

Last Prophecy to Pharaoh (Exodus 11:1-10)

I Exodus 11 is like an epilogue to Chapter 10. (We might wonder how, after Pharaoh threatened to kill Moses if he ever came again, how Moses got an audience with Pharaoh to deliver the message in 11:4-8. It is that he had not yet left. God had told Moses what to say and to do, beginning in about Chapter 4; and there was some time before and during the Plague of Darkness during which God could give Moses the latest updates. When Pharaoh summoned Moses in Chapter 10, he already knew what Moses would say, and he was prepared with his official response. Moses also already knew what Pharaoh would say, and he was prepared with God's response. When Pharaoh ordered him *Get out of my sight* (10:28) Moses was ready to go and never to come again. But God had one more prophecy for Pharaoh, and Moses was to deliver it before he left the palace. Verses 1-3 of Chapter 11 are parenthetical. They appear in our text as background information, concerning this last meeting between Moses and Pharaoh. We need to know this because the setting for the story is about to change. From Chapters 6-10, the story is about the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, and the setting is in the Palace. Beginning in Chapter 12, the setting of the story moves to the community of the Israelites, and the story changes. Beginning in Chapter 12, God will stop speaking to Pharaoh and start speaking to the Children of Israel.)

A (We learn that the) Egyptians held Moses in high regard. (Let us consider for a moment how ordinary Egyptians reacted to the prophecies of Moses and Aaron. When one plague followed another in such rapid succession, they no doubt began to understand that the real God in Heaven did not respect Pharaoh's claims to divinity. They may even have stopped Moses and Aaron in the street to ask for advice, so that they might prepare a little better for the next calamity. It is reasonable to think that they saw the cause-and-effect relationship between Palace visits by Moses and Plagues on Egypt. When they met Moses in the street outside the Palace, they no doubt tried to impress him with their sympathy for his message and asked him to pray for God to be merciful to them. If they happened to observe that the Plagues followed Aaron's smiting something with his rod, or Moses' stretching out his hands toward the heavens, they would also have understood that Moses had a lot better connections with God than Pharaoh did. So should we think that Moses and Aaron ignored their misery? It seems more likely that, as they passed through the marketplaces and bumped shoulders with Egyptian peasants, they warned them about the coming calamities too. Egyptians as well as the Children of Israel held Moses in high regard because they understood he was a prophet, and perhaps, because he gave them good advice about protecting themselves and their families from God's wrath as He judged, and condemned, all their gods, including Pharaoh.)

B Moses had one more prophecy for Pharaoh. (So now we come to God's final message for Pharaoh. God knew, and Moses learned, that Pharaoh was not going to accede to the Will of God in any case. God showed Moses the final plague, of the Death of the Firstborn, and Moses told everyone to start getting ready for their Exodus. We can only speculate about how much he told the Egyptians, and whether any of the Egyptians (who had learned to respect God) might have sought refuge in the Land of Goshen, or whether the Children

of Israel were hospitable toward them. Our own practical experiences in dealing with people make us think that Moses was disposed to warn ordinary people as well as Pharaoh; and our experiences with God make us tend to think that God would have been merciful to Egyptians who respected Him and His prophets. The Children of Israel no doubt saw that they enjoyed divine protections that the Egyptians did not, and since they were *all* only people, some of them were good and kind (even to Egyptians) and some were not. All of this is only speculation; it only serves to finish the story of Chapters 6-10 and provide background for the next few Chapters of Exodus. The historical facts, as presented in the scripture, are that Pharaoh never relented, and at the end of Chapter 10 he ordered Moses out of his sight and threatened to kill him if he ever came again. Moses, for his part, never backed down from his demand that Pharaoh let the Children of Israel go—because God never backs down from His demands. And so Moses, mindful of God’s plans and angry at Pharaoh’s impenitence, gives him God’s final prophecy. This one is different. There is no *if you don’t let them go something worse will happen*; and there is no *God says that this is to teach you to behave better*. This time there is nothing but doom. The prophecy is that something bad will happen *and* that Pharaoh’s officials will break ranks with him: *All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all the people who follow you’*. Moses probably expected to be pursued, too.)

II God told Moses several things before Pharaoh summoned him in 10:24. (We don’t see them in print until they happen, but we should remember that Moses spent a lot of time talking to God. There were 3 days of darkness after Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky (10:22). God had plenty of time to explain to Moses what would happen next. Moses had plenty of time to meet with the elders of the Children of Israel, and probably with the moms of the Egyptian children their kids played with too. During that time, some of the Israelites probably told the Egyptians what they could tell, and the Egyptians, kindly disposed toward them (in panic, and probably searching for some glimmer of hope for themselves) gave the Israelites what they asked for. They probably did not expect their Hebrew neighbors to return anything, but they might well have sought to go with them. In any case, the 10th day of the month would be the last day the Children of Israel spent in Egypt, and they got ready to depart.)

