

# OpenTheo

## March 3rd: Exodus 10 & Matthew 13:44-58

March 2, 2020



### Alastair Roberts

Locusts and darkness. Treasure, Pearl, and Dragnet.

Genesis 22:17 (locusts punning on multiplying); Genesis 41:23 (the east wind); Exodus 14:28 (not one of the Egyptians left).

Habakkuk 1:14-17, Ezekiel 32:3, 47:10 (dragnets and fishing).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Exodus 10. Then the Lord said to Moses, Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians, and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord. So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, how long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me.

For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your

country, and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land. And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field, and they shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your servants, and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen from the day they came on earth to this day.' Then 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 understand that Egypt is ruined? So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, Go serve the Lord your God, but which ones are to go? Moses said, We will go with our young and our old, we will go with our sons and our daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the Lord. But he said to them, The Lord be with you if I ever let you and your little ones go. Look, you have some evil purpose in mind.

No, go the men among you and serve the Lord, for that is what you are asking. And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence. Then the Lord said to Moses, Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.

So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt.

Such a dense swarm of locusts as has never been before, nor ever will be again. They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that had been left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the Lord your God only to remove this death from me. So he went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the Lord, 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. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go. Then the Lord said to Moses, Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.

So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the people of Israel had light where they lived.

Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, Go, serve the Lord. Your little ones also may go with you. Only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.

But Moses said, You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also must go with us. Not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, Get away from me. Take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.

Moses said, As you say, I will not see your face again. In Exodus chapter 10 we reach the final two plagues in the third cycle of the plagues, the eighth and the ninth, the plague of the locusts and the plague of the darkness. At this point the plagues have a greater finality to them.

They are no longer warnings to Pharaoh so much as they are final judgments, destruction being brought upon the land. God now declares that he is doing this so that the Israelites will recount his signs performed upon the Egyptians in the future to their sons and their grandsons, so that they might know that he is the Lord, as they look back upon his humiliation of the Egyptians and their power. A plague of locusts could completely ravage a region, devouring everything in sight.

And the locusts that come here would completely cover the eye of the land so that no one would be able to see the land. They darken the entire surface of the land. There's playing upon the notion of sight here, covering the eye of the land so that no one will be able to see the land.

They're darkening the land. The failure of sight seems to be particularly important in these final two plagues of this cycle. At this point Pharaoh's courtiers get involved and try to get Pharaoh to compromise and negotiate with Moses and Aaron.

They see that the land of Egypt is being completely destroyed as a result of the stubbornness of Pharaoh, and they want to try and get some sort of deal negotiated. Pharaoh wants to ensure that the Israelites return, and for this purpose he wants the children and the women to stay behind, because if they stay behind then they can be sure that the Israelite men will come back for them. They're hostages to some degree.

The locusts are brought in by a strong east wind. They settle on the entire land of Egypt and consume all of its vegetation, darkening the whole land. Again Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron to ask them to plead for the removal of the locusts.

He describes the locusts as this death. It is something that has completely ravaged the land and is associated in Pharaoh's mind with death itself. God removes the locusts from

the land at Moses' request, and there's not a single one left.

They're blown away by a strong sea wind and blown into the Red Sea. But then the Lord strengthens the heart of Pharaoh once more. So once more when the pressure is off he resists the command to let the people go.

We are told that not a single locust remained in all the land of Egypt. As we look through this plague we can probably recognize some similarities with other things in the story of the Exodus, not least the experience of Israel. We've first encountered a strong east wind with the blighting east wind in the dream of Pharaoh concerning the years of famine.

It was that wind that brought in the Israelites to the land and they multiplied and grew strong within the land, covering the whole surface of the land. The locusts are described as the Abba, and that is language that maybe plays upon the description of God's multiplication of the people in places like Genesis 22, verse 17. And when the locusts are removed, they are removed by a wind to the Red Sea.

Perhaps we are to see in all of this that the locusts represent the people of Israel. They are going to be removed from the land, but they are going to be removed at Pharaoh's request. The locust devouring the land is just one of ten plagues, but the Israelites devouring the land, as long as they are not being sent away, is the whole story of the plagues.

This is something that Pharaoh needs to deal with, if the locusts of Israel are supposed to go. Now comparing Israel to locusts, in part, I think, arises from the Egyptians' own conception of the Israelites. They think of the Israelites as insects that devour the land, that multiply in swarms.

They think of them as vermin, like the frogs, and all these sorts of creatures that are undesirable and destructive. They're also like flies that cause defilement. And until the Egyptians will send the Israelites out, they will be afflicted by these creatures, these creatures that represent what they regard the Israelites to be.

And when they finally send out the Israelites, they'll find they're blown into the Red Sea. There's a strong wind that enables them to cross the sea, and they never see them again. They're completely removed.

There's not one left in the land. And so maybe we're supposed to see Israel within this. But there's another way of seeing it.

