

The Tenth Plague
Exodus 11:1–10
February 22, 2026

I was *way* late to the Olympics this time around. But after conversations with some of you last weekend, I decided I was going to figure out curling Thursday night. I didn't google the rules. I didn't look up anything. Instead, I just turned it on and watched, assuming in a few minutes I'd know what was going on.

I *did* know it was the US versus the Swiss.¹ And I knew that if we won, we'd be in the semifinals. So, I knew the stakes. But I *still* didn't know the rules. Eventually I figured out they have "innings" like baseball, but they're called "ends." Multiple "ends." Regardless, little by little it started to make sense. And we were winning. Owen told me he wanted to go to bed. I asked him to stay up and watch the "end."

We were up 6 to 3 going into the final "inning." And before they slid the rock down the ice, I knew what the Swiss needed to do to tie it up. And they, *unfortunately*, did it. So, the game went into an extra "end."

In this one, we would have the last "shot." I'm assuming at this point I know the possibilities—what needs to happen for us to win. So, the "rock" slides across the ice. It rests in a certain spot. But when it stopped, Owen and I looked at each other fairly bewildered; *neither* one of us knew whether we'd won or not.

Not until we saw the Americans hugging each other.

The point is this: because we didn't understand what was happening, we didn't understand the "end."

Now, if you don't have any idea what I just said, maybe that's made the point as well.

Today we're concluding the plagues. We took a week to preview the plagues, because Exodus does so. And then we divided them into sets of three, because we think Exodus does so. Today we consider the final one. And as we do, I repeat what we said at the beginning—something I hope has been clear throughout, and something that is vital to understand the conclusion of the plagues. The conflict here is not *primarily* between Moses and Pharaoh, nor between Moses and the Egyptian magicians, nor between Israel and Egypt. It is, instead, between the deities of Egypt and the God of the Hebrews.²

I say that because, as we conclude, the rule of Yahweh over the gods of Egypt is apparent—the victor obvious.

1. The LORD's Rule Over Egypt (11:1–3)

Verse 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."

As we've considered on Wednesday nights for the past few weeks, the solitary God, the One that *knows* all things, has also *decreed* all things. Before the plagues began, He wasn't wondering how many there would end up being. He didn't wonder when Pharaoh would let the people go. After the third plague, when Pharaoh refused, Moses wrote that it was **as the Lord had said** (8:19). After the sixth plague, when Pharaoh *still* did not listen, Moses wrote that it was **just as the Lord had said** (9:12).

¹ Longtime rivals in the world of cheese.

² John Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*, 86; Alec Motyer, *Exodus*, BST, 97.

He knew what Pharaoh would do (3:19). And the LORD knew how many plagues there would be. There have been nine.

And in verse 1's language, there's **one more**. After *this* one, God's people would be let go. In fact, it would be *more* than mere allowance, or permission. Pharaoh wouldn't ask them to go sacrifice nearby, nor would he say "not to go too far"; instead their departure would be a requirement.³ Verse 1 continues: **When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely.** The Lord says this will happen. And it does. If we skipped over to the end of chapter 12, we'd read Pharaoh say, **Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go** (12:31).

Why point this out? Because the LORD's rule is on every page of Exodus. As Moses writes all this down, he isn't *only* interested in helping his fellow Israelites trust the LORD *as* things happened, but to help them learn to trust that the LORD is the One who makes things happen in the first place.⁴

The LORD's rule is on every page of Exodus. And it's in every corner of Egypt. Verse 2 goes on: **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.** To put it simply, *knock, knock, knock* "Hey, we've been here a long time. We've built this city. But we're leaving now. Before we go, can we have some of your money?"

It'd be a foolish request had the LORD not told them to do it, and if He hadn't been orchestrating events and turning hearts. Back at the burning bush Yahweh told Moses, **I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.** And should we go *further* back—hundreds and hundreds of years—be reminded of what the Lord told Abraham in Genesis 15:13: **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.**

The Lord promised this. He said that *He* would turn the hearts of the Egyptians. And that's what He did. Verse 3 of chapter 11: **The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.** The One who channels the hearts of kings like water can certainly turn the hearts of a kingdom's citizens.

