

# EXODUS

## THE GOD WHO RESCUES

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### SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 12:29-32

To understand more about the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn.

#### Read the Text:

*At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 30 And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. 31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!" (Exodus 12:29-32, ESV)*

#### Study the Text:

### Plague #10: The Death of the Firstborn

The verbiage to describe the tenth, final, and worst plague is among the shortest of plague accounts. Not much description is needed to convey the horror of this moment. It would result in "a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again" (Ex. 11:6). Below is a breakdown of some of the key details of this passage.

#### A MILD VARIATION

The tenth plague begins "at midnight," or possibly simply "in the middle of the night," as the Hebrew term here can be understood either way. The LORD does precisely what He said He would do in Exodus 11:5, but with one small variation. In the original announcement in chapter 11 God includes "the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the hand mill," but here in chapter 12 that phrase is replaced with "the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon" (Ex. 11:5; 12:29). Why the change? It is likely stylistic or perhaps meant to expand to the reader the extent of this judgment because both phrases carry the same impact: the plague will impact the heir to the throne of Egypt all the way down to the bottom of society. In other words, no social classes escape judgment. The royal family will feel the sting of death's judgment as will the slave girl and the man in prison, and even the livestock. This is a *comprehensive* judgment.

#### ALL OF EGYPT SUFFERED JUDGMENT

Were there any Egyptians who perhaps participated in the Passover? Apparently not. Verse 30 states, "And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead." The lack of any Egyptian house that survived the Passover indicates that all of Egypt suffered this judgment. The crying, weeping, and screams of horror filling the Egyptian air would have been a terrifying thing to behold for the Israelites who had been spared. This was truly the most devastating moment in Egyptian history.

#### SUMMONED BY NIGHT

Verses 31 and 32 conclude: "Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your

flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!" Pharaoh does not wait for morning to release Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites. He does so with haste. He will not endure another moment with them in the presence of the kingdom. Notice that after all the bartering between Pharaoh and Moses, Moses will walk away with all of the Israelites, young and old, and all of their livestock and herds, just as the LORD promised. The bartering was in vain; it always is when it comes to the LORD. God will not barter over His will. This sudden departure clearance validates the previous commands of God to prepare and eat the Passover meal with haste and already dressed (Ex. 12:7-13).

### **A BLESSING**

The inclusion of the plea, "Bless me also," is intriguing. Blessings were common upon departure (Gen. 24:60; 47:10, 1 Kg. 8:66), but what is meant by this is puzzling. Two possibilities abound.

#### **A Plea for Reversal**

One possibility (Propp, 1974) is that by "blessing," Pharaoh meant for Moses to release the curse that had been thrown upon Egypt, perhaps even hoping that the dead would be brought back to life. Pharaoh had seen enough to know that the LORD had the power to undo that which He had enacted on the Egyptians (something of which his own powerful court magicians were incapable), and so it was worth a shot. Perhaps upon leaving Moses could appeal the LORD to undo the devastation waged upon the Egyptian kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

#### **A Proudful Request**

The more likely possibility (Alexander, 2017) is that Pharaoh is asking for a "blessing in return" for his willingness to let them go. Because he has finally done what Moses and Aaron have requested, he sees this as reason for them to bless him in return. This would be an ancient example of *quid pro quo*. This would also be consistent with the presumptuous, prideful character of Pharaoh and his total lack of self-awareness that has been on display throughout the entirety of the Exodus narrative thus far. He believes he's owed a blessing because he is graciously allowing the Israelites leave, even in utter defeat. Alexander writes, "In spite of all that has happened Pharaoh seeks some kind of reward for the concessions he has just granted to the Israelites. Even at this stage Pharaoh appears reluctant to concede defeat."<sup>2</sup> His pride blinds him in defeat.

Either way, the desire for blessing will be short-lived. Predictably, Pharaoh will turn on the Israelites in the coming exodus as he has in every prior instance.

## **A Note to the Modern Reader**

Modernity and post-modernity has made much of the ideas of privilege, power, and oppression. In a system wherein a group holds power, there will usually be oppression that follows, or so says the modern critical theorist. The answer to oppression, according to critical theory, is to force a change in power from the oppressor to the oppressed. This results in a kind of vengeance against the cruelty of the privileged on behalf of the innocent. Now, consider the contrast between this kind of system and that which is described in the book of Exodus. There is clearly a group in power with privilege (the Egyptians) who oppress the minority group (the Israelites). The Egyptians even kill the firstborn sons of the Israelites at the command of that generation's Pharaoh (Ex. 1:22). The tenth plague in some sense seems like retribution for this. However, it is God, not the Israelites, who exacts justice. If the Exodus story were written with a critical theory in mind, it

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<sup>1</sup> William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 411.

<sup>2</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 237.

would look like Israel rising up and overthrowing Egypt and killing all of their children, an evil for evil proposition. The Exodus story, however, never places Israel into a position of power in Egypt. Yahweh is the One who is in power, and it is He who exacts vengeance, not the people. This is always the case in the biblical text, and why the apostle Paul says: “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” This is simply another example of how worldly wisdom runs contrary to the wisdom of God. It may sound nice, but it fails to conform to God’s revealed wisdom.

## What About Now?

One takeaway is the comprehensive nature of God’s judgment. God judges all of Egypt (Ex. 12:30). Everyone remotely complicit in the oppression of Israel faces the wrath of God. Another takeaway is the boundless nature of pride. If Pharaoh is demanding a blessing for finally relenting, it demonstrates the way pride ultimately blinds us from reality and common sense. Pride has a way of making us act like a crazy person.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Exodus 12:29. At what time did the LORD execute His tenth plague?

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2. Read Exodus 12:29. Who all was included in the judgment of this tenth plague? Write them down.

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### Day Two

1. Read Exodus 12:29. How does the description of this judgment differ from the description in Exodus 11:5.

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2. Read Exodus 12:30. When did Pharaoh and his servants realize the tenth plague had occurred?

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### Day Three

1. Read Exodus 12:30. What was the reaction of Egypt in light of the tenth plague?

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2. Read Exodus 12:31. At what point did Pharaoh summon Moses and Aaron?

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## Day Four

1. Read Exodus 12:31. What does Pharaoh say to Moses and Aaron?

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2. Read Exodus 12:32. What does Pharaoh tell Moses and Aaron to take with them? What does he ask them to do?

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### Discuss the Text!

## Week 26 Discussion: Blinded by Pride

If we understand Pharaoh's request for a blessing in verse 32 to be motivated by his own pride, then pride shows how powerful it can be in blinding us from reality. Talk as a group about the ways in which pride has sabotaged you and your relationships.

1. Icebreaker: What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word "pride."
2. How has pride caused you to be blinded to reality? Give specific examples if you are willing.
3. Do you struggle with pride?
4. In what areas of your life are you most prone to pride?
5. Have you ever seen pride blind someone else? How difficult was it to speak truth to them?
6. How can you practically work against pride in your life?

## Takeaways:

1. The tenth plague results in the death of every firstborn in Egypt.
2. Pharaoh awakens to discover the horror of this plague as all of Egypt cried out.
3. Pharaoh asks Moses and Aaron to take all of their people and possessions and leave immediately.