

Exodus 11:1-10
Plague 10: Death of Firstborn

When was the last time that you took some time to thank God?

- For His patience
- For His grace
- For His commitment
- For His love
- For His holiness

So often, we are so busy that we seldom take time to praise God

- We are quick to ask things from Him
- But we are slow to thank Him and praise Him

Sadly, some people never take the time to praise God¹

- They are too busy living for their own desires and pleasure
- They are too preoccupied with their own goals

Pharaoh was like that

- Even though he had been warned several times, he still chose to disobey
- The king of Egypt still chose to live for a purpose other than the glory of Yahweh

The challenge is before us as well

- Will we commit to living for God's glory?
- Will we live a life of submission to God?
- Will we seek to obey the Word of God?

Let's read Exodus 11:1-10

In the 11th chapter of Exodus, we find ten (10) verses that describe the preparation for the 10th plague

This isn't when the 10th plague takes place

- That won't be until chapter 12

But the description and overview of the 10th plague does take place here in Exodus 11

We will look at three elements of the description of the final plague

- Plunder of the Egyptians (11:1-3)
- Protection of the Israelites (11:4-8)
- Pride of Pharaoh (11:9-10)

¹ Michael Bentley, *Travelling Homeward*, 136.

I. Plunder of the Egyptians (11:1-3)

1 Now the LORD said to Moses, “One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here.

Moses is now told a crucial piece of the puzzle regarding the plague accounts

- He is told, “One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here”

“one more plague... after that he will let you go from here”

- These are comforting words
- The end is near!²

We have the benefit of reading the Text

- We know there are ten plague
- We can know the order

But for Moses and everyone else involved, they didn't know how many

- Until now

Moses had been told that the LORD would bring Israel out of Egypt

- “So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite” (3:8)
- “Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt” (3:10)

Moses had also been told that God would kill the first-born of the Egyptians

- “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Israel is My son, My first-born. So I said to you, ‘Let My son go, that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your first-born.’”” (4:22-23)

What Moses didn't know was much of the specifics

- How many plagues
- How long they would last
- When the last plague would be announced

Now the LORD promises Moses that after this one plague, He will deliver Israel from Egypt

The word here for “plague” is used elsewhere in the OT of a strike³

- A violent hit

God would not gently tap the king of Pharaoh in this last plague

- It would be a violent strike

² John L. Mackay, *A Mentor Commentary, Exodus*, 193.

³ John D. Currid, *An EP Study Commentary, Exodus*, 232.

When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely.

God also promises that Israel would be released from under Pharaoh's grip and control

- The words "when he lets you go" must have been comforting and encouraging

This is what God has been demanding from Pharaoh for a long time

- "let My people go" (Ex 5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20–21; 9:1, 13; 10:3–4)

But he wouldn't merely let Israel go

- God says, "he will surely drive you out from here completely"

A much stronger word is used here

- "drive"

This word has been used before in Exodus

- "Then the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock" (2:17)
- "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he shall let them go, and under compulsion he shall drive them out of his land.'" (6:1)
- Moses and Aaron "were driven out from Pharaoh's presence" (10:11)

What a change in the actions of Pharaoh

- He was attempting to control Israel in keeping them in Egypt
- Now he is not only letting Israel leave, but he is driving them out of Egypt

There would be no more compromises on the part of Pharaoh⁴

- He would be demanding that they leave

Something serious must cause him to change his mind like this

- Indeed, it was the strongest plague up to this point

2 "Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold."

The LORD then tells Moses to prepare the Israelites for their Exodus

- Remember, the 10th plague doesn't actually take place immediately
- But God's people are to make preparations

The Israelites are to ask for silver and gold from the Egyptians

- Both men and women are to do this

Why gold and silver?

- Have you ever wondered this?

Why would God give gold and silver to a bunch of people living in the desert?

- Can you imagine carrying this weight?

⁴ Currid, 232.

There are a few reasons why God allowed the plundering of the Egyptians⁵

- It was a further humiliation of how the people of Israel were blessed by God
- It was also a way of God providing for His people as they were a people on the move toward the land of Canaan

This is actually a fulfillment of a promise made to Abram, all the way back in Genesis 15⁶

- After God entered into a unilateral covenant with Himself, God promised Abram, “**Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions**” (15:13-14)

In Exodus 3, God told Moses, “**I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. And I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed**” (3:19-21)

3 And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.

Here’s another question to ponder

- Why would the Egyptians go from hating the Israelites to blessing them with gold and silver?

