

EXODUS—WEEK 6

SETTING THE STAGE



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is The Plague of Locusts by James Tissot (1836–1902)
On display in the Jewish Museum, New York*

The plagues are getting worse—even to the point of locusts wiping out everything. But this just makes Pharaoh all the more obdurate. He flops back and forth between confessing his sin to Moses and pledging to let them worship YHVH and refusing to let them do anything.

He's losing his mind and his kingdom at the same time.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at www.ailbe.org and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletters *Crosfigell* and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

Exodus 9:8–10:20 — Setting the Stage
Copyright 2024 F. Michael Slay
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 Exodus 9:8–12

So the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh. And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” Then they took ashes from the furnace and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses scattered them toward heaven. And they caused boils that break out in sores on man and beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians. But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

All the Egyptian gods of medicine, particularly Imhotep, are powerless to do anything about the boils. Imhotep is especially interesting because he had been a real person. Will Durant, in his authoritative reference on world history, *The Story of Civilization*, says of Imhotep, “*He did so much for Egyptian medicine that later generations worshiped him as a god of knowledge, author of their sciences and their arts; and at the same time he appears to have founded the school of architecture which provided the next dynasty with the first great builders in history.*”

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/3293164/How-Imhotep-gave-us-medicine.html>

But the big story here isn’t about the Egyptian gods. With them mostly debunked, the plagues are starting to move on. Notice how they’re getting more unpleasant and more personal. The magicians cannot even stand before Moses. Did they kneel, crawl, what? This must have been a painful moment for them, figuratively as much as literally.

By dismantling the Egyptian deities, the LORD established the point of all this—YHVH is the one true God. That theme remains, but now He’s cranking up the volume by attacking the Egyptians personally. The Egyptian gods are still mocked as useless, since they can’t protect the Egyptians from the plagues.

When you can’t even stand, the message starts to come in loud and clear.

The Egyptians were told why they were being afflicted. We rarely are. That makes suffering worse.

This is especially true for illness. Being sick feels like being punished, though that’s usually not the point. Thus, we should ask the Great Physician for healing. We should also pray for emotional comfort. If you know people struggling with illness, ask the LORD to encourage them and give them peace.

However, it’s a mistake to leave it at that. Part of caring is being there. Being sick is lonely. Friends need to call and show up.

Sick people may need help with chores, shopping or cooking, but they mostly need someone to talk to. Emotional support enhances healing too.

Be the friend who makes a difference.

2 Exodus 9:13–26

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: “Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth. Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go. Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now. Therefore send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.” ’ ”

He who feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. But he who did not regard the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt—on man, on beast, and on every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.” And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail.

As always, the Egyptian gods are useless. The useless “god of the day” is Nut—the goddess of the sky.

<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/nut.htm>

But there’s something new in this passage that’s more important. God tells Pharaoh exactly what’s going on with all these plagues. He shocks Pharaoh by telling him, “*But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.*”

Imagine you are engaged in a war, and the leader of the opposing side informs you that he got you appointed as the leader of your side. Furthermore, he did this to make himself look good.

Can you think of a greater put down?

That same put down is part of the beauty of the gospel. The purpose of salvation by grace alone is God’s glory. Just as He raised up Pharaoh to make Himself look good (and Pharaoh look bad), He raises us up for His own glory while hammering home the point that we deserve none of that glory.

3 Exodus 9:27–35

And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Entreat the LORD, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.”

So Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s. But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God.”

Now the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was in the head and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they are late crops.

So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and spread out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain was not poured on the earth. And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the LORD had spoken by Moses.

Now the Egyptian people are divided. Any Egyptian who *feared the word of the LORD ... made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses*. Any who didn’t, *left his servants and his livestock in the field*. This surely led to a great deal of anguish and argument. The loss of life and livestock was severe. Imagine the conversations between the two camps afterwards.

This is turning into a clinic on bad leadership. It’s hard to tell whether Pharaoh’s vacillation is a psychological disorder or just someone out of his depth flailing around. We can’t blame this on his advisors (the “magicians”); they got a clue back in plague number three.

