

Exodus 11:1–10

Introduction

This morning, we begin “Act II.” There was the introductory act of the staff turned into a serpent. Then there was the first main act which consisted of the nine plagues, divided into three sets of three. And now we have Act II, which is all wrapped up in a single plague – the tenth plague. The final “Act III” will be the crossing of the Red Sea, and the Israelites’ victorious song of celebration and praise.

The tenth plague, here in Act II, is all interwoven with the institution of the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the consecration of the firstborn in Israel. And so the tenth plague, interwoven with all of these other things, covers almost three entire chapters. (11:1-13:16) Next week (or the week following), we’ll begin to reflect on the plague itself (the death of all the Egyptian firstborn), and how it relates to Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the consecration of the firstborn in Israel. In other words, next week we’ll focus in on the *main point* of the *big picture* in Act II. This week, I just want to look at chapter eleven all on its own for another very powerful lesson that it should drive home to our hearts.

I. Exodus 11:1a — Now the LORD had¹ said to Moses, “Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here.”

What *welcome* words these must have been! – and still are even today. “One plague more... afterward he will let you go.”² By now, the Hebrew word for “let go” (*sallah*) would have been pretty familiar to Moses’ readers. It seems like ages ago that the Lord first said to Moses at the burning bush:

✓ Exodus 3:20 — I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that [*Pharaoh*] *will let you go*.

Between that assurance in chapter three, and now the renewal of that assurance and promise here in chapter eleven, we’ve heard an awful lot about letting the people go!³

¹ Cf. NIV; Hamilton, Enns, Kaiser, Keil, Calvin. See especially Stuart. Currid contests the pluperfect sense, and believes that God spoke to Moses right then and there as he stood in Pharaoh’s court. However, this seems almost impossible to reconcile with verses 2-3.

² This explains how Moses could say with such confidence at the end of chapter ten: “As you say [Pharaoh]! I will not see your face again.”

³ The Hebrew *sallah* could be translated here more literally, “*send my people out free*.” This translation reveals the play on words in the following passages:

Exodus 3:20 (cf. Exod. 9:14-15) — I will *send out* my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will *send you out*.

Exodus 7:14-17 — The LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to *send the people out*. Go to Pharaoh in the morning... And you shall say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, *sent me* to you, saying, “*send the people out*...”’

Exodus 8:20-21 — “Thus says the LORD, ‘*Send my people out*... Or else, if you will not *send my people out*, behold, I will *send* swarms of flies.

Exodus 9:7 — Pharaoh *sent*, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But... he did not *send the people out*.

- ✓ Exodus 5:1–2 — “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘**Let my people go...**’” But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should... **let Israel go?** ... I will not **let Israel go.**”
- ✓ Exodus 7:14–17 — The LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh... refuses to **let the people go**. Go to Pharaoh... And you shall say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “**Let my people go...**” But so far, you have not obeyed... With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.
- ✓ Exodus 8:1–2 — Thus says the LORD, “**Let my people go...** But if you refuse to **let them go**, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs.”
- ✓ Exodus 8:8 — Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “I will **let the people go...**”
- ✓ Exodus 8:20–21 — “Thus says the LORD, ‘**Let my people go...** Or else, if you will not **let my people go**, behold, I will send swarms of flies.
- ✓ Exodus 8:28–29 — Pharaoh said, “I will **let you go...**” Then Moses said, “...Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not **letting the people go...**”
- ✓ Exodus 8:32 — But Pharaoh... did not **let the people go**.
- ✓ Exodus 9:1–3 — “Thus says the LORD... ‘**Let my people go...** For if you refuse to **let them go...** the hand of the LORD will fall... upon your livestock.
- ✓ Exodus 9:7 — But... [Pharaoh] did not **let the people go**.
- ✓ Exodus 9:13–14, 17–8 — “Thus says the LORD... “**Let my people go...** You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not **let them go...** Behold... I will cause very heavy hail to fall.
- ✓ Exodus 9:28 — Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will **let you go**.
- ✓ Exodus 9:35 — [Pharaoh] did not **let the people of Israel go**.
- ✓ Exodus 10:3–4 — “Thus says the LORD... ‘**Let my people go...** If you refuse to **let my people go...** I will bring locusts into your country.”
- ✓ Exodus 10:7 — Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “...**Let the men go**, that they may serve the LORD their God.”
- ✓ Exodus 10:10 — [Pharaoh] said to [Moses and Aaron], “The LORD be with you, if ever I **let you and your little ones go!**”
- ✓ Exodus 10:20 — [Pharaoh] did not **let the people of Israel go**.
- ✓ Exodus 10:27 — [Pharaoh] would not **let them go**.