Verse 3 has the answer to that question

- “**the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians**”

“**favor**” can also be translated grace

- It implies a benevolent attitude

There is no other explanation for the change in the disposition of the Egyptians toward the Israelites

- It can only be accredited to God alone

Furthermore, the man Moses *himself* was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, *both* in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.

The first part of verse 3 was a generic explanation of the favor of the Egyptians toward the children of Israel

- The second part of verse 3 is specific explanation

Moses, the human, visible leader of Israel, enjoyed remarkable favor in the eyes of the Egyptians

- He has been the visual focus during these plague accounts

Notice the specificity of Moses’ fame and esteem

- He “**was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, *both* in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people**”

Think about this

- Moses was esteemed highly “**in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants**”

⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *NAC, Exodus*, 263.

⁶ Currid, 233.

These are the same servants who had sided with Pharaoh earlier

- But as time went on, they began to see the folly of following the king of Egypt

Moses was also highly esteemed “in the sight of the people”

- The Egyptian people esteemed Moses very highly

Moses wasn't esteemed because of personal greatness or qualifications

- It was due exclusively to God⁷

So we see that Moses was highly esteemed by

- The Egyptian people
- The servants of Pharaoh

But who is missing?⁸

- Pharaoh himself
- His heart was hardened by continual stubbornness and disobedience

It is oftentimes lost in the big picture, but we have to remember Moses' early years

- He was raised by the daughter of Pharaoh
- He was raised by an Egyptian!

All of this was in the plan and providence of God

- Nothing happens by accident!

It is remarkable to see how the Israelites enjoyed such a turn of events

- They were once enslaved and mistreated
- But when they leave, they will be showered with blessings and gifts

Proverbs 16:7 tells us, “When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

- **Plunder of the Egyptians (11:1-3)**

II. Protection of the Israelites (11:4-8)

4 And Moses said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt,

There has been some level of confusion regarding verses 4-8 of Exodus 11

- Specifically, when were they spoken?
- When were they given to Moses?

We noted at the end of Exodus 10 how further negotiations broke down between Moses and Pharaoh

- Pharaoh threatened Moses that he ever saw his face again, he would have him killed
- Moses responded, “You are right; I shall never see your face again.” (10:29)

So how do we reconcile those statements with Exodus 11?

- Moses continues to speak to Pharaoh
- We can assume that he is still in the presence of Pharaoh

⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 369.

⁸ Currid, 234.

Some have said the LORD had given Moses these words before the face-to-face interaction of Exodus 10⁹

- In other words, Moses had been warned and prepared long before things turned ugly

But that doesn't seem right to me in light of the context

- Perhaps I am wrong, but I think there is a more natural explanation

As I understand things, Moses and Pharaoh came to a heated discussion at the end of chapter 10

- Both agreed that they would never see each other again

But we are not told that Moses left the presence of Pharaoh¹⁰

- That isn't specified until Exodus 11:8

I believe that after the heated exchange of words at the end of Exodus 10, the LORD gave Moses an additional revelation that we find in verses 4-7

This was the last straw

- No more negotiations
- No more playing games

God was going to bring the 10th plague upon Pharaoh and Egypt

- This would be the most personal and powerful plague to date

Speaking as a messenger and prophet, Moses says, “**Thus says the LORD, ‘About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt’**”

- “**Thus says the LORD**” – speaking for the Lord, not his own opinions
- “**about midnight**” – not during the day, but during the night
- “**I am going out into the midst of Egypt**” – God would not use secondary means, but He would go out Himself into Egypt

Nighttime was an especially fearful time for the Egyptians¹¹

- Their supreme deity, the sun god, had departed to the underworld
- It was no longer protecting the land of Egypt

The Egyptians felt exposed

- It was at nighttime that they felt most vulnerable

It was the deepest, darkest time of the night

- It was a time of great defenselessness¹²

The Egyptians placed a great emphasis on death¹³

- The pyramids, which have stood for thousands of years, are monuments to the kings/Pharaohs who have died

What a contrast, however, when we look at Yahweh

- The people of Israel didn't fear the nighttime

⁹ Kaiser, 369.

¹⁰ Currid, 231.

¹¹ Currid, 234.

¹² Stuart, 265.

¹³ Bentley, 139.

Psalms 121:4 tells us, “Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep”

- That is our God as well!

Up till this point, God has used secondary means to bring out destruction and devastation¹⁴

- Gnats
- Hail
- Locusts
- Etc.