We could also see it as representing the Egyptians themselves. They are, as a result of their own unfaithfulness, destroying their land. It's being absolutely ravaged because of their sin.

And they will ultimately be blown into the Red Sea, and they'll all drown there. That is going to be their fate. And the presence of the wind in the opening up of the sea and then the closing of the sea suggests maybe that there is such a connection here.

We might also notice that when the Egyptians are destroyed, in chapter 14, verse 28, we are told that not one of them remained. So there's a similarity between the Israelites and the locusts, but also some similarities between the Egyptians and the locusts. The plague that follows is a plague of darkness.

Now this doesn't seem to have caused much destruction, but symbolically it was incredibly powerful, turning the lights off over the entirety of Egypt, a victory against the greatest god of all in the pantheon, the god that represented the sun itself and his victory over darkness, now being repealed. This is a return to the state of the original creation before light was created. And in that respect, it's the completion of a de-creation process, an event of devastating symbolic import.

This plague was almost certainly the result of a great sandstorm, that the darkness could be felt, would be all these different particles and other things in the air that made the darkness itself tangible. It lasted for three days, once again three days appearing within the stories of Genesis and Exodus. We've seen this number occurring on a number of occasions to this point, and it seems to be a number of some significance.

Three days on the journey to Mount Moriah, three days before the chief baker and the chief cut-bearer would be restored to office or killed, three days the brothers were placed in prison, and three days was also the period of time that they asked to travel into the wilderness. So there seems to be, first of all, a significant number here, three days, but beyond that more general significance, there's the more particular significance of the way that it parallels the three days that they had requested. As they had asked to worship the Lord and that had been denied, now there will be three days in which the heavens themselves are blocked out, they have no communion with their great God.

Perhaps there's some sort of poetic justice in this particular judgement. Pharaoh summons Moses at this point, and he says that they can go and serve the Lord, they just have to leave their livestock behind. He's made a great concession at this point.

He's going to allow them to take the women and the children, they just have to leave the livestock. But Moses refuses. They have to take the livestock with them, and indeed Pharaoh has to give them sacrifices to take too.

It's not enough that Pharaoh will allow them to take their own livestock, they have to take some livestock of the Egyptians as well. But God strengthens Pharaoh's heart once more, and he will not let them go. And then Pharaoh dismisses them completely.

Pharaoh is not going to allow them to see his face again. And Moses confirms that this

will indeed be the case. Pharaoh might think that this is some sort of judgement against Moses, but really the fact that Moses will no longer come to him with warnings is a sign of judgement upon him, the finality of that judgement.

No longer will there be a heads-up that God is about to judge. Rather, the great judgement to come will fall, and it will be catastrophic and final, and Pharaoh will not be prepared for it. A question to consider.

There is an event in the New Testament that closely parallels the plague of darkness. What event is that, and how can we fill out the significance of the parallels between them? Matthew chapter 13, verses 44-58 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw away the bad.

So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Have you understood all these things? They said to him, Yes. And he said to them, Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? Are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things? And they took offence at him.

But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honour except in his hometown and in his own household. And he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. At the end of Matthew 13, Jesus is concluding his body of teaching on parables.

The parables address Israel's history and the way that the kingdom comes. I've noted that we find pairs of parables and sometimes even triplets of parables. They are intended to be read alongside and in conversation with each other.

The first of the parables here is the parable of the treasure. And the treasure found in the field is an unexpected find, in a field that belongs to some other party. The person who finds it must buy the field from an owner who does not know the value of what he possesses.

The kingdom in this parable is valuable above all else. The man who finds it must sell all that he has to obtain it. The treasure of the field eclipses the value of everything else in his possession.

He willingly surrenders all other possessions, priorities and property to get this one field. It's the only thing that matters. It completely changes his attitude to his life and all else is counted as nothing in order that he might gain the kingdom.

It calls for unreserved and complete self-investment. And the purchase of the man is characterised by joy, a joy that utterly overwhelms any sense of loss of the rest of his possessions. And alongside this parable of the treasure we find the parable of the pearl of great price.

It's a counterpart but there are also differences. The parable of the pearl of great price involves a treasure not that's to be found in a field but one associated with the sea. And now it's a merchant that finds this treasure.

The focus in this parable is not primarily on the treasure but upon the finder. In the first parable, the parable of the hidden treasure, the kingdom of heaven is likened to treasure hidden in a field. But in this one the kingdom of heaven is likened to the merchant in search of fine pearls.

The first parable emphasises joy, surprise and hiddenness. But the second doesn't even though it has seeking as a key element. The second focuses on the surpassing character of one particular example of a group of things being sought.

So he's seeking for pearls and he finds this one particular pearl, a pearl that is of greater worth than any other. And so he begins by seeking for pearls more generally and he ends up in possession of one particular pearl. The parables have different nuances.

