



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 11:1-10

Topic

Moses' final warning is that as midnight strikes, all of Egypt will weep and wail when their firstborn are killed

Title

*"After Midnight,
You Gonna Cry, Lament & Shout"*

Can you name the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World?

1. The Colossus of Rhodes
2. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon
3. The Lighthouse of Alexandria
4. The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus
5. The Statue of Zeus at Olympia
6. The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, and
7. The Great Pyramid of Giza

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Exodus 11:1-10

*"After Midnight,
You Gonna Cry, Lament & Shout"*

We might want to rename the list the **Wonder** of the Ancient World. The only location on the list that still exists is the Great Pyramid of Giza.

If I understand the dates correctly, the Great Pyramid at Giza was standing when Moses led the exodus. I doubt he was interested in it as a wonder, however.

In chapter eleven of Exodus, the real “wonder” in Egypt was the series of signs God was performing through Moses and Aaron.

When God first spoke to Moses from the burning bush, we read,

Exo 3:20 So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My **wonders** which I will do in its midst...

After nine such wonders, we read,

Exo 11:9 But the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My **wonders** may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."

Exo 11:10 So Moses and Aaron did all these **wonders** before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

The tenth wonder was coming: The Death of the Firstborn of all Egypt. In its aftermath, Pharaoh would finally relent.

Chapter eleven is a pause, allowing us to take a breath before we get to the terror of that night. As Gandalf said to Pippin on the eve of the attack on Gondor, “It’s the deep breath before the plunge.”

As we catch our breath we are reminded that our God is a God of wonders; that He does wonders, especially to forward His agenda to save lost men and women.

I'll organize my comments on these verses around two points: #1 God's Plan To Save You Is A Wonder In Its Completion, and #2 God's Plan To Save You Is A Wonder In Its Compassion.

#1 God's Plan To Save You Is A Wonder In Its Completion

(v9-10)

Do you have any unfinished projects at home? Ladies, don't elbow your husbands too hard.

God has an unfinished project, but He doesn't need to be elbowed to finish it. He's always working to bring it to completion. It's an ambitious project, described by the apostle Paul when he said,

Rom 8:19 In fact, all creation is eagerly waiting for God to show who his children are.

Rom 8:20 Meanwhile, creation is confused, but not because it wants to be confused. God made it this way in the hope

Rom 8:21 that creation would be set free from decay and would share in the glorious freedom of his children.

Human history is moving towards a consummation when God will "show who His children are." That's another way of saying that God is at work saving lost men and women for eternity.

Meanwhile, “creation is confused.” That’s putting it mildly. Creation “groans,” other translations say. We refer to creation as fallen, recognizing there is something terribly wrong with the world we inhabit.

One day creation will be restored. Saved individuals will live for eternity in the restored creation. It will be the ultimate, “And they lived happily ever after.”

From eternity past, God had a plan to save mankind, and to restore fallen creation. It’s a plan full of wonders as He works in human history to accomplish it.

I mean, is it not a wonder that in the Garden God promised to add to His deity humanity, to come as a man, in order to defeat sin and Satan, saving men and restoring creation?

Is it not a wonder that he made a nation from Abraham and Sarah when they were beyond the age and ability to have children?

There are wonders predicted in God’s Word that we see in our world. Is it not a wonder that Israel is again a nation, and that Jews continue to return there from their dispersion all around the world?

Speaking of God’s Word, is it not a wonder it has been preserved these many centuries despite the efforts of men and entire governments to eradicate it?

We see wonders most, of course, in the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Wonders upon wonders - so many that the apostle John said if they were all written down, the world could not contain the books necessary to catalog them.

God performed a series of wonders to get Israel out of Egypt. We've seen nine of them, and are introduced to the tenth.

Chapter eleven is not in chronological order. It's clear from reading verses nine and ten that they occur *after* the ninth sign, but *before* the warning to Pharaoh about the death of the firstborn. They summarize the first nine signs, which we think occurred over a period of maybe eight months.

Since they are not in chronological order, we can take them in logical order, and comment on them before verses one through eight.

Exo 11:9 But the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."
Exo 11:10 So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but every time we encounter the phrase, "the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart," I feel we need to pause and explain it. It sounds as if God was the cause of the hardening. It sounds as if God was asking Pharaoh to do something that He was preventing him from doing.

In fact, a lot of Christians will tell you that is exactly what it means. Then they say it somehow glorifies God that He acts in a manner that would be evil if we did likewise.

God is no puppet-master; He is no monster. The hardening, or you could say, the *strengthening*, of Pharaoh's heart was Pharaoh's own choice in response to the pressure God was exerting upon him.

I can think of no better illustration than the pressure the nations of the world are exerting upon Kim Jung-un of North Korea to get him to abandon his nuclear ambitions. With every round of new, stricter sanctions, his decision to defy the world is only strengthened.

