

## **The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn**

**Exodus 11:1-20**

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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If you'd take your Bibles and turn with me to Exodus, chapter 11, we come now to the final plague. Let's hear God's Word.

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. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely. Speak now in the hearing of the people, that each man asks from his neighbor, and each woman from her neighbor, for articles of silver and articles of gold. The Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. 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. And Moses said, "Thus says the Lord. About midnight I am going out the midst of Egypt. And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh, who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones. All the firstborn of the cattle as well. 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. 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. 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.' And He went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh, will not listen to you so that my wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt." 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.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's Holy Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, we bow before You again, and we acknowledge You as the sovereign One. You display Yourself as such in this great word throughout this passage. You've

reminded us that in Your hand is the destination of nations, and the heart of kings. Teach us that truth for our own lives, as we are called upon to trust in trial and in uncertainty. In Your certain and good and wise providence, even when all its wisdom is not apparent to us in the midst of those situations. Those things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Over and over and over again, we've seen in the plagues God display His sovereignty. And I'm going to look at three more ways He displays His sovereignty in this final plague that we study tonight. You'll notice, of course, that it is announced, but in the passage that we've read it is not implemented. It will not be implemented until the people are in the midst of worship on the night of the Passover. There is a great significance in that, and we'll come back to that in a moment. But for now, the tenth plague is announced. It is the culmination, it is obvious. All you have to do is hear it to see that this is the culmination of God's judgment against Egypt. And in it, He will display his own nature and name in a way beyond that which He has displayed Himself before. So let's pay attention to what God has for us in this passage.

If you look at verses 1 through 3, they basically serve as a parenthesis to explain to you of the context of this particular announcement. Then in verses 4 through 8, the plague is actually announced in the presence of Pharaoh. All of this is happening before Moses leaves. You remember back in chapter 10, verses 28 and 29, Pharaoh said to Moses, "I'm never going to see your face again, and if I do I'm going to kill you." And Moses says, "You're right. You're not going to see my face again." Well before Moses has left the presence of Pharaoh, he has announced this tenth and final plague, and then he dismisses himself in great anger against Pharaoh. And then finally, in verses 9 and 10 we have a summary explanation for all of God's dealings with Pharaoh in the plague. So let's work through these passages together.

### **I. God's sovereignty shown in the fulfillment of prophecy and the esteem of the Egyptians.**

First, let's look at verses 1 through 3. Here, we see the announcement of one last blow against Egypt, and we see an interesting directive given by God to Moses to the people to plunder the Egyptians, to receive from them gold and silver, and valuables. And God's sovereignty is shown here. You're asking, "How is God's sovereignty shown here?" Well it's shown here in at least two ways. It's shown in the fulfillment of prophecy because Exodus, chapter 11, verse 2 is certainly a fulfillment of prophecy. And we'll look at that in just a moment. And, furthermore, we see God's sovereignty in the esteem that the Egyptians have for the children of Israel, and especially for Moses. Let's consider that for a few moments.

From the very start of this passage, it is clear that this is the announcement of the final plague. God says to Moses, "One more plague." And so immediately

preparation for departure begins. It's time to leave, and so the people begin to prepare for their departure. The very usage of the word *plague* here, and the very manifestation of the kinds of plagues which have been brought against Egypt at this point is very important. It indicates God's sovereign control of nature. Now you remember for the Egyptians their gods were nature personified. And so when Moses tells us repeatedly that God controls nature over against the Egyptians, it is a visible manifestation of God's sovereignty over the gods of Egypt, and thus, over Egypt itself.

