

Exodus 11

This short chapter is the beginning, the second prediction, of the last plague, the death of the firstborn among Pharaoh's house, all the houses of Egypt, and all the animals.

TRANSLATION - 11:1-10:

1 And Jehovah said to Moses, "Yet one plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; afterward thus he will send out you from there. When he sends out completely from here, to drive out, he will drive you out from here. **2** Speak, please, in the ears of the people and let a man ask from his friend and a woman from her friend vessels of silver and vessels of gold. **3** And Jehovah will give grace for the people in the eyes of Egypt, even the man Moses [will be] very great in the land of Egypt in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and in the eyes of the people."

4 And Moses said, "Thus says Jehovah, 'About the middle of the night, I Myself am bringing you out from the midst of Egypt. **5** And he will die every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, the one sitting on his throne, until the firstborn of the female slave who [is] behind the handmill and every firstborn of the beasts. **6** And there will be great cry in all the land of Egypt which like it there has not been and like it there will not be again. **7** And against all the sons of Israel there will not growl a dog to its tongue, against man and against beast so that you all will know that Jehovah makes a distinction between Egypt and between Israel. **8** And all these your servants will come down to me and they will bow down to me saying, 'You go up and all the people who are [following] in your footsteps.' And after this I will go out." And he went out from with Pharaoh in the heat of anger.

9 And Jehovah said to Moses, "He will not listen to you all, Pharaoh, so that to become great My signs in the land of Egypt."

10 And Moses and Aaron did all these signs in the presence of Pharaoh and Jehovah hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not send out the sons of Israel from his land.

HEBREW WORDS:

This is the first use of this word for "plague" (ver. 1) in Exodus. It was used once in Genesis (12:17). It will be used most extensively in Leviticus (61 times), mostly in chapter 13, where it is translated "infection". It is used 78 times the OT. "Completely" (which is a noun in the Hebrew, so it would be translated literally as "with completion") is used here for the first and only time in Exodus. It was used once in Genesis, 18:21. It will be used 22 times. The word "please" (ver. 2) is often translated "now." It is used 405 times in the OT, 74 times in Genesis but only 15 times in Exodus; see 3:3, 18. The word "friend" was used earlier at 2:13. "Vessels" is used 325 times in the OT and is a generic word for "things." It can mean kitchen utensils, or luggage, or weapons, or even jewelry. On "silver" and "gold," see 3:22.

"Firstborn" (ver. 5) was used earlier at 4:22-23; 6:14. Numbers will use the word most extensively, 25 times, and 1 Chronicles (25 times) out of 120 times in the OT. The "handmill" is only used 5 times in the OT: Exo. 11:5; Num. 11:8; Deut. 24:6; Isa. 47:2; Jer. 25:10. This word for "cry" (ver. 6) was seen earlier, relative to Israel, in 3:7, 9. The verb "to be again" was used earlier at 1:10; 5:7; 8:25; 9:28, 34; 10:28-29. It is related to the name "Joseph."

"To growl" (ver. 7) is only used here in Exodus; it is only used 5 times in the OT: Joshua 10:21; 2 Sam. 5:24; 1 Kings 20:40; Isa. 10:22. "Dog" is used more extensively in the OT (32 times), but only twice in Exodus: 11:7; 22:31. "Tongue" is used only here in Exodus, out of 117 times in the OT. Note here the use of the verb "to know;" see comments at 1:8. "To separate" was used earlier at 8:22; 9:4; it will be used at 33:16 and only again at Psalm 4:4.

The verb "to bow down" (ver. 8) is the verb often translated "to worship." It was used earlier at 4:31. We translate it with the more generic meaning here: to bow down. "Footsteps" is more literally translated "foot" or "feet." It was used earlier at 3:5; 4:25. It will be used 251 times in the OT. "Heat" is used only 6 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. See also: Deut. 29:23; 1 Sam. 20:34; 2 Chron. 25:10; Isa. 7:4; Lam. 2:3. "Anger" was used earlier at 4:14. "To

become great” (ver. 9) was used earlier at 1:7, 10, 12, 20. “Signs” was used earlier at 4:21; 7:3, 9. Its last use in Exodus will be here: 11:9-10.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“To drive out, he will drive out” (ver. 1) translates the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in the imperfect tense, which in Hebrew grammar denotes emphasis.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The promise in verse 2 is a fulfillment of God’s statement to Abraham in Genesis 15:14.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The “handmill” (ver. 5) was a stone which was rubbed over another stone in order to break apart the grain. The bigger millstones had to be moved by a donkey.