You could accurately say of him that the nations of the world have hardened his heart.

The other thing we've talked about at length is that just because God has foreknowledge of Pharaoh's final decision, it doesn't mean God predestined it to occur apart from Pharaoh's free will. All things are foreknown by God, but not predetermined by Him.

One of the things we learn from the wonders leading up to the exodus is that God will most definitely bring His plan to completion. No matter Pharaoh's hardness of heart, and God's unwillingness to violate Pharaoh's free will, you know all along that Moses is going to prevail, and lead the Jews out of Egypt.

Looking ahead, God's plan for the future remains intact. He will resurrect and rapture the church; He will put the inhabitants of the earth through the seven-year Great Tribulation; Jesus will return in a glorious Second Coming to establish a one-thousand year Kingdom on the earth.

Beyond that is the final judgment of all the lost at the Great White Throne. Finally He will restore creation and we will enjoy His presence in eternity.

God is simultaneously working in your life. He Who has begun a good work in you will certainly complete it.

And this is where the elbowing comes in to play. It can seem as if God has set you aside - that He has thrown a tarp over you as an unfinished project, and is stacking boxes on you - like we do in our messy garages.

I wonder if the Israelites felt that way? Think about their plight:

- They'd been subjected to Egypt for nearly four centuries - waiting to be delivered.
- When promised a deliverer, they found themselves seeing their infant boys thrown into the Nile River to drown.
- Then, when their deliverer showed-up, he wasn't ready at age forty. He needed to learn how to shepherd - so the Israelites suffered another forty years for Moses' return.
- Upon his return, their life was made more miserable as they were ordered to meet their daily quota of bricks without being provided the necessary materials. Many of them were beaten because of it.

- Lately they waited another eight months - during which time they suffered along with the Egyptians through the first three signs.

They were about to suffer through one terrifying night, asked to believe that a little lamb's blood applied to their doorposts would save their firstborn from Someone called the Destroyer.

Going out into the desert would be no joy ride, either. They weren't used to travel; and some of the peoples they would encounter along the way would be hostile. They'd be called upon to fight - having no training or experience in combat.

The Promised Land would present enormous challenges - literally, as there were Nephilim giants there who needed killing.

Is that how we normally view those biblical events? Not really. We see them as wonders God did in the midst of His people.

It may not seem like it, but God is doing wonders in your life. You may not be able to see them until they are passed... But He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Some of His wonders you **can** see:

- Are you saved? It's a wonder of His grace and mercy, having provided Jesus as your Substitute to take your punishment for sin.
- Are you saved? It's a wonder that your body houses God the Holy Spirit.

- Are you saved? It's a wonder you are called upon to serve others in His Name, and (especially) to proclaim the Gospel to the lost as an ambassador of Heaven on the earth.
- Are you saved? It's a wonder that you could be raptured any moment. And that if you are not, if you die, you will be absent from your body and immediately present with the Lord in Heaven.
- Have you sinned? It's a wonder that God forgives you seventy-times-seven, restoring you to fellowship with Him.

Next time we sing *God of Wonders*, don't just think of "water, earth, and sky," the heavens and beyond our galaxy. **Think of yourself.**

#2 God's Plan To Save You Is A Wonder In Its Compassion

(v1-8)

I hope by now you, too, see God's compassion in these nine wonders. They were signs pointing to salvation in Him. Through them, God was reaching-out to the Egyptians.

That's not just my opinion - it's not just my hoping to make God look better. He needs no defending from me or anyone else.

No, it's borne-out in the series of wonders themselves:

- In the first place, most of the plagues were preceded by an announcement and a warning. Warnings indicate the opportunity to avoid something.

- Each succeeding plague was further proof of God's existence and power, and gave greater substance to the warnings which followed.
- The Egyptians were specifically told to get their slaves and their livestock to safety before the plague of hail. Some of them heeded his warning and thereby spared lives.
- During the plague of locusts, Egyptians approached Pharaoh, begging him to yield to God.
- In verse three of this chapter we will hear that all of the Egyptians came to respect Moses (11:3).
- When the Jews do leave in the exodus, many Egyptians accompany them.

Sure, God was judging Egypt. They deserved it, if for no other reason than they enslaved the Israelites. But in wrath God remembered mercy, and was giving them opportunity after opportunity to repent.

Don't forget, either, that God was showing them the weakness, the powerlessness, of their many gods. This, too, shows compassion. Why follow a god who cannot help or save you - when Almighty God is reaching out to you?

If a person is devoted to one of the world's religions - Islam or Buddhism or Hinduism - they are on the broad road that leads to Hell. Is it not compassionate to show them the powerlessness of their gods?

Exo 11:1 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets *you* go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether.