Note also, the specificity of this prediction. Look at verse 1. The very specifics that are given in this prediction emphasize the sovereignty of God. Look at the repeated phrases. "One more plague I will bring." And what's the result? "He will let you go. And when he lets you go, he will surely drive you out." And he's not going to drive out some of you, or most of you; he's going to drive out every last one of you." So God indicates through this succession of particulars just how sovereign He is. He can tell you exactly how it's going to happen. It also indicates, doesn't it, that the Exodus isn't going to be a concession on Pharaoh's part? God has worked this whole story up to the point that Pharaoh himself is going to be begging for Israel to leave his land when it's all done. He's going to be desirous of their leaving his land. He is going to earnestly desire them to depart from Egypt. In fact, he's going to facilitate their departure from Egypt. And so just as Moses had demanded, all of Israel will leave and just as God had predicted, Pharaoh, himself would be brought to recapitulate and desire it.

Notice also, if you look at verse 2, for the first time in the stories of the plagues, Moses is instructed to speak to the people of Israel. He had spoken to the children of Israel before the plagues began, but during the plagues, the focus is on this contest between Moses and Pharaoh, ultimately between God and Pharaoh, God and Egypt, God and the oppressors of His people. And so there had not been any recorded dialogue between Moses and the people. But now that the preparation for departure is beginning, now Moses needs to deal with internal affairs. And so he speaks to his people, and he directs his attention to them. And the so-called 'plundering of the Egyptians' is described here in verse 2. It is a fulfillment of something that God had said to Abram hundreds of years before. Four hundred and some odd years ago, in Genesis, chapter 15, verse 14, God had told Abram that the children of Israel would come out of the land of their oppression with many possessions. Now, God instructs Moses to tell the people to ask their neighbors to give them gold and silver. And from everything indicated in the text, the people of Egypt do so willingly.

Now, there's something very interesting going on here. When do you plunder someone? You plunder someone after you have conquered them. You remember those great narratives in the historical books of the Old Testament when Israel wins a great battle? What happens? The armies go out in the field, and they plunder. Well, the children of Israel are being told to go to their neighbors, and just ask them for gold and silver. And the neighbors give these

things to them. What is this a sign of? It's a sign of the total conquest of the sovereign God over Egypt. And it's indicated again on the Passover night. When we get to Exodus, chapter 12, verses 35 and 36, it will be indicated again that the children of Israel did this. They asked for these things. They asked for this gold and for the silver, these possessions. And they received them.

By the way, isn't it interesting that the things which the children of Israel will receive from Egypt will be both used for good and evil. We often talk about plundering the Egyptians as a view of how Christians are to take possessions of the world, and use them for the Lord. But isn't it interesting, that these things gotten from the Egyptians were both used for evil and good. In Exodus 32, some of these things were used to build the golden calf. In Exodus 35, verses 22 and following, some of these things were used to build the tabernacle of God. Same things, different uses. Things aren't evil, their uses are. And so the taking of those things and the use of those things in and of themselves did not involve Israel in sin. However, the wrong use of those things, in the case of the golden calf, involved Israel in sin, as the right use of those things brought glory to God.

Notice also in verse 3, that the Egyptians give them things upon their departure, for many of those Egyptians had come to esteem Moses, even Pharaoh's servants had a great regard for him. And this, of course, is a part of the fulfillment of God's purpose in the Exodus, that the Egyptians would know His greatness. He had said this all along. "I want them to know I am the Lord. I'm the Lord God Almighty. I'm the ruler of heaven and earth." And as they begin to esteem the one who He has sent as His representative, we're beginning to see this fulfillment. The Egyptians had a grudging respect for this one who had been brought against him as a scourge.

I don't know whether many of you have ever read any of the writings of Douglas Southall Freeman, the author of *Lee's Lieutenants*, and the four-volume account of Robert E. Lee. He also wrote a wonderful biography of George Washington. He was a newspaper editor and writer in Richmond, Virginia, and his father fought in the Army of Northern Virginia in the time of the late unpleasantness. And as Douglas Southall Freeman was writing *Lee's Lieutenants*, and this four volume biography of Lee, he spent many a Saturday talking with his father about the events of the battles in northern Virginia, and the other battles as the Army of Northern Virginia ventured over a couple of times into northern territory. And over and over again his father would say to him, "Now, son, don't you ever belittle, don't you ever denigrate the Army of the Potomac, the cavalry of the Potomac. The cavalry of the Army of the Potomac was the finest cavalry ever to ride. The Army of the Potomac was one of the greatest armies that ever walked on the face of the earth." He was referring to the northern counterpart which had waged war against the Army of Northern Virginia. And then he would always add, "Except for one, the Army of Northern Virginia." And so he had this grudging respect for the Army of the Potomac. Well, the Egyptians had come to a grudging respect for Moses in this particular context. And it's interesting, isn't it in this