A The Children of Israel were already asking their neighbors for gold and silver before the Plague of Darkness began. (As we just noted, all of them, Hebrew or Egyptian, were just people, and so some of them would have been good and kind and some malevolent and mischievous. Some Egyptian peasants probably asked what they could do to help the Hebrews, and if it might be possible for them to be protected from the wrath of God as well. Hebrews, for their part, would have been compassionate and sympathetic, if their hearts were good; and they might have been vindictive and treacherous, if they were selfish or mean-spirited. Some of the Hebrews would have told the Egyptians the truth, and then asked Moses to intercede for their friends with God; some would have taken advantage of the situation, and taken everything the Egyptians had, perhaps offering to take them along if the price was right. We should not read too much into this; the scriptures tell us only that the Hebrews asked their neighbors for silver and gold and that the Egyptians gave

it to them. We can guess that some Egyptians did so out of a collective sense of guilt, or sympathy; and we may suppose that some of them were hoping to bargain for mercy from God when the Last Plague arrived, but the record of scripture tells us only that the Egyptians gave the Israelites gold and silver and clothing.)

B God told Moses about the Plague of Death before he met Pharaoh. (God had been talking to Moses for a long time, and now the Hebrews had 3 days to make final preparations for their Exodus. Moses knew that the Plague of the Death of the Firstborn was coming before Pharaoh summoned him (10:24). We will see in Chapter 12 that Moses had known for quite some time. He even knew the exact night, and what the Hebrews needed to do in preparation for that night. When Pharaoh told Moses to get out of his sight and never to come again Moses was ready to go; he had just one more prophecy for Pharaoh and then he turned and left. Pharaoh never wanted to see Moses again, and Moses knew that he would not. That night the Death Angel would take the firstborn child from every home and the firstborn animal from every barn, except in the Land of Goshen. We should note that if this had been a threat it might not have happened; if it had been a warning then there would have been some way to avoid it. This was purely a prophecy about what *would happen*, as a demonstration of the Power of God in the country of Egypt. If Chapter 11 is a sort of parenthetical epilogue for Chapter 10, it is also a prologue for Chapter 12.)

C God already hardened Pharaoh's heart, and nothing Moses said could change that. (We need not elaborate this point very much. Pharaoh was too proud to give in even after seeing all the calamities that resulted from his stubbornness; God (and Moses) were not going to back down from their demands, either. The purpose of correcting a child is to break his spirit and change his behavior, but how long can patience allow stubbornness to persist? Similarly, Pharaoh was so full of himself that not even all the miraculous plagues that afflicted Egypt could correct his behavior or change his attitude. There is only one thing left, when no correction will humble a miscreant. Punishment from God is terrible and final. There is no appeal. There is no reprieve. Let us pray that we can explain the fires of Hell to an unbeliever in this context. If his heart is so hard that not even all the prophecies in Matthew 24, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 15-18 (among other places) can break his spirit and make him turn to God in humble repentance, then the only thing left for the impenitent sinner, as it was for Pharaoh, is eternal condemnation at the Final Judgment of God.)

III God made a difference between Israel and Egypt. (Let us turn now to the difference God made between the Egyptians and the Children of Israel. The Scriptures tell us that He protected them from some plagues, but it does not say they were protected from all of them. This is a somewhat unorthodox observation, but it is true all the same. So what might have been God's purpose in that? God wanted the Hebrews to recognize that they, too, are just people. God would have us realize something, too: it is that all men are born in sin and need Jesus to save them from sin, whether they are baptized church members who share the Lord's Supper at Easter and Thanksgiving or not. God also allowed the Hebrews to observe the misery in Egypt that resulted from the Plagues, even if they did not suffer from one or another plague themselves. This should have taught them compassion for their fellow-man. Did it? Let us ask whether World War 2 taught humanity to stop

killing each other, or if the devastation of 2 Japanese cities taught people to stop building nuclear weapons. We can see from these examples that men do not share God's point of view, especially with respect to compassion for suffering, especially for the suffering of an enemy. Yet God made a difference between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. Why should He want to do that? It was to demonstrate His wrath against the gods of Egypt, and to prove that He, alone, was the God Who both sent and stopped Plagues, and could afflict people with plagues or protect people from them. What constituted the difference that God made? It was His Promise to the Patriarchs and His Presence among the Hebrews as a result of that promise. It was God's determination to fulfill His Promises (of return to the Land of Canaan) for the Children of Israel, in the fourth generation after they went to Egypt. And it was His propensity to identify with the victims of abusive and tyrannical government policies. The New Testament Christian should see a similar difference between his life and the life of an unbeliever, constituted of a similar Promise from Jesus, to come again; and a similar propensity in the Body of Christ, His Church, to identify with hungry, sick, homeless, and imprisoned victims of social injustice in our times (as we learn from Matthew 25:31-46).)