But this is entirely different

- God says, “I am going out into the midst of Egypt”

This should have been terrifying to the Egyptians

- Look at what God has done through secondary means!
- Imagine what He could and would do through His own personal involvement!

When would God bring this plague?¹⁵

- We are not told!

Previously, Pharaoh was told, “Tomorrow” (Ex 8:10, 23, 29; 9:5, 18; 10:4)

But in this case, no timeframe is given

- Pharaoh is left in suspense!

Just what would God do?

- Verse 5 tells us

5 and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the first-born of the cattle as well.

Oh, these solemn words, “all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die”

- Human death would be the consequence of the king’s arrogance and pride

Every Egyptian family’s first-born would be killed

- No exceptions

Why the first-born?

- The first-born was viewed as holding a special place in the family

If the first-born was a son, then the hopes and dreams were bound up in him¹⁶

- He was to receive a double portion of the family inheritance (Deut 21:17)

Moses uses two examples that show the effects of the plague on the contrasting social classes

- “from the first-born of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne”
- “even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones”

¹⁴ Kaiser, 369.

¹⁵ Mackay, 195.

¹⁶ Ronald F. Youngblood, *Everyman’s Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 57.

All the way from the king's palace to the slave's workplace

- From the high to the low
- From the royalty to the poverty

For the first-born of Pharaoh, this was especially significant¹⁷

- He was viewed as the ascending incarnation of the sun god
- He was a future god!

Every single Egyptian family would be affected

- It didn't matter what social status you belonged to
- It didn't matter how much money you had
- None of this mattered

But God doesn't stop there

- As bad as the death of the first-born was, there is more

The last phrase of verse 5 tells us, "all the first-born of the cattle as well"

- Cattle?
- Why is God killing the first-born of cattle?

As far back as the Fall, animals were affected by the sin of humanity¹⁸

- Our sin has caused major ramifications for the animal world

Remember what the LORD told Noah about the future flood?

- "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them" (Gen 6:7)

Remember the end of Jonah, when God speaks of His mercy toward the Ninevites?

- "And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jonah 4:11)

God's grace is seen in that He only killed the first-born of the Egyptian families¹⁹

- He could have rightfully killed the entire population of Egypt!
- But He didn't

The first-born represented the entire race

- It was the strength and hope for the nation
- It represented the next generation

This raises a moral question²⁰

- Why does God go around killing babies?

This is an assumption, of course, that all the first-borns were newborns

- That isn't the case

¹⁷ Mackay, 196.

¹⁸ Mackay, 197.

¹⁹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT, Exodus*, 324-25.

²⁰ Mackay, 197.

Many of the first-born killed were older individuals

- Perhaps with children of their own

What we need to realize is that God has a right to bring judgment upon any or all of us

- We are all vile, wicked sinners
- We have fallen woefully short of His perfect goal of righteousness

God oftentimes does things that go far beyond human explanation

- But human understanding is far too limited to explain the complexities of God's overall plan and sovereignty

We have no right to His grace

- We deserve nothing good from Him

What we see here in Exodus 11 is simply a foretaste of future judgment

- He will punish sinners

Consider these verses from Romans

- Romans 3:23, "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**"
- Romans 5:12, "**Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned**"
- Romans 6:23, "**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**"

We trust God because He is perfect

- Every action, motive, and element of His plan are perfect and flawless

6 'Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been *before* and such as shall never be again.

God gives Moses a foreshadowing of the effects of the 10th plague on the Egyptians

- Remember, the plague won't take place until Exodus 12
- But Moses is describing what will happen to Pharaoh

"there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt"

- Can you even imagine the crying that took place?
- Can you picture fathers and mothers holding their dead children in their arms?

Keep in mind that Moses is telling this to Pharaoh before it happens

- In other words, Pharaoh, are you still going to remain arrogant?
- Are you still going to refuse to submit to God's authority?

This cry of grief and sorrow would be like nothing Egypt had ever witnessed before

- Moses says, "**such as there has not been *before* and such as shall never be again**"

There had never been anything like this

- Nor would there be anything like this in the future

There is a bit of irony here

- It has to do with the use of “cry”²¹

In the earlier chapters of Exodus, it was Israel who was crying out

- “The LORD said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings’” (Ex 3:7)

But now, the tables have turned

- It is the Egyptians who are crying out!

7 ‘But against any of the sons of Israel a dog shall not *even* bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.’