passage, that Pharaoh now stands alone in opposition to God. The people of Egypt are beginning to see. "You know, this is a noble man that has been brought against us. This is a noble man that is demanding his people be released from oppression." And the servants and the house of Pharaoh are beginning to say, "Well, this man, Moses, he's a man of dignity and character." They are beginning to have a grudging respect, and Pharaoh himself is left alone.

Now God's wonders have been brought before his eyes, and though his people having seen those wonders, have come to a grudging respect for Moses and the children of Israel, Pharaoh is unmoved. Is this not a picture of a hard heart? And one is prompted to wonder, "Had it not been for Pharaoh, what would the effect of these signs have been upon Egypt?" Never think that your leaders don't matter. We've been hearing about leaders tonight in the report. Never think that your leaders don't matter. What havoc, what spiritual havoc did the hardness of heart of Pharaoh reap upon his own people because he would not repent. Well, here you see, my friends, the sovereignty of God, and the fulfillment of this prophecy and in the esteem of the Egyptians, and even in the isolation of Pharaoh, all of Pharaoh's support is beginning to crumble now, and he alone stands against the Lord.

Have you noticed how the Lord has moved everybody out of the way? And now the total focus of His attention is upon this one who is the representative of rebellion against His rule, and the representative of oppression of His people. Do you not see Pharaoh set forth as the one who back in the shadows is indeed the archenemy of the people of God? Do you see God not clearing the battlefield to deal the deathblow against the one who opposes His people's good?

## **II. God's sovereignty is shown in His fearsome judgment and in His discrimination and conquest.**

Well, we look at verses 4 through 8. Here Moses is instructed, perhaps even receiving this revelation in the presence of Pharaoh, he is instructed to tell Pharaoh about this revelation, and this tenth plague is heralded to Pharaoh in hot anger. And again, we see something of God's sovereignty here. God's sovereignty is shown in His fearsome judgment, and it is shown in His discrimination, and it is shown in His conquest. In His fierce judgment, in His discrimination, and in His conquest.

These words, look at verse 4, seem to have been delivered to Pharaoh before that final breach that was recorded in Exodus, chapter 10, verse 29. Pharaoh will not let Israel out of Egypt. And so what does God announce? "You won't let My people go out of Egypt? I'm coming to Egypt. I'm coming to the midst of Egypt." Now my friends, that's not a happy announcement. The presence of God is sweet to those who have been reconciled to Him, but it is a terror, and it is an awesome thing when God comes into the presence of His enemies. "It is fearful

thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And the living God is announcing here, in verse 4, that He is coming to Egypt. Pharaoh will not let Israel go, so God comes to Egypt.

It's interesting, of course, that this whole scenario is going to come about at night, at midnight. And by the way, when the Hebrew says, "About midnight," it doesn't mean roughly midnight, it means at that very time. "That's when I'm coming. I'm coming at midnight. That's when I'm going to be arriving." It's the only night festival for Israel, and it's interesting that this would have been a particularly terrifying time for the Egyptians. You know, we've already said that Ra, the sun god, was their great god. And nighttime was a picture of the battle between darkness and death and chaos against Ra, the sun god. And midnight was the pinnacle of that darkness, and so the most terrifying time for Egyptians. And God says, "That's exactly when I'm coming to visit you. I'm coming at that point when you yourself recognize yourself most vulnerable."