And now *finally*, after *all* of this, we read these very simple, very matter-of-fact words: “Yet **ONE plague more** I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. **AFTERWARD he will let you go...**” And so as astonishing and unbelievable as it may seem, what’s the point? What’s the message that this Scripture is proclaiming to us loud and clear? It is this: Everything is proceeding exactly on schedule – not a moment too soon, not a moment too late. Everything is proceeding exactly according to plan. Indeed, the Lord goes *on* to say to Moses:

II. Exodus 11:1b — “When [Pharaoh] **lets you go**, he will **DRIVE** [*gares*]⁴ **you away completely.**”

In other words, when Pharaoh lets the people go he won’t just give them “permission” to go as though he were still the one in control. When he lets the people go he will drive them away completely in frantic, panicked desperation. It seems like ages ago, now, that the Lord first said to Moses, before any of the plagues had ever happened:

⁴ The Hebrew *gares* (“drive”) is repeated in the Hebrew text for emphasis (cf. 12:33, 39). In light of the following passage, it’s somewhat ironic that Pharaoh would end up driving the Israelites out of the land.
Exodus 10:8, 11 — [Pharaoh] said to them... “Go, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you are asking.” And they were **driven out** [*gares*] from Pharaoh’s presence.

- ✓ Exodus 6:1 — Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will *drive* [gares] *them out* of his land.

Between that assurance in chapter six, and now the renewal of that assurance and promise here in chapter eleven, Pharaoh has agreed many times to let the people go, but always in a way that makes him look like he's still somewhat *in control*.

- ✓ Exodus 8:8 — Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs... *and I will* let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.

That's bargaining.

- ✓ Exodus 8:25 — Go, sacrifice to your God *within the land*.

That's trying to dictate the terms.

- ✓ Exodus 8:28 — I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; *only you must not go very far away*.

That's dictating terms again.

- ✓ Exodus 9:28 — *Plead with the LORD*, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. *I will let you go*, and you shall stay no longer."

That's bargaining.

- ✓ Exodus 10:8, 11 — Go, serve the LORD your God. *But which ones are to go? ... Go, the men among you*, and serve the LORD, for that is what you are asking.

Dictating terms.

- ✓ Exodus 10:16–17 — 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.

Bargaining.

- ✓ Exodus 10:24 — Go, serve the LORD; your little ones also may go with you; *only let your flocks and your herds remain behind*.

Dictating terms.

- ✓ Exodus 10:28 — Then Pharaoh said... "Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die."

End of discussion.

It feels for all the world like so much futility, and so much wasted time. After all these numerous attempts at bargaining and dictating terms, Pharaoh just finally says, “Enough is enough, I’m through; if I see your face again, I’ll kill you.” And it’s *then*—only ***then***—that we finally read these almost laughably simple, and matter-of-fact words: “Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt... When he lets you go, ***he will DRIVE you away COMPLETELY.***”

Once again, what’s the point? What’s the message that this Scripture so powerfully proclaims to each one of us? Everything is proceeding exactly according to plan. Always on schedule – not a moment too soon, or a moment too late. The Lord goes on to say to Moses:

III. Exodus 11:2–3 — Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry.” And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.