Moses then tells Pharaoh that there is a place of refuge from the plague

- What Moses is about to say must have infuriated the king

The LORD tells Moses, “But against any of the sons of Israel a dog shall not *even* bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel”

Once again, God would make a very clear distinction between those who belonged to Him and those who didn’t

- The Egyptian households would have their first-born killed
- The Israelite households would have their first-born spared

Moses says, “But against any of the sons of Israel a dog shall not *even* bark, whether against man or beast”

- What does this mean?

In those days, dogs were not domesticated animals

- They were a nuisance and a pest
- Must like a rat is in our mindset

They were dirty animals that had to rummage for their food

- They were scavengers²²

Dogs were also known to bark very loudly

- They would wake up people at different times during the night

But God says that a dog wouldn’t even bark

- There would be complete silence!

Imagine the contrast

- In Egypt, there is chaos, wailing, and weeping
- In Goshen, there is silence

This was, of course, because of Israel’s innate goodness and superior obedience, right?

- That is the reason why God spared the Israelites, right?
- Wrong!

²¹ R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Exodus*, 103.

²² Stuart, 267.

God doesn't elect anyone based on his/her goodness

- If He did, He would not have chosen anyone!

Even our very best righteous acts are viewed as filth in God's eyes

- He is holy!

8 "And all these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, 'Go out, you and all the people who follow you,' and after that I will go out."

To throw some more fuel on the fire, Moses tells Pharaoh in verse eight, "And all these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, 'Go out, you and all the people who follow you,' and after that I will go out."

Moses is predicting, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Pharaoh's own officials would defect

- They would bow down to Moses!

Furthermore, the officials – **not Pharaoh** – would demand that Moses and the Israelites leave Egypt

- That would be the obvious sign that Israel would be leaving Egypt

This would also play a large part in the favor that Israel would earn in the eyes of the Egyptians

- God would turn the tables on Pharaoh
- His own people would help Israel to leave!

This would have been humiliating to Pharaoh²³

- Seeing his own officials bow down to someone else

Yet, we are not told of any response on the part of Pharaoh

- Mr. StonyHeart remains hardened in his sin

And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

As Moses finished saying these words, we are told "he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger"

Moses had delivered God's Word

- He had performed his duty

Moses leaves the presence of Pharaoh

- Yahweh, not the king of Egypt, was setting the timetable

- **Plunder of the Egyptians (11:1-3)**
- **Protection of the Israelites (11:4-8)**

²³ Mackay, 199.

III. Pride of Pharaoh (11:9-10)

9 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt.”

Now away from the presence of Pharaoh, Moses is told by the LORD, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt”

Isn't this ridiculous?

- Not even the threat of Pharaoh's first-born being killed moves him!

Pharaoh continues in his obstinacy

- He doesn't listen to Moses

But God is sovereign, even through Pharaoh's stubbornness

- God is working out His purpose, “so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt”

Notice that God is once again taking responsibility for these plagues

- He calls them “My wonders”

God was showing His wonders to the world

- He was making a fool of Pharaoh

10 And Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; yet the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.

Verse 10 is a summary verse

- It helps to transition us from Exodus 11 to Exodus 12

Moses and Aaron were faithful in performing the various signs associated with the plagues

Let's review what God was teaching about His own Divine nature through these various plagues²⁴

- God is almighty – He holds absolute power over everything He has made
- God is jealous – He will not share His glory with anyone else
- God is just – in His righteousness He will deal with people according to their sins
- God is merciful – He saves the needy when they cry out for deliverance
- God is sovereign – His mercy and justice are His choice

We have the repeated phrase, “the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart”

- God is the One hardening Pharaoh's heart

We need to understand the truth of Ezekiel 33:11, “As I live! declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”

- Do you hear the heart of God?
- Do you hear the love of God?

²⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word, Exodus*, 316-17.

God doesn't take pleasure in the death of the wicked

- He wants the wicked to repent!

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9)

Dear friend, repent from your sins this morning!

- Don't continue rejecting the Lord's conviction

Timothy McVeigh is a name that is quite familiar to most of us²⁵

- He was sentenced to die for the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City

He was a hardened man

- Defiant to the very end of his life

Shortly before his execution in 2001, he said, “If I go to hell, I'm gonna have a lot of company.”

His very last words were a quote from a poem by Ernest Henley

It matters not how strait the gate
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

How about you?

- Do you believe that you are the captain of your soul?

If so, then dear friend you are sadly deceived

- You need to repent from your sins
- Cry out to Jesus for grace, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation

²⁵ Ryken, 320-21.