And then in verse 5, the curse is announced. All the Egyptian first born shall die, from the greatest of the Egyptians to the least, and even their cattle, God will strike down the firstborn. Even Pharaoh is going to be directly impacted. And as if it needed to be pointed out, verse 6 tells us that the anguish of this event would be unparalleled in Egyptian history and experience. And there's an irony here. Look at verse 6 and what it says: "There shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt." Now Moses has been telling us about several cries that have gone up in the book of Exodus. In Exodus, chapter 2, verse 23, the people of God cried out for deliverance under the burden of their oppression. And we are told at the end of that chapter that God heard that cry. In Exodus, chapter 5, verse 15, the people of God cried out to Pharaoh for relief from their burden and oppression. And Pharaoh turned a deaf ear to them. Now, the Egyptians will cry out to their gods, and no one will hear them, for they have created their gods themselves. Their gods are idols and are not real; and this cry of anguish will be met by a deafening silence, and no help. Just as Israel had been done by Egypt, just as Egypt had done to Israel, now God will do to Egypt.

And in verse 7, it is made very clear that God will make a distinction between Israel and Egypt. Israel is going to be unscathed, and the Egyptians will see this and know this. In fact, Moses uses a figure of speech to emphasize how completely protected the children of Israel are going to be. It says, *not even a dog will bark*. And I'm told by those who are experts that that literally means that *not even a dog will growl*. You know, sometimes you'll surprise a dog, and a dog will give you that deep guttural sound like, "Stay off my turf." Well, it's being said here that not even a dog will growl against the children of Israel, neither man nor beast. And this may even be a little backhanded slap at another Egyptian god, because you may or may not know that the god of death, and the god of embalming in Egypt was a god called Enubis, and he had the form of a canine, a dog. And here Moses says, not even a dog will growl against my people. And by the way, beginning in verse 7, Moses is pointedly directing these words at

Pharaoh. And you'll notice this. Look at verse 7. "That you, (singular) Pharaoh, that you may know that the Lord makes the distinction between Egypt and Israel. It's not simply that God is making this distinction, it's that God is making this distinction, and He is going to make it clear to Pharaoh that He's made this distinction; that He's chosen His people for mercy, and He has chosen Egypt for destruction. He's going to make that clear to Pharaoh.

And again in verse 8, Moses continues by saying that God will make Egypt, as it were, to be servants and to come and to beg Israel to leave. Moses is addressing this directly to Pharaoh, and He says this. Can you imagine this? Here's Moses in the house of the most powerful monarch in the mideast, and he says to him this: "Man, your servants are going to come to me, and they're going to bow down; and they're going to beg me to leave. And I want to tell you, sir, that's exactly what I'm going to do." And then we are told that after this announcement, Moses leaves in a rage.

Now I just want to ask a question. Why? Why do you think Moses would have left in a rage after that exchange? There are several good answers that are given. Some have suggested that it was in response to Pharaoh's threat. That even after all these warnings, all these dire prophesies, these ominous warnings of the doom to come that there is no repentance upon the part of Pharaoh and Egypt; that Pharaoh then responds with this threat again. "I'll kill you if you show your face again." And Moses is angry about it. But I wonder if rather Moses' anger is found, not so much in the threat against him, but his own frustration at the recalcitrance of the unrepentant Pharaoh's heart. He would rather bring down a nation, than bow the knee to the merciful and sovereign God of Israel. And Moses is wroth. His anger is hot, because he sees a sinner about to bring down judgment on his own head. And I wonder if we see here a glimmer of Moses own hopes for mercy, for Pharaoh, and for Egypt, and for his frustration over Pharaoh's hardness of heart.

No, my friends, there is nothing that shows God's sovereignty like His judgment, and like His judgment, and like His election. And is it any wonder that those two things are things that we very quickly attempt to deny? We live in a day and age where professing Christians left and right do their best to deny God's final judgment. "Oh, no, there will be no hell. It's heaven for all, or vaporization." We'll do anything we can to get rid of God's judgment. And even professing Christians are quick to dismiss this doctrine of God's election. "Well, that's not fair." And the apostle Paul has only one word to that. "Who are you, O man, who are you?" Because "He has mercy on whom He has mercy, and He has compassion on whom He has compassion." (Rom 9) There is nothing that shows God's sovereignty like His judgment and His election. And we see it here in this passage.