COMMENTARY:

God has one final plague to bring against Egypt. God has not told Moses how many plagues He would send. This will be the last one and after this, Pharaoh will send Israel out of the land. God had promised that Pharaoh would not send them out except “under compulsion” or “by a strong hand” (3:19; 6:1). In fact, once God brings this final plague on Egypt, Pharaoh will “completely” drive them out and Moses emphasizes it through the use of a unique grammatical construction (see “Hebrew grammar” above): to drive out, he will drive them out.

It is uncommon, but not unique, for God to say “please” to a human being (see Genesis 22:2). Here, He does so with Moses (ver. 2), telling him to tell Israel to ask their friends, men and women, for “vessels” of gold and silver. God had told Moses that He would give grace relative to Israel in the eyes of the Egyptians and they would send Israel out with their arms full (3:21-22). Here, God mentions this again. Part of the motivation for Egypt to provide for Israel’s departure is that “Moses will be great in the land of Egypt” (ver. 3). Not only could this be true because of the great signs which Moses had been doing in the presence of Pharaoh and his servants, but perhaps also because Moses was a good man. The law records in Numbers 12:3 that Moses was more humble than anyone on earth (we presume Joshua appended these words to the text after Moses died, but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit). Add Moses’ humility to the powerful signs he was doing and we can imagine that he had great influence over both the Israelites and the Egyptians.

At verse 4, Jehovah God states that He will strike “about the middle of the night.” However, He does not say *which* night. Pharaoh will have to fret over which night it will happen. Yet this also shows that God is *still* giving Pharaoh time and opportunity to repent of his stubbornness. Some think that this conversation of Moses to Pharaoh probably happened before Pharaoh sent Moses out of his presence (10:28-29). If not, then Moses had one last confrontation with Pharaoh or, even less likely, spoken through another messenger. Moses will not have the role in this plague which he has had in the previous plagues. The destruction in this plague, appropriate considering it involves the taking of human life, is completely the work of God, or the “destroyer” (a participle in Hebrew - “the destroying one”) as He is identified at 12:23.

In verse 5, God explains the last plague: the death of the firstborn. God had told Moses before his first appearance before Pharaoh that He would kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son, as punishment for Pharaoh’s treatment of God’s “firstborn,” Israel (4:22-23). The death would be comprehensive, from the death of Pharaoh’s own firstborn son to the death of the slave girl’s son, the one who worked “behind” the handmill, including the death of the beasts. “Firstborn” usually refers to the boys; it clearly referred to Pharaoh’s son. It appears from 12:30 that the “firstborn” might also include daughters, unless the statement is hyperbole and simply means the death of the firstborn sons will touch practically every home in Egypt.

The “cry” will be great in Egypt from the discovery of all the dead ones (ver. 6). Israel had cried to Jehovah God because of the slavery imposed by Pharaoh (2:23) and God had

heard their cry (3:7, 9). Now God is going to cause Pharaoh to cry and all Egypt with him. This mourning would be more intense than any the Egyptians had ever experienced before (ver. 6).

The dog not growling “to its tongue” (ver. 7) is not clearly understood; but the phrase is used with humans also in Joshua 10:21, where it is translated “uttered a word.” What the phrase means, however, is that dogs will be silent as Israel leaves out at night to make their way into the wilderness to worship Jehovah God. This might also be a slap in the face of one of Egypt’s other gods. The god of death, Anubis, was often portrayed as a dog. Perhaps God is saying that even the god of death will not touch or utter a sound against Israel as they leave. One might say that the Egyptians were obsessed with death. The great pyramids were tombs of the pharaohs and their mummification process illustrate this point. Yet God will show Himself the God of the living and of the dead!

God will make one final distinction between Egypt and His own people Israel (see 8:22; 9:26). The distinction, however, will come with conditions to be met by Israel, which will be detailed in the following chapter. Rather than Pharaoh’s servants going to him, they will in turn come to Moses (ver. 8) and will bow down to him (as if he is God, see 7:1) and will urge Israel to leave, all those following in his footsteps. Once Moses informs Pharaoh of all these events, he left Pharaoh “in the heat of anger,” literally the Hebrew text says: “flaring his nostrils.” Moses is angry. The same expression is used of Jehovah God at 4:14; see our comments there.

