



The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

G. The final plague and the Passover (Exodus 11–13)

Part 1: The plague announced—Exodus 11:1-10

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Introduction

WITH THEIR account of Passover legislation, chapters 11–13 of Exodus introduce a new type of material to the book, a style more commonly associated with Leviticus and Numbers. Yet this legal material, which primarily concerns the observance of three particular rites (Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the consecration of the firstborn), is intertwined with a narrative thread that continues from chapter 10.

The chapters themselves seem quite diffuse and fragmented at first sight, but may usefully be simplified down into a fivefold structure:

A Plague and departure announced (11:1-10)

B Legal material (12:1-28)

C Plague and departure take place (12:29-42)

B' Legal material (12:43–13:16)

A' Departure (13:17-22).

The first part announces the final plague and departure, the last provides completion by recounting that departure. The central section (12:29-42) consists of historical narrative, documenting the actual fulfilment of God's plan to destroy the firstborn and the hurried evacuation of Egypt by the Israelites. This leaves two sections of legal material, **B** and **B'**. Although the departure appears to be covered twice (in **C** and **A'**), in fact the treatment is quite different in each.

The main overlap comes instead in the two blocks of legal material (**B** and **B'**). There are undoubtedly similarities between them: both record an address by God to Moses, then an

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

address by Moses to Israel; both repeat commands concerning Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the calendar, and so forth. The organisation of the material into two blocks gives plentiful scope for the repetition of salient points.

Yet there are differences. The first block is given as *preparation* before the events of Passover night unfold, whereas the second is given afterwards and emphasises more the continuing requirements of Passover observance. (It also focuses more on Unleavened Bread and less on Passover, since Passover has already taken place at this point, whereas the Feast of Unleavened Bread is just beginning.) The first block (particularly 12:1-20) is all structured around the calendar, and is consequently very concerned with dates. The second is concerned with what will

happen when Israel are in the land and with who may partake in the feasts. It emphasises the duty to explain the significance of the ritual to one's offspring, and also introduces the redemption of the first-born, especially appropriate now that Egypt's first-born have been destroyed.

Passover remains, of course, a core and defining element of Judaism. The Jews have a document called the Passover *Haggadah*, which derives from Exodus 11–13 but which provides further elaboration and edict beyond the Biblical text, for instance, the presence of four cups of wine (no mention of drink is made in Exodus) and the prescribed ritual and readings. The *Haggadah* is a vital document for Judaism, gaining its name from the root *nagad*, 'to tell, show, explain', as found in Exodus 13:8: "And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying . . .".

Passover is no less central to Christianity, even though the observance is no longer kept in the way recorded in these chapters. So much of the New Testament's language and imagery when referring to and expounding the sacrifice of Christ is drawn from Passover; as Paul unmistakably put it: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"

(1 Cor. 5:7). The beauty of God's deliverance and the pain of destruction spoken of in the Exodus Passover have been transformed into a new feast that epitomises and celebrates both the love of God in giving His Son and also God's condemnation and destruction of sin.

These chapters, then, and the truths they contain, are central. The point is made by the text itself. On no less than three occasions (with a fourth in Deuteronomy) it is stipulated that these events and ordinances and an understanding and explanation of their significance are to be handed down from father to son, from generation to generation. This command carries through to the modern disciple who has come to know the Truth, whether from a natural or a spiritual father. The message has been handed down and received, as it should be, but the process of explanation and handing down must continue.

In sum, Passover rewrites history and reconfigures time itself. Even the very calendar of Israel and the way in which time was organised was to be completely rewritten on the basis of what God did at Passover. That is how important it is—to them and to us.

One plague more

11:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust¹ you out hence altogether.

11:2 Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels² of silver, and jewels of gold.

11:3 And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses³ was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.

11:4 And Moses said,⁴ Thus saith the LORD, About midnight⁵ will I go out into the midst of Egypt:

11:5 And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.

11:6 And there shall be a great cry⁶ throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.

11:7 But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move⁷ his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference⁸ between the Egyptians and Israel.

11:8 And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger.⁹

11:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.

11:10 And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.¹⁰

Comment

There are two very clear points in which chapter 11 loops back to God's original promises made in Exodus 3–4 and announces that those earlier words are about to be fulfilled. It is worth setting these out:

Exodus 3–4	Exodus 11
<p>“And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: but every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians” (3:21,22).</p>	<p>“Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians” (11:2,3).</p>
<p>“And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is My son, even My firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (4:22,23).</p>	<p>“And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne . . . and all the firstborn of beasts” (11:4,5).</p>

Now God’s earlier promises are about to be fulfilled. The time has come.

Another issue concerns 11:9,10. The rationale behind the death of the firstborn has to do with the principle of rendering unto God what is God’s. Egypt had failed to do this, both by refusing to recognise that they owed their own lives to Him, and (and this is especially pertinent to the present context) by trying to exercise control over God’s firstborn. Egypt has made no acknowledgement of God or their obligations to Him, and now they must pay the price by forced surrender of what is His—the lives of the Israelites, and their own lives also.

The effect of God’s judgement by means of this plague is to be so immense that the Egyptians will be eager to thrust out the Israelites from their land, giving them ‘gifts’ as they go (leading captivity captive, in a manner of speaking). No one will dare to speak against Israel by bad-mouthing man or beast—in the colourful words of the passage, not even a dog will move his tongue (v. 7). Indeed, Israel will find popular grassroots support from the Egyptians as the taskmasters’ whips are put away. The Israelites will have favour in the sight of the Egyptians, who will be only too glad to ‘lend’ as Israel ‘borrows’ jewels of silver and gold. The rabbis expounded this euphemism as being the wages to which Israel should have been entitled for all those years spent slaving at the brick-kilns and on the construction sites of Egypt. Now the Egyptians recognise the rightness of sending Israel from amongst them, and the common people root for Israel rather than their obtuse Pharaoh.