And this groundswell of support among the populace exposes something we haven't talked about much. And that is how the plagues have isolated Pharaoh. It's likely that many would've seen his *continued* resistance as fanatical, destructive, and harmful.⁵ How could they *not*? Their livestock had died. Their fields were laid waste (8:24). The locusts ate every fruit and every green (10:15). So, when Pharaoh kept digging in his heels, the "ruled" no longer preferred their ruler's policies.

Many sided with those they'd *previously* oppressed. Verse 3: **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.**

It's worth pointing out that Yahweh came to make Himself known to the Egyptians as well. He came to show *them* a rule more powerful than the one they'd lived under. I don't know if you've considered this, but in the next chapter Moses writes that a "mixed multitude" make their exodus out of Egypt (12:38). Egyptians saw their *own* livestock die. But *not* Israel's. Egyptians saw darkness all around them, but light in Goshen.⁶ And some believed.

³ Stuart, 263.

⁴ Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 262.

⁵ Stuart, 263.

⁶ As Chris pointed out to me this week.

As we've said before, Egypt had a panoply of gods. Pharaoh would've been the manifestation of one. But as his quote "power" was exposed, his influence was lessened. He was being unmasked. And so were the gods Egypt served.

2. The LORD's Rule Over Egypt's gods (11:4–7)

Some of us that grew up around here have been talking about field trips we took in the 80s and 90s. Most of them are forgotten, of course, but I remember a few. One of them was a trip to the Cook Convention Center to see an exhibit on Egypt. And though I don't remember *much* from that exhibit, I do remember tombs everywhere. I bring that up because thus far in this study we've talked about the Nile, we've talked about Pharaoh, but we've *not* talked about one of the things Egypt is *best* known for—their obsession with death and the afterlife. Phil Ryken notes that the Egyptians invested a larger portion of their wealth in the afterlife than any other culture in the history of the world.⁷ Consider the Pyramids, the mummies, and the sarcophagi.

Egypt's hyper-focus on death and the afterlife certainly intersected with their commitment to many lower-case gods. For example, the god of the dead was named Osiris, and his name meant "the Mighty One; he who has sovereign power." Another god of the afterlife that served alongside Osiris—named Anubis—was seen to be in canine form.⁸ It's possible that verse 7 relates to that.

Regardless, all of these gods were supposed to maintain order within Egypt, to protect them from outsiders, and to bless the Egyptians. And, yet, in plague after plague, *their* power—expressed through the magicians, the Nile, Heqet, or whomever—has been systematically unmade.

And this final plague sets its sights on the essence of what the gods existed to preserve. Verse 4: **Moses said, "Thus says the LORD, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt.'"** At least in emphasis, this verse indicates something of a shift. Many of the other plagues center on the use of the staff (7:19) or the hands being raised (9:33; 10:21), or something like soot thrown in the air (9:8) to bring about the sign. And while each plague is certainly to be understood as an act of the LORD, in *this* case there's no staff, hands, or soot involved. Instead, the LORD says, **I am going out into the midst of Egypt.**

And He was going to do so **about midnight**. For the Egyptians, midnight would've been the deepest, darkest time of the day—the diametrical opposite of high noon. And in that darkest of moments, verse 5: **all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on the throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones.**

Over the past few weeks, we've noted how the plagues escalate. Death to cattle was worse than the earlier annoyance of the flies. Boils on the body was worse than the earlier gnats. Again, it wasn't until the fifth plague that anything died. And it wasn't until the sixth that the flesh of humanity experienced a direct attack. The plagues escalate. They do so purposefully. Because they were *always* leading here. This final plague sets its sights on the essence of what the gods of Egypt sought to preserve, that is, life. And this plague would not fall only upon a few households, nor just upon a certain economic demographic. No respecter of person or status, from slave to prince, death came. In chapter 12 we'll read that **there was no home where there was not someone dead** (12:30).

⁷ Phil Ryken, *Exodus*, 318.

⁸ Ryken, 318.

With that, the scene in verse 6 is understandable, and *rightly* seen, visceral: **Moreover, there shall be a cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again.**

Throughout this book, we've read about those that cry out. But thus far the cries have been from the Hebrews as they suffered under the whip of the Egyptians. God said in chapter 3: **I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters** (Ex. 3:7). That's not the only verse we could name. Repeatedly, they've cried out.