But there's one more thing that I want you to think of. You know, the early Christians, as they gave their exposition of Scripture before the giving of the

Lord's Supper, often went back to Exodus 12 in order to expound that passage before the taking of the Lord's Supper. And I want to ask you a question. Is it possible that this passage, Exodus 11, and 12 and 13 could have been read in the presence of the earliest Christians, and could it have been lost on them, that their liberation came at the expense of the Son of God Himself, being the one to lift up a loud cry. In Matthew, chapter 27, verses 46 and 50, Matthew twice tells us that on the cross, in the darkness, He cried out with a loud voice. Now, think of it, early Christians. They had just gone through the Lord's Supper, they've just heard the Exodus experience recounted, they've just heard of the cry of Egypt being lifted up. And now they hear of the Son of God, the sinless Son of God, alone on a cursed tree in a midst of darkness receiving the wrath of God, lifting up a loud cry. Now hold that thought. We'll come back to it.

### **III. God's sovereignty is especially seen in His dealings with Pharaoh.**

One last thing, friends, as we close. If you look at verses 9 and 10, we see here Pharaoh dead in sin and dead to warning. And again we see God's sovereignty, especially in His dealings with Pharaoh. This summary is needed here at the end of Exodus, chapter 11, because of what was said in Exodus 10:28. The negotiations are now over. Here is the final judgment of God. Look at verse 9. Pharaoh won't listen, so God will do wonders. Wonders will be done in Pharaoh's sight, and he will not believe, and he will not relent. Verses 9 and 10 bring to conclusion the final sequence of this plague saga, and just as the final words of Exodus 6 bring a conclusion to the end of the first section of that part of the book, so also these words bring an end to the plague stories. And Pharaoh, just like the unrepentant ones of Revelation, chapter 16, verse 9, refuses to repent.

And it reminds us, my friends, that repentance is not circumstantially produced. Repentance is not produced by showing a person the terror of judgment. You know, there are some folks that think you can cause someone to repent by showing them hell. Well, my friends, God has shown Pharaoh hell. Everything but the fire, and there's no repentance. Because repentance is a grace, it's a mercy, it's a gift of God, it's a work wrought of the Holy Spirit. And it is not one that is commonly bestowed. And so, my friends, we see here the lunacy of sin and the hardness of an unrepentant heart, as Pharaoh sees the judgment of God displayed before him, and he will not turn.

Now there's one last thing that I want you to note. As I mentioned in the very beginning, the announcement of this plague, the implementation of this plague, is not brought into being until Exodus, chapter 12, verses 29 through 32. The plague is announced here in chapter 11, but it's not implemented until Exodus, chapter 12, verses 29 through 32. Now what's significant about that? What's going on in Exodus, chapter 12, verses 29 through 32? The Passover lamb is being slaughtered and eaten, and as that worship is going on in the houses of Israel, God comes for judgment and salvation. Think of it, my friends. Over and



over God has been telling to the children of Israel, "I am redeeming you, so that you may worship. I am saving you out of Egypt. I am delivering you out of bondage in order that you might serve Me."

And ironically, but not ironically, perfectly fittingly, when does the judgment of God come against Egypt? When does the deliverance of God come for Israel? In the midst of worship. As the sacrifice is being lifted up, as the Passover lamb is being slaughtered, then the angel of death comes. Judgment and deliverance are accomplished by sacrifice and plague. God will not be trifled with. Those who resist Him and mock will not have the last laugh, and He will redeem His people in worship for worship. Let us pray.

Oh Lord and God, Your designs are past our understanding, Your ways are past our finding out, Your wisdom is manifold and inscrutable; and yet when You display to us an inkling of it, we are baffled and put in awe and can only say, oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How they are past finding out. Oh Lord and our God, cause our hearts to wonder and love and praise and break us of our own hard-heartedness that we might repent and worship and serve. These things we ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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