Now it is Moses who is the leader held in honour, even in Pharaoh’s courts. The tables have

been utterly overturned. Indeed, Moses will wait until the people all bow down to him, and only then, once this acknowledgement has been made, will he lead out the Israelites (v. 8). This is an astonishing statement, and one which looks forward to the time when Christ will return and all nations will acknowledge and worship him. Moses the stammerer, who dared not stand before Pharaoh, is gone; instead there stands a ruler of great authority and conviction, one revered not only by his own people, but by his enemies as well. The words of one of our hymns come to mind: “Our Lord will come, but not the same/ As once in lowly form he came” (No. 404).

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1. **v. 1 thrust you out hence altogether.** Pharaoh’s expulsion of the Israelites is expressed in the most emphatic terms, the verb *shalach*, ‘to send away’, being used twice, and *garash*, ‘to drive away’ also being used twice, ‘driving he will drive you completely’. The verb *garash* is in fact an old friend; it was found in the important passages of 2:17 and 6:1, was echoed in the naming of Moses’ son Gershom (2:22; see commentary on these passages), and occurred most recently in 10:11, a prototype of 11:1 in which Pharaoh drives Moses and Aaron from his presence. The point about this ultimate rejection of the Israelites by Pharaoh might be spiritualised. For everyone who wants more than the world has to offer, there may come a point of rejection or thrusting away as the world rejects what was once its own. Such expelled people will find themselves alienated until they wholeheartedly resolve to find themselves a new home with their heavenly Father. As the world

- thrusts away, there must be a drawing towards God, otherwise there will only be emptiness, a failure to belong either here or there.
2. **v. 2 jewels.** This is a fairly nondescript, general term, translated most frequently as 'vessel' in the AV (more than 150 times). 'Objects' might be a reasonable translation.
 3. **v. 3 the man Moses.** This expression is noteworthy, for it occurs only twice. The other occasion is Numbers 12:3, providing an instructive contrast. In Exodus we discover that the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in Numbers that the man Moses was very meek, above all men on the face of the earth. Such greatness foiled by such meekness was surpassed by only one other.
 4. **v. 4 Moses said.** By implication, 'to Pharaoh'. In verse 2 Moses is commanded to address Israel (the actual delivery of that address is not recorded), whereas by verse 8 it is Pharaoh who is being addressed. The change seems to occur at verse 4, even though it is not flagged explicitly in the text. It is possible that chronologically speaking 11:4-8 is part of the dialogue recorded in 10:28,29 as the two splice together quite well. If this is so (and ultimately it makes little difference to interpretation), then Exodus splits the dialogue up in order to make the tenth plague a discrete unit beginning at chapter 11.
 5. **v. 4 midnight.** Although 'midnight' is the correct translation, the expression literally means 'the dividing of the night'. It was indeed a night of decisive division, as the Lord divided between those who would be slain and those who would be spared. The timing of the event was singularly appropriate.
 6. **v. 6 a great cry.** This is the exact phrase used to describe the misery of the Israelites under Egyptian bondage earlier in Exodus (3:7,9; 5:15; cf. 2:23).
 7. **v. 7 move his tongue.** The verb 'move' is literally 'sharpen'. Psalm 140:2-4 refers to the sharpened tongue of the snake, but here the idiom is of threatening barking. Even the wild dogs will be silenced from their baying and howling by God's great judgements.
 8. **v. 7 the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.** This is a classic illustration of the principle of election. According to the record, no provision is made for the Egyptian who might happen to believe at this point (the plague of hail, for instance, had made such a distinction). Of course, this does not mean that no Egyptian could be saved; it does appear to mean, however, that though salvation might ultimately be granted to them, believing Egyptians would still have to suffer the consequences of this plague. Its effect was universal throughout Egypt.
 9. **v. 8 [Moses] went out . . . in a great anger.** Literally, 'anger of nose/nostrils', an idiom for extreme anger. No value judgement is given on this anger; it is left as a matter for the interpreter. There were other occasions on which he became enraged, most notably when he smashed the tables of stone (cf. Ex. 2:12; 32:19; Num. 20:10).
 10. **vv. 9,10.** Verses 9 and 10 seem to constitute a general summary of what Pharaoh's response to Moses and Aaron has been all the way through the preceding chapters, rather than having direct pertinence to verses 1-8. The reminder forms a useful summary and structural break before the Passover legislation begins in chapter 12.

The canon of the Old Testament

Our English versions of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) contain thirty-nine books, while the Hebrew Scriptures themselves contain twenty-four. Josephus mentions twenty-two, combining Ruth with Judges and Lamentations with Jeremiah. This was done to correspond with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Jews did not divide the writings in the same manner as today's translators divide them. For example: the minor prophets are grouped together as the "Twelve"; Ezra and Nehemiah are taken together; Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are each one book rather than two. These twenty-four (or thirty-nine) books constitute the canon of the Old Testament. The word 'canon' is Greek and means a straight rod, rule or measure, or that which is measured by the 'canon'. The canon of the Old Testament as we have it today was set in the time of Josephus; by his time (c. A.D. 90) the Apocryphal books, which had found their way into the Septuagint, had been rejected. The Old Testament in the days of Josephus was recognised as of ancient authority and Divinely inspired.—*G.B.*