It was four *centuries* earlier that the Lord had said to Abram in a vision:

- ✓ Genesis 15:13–14 — Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs... and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

If four centuries felt now like a long, long time ago, we might still feel justified in saying that even the burning bush feels like ages ago. It was at the burning bush that the Lord said to Moses:

- ✓ Exodus 3:21–22 — I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.

Between that first assurance and promise made to Abram four centuries earlier and the renewal of that promise at the burning bush, it hasn’t seemed likely that there could *ever* be a day when the Egyptians freely give their possessions and valuables to the Israelites – just for the asking.

- ✓ Genesis 43:32 — The Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.
- ✓ Genesis 46:34 — Every shepherd [which the Israelites were] is an abomination to the Egyptians.
- ✓ Exodus 1:12 — The Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

So much so that Pharaoh could command “all his people”:

- ✓ Exodus 1:22 — Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile.

And now, ever since the burning bush, the only new development has been the wrath of Israel’s God poured out on the Egyptians in nine terrible plagues. *Nevertheless*, it’s only after four hundred years, only after centuries of hostility and oppression, only now after nine terrible

plagues, that the Lord finally says to Moses: “Speak **NOW** in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry.” And then Moses adds: “And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.”

And once again, what’s the point? What is it that God would have us to see? Even after a wait of four hundred years, and then another wait that at times must have seemed equally as long, *there has been no delay*. Everything is exactly on schedule – not a moment too soon, not a moment too late.

IV. Exodus 11:4–8 — So Moses said [to Pharaoh],⁵ “Thus says the LORD: ‘About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. There shall be a great cry⁶ throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.’ And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get 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.

In the last chapter, Pharaoh made his last-ditch effort to be the one in control. He threatened Moses with death if he ever saw his face again. (10:28) But now Moses turns the tables. It’s true he won’t ever see Pharaoh’s face again, but that’s only because Pharaoh will send his servants to Moses, and they will bow down to him, saying, “Get out, you and all the people who follow you.” And then Moses ends with the ultimate trump card: “**After that** [*—only after that—*] I [and all the people of Israel] will go out.”⁷

Moses can see as easily as we can that God *could* have led the Israelites out of Egypt *before now*. (cf. Calvin) What about when all the Egyptians were suffering from the boils? What about when all the Egyptians were seeking shelter from the hail? What about when all the Egyptians were blinded by the darkness? But a deliverance at any one of those times would have been “**too soon**.” And so Moses, too, has come to see that with God there never any delays – everything is always proceeding exactly on schedule, not a moment too soon, not a moment too late.

⁵ After learning what the Lord had previously said to Moses (1-3), in these verses we come back to the “present” to learn more about Moses’ final words to Pharaoh before he walked out of his court for the very last time. (cf. 10:28-29)

⁶ We hear the great “cry” [*seaqah*] of the Egyptians, and we’re reminded of the earlier “cries” [*seaqah*] of the Israelites.

Exodus 3:7 — I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry.

Exodus 3:9 — The cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

The cry of God’s people will now be answered with the “great cry” of the Egyptians, a cry such as there had never been before, nor ever would be again. (Apart from Exod. 22:23, *seaqah* appears only four other times. Twice it refers to the cry of the Israelites [3:7, 9], and twice it refers to the cry of the Egyptians [11:6; 12:30].)

⁷ Calvin writes: “It was the same as if Moses had said—Thus far I have *entreated* you to *allow* God’s people to depart; now, whether you will or not, I will freely go, and not even without the *request* of yourself and your followers.”

But notice that this doesn't stop Moses from leaving Pharaoh's presence in "hot anger"! The predetermined plan of God doesn't excuse the rebellion of Pharaoh, or turn his people into fatalists. The sovereignly ordained, perfect timing of God doesn't mean that His people never feel anger, or sorrow, or pain. But it does mean that we can be *at peace* – *confident* that in the midst of all the mess and all the mystery, everything is always proceeding precisely on schedule.