A The Angel of Death would not visit the Land of Goshen. (We shall see in Chapter 12 how the Israelites protected themselves from that plague. Now let us try to imagine standing in front of God while He evaluates our lives by the absolute standard of His own Holiness, knowing that unless Jesus claims us as one of His own blood-bought born-again believers, we will share the same eternal destiny as any other impenitent sinner. How can we protect ourselves from the eternal fires of Hell? The only means of escape for us is for the Lord Jesus Christ to be our righteousness. His Blood must be the sacrifice that we offer, as atonement for our sins. The Angels of God will see the Blood of Jesus dripping from the very soul of every believer, and gather us safely into Heaven to live forever with our Heavenly Father; other angels will burn up the souls of all the rest in *the fire that is not quenched, where their worm dieth not* (Mark 9:44, 46, 48).

B Egyptians would wail; Israelites would pass the night in peace. (Here we see a description of a specific difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians. It is easy enough to imagine being awake at midnight; I don't know anyone besides me who goes to sleep early in the evening. But we all would like to sleep, at least for part of the night. Can we imagine the cacophony of noise, as an entire country realizes that its firstborn children just died? One by one, people all across Egypt woke up to *Mom, come quick, something just happened to Brother!* And to the mournful wails of Moms and Dads, some of them no doubt watching the life slip away from their children's bodies, and realizing that they are powerless to help them. Yet in the Land of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, not even a dog barked at a man. Early the next morning, Pharaoh's officials would have done as Moses predicted. The Hebrews were ready. They ate dinner with their shoes on and their staffs in their hands. They threw their leftover pieces of lamb meat into the breakfast fires, and followed Moses out of Egypt.)

C God made believers different from unbelievers, too. (When a sinner repents his sins sincerely and humbly asks God to forgive him and save him, God puts new life in his dead soul. That new life is the life of

Jesus Christ, Who died to redeem us from sin. His Holy Spirit now animates the life, the very body, of the new believer. That fact alone makes believers different from unbelievers. But there is more. As we grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) we start to think like Jesus. We learn to love what He loves and hate what He hates. And most importantly we learn to trust God to perform the promises in His Word. We start applying the truth of the Word of God to our own lives. Then, little by little and day by day, the Holy Spirit changes us, conforming us to the image of Christ. We say again, that these differences will be obvious to everyone. That is the Glory of God in our lives.)

IV (After the Night of the Passover,) every firstborn child would be holy to God. (We should remember that from the very beginning, heads of families were the lawgivers, the enforcers of social order, and the religious priests of a family. As extended families grew larger, the oldest members became the elders tribes; and as tribal societies evolved into national units a hereditary succession of kings followed among the chiefs of the tribes. Now we see in Chapter 11 a kind of affirmation, if you will, of the importance of the oldest son in the family. The oldest sons (and daughters) of the Egyptians all died, the night of the Passover, making the oldest sons of the Hebrews rather special (the Bible word is *holy*) to God. In later passages we will see that even the firstborn animals were to be either sacrificed to God or redeemed, and if it was an unclean animal (a donkey, for example), God did not want it as a sacrifice so a redemption tax became mandatory. Firstborn sons would automatically have been high priests in their families after they married anyway; but God will eventually arrange another way to have priests. Thus arose a kind of exemption tax, or exemption sacrifice, by which eldest sons were excused from service as priests in the Temple.)

A God used the Priesthood of the Firstborn as a transition to a more formal arrangement, which He would set up in the Tribe of Levi. (There were 12 Tribes in Israel, and Moses and Aaron belonged to the one called *Levi*. Other than the fact that Moses and Aaron were Levites, there was no particular reason why that tribe should have become the priests of Israel, but that was the Tribe God chose to be priests in Israel, and for that reason. Now while firstborn children have a tendency to be somewhat more responsible about most things than their siblings, this Priesthood of the Firstborn was not precisely related to character so much as it was to history and tradition. The firstborn sons were not especially important in the messianic covenant, either. Noah and Abram, for example, were probably the oldest sons of their fathers, but Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Moses, and King David were not. Only from Exodus 11 - 12 and onwards does the culture of primogeniture have a significant biblical role, and that had more to do with responsibilities before the eyes of God than with privileges among siblings.)