But *never* like this. Egypt wakes up to a nightmare.

We've noted how the plagues escalate. Another thing we've noted throughout the plagues is the distinction God makes. With the livestock, it was Egypt's that died. Israel's did not. When the boils attacked, the magicians couldn't stand. Moses could. Thunder and hail and fire fell. Darkness covered the land. But in Goshen, light shone.

The God that sets apart a people distinguishes here as well. A great cry from Egypt rang out, one unlike any before or since. And yet, verse 7: **But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not even bark, whether against a man or beast.**

On the same morning, the people of God woke up in peace. And we know why. It's *not* in *this* week's text, but we'll consider it in the weeks ahead. The firstborn Israelites lived because of blood applied. They lived because of substitution.

I can't help but think of the sixth plague when Pharaoh rushed out to see whether the Hebrews' cattle lived. This time he wouldn't have to.

Death came to every house in Egypt. But to God's people, it had *already* come—in the death of another, one in *their* place.

In one sense our text today is *both* an ending of the plagues and a preview of the Passover. What we'll see as we consider it together is that the gods of Egypt—god after god over death and the afterlife—were shown to be *nothing* next to the Giver of life.

And all of this is central to the good news we prize. It's what we saw in the baptistry earlier—someone brought from death to life, by the power of God, because of Someone else in their place. And in this *better* case, not just dying, but rising.

God's people lived. Verse 7 says why: **that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.**

3. The LORD's Rule Over Egypt's Ruler (11:8–10)

In one of the more shocking moments thus far, verse 8 details just how much influence Moses has, even among those most loyal to Pharaoh. Verse 8: **All these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me.** It's certainly possible this “coming down” refers to Pharaoh's servant coming down off of a platform—a platform they stood on next to Pharaoh.⁹ And having come down, they bow before Moses¹⁰ and say, verse 8, **Go out, you and all the people who follow you.**

Moses tells Pharaoh that after they do that, he will leave. And he does. And verse 8 goes on to say he does so **in hot anger.**

Pharaoh's afflicted his people. Just moments before this, Pharaoh threatened Moses's life (10:28). If we were looking for examples of righteous indignation, this might fit. Moses loves God's

⁹ Stuart, 268.

¹⁰ Another stunning reversal

people. And he's no longer cowering before power. He's emboldened by the God that speaks to Him, the God that's shown *His* power over Egypt's pseudo-ruler.

Verses 9 and 10 function as something of a summary of the whole section. It repeats things said in the prologue to the plagues back in chapter 7.¹¹ Verse 9: **The LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you."** The LORD told him that back in chapter 3. It's been proven true. But his stubbornness did not come *close* to thwarting the purposes of God. Pharaoh didn't listen, according to verse 9: **so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt.**

As last week's text made plain, God *could've* delivered His people with a single stroke. But the point of *all* this was to *multiply* His signs—to repeatedly and convincingly make Himself known.

Verse 10 gives us one more summary statement. There's nothing new here. But that's the point. What's happened has come about *precisely* as the LORD purposed. Verse 10: **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.**

Conclusion

I read a quote earlier in the week that said something like this: "Only in the plague stories was a tradition retained in which such great miracles, constantly repeated, continued to fail."¹² That's someone that has no idea what's going on, and therefore misses the point entirely. In fact, if there is a failure in the narrative, it is the failure of Pharaoh to recognize the power of God over the gods he kept bowing before.¹³ Could it have been more obvious?

So, as we conclude the plagues, have *we* read them rightly?

Have we rightly identified the combatants? And seen Yahweh unmask false gods one after another?

And have we seen the LORD rightly?

Do we see His rule over Egypt, and by extension, over all of humanity?

Do we see His rule over false gods—and over life and death?

Do we see His rule over *us*?

Because in Exodus, in the history of the world, and in the Gospels, the question is *not* whether God will make Himself known. The question is whether we will see Him rightly, know Him, and bow.

¹¹ Motyer, 115.

¹² Brevard Childs, quoted in Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, AOTC, 210.

¹³ Alexander, 210.