They both emphasise the value of the kingdom and the appropriate action that must follow is emphasised, that this selling of everything to obtain this one thing. But the first one seems to have a focus more upon the land. We can think about the parable of the treasure perhaps as a parable concerning Israel.

There is this great treasure, the treasure of the covenant, hidden in this field, this field of Israel. And yet this hidden treasure of the covenant and the kingdom is not valued by the people who own it, is not truly recognised for what it is. But the person who recognises it, whether that's a faithful Jew or whether it's Christ himself or whether it's some Gentile proselyte, that person recognising the true value is willing to make the necessary sacrifice to obtain it.

The parable of the pearl of great price may be speaking more from the perspective of a Gentile God-fearer or some other person who's coming upon the treasure of the covenant of Israel. Among all these other nations there is this one particular pearl of great price and when he discovers the value of the covenant, when he discovers the value of the kingdom of Israel, he's willing to sacrifice everything to obtain it. And so as we've recognised already, paired parables need to be read alongside each other

recognising that they are both similar and different.

They have slightly different shades of nuance, they emphasise different facets of the kingdom. But placed alongside each other they'll often reveal more than if they're read in detachment from each other. The parable of the dragnet follows.

And even though the parable of the dragnet is not next to the parable of the wheat and the weeds, there seem to be a great many similarities between them. Sorting of good and bad, weeping and gnashing of teeth, the angels, the end of the age, division, all these sorts of things. But there are differences.

There's no enemy involved in the parable of the dragnet. There's almost an entire focus upon the negative punishment. We do find background in the Old Testament as well.

You can maybe think of Habakkuk chapter 1 verse 14 to 17. You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. He brings all of them up with a hook.

He drags them out with his net. He gathers them in his dragnet. So he rejoices and is glad.

Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet. For by them he lives in luxury and his food is rich. Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? Here nations and peoples of the Gentiles are compared to fish in the sea.

And the Chaldeans are going through with their hooks and their dragnets and bringing people out. The imagery of the dragnet and the hook here is a negative one. It's one of actually overcoming or defeating people.

Related imagery could be found in Ezekiel chapter 32 verse 3. Thus says the Lord God, I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples and they will haul you up in my dragnet. It's a reference to Egypt in the midst of the seas. But there are positive uses of the language of the dragnet too and of fishing.

In chapter 47 of Ezekiel verses 9 following. So everything will live where the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside the sea.

From En Gedi to En Eglim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds like the fish of the great sea. So the dragnet can be used as a symbol both of blessing and of judgment.

As in the case of the Pearl of Great Price, as a sea parable this relates chiefly to the Gentiles as distinct from Israel. So Israel has gathered a great many people from the nations who believe in or have pledged adherence to the God of Israel. And they are



going to be divided too.

This is the parable of the dragnet. Jesus concludes this body of teaching by speaking about the scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven. Once again Jesus is giving a saying that explains his use of parables.

There are three blocks of parables here each with an explanatory statement. And this is the one in this particular body. It particularly relates to the disciples who will become teachers in the kingdom.

And they are to bring out both old and new things. Now we can see this maybe as bringing out truths from the Old Testament and maybe bringing out new truths of the gospel. But it could also be a reference to what Jesus has already spoken about.

He's spoken about things that righteous men and prophets long to see and hear. And also to things hidden since the foundation of the world. The things that the righteous men and prophets long to see and hear are the things that are new that Christ is bringing about through his ministry.

But the things hidden from the foundation of the world are treasures that have been there all the time. The oldest things of all but yet they've never truly been revealed. So maybe what they're bringing out are not just the new things that are being accomplished by Christ.

But the very old things that are being brought into the light by Christ. When we read the Old Testament as Christians we're not just bringing out truths that have been known since time immemorial. We're revealing something about what is old in the light of Christ.

The old treasure that has been hidden is being disclosed and now people can see its true value. Following this teaching Jesus spends time teaching in the synagogue of his hometown. And Jesus has already challenged the primacy of biological family ties at the end of the previous chapter.

And here his hometown's presumed familiarity with him and his identity prevents them from seeing him. They just see him as the one that they're familiar with as the son of the carpenter. They know his family and his relatives.

They know his mother, his brothers and his sisters. And they cannot see beyond that. They cannot see that this man from Nazareth could be anything more than a mere carpenter's son.

We should recognize here the ongoing themes of hiddenness that have been in this chapter are once again at play in their failure to recognize who Christ is. Also the themes of division. People are being divided on the basis of their failure to or ability to recognize

Christ.

And here in Jesus' own hometown there are people who are hearing but not understanding. Seeing but not perceiving. A question to consider.

There are two key parables in this section that speak of selling everything in order to obtain the kingdom. Jesus has already taught concerning our relationship to wealth in the Sermon on the Mount. And here he returns to themes that invite reflection upon economic attachments and commitments and priorities.

How could we reassess our economic values in the light of the teaching of the parable of the Pearl of Great Price and the treasure in the field?