Remember, these verses don't follow a chronological order. At some point God had given Moses the revelation of the tenth and final wonder... And with it the assurance that it would be so severe that Pharaoh would, of his own free will, relent, and let them go.

Exo 11:2 Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold."

There may be some symbolism in this. When someone was freed from slavery, it was common to send them off with gifts. Moses and the Israelites would see this gift-giving as a sign of their permanent release from Egypt.

Exo 11:3 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.

The series of signs - devastating though they were - were wonders to the Egyptians that pointed to the greatness of God and His servant, Moses.

The Egyptians were not filled with hatred or animosity toward God or Moses; quite the opposite. They saw the hand of God in all this. I'm not saying they were saved - only that their hearts were definitely affected for the good.

Why accuse God of being cruel or vindictive in sending the plagues when their result was so spiritual? Would it be better to let Egyptians prosper, and never see the need to believe God to be saved?

Look at it this way. The firstborn of every Egyptian would one day die from illness or accident or age. If they died without an opportunity to believe God and be saved, they'd face what the Bible calls the Second Death, which is eternal separation from God in Hell. Instead, in compassion, God was telling them, "Tonight your firstborn WILL die, unless you do as I prescribe."

The next set of verses, chronologically, took place at the end of chapter ten - where Moses is still talking to Pharaoh, and we're informed they will never see one another again.

Exo 11:4 Then Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: 'About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt;

Exo 11:5 and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who *is* behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals.

Exo 11:6 Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it *before*, nor shall be like it again.

This last wonder will occupy us for a few weeks. We'll talk more about the "firstborn" in subsequent studies.

Notice that God says, "I will go out into the midst of Egypt." God Himself would be the Destroyer. There is no Angel of Death; no Grim Reaper. It was the Lord Himself.

Matthew Henry writes, “God’s Son, even His firstborn, released this judgment and conquered Pharaoh...” It was Jesus in a theophany, in a pre-incarnation appearance, as the Angel of the Lord.

Since it was Jesus, we’re even more prone to see the compassion involved in it. So where is that compassion?

Let’s answer that by asking another question. Do you think Egyptians could have avoided the death of their firstborn by doing what God will tell the Israelites to do - by applying the blood of a lamb on their doors so that the Destroyer would pass-over their homes?

One commentator, who thinks “Yes,” put it like this:

There is no specific mention of any Egyptians celebrating the first Passover, although this is possible, even likely. This possibility is enhanced by the report that some Egyptians had taken heed of previous warnings (9:18-21). Also, in the instructions God will give concerning the future observance of Passover, foreigners who placed themselves under the Abrahamic Covenant (as signified by circumcision) were allowed to participate, with no distinctions made between them and (other) Israelites (12:43-49).

We’re not told if Egyptians could be spared; **but we’re not told that they could not be spared.** Left to decide, we fall out on the side of grace. While the account is not written to underscore the conversion of Egyptians, I think that there is ample evidence to suggest that some of the Egyptians were converted to true faith in the God of Israel.

Had an Egyptian family gone to ask the Israelites how to serve their God and avoid the plague, they could have received the instructions for the Passover and thus spared their family.

Why believe they could *not* be spared if there is a biblical alternative that is more compassionate?

Listen, if you can biblically believe something about God that amplifies His grace or mercy or love, or an alternative that makes Him seem petty or cruel - **go with the position that is most fitting of God's nature as revealed in the Bible.**

Exo 11:7 But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.'

While wailing and weeping, screaming and shrieking, filled the night in Egypt, it would be so peaceful in Goshen that dogs would not bark.

Exo 11:8 And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Get out, and all the people who follow you!' After that I will go out." Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger.

Someone said, "To be in the presence of evil and not be angry is a dreadful spiritual and moral malady."

What a waste was caused by Pharaoh's hardness of heart. Unnecessary loss of life; economic and agricultural hardship for years to come.

Let's talk about Moses for a moment. He faithfully discharged his mission, and stayed on message. The results were not what he might have hoped for: Pharaoh remained hardened, and great ruin ensued.

In serving God, you are not responsible for the results. As I've heard it put, "the husbandman cannot give the desired harvest, he is only responsible for the sowing."

The Israelites **must** be released to journey toward the Promised Land. God provided for this part of His plan by the ten wonders He brought to pressure Egypt. He could have delivered Israel immediately, or in any number of other ways. Instead He chose compassion - reaching-out to save them, putting His glory and power on display.

God's plan to save men and to restore creation cannot fail. He provides for it, but does so compassionately, without violating free will.

Along the way He tolerates evil. He could and He will overcome evil once-and-for-all. In eternity there will be no more tears. But once evil is totally eradicated, it will mean there is no more opportunity for lost individuals to be saved. Their eternal destiny will be set.

Meanwhile, though you may not see it through your tears, He is your God of wonders, working in you to bring to completion the work He began when He saved you.