Once all this is done, Jehovah God says to Moses one more time that Pharaoh will not listen to Moses (ver. 9; see also 3:19; 7:4, 13, 16, 22; 8:15, 19; 9:12). Since Pharaoh has not listened and has not obeyed Jehovah God’s voice, it has given God an opportunity to show His “great signs,” His wonderful power, His divine nature. As we explained before, if Abraham and Sarah had become parents when they first tried to conceive, God would not have been glorified. God does not want man to boast (Judges 7:2); man needs to acknowledge his dependence on God. Pharaoh’s hardheartedness has given Jehovah God the opportunity to display His greatness, not just through the plagues (in most instances He also graciously gave Pharaoh an opportunity to respond favorably), but also through the deliverance at the Red Sea.

Verse 10 summarizes everything that has been happening since chapter 7, in effect laying out the motivation for God bringing the final plague on Egypt. Moses and Aaron had already performed ten signs before Pharaoh, nine plagues and turning the staff into a snake. Yet Pharaoh had hardened his own heart while Jehovah God continued putting pressure on Pharaoh (hardened his heart) so that he would not and did not send out the Israelites, until the final plague, which will be detailed in chapter 12, the longest chapter in Exodus.

Let us make a comment about the ethical question of God killing children and perhaps innocent people. First, presuming the God who exists is the God portrayed in the Bible, who has a right to judge Him of violating a standard of ethics? If we don’t judge ethics by the nature of the perfect God of the Bible, by what standard are we to judge? Secondly, God is the “God of love” (1 John 4:8), so that whatever He does must be the right, loving thing to do at the moment. As humans, we ought to be humble and acknowledge that we don’t know everything and we can’t judge God’s actions since we can’t see earth from His perspective.

Third, God holds all life in His hands (Acts 17:28), which means He *gave* life and He has the right to *take it away* (see Job 1:21). Fourth, while it is true that many Egyptians likely were apathetic, if not sympathetic, to Israel’s enslavement, it is also likely true that many of the Egyptians also feared Israel and consented to the enslavement, probably overtly and covertly. As to the “innocent” adult Egyptians... there are no adults who are innocent of sin, especially these who deserved death for worshipping idols. It was only by God’s grace, and for the sake of His plan to bring Jesus into the world, that He did not destroy Israel for its sins (Deut. 9:6-7).

Finally, since children are innocent of any evil, for God to take their spirits from their bodies as He would do in the plague (which we presume was completely painless), then He is taking their spirits out of the hands of parents who might love them intensely but temporarily and keeping them in the hands of One who loves them perfectly and eternally. Related to this

point is the fact that such children would therefore not grow up in a pagan society, worshipping idols, and so offend the God of heaven. God was actually acting in their eternal best interests.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Moses will record in 12:33-36, that the Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave for they were tired of all the death and they feared their own death. In the process, the Israelites asked the Egyptians for "vessels" for their journey, which the Egyptians graciously provided, just as God had earlier promised. Exodus 12:30 also records the fact that all the Egyptians cried when they arose to find their firstborn dead. God will tell Israel that their firstborn will belong to Him (Exo. 13:1-16).

Not only was there death all around Pharaoh in a physical sense (see our comments on 10:17), but there was also "death" all around Pharaoh in a theological sense. That is, his gods were proven impotent, if not "dead," in every plague. We do not know absolutely if God had specific gods in mind through each plague; even if He did, there were many more gods in the pantheon of Egyptian theology than just these dozen or so we have mentioned. However, there should have been no non-believers in the land of Egypt after ten demonstrations of the power of the God of the Hebrews (counting turning the staff into a snake, which was not technically a "plague"). Yet, there were, including Pharaoh himself.

Later Jewish writers - The psalmist will reflect on the death of the firstborn in Psalm 135:8; 136:10.

We summarize here the reasons God sent the plagues, paraphrasing the thoughts of Coffman¹:

1. To establish Israel as a nation.
2. To show the impotence of Egypt's gods.
3. To reveal God's nature as Jehovah God to both Israel and to Egypt.
4. To punish Egypt for her abuse of Israel.

NT writers - The NT is clear that it is Jesus Christ who holds the power of death and hades (*sheol* in Hebrew) in His hands: Revelation 1:18; Hebrews 2:14-18. See comments at 4:22-23 for further notes on the idea of "firstborn" in the NT.

¹ Coffman, 141.