B Jesus was Mary's firstborn son, and God's only Son. (There are many theological points to be raised in connection with the birth of Jesus. For purposes of our discussion of the Priesthood of the Firstborn, let us focus on just three of them. First, the eldest brother of humanity (Adam) was responsible for bringing sin into the world; and it will be up to the *Firstborn among many Brethren* (the way Romans 8:29 describes Jesus) to redeem humanity from sin. Second, no one who was also contaminated by the Original Sin could

save mankind from sin, which is why it is so important for us to believe that Jesus was God and the Son of God, rather than Joseph and Mary's first *woops*. Third, Jesus must be completely human in order to be the Son of Man, whose death would represent all men as the Sacrifice for all sins of all people of all times; therefore we believe, as the Gospels tell us, that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin. Now the fact that Jesus was the firstborn child of Mary, and the only begotten Son of God, made Him holy to God in terms of Exodus 11, and subject to the Exemption Tax by which all other firstborn children born in any tribe other than Levi were excused from service in the Temple Priesthood. This was why Joseph and Mary presented the Baby Jesus in the Temple, in Luke 2 (for a fuller account of this regulation, please read Leviticus 12:2-7). Yet Jesus *was* a Priest, by any definition we may choose to employ. The easiest one to understand is that the priest represents God in front of Man by speaking for God, and he represents Man in front of God by offering sacrifices (and prayers) on mankind's behalf. In the case of Jesus, He was the Sacrifice as well as the Priest Who offered it; by His own blood He atoned for our sins and entered the presence of God to present the sacrifice, thus removing our guilt forever. This is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, in the words of Hebrews 8, not after the Levitical priesthood in Aaron and his sons.)

C Here then, is another symbol for us, of the roles of Christ and the Church. (As we have mentioned previously, all of this historical inquiry in Exodus would mean little to us if we could not apply it to our own lives, in our own times. So here we should look the symbolism of Exodus 11, in the context of our own faith. The Angel of Death took the firstborn children of Egyptians, as he will take us all eventually. The Hebrews had hope that night, instead of despair, because of the blood of the passover lamb, on their doorposts and window frames. Protected by the blood of the lamb, they were safe from the Angel of Death. Believers have hope too, now, instead of despair, because we are protected from the eternal second death by the Blood of Christ, Who is *our* Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God, in the words of the Gospel of John. The Children of Israel were to leave Egypt that night, on a journey to their promised land in Canaan. Believers also leave *egypt* (the world) and *egyptian-ness* (worldliness) behind, on our journey to our Promised Land, in Heaven. God was in the Land of Goshen, among the Hebrews, protecting them from at least some of the plagues, as the Holy Spirit of Jesus is in believers now, providing us just as much protection from damages by this world as our faith can sustain. We see the glory of God revealed in Exodus 6-11, and in the lives of true believers ever since the Resurrection of Christ. And finally, we see preparations by God, for the Children of Israel to become a Kingdom of Priests, a concept we will revisit several times more; just as God intends for the real, spiritual, capital-C-Church to be the royal Priesthood of the Kingdom of God in the contemporary world.)

V The Plague of Death was the final judgment, against Pharaoh himself. (Pharaoh minced no words in his expressions of contempt for God and God's prophets; he was finished with Moses, and Moses and God were finished with Pharaoh. We must surely realize that modern man cannot continue forever to spurn God and refuse to repent. We must also surely realize that by the end of the story for Pharaoh, it would have made no difference if he finally said, *O.K. God, You win I'll let them go*— after they were already gone. The Bible

tells us that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, but what will be the point of bowing and confessing on the edge of the Pit of Hell? How can one say, *I am lying down of my own free will* after it is no longer possible to stand up? I know, the liberals will not give in on that point either— that is, some seem to think that even at that moment on the brink of eternity, they could still repent and be saved; but the message of the scriptures is very different. Let us make it our business to give them their opportunities now, while their profession of faith might still mean something to us, and to other unbelievers. Let them absolve their guilt now with the confession that Jesus is Christ and our Lord, rather than expecting mercy for their impenitence in spite of the hardness of their hearts.)

A The Passover became the holiest of all holy days for Israel. (That Day became their Liberation Day, and that month became the first month of the year on their calendar. It was so important that Jesus went to Jerusalem to share the Passover Dinner with His Disciples, the night before He was crucified; and it is so important that modern Jews still celebrate it. As believers we remember it too, in a slightly different form.)

B Christians can understand the context of the Lord's Supper only in relation to the story of the Passover. (As we mentioned, Jesus was the Lamb of God, Who takes away the Sin of the World. The Lamb of the Passover was sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, which came on the morning after the night of the first full moon after the spring equinox. (We shall see in a few weeks how to correctly calculate the date for Easter Sunday.) That night, with the full moon, was the night of the Passover, and it was the night Jesus shared the Last Supper with His disciples. After that special dinner (called seder by Jews), He gave these instructions to His Disciples: *Do this in remembrance of me.* Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper as a perpetual memorial of the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, Whom we trust to take away our sins. The word *this* is a pronoun in that sentence, and the antecedent of the Pronoun was the Passover Dinner, in the 11th and 12th Chapters of Exodus. The end of the story for Pharaoh was the beginning of the story for the Hebrews, and if we understand it properly, for New Testament Christians too.)