As mean as he is, it’s still hard not to feel some sympathy for Pharaoh. He’s just pitiful. Each time he pleads with Moses to end a plague, it’s more obsequious than the time before. This time he even says, *“I have sinned.”*

But he’s just saying that; he doesn’t really mean it.

Words without meaning are way too common in America, and not just with politicians. We elect people who talk like that because it doesn’t offend us that much. This is a catastrophe. We’re so marinated in this culture that we don’t even notice it. That makes this hard to explain.

Our conversations are usually not even conversations. We ask, “How ya’ doin’?” but don’t expect a real answer. We’d be stunned speechless if someone replied with something like, “I’m really hurting.” We talk to people like we don’t want to talk to them, and we say things we do not mean. For example ...

Beware of the line, “I’ll pray for you.” If you commit to praying for someone, write it down (e.g., on your phone). If possible, don’t just promise, stop and pray right then—and write it down.

4 Exodus 10:1–11

Now the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”

So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. And they shall cover the face of the earth, so that no one will be able to see the earth; and they shall eat the residue of what is left, which remains to you from the hail, and they shall eat every tree which grows up for you out of the field. They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians—which neither your fathers nor your fathers’ fathers have seen, since the day that they were on the earth to this day.’ ” And he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “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 know that Egypt is destroyed?”

So Moses and Aaron were brought again to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve the LORD your God. Who are the ones that are going?”

And Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.”

Then he said to them, “The LORD had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you. Not so! Go now, you who are men, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desired.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

This time Pharaoh’s servants convince him to bring Moses and Aaron back with the words, “*Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?*” But Pharaoh keeps playing games and won’t let the people of Israel worship the LORD the way He requires. Finally, he blurts out, “*The LORD had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go!*” Then *they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.*

Pharaoh has, in modern terms, a god complex. This is perfectly understandable, given that the Egyptian religion deifies Pharaohs. When the LORD asks, “*How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?*” Pharaoh’s answer is, “Forever!” Humility is out of the question.

This is a perfect portrait of a hard heart.

We are sometimes like Pharaoh in that the more obvious it becomes that we’re wrong, the more we dig in our heels and refuse to admit it. Even though we confess Jesus as Lord, we have a god complex too.

It’s pride. Despite all we’ve been taught, our sinful nature clings to the notion that we deserve blessings.

5 Exodus 10:12–20

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land—all that the hail has left.” So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind on the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. They were very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only.” So he went out from Pharaoh and entreated the LORD. And the LORD turned a very strong west wind, which took the locusts away and blew them into the Red Sea. There remained not one locust in all the territory of Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

Locust plagues still happen. There was one not all that long ago in Madagascar.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/jul/12/madagascar-locust-plague>

Even with modern technology, it’s a tragedy of biblical proportions. I like to gripe that the deer eat everything. Imagine living in a primitive agricultural society and seeing locusts wipe out all your food.

If there are any Egyptians left that still worship their “gods” they might be wondering, “Where’s Osiris?”

<http://www.egyptianmyths.net/osiris.htm>

Pharaoh seems to have abandoned this perspective and *called Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that He may take away from me this death only.”*

The fact that Pharaoh did this *in haste* speaks volumes. He sees how dire the situation is. Then he forgets.

One of the weirdest aspects of our sinful nature is how it makes us unseriously serious. Pharaoh was totally serious while pleading with Moses, but that was quickly forgotten. We do this more than we realize. How many promises are broken because they somehow “couldn’t be kept”?

Give me break. If that happens a lot, what does the word promise mean, anyway? You think this is rare? Every debt not paid is exactly that—including every bankruptcy. We’ve even made bankruptcy normal.

Making a promise you might not be able to keep is being unseriously serious.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever seen a healing miracle?
2. What's the greatest insult or comeback line ever?
3. What expressions are typically meaningless or insincere?
4. When do you most struggle to admit you're wrong?
5. How have broken promises hurt you?