envision that the fishing on the Red Sea had to be fantastic! Growing up, sometimes my mom didn't have the disposable income or desire to buy me bait to fish, so I had to get creative. Especially in August and September, the vast farmland near my fishing spots sported a host of insects. With a jar, I became quite the efficient at catching grasshoppers, which I discovered was a particular delicacy to the catfish community. Beyond my own battles with these elusive jumpers, in the millions they were no issue for the LORD. Sent to destroy, they served God's purposes. Again, Moses pleads for Yahweh to relent and He answers. He orders the chaos and restores stability. And though *not a single locust was left in all the country*, Pharaoh was not finished resisting what God demanded.¹³ The sky was darkened. The land was darkened with locusts. And so was this mighty Pharaoh's heart.

III. The Ninth Wonder: Debilitating Darkness

We come to the penultimate sign beginning in verse 21 of chapter ten: The divine phenomena of darkness. Our 21st century lives don't think a lot about darkness. With relative ease, we move about freely when the sun sets. And most of the world does the same. We have so many illuminating devices that a term has come into vogue in recent years—*light pollution*. But light pollution was certainly not present in the 15th century B.C. It was already dark, but we see here that something darker was afoot.

Without many opening details or pleasantries exchanged by Moses and Pharaoh, this plague has a punchy, conciseness about it. The LORD commands Moses to stretch out his hand over Egypt. He does so. And then there is pitch darkness in all Egypt, excepting Goshen.¹⁴ And a distinct darkness it was. Moses pens that it was *a darkness to be felt*.

Moses expresses that it is *pitch darkness* in verse 22. There is stumping-one's-toe-in-the-middle-of-the-night-to-get-a-drink-of-water kind of darkness, and then there's pitch black where you have no orientation whatsoever. For three days, that type of darkness reigned. Genuine travel was rendered impossible because the lamps used then would shed very little light, certainly not enough

¹² news.mongabay.com/2025/07/agencies-race-to-prevent-new-food-crisis-as-locusts-return-to-northern-africa/

¹³ Exodus 10:20

¹⁴ Exodus 10:23, "...all the people of Israel had light where they lived."

to warn of some coming dangers such as wildlife or robbers.¹⁵ Yet, more than assaults on their freedoms afforded by light, this was a clear assault on a central god of the Egyptians, Amon-Re,¹⁶ who personified the sun. And it's here that God hid what the Egyptians worshiped, making a mockery of their supposed power.

In verse 24 Pharaoh keeps showing his resistance as he sought to strike yet another deal with Moses. *Your little ones may go with you* this time, but *your flocks and herds* must stay. It's a tale as old as time, and a song as old as rhyme. "I'll negotiate my way through this, or out of this, or around this," we think. But the heart is most ready to receive whatever the Lord has or do whatever the Lord says when the bargain chips fall to the ground. Pharaoh was gripping whatever he could, running incessantly on self-preservation mode.

However, God's plans weren't being frustrated by this stubbornness. Verse 27, ***But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.*** And then we notice a new level of venom¹⁷ by this snake-crowned lord in verse 28, ***Then Pharaoh said to [Moses], "Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die." [29] Moses said, "As you say! I will not see your face again."*** We know that Pharaoh is now accustomed to changing his demands and his mind in light of the circumstances. One could see how the most powerful man in the world might operate within confusion and inconsistency if he is being routed and humiliated by an onslaught of devastating works at the hand of an invisible enemy. In no position to set any terms, the threat here is fangless. The visible displays of darkness—the hailstorm, the locusts, the pitch black—have yet to open the eyes of Egypt's morally dimwitted and disturbed despot.

Conclusion

It's not without purpose that the themes of darkness and light are clustered about from Genesis to Revelation. And it's not without an eternal purpose that God strikes Egypt with these dark realities. Darkness is the tale-tell sign of His displeasure and righteous judgment. Peter says it with utter clarity, that is, for the unrighteous *the gloom of outer darkness has been reserved*.¹⁸ Akin to this picture, the absence of light is represented by death in the scriptures, and even understood this way in countless historical sources. Darkness is also emblematic of sin, as Paul teaches us about the state of all humanity in Romans 1:20 wherein rejecting the Creator is synonymous to our *foolish hearts* being *darkened*. Jesus taught us that humans *love darkness rather than the light* of truth and grace.¹⁹ In fact, He is the light of the world, and whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.²⁰ And these truths are meant for the world. It's His refrain in Exodus—***that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.*** And Yahweh's eternal decree—His fullest intention—is realized in the dominion and grace of His one and only Son.

When anyone takes an honest look into the New Testament, found is One who is at the same time like us and not like us. We find this LORD of Exodus rising from needed sleep to command more life-threatening weather. We can rightly draw a straight line from Exodus 9 to Mark 4—the winds

¹⁵ Stuart, 257.

¹⁶ Currid & Barrett, *ESV Bible Atlas*, 84.

¹⁷ J. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, 200.

¹⁸ 2 Peter 2:17

¹⁹ John 3:19

²⁰ John 8:12

and waves have always fallen in line with His demands. When we square up to Jesus in the Gospels, we discover a Sovereign who likewise choreographed creatures in creation. We can inlay these locusts onto a coin in a fish's mouth and onto full nets after a night of unsuccessful trawling. Christ astounded these young, Jewish fishermen into recipients of grace. And if we're seeing this Jesus aright, we'll give thanks and worship the One whose death darkened the skies as He absorbed the blows of divine justice on Himself, for your sin and mine.

Saints, let's worship such a God of majesty. 6,500 miles from where God worked these wonders we sit, exalting the God who darkened the lands of Egypt. His name is great in all the earth. What He did centuries ago would ring out with power to a prostitute in a foreign land, who said of this God, "*For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt...And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted...for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.*"²¹ And what He did reverberates through this sanctuary this day; for He has delivered us from our greatest enemies and into a gospel flowing with milk and honey. Might we all know the transfer from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, reveling in the forgiveness of all our sins.

²¹ Joshua 2:10-11