It seems so very, very long ago now that the Lord spoke to Moses as he was just setting out from Midian:

- ✓ Exodus 4:21–23 — When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me.' If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son."

Between that time and now, there has been no gradual softening of Pharaoh's heart. No hopeful signs that the "next plague" might be the last. And yet *God* always knew the exact number of the plagues He had planned. "See that you do before Pharaoh **ALL** the miracles that I have put in your power." *God* always knew the exact number of times that He would harden Pharaoh's heart before sending the last and final plague. "I will harden [Pharaoh's] heart, so that he will not let the people go. **THEN** you shall say to Pharaoh... 'If you refuse to let [my firstborn] go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'"

And now, finally, after all the heartache, and rejection, and frustration, and additional suffering, *now it's time* – right on schedule, and exactly according to plan. God will *now* go out *Himself* into the midst of Egypt – not a moment too soon, or a moment too late. And when He does, "Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die."

Just in case, now, anyone might still have missed the point:

V. Exodus 11:9–10 — Now the LORD had said⁸ to Moses, "***Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.***" Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

Here we are, after nine supernatural plagues of death, and destruction, and terror. Here we are, after all the land of Egypt has been ruined and all the gods of Egypt proved powerless. Here we are, after all this, and now Moses announces to Pharaoh the death of his own firstborn son, and of every single firstborn, without exception, in all the land of Egypt. How does *anyone* not surrender, now? After a warning like this, which Pharaoh has to know, by now, is no empty threat, how can he possibly still refuse to let the people go? How can it be that a mere mortal should so stubbornly resist Yahweh, the God of Israel? (cf. Calvin) It seems like ages ago that God said to Moses in chapter seven:

⁸ Cf. NIV; Stuart; Keil; see note on 11:1

- ✓ Exodus 7:3–4a — I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and *though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you.*

Since then, *twelve times* we’ve been explicitly reminded of God’s sovereignty in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. And now here, *for the very last time* until Pharaoh follows the Israelites into the Red Sea, we’re reminded *once more*. How can it be that Pharaoh, a mere mortal, should so stubbornly resist Yahweh, the God of Israel? In the end, this can only *be*, if the God of Israel has *Himself* hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

Conclusion

So for the last time, we ask: What’s the point? With God, there are never any delays, setbacks, adjustments, or changes in plan. Everything always proceeds exactly on His schedule – never a moment too soon, never a moment too late. Everything in our lives, and everything in all the world, is always happening exactly according to *His* plan. And it’s not just these verses here, but really the first eleven chapters of Exodus have been *at pains* (maybe more so than any other place in Scripture) to drive this point home *to us*.

This doesn’t mean that we don’t struggle, and wonder, and question. It doesn’t mean we don’t labor, and wrestle, and strive. It doesn’t mean that we don’t desire, and hope, and pray. It doesn’t mean that we’re never angry, or full of grief, and sorrow, and pain. It doesn’t mean that evil isn’t evil, or that God doesn’t hate evil, or that the wicked are no longer accountable for their wickedness.

But *what it does mean* is that we can be at peace—and even, at all times, full of joy—because we know that in the midst of all the mess and all the mystery, and what may feel for all the world like obstacles, and delays, and sin having the upper hand – in spite of all this, everything is always happening exactly on schedule and according to plan. Never a moment too soon, never a moment too late. And to quote Calvin: “We can never lose this felicity... that all [things] conspire unto the salvation of us, whom he has once embraced with His loving-kindness.”

Have you ever been afraid of your future? Have you ever been paralyzed by your past? Have you ever been overwhelmed at the present? It’s as though we can hear the first eleven chapters of Exodus calling out to us to give all of these things over to our wise, and sovereign, and all-powerful God. No matter what your past, or present, or future may be, God remains the God of all three. This is the God of whom the Psalmist writes:

- ✓ Psalm 139:16 — Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, *every one* of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Will we respond to this awesome truth like the Psalmist does?

- ✓ Psalm 139:17–18 — How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.