

Bible Study # 18 Exodus 10.21–11.10 02–27–2021

Another dramatic sign brought darkness over all Egypt. Like the earlier signs of gnats (8:16-19) and boils (9:8-12), this one was unannounced, and was without any reference to Moses and Aaron appearing before Pharaoh.

Moses was instructed to stretch out his hand heavenwards, so that deep darkness would come over the land. This was to be so thick, that one could feel it. The verb for 'feel' is rare. If the translation 'feel darkness' is correct, then it is use of graphic imagery in attempting to say how dense the darkness was.

The other alternative is taking the verb to refer to the resulting need to grope to find one's way in the dark (cf. this usage in Deut. 28:29; Job 5:14; 12:25), which also gives a satisfactory meaning. When Moses stretched out his hand, 'deep darkness' came over the land for three days. The expression 'deep darkness' is an attempt to translate the combination in Hebrew of two words for darkness.

So serious was this darkness that not another person could be seen (lit. 'a man did not see his brother'), and it prevented people from going out-of-doors. Once more the principle of divine election was demonstrated, in that this sign was not applied to where the Israelites were living in Goshen. They, as God's people, did not have to walk in darkness but had God's light.

Pharaoh sent for Moses (v.24) to come during that darkness. Pharaoh relented, up to a point. He was willing that the Israelites should go out into the desert to worship, even taking their children with them. However, flocks and herds had to stay behind. He rightly reasoned that if the whole Hebrew community, with their animals, went out, this would not be merely a worship time but a full exodus from Egypt.

The intent of Moses' reply (vs. 25–26) is obscured by most of the English translations. The literal translation is, 'You must also give into our hand sacrifices and burnt offerings' (NASB mg.). Then the point is that Moses was indicating that Pharaoh himself (the word 'you' is emphatic) must provide some of the sacrifices.

Some believe it is an ironic comment that should be understood: Even if you were to provide sacrifices and burnt offerings, we must still take our animals. We must sacrifice to our God. Worship is not just a ritual, it is personal. We must give to God personally.

The offerings were going to be sacrifices that were partially eaten by the worshippers, and burnt-offerings that were entirely consumed by fire. It was also necessary for the cattle and small animals (the Hebrew word denotes sheep and/or goats) to be taken, as some of them would also be needed. The further explanation was that until they were out in the desert they would not know what other sacrificial animals they would need.

Once more the text indicates that the divine plan of God was in the whole affair and on this further occasion he hardened Pharaoh's heart (the same language is used as 9:12 and 10:20). He remained obstinate, refusing to send the people away. Moses was summarily dismissed from his presence, with the warning that he had to take care lest he come back before him again. A return to Pharaoh's court and presence would result in death.

The reference to 'the day you see my face' is simply a Hebrew way of saying 'when ...' The expression 'just as you say' in Moses' response to this stipulation is only found in two other passages in the Old Testament (Num. 27:7; 36:5). It denotes that Moses thought that Pharaoh had spoken what was right.

The final sign related in chapters 11 and 12 was the most serious of God's judgments, for it involved all the Egyptian families and touched them deeply by taking the lives of all their firstborn, whether human or animal (12:29). It also involved the institution of the Passover celebration, the regulations for which are set out in Exodus 12:1-30, 43-51, and Deuteronomy 16:1-8.

In chapter 11 some explicit directions were given to Moses relating to the final smiting of the Egyptians. This was to be inflicted on Pharaoh and the whole land. The use of a special Hebrew word here points to divinely inflicted punishment, and this is the only time it occurs in the narrative here in Exodus. The assurance was given that on this occasion the result would be release of the Israelites, with Pharaoh driving them out.

Reference had already been made to the fact that the Israelites would not leave Egypt empty-handed (see comment on 3:21-22). Moses was to instruct both men and women to ask for vessels of silver and gold. These actions go back to a promise made to Abraham, that his people would leave the land of servitude 'with great possessions' (Gen. 15:14).

This should not be understood to mean that the Israelites deceived the Egyptians, borrowing things they knew would never be returned. Rather, God caused the Egyptians to pity them (Ps. 106:46), so that the general populace of Egypt was quite willing to admit that their slaves had been ill-treated and that the God of Israel had been directly involved in the miraculous events that had occurred which we examine soon.

By God's own action, the attitude of the Egyptians was altered so that they were sympathetic to the Israelites. The attitude towards Moses himself was also a factor, God giving him favor (11:3) in the eyes of the officials and the people. The account of the actual asking for articles is given in 12:35-36.

No indication is given here of the person to whom Moses was speaking, but it is clear from the plural verbal form in verse 7, ('that you (pl.) may know') and from verse 8 ('all your officials') that it was to Pharaoh. The final judgment was not to be a further distortion in regard to nature (the Nile, insects, hail, locusts, etc.) but a direct attack upon the children and animals of the Egyptians.

Every firstborn son, and all the firstborn among the cattle, were to die. The time when it would happen is said to be the middle of the night, without any explanation why this time was chosen. No exception was to be made among the Egyptians. It did not matter what social standing anyone had. From the ruler, the Pharaoh, to the humblest female slave working at her millstone.

All in Egypt, except for those who had the blood painted on their doorposts, experienced this tragedy, causing such an outcry as had never occurred, nor would occur in the future. It is significant that the word for 'wailing' or 'outcry' is used of the response to this judgment. It occurred earlier of Israel's cry to God (3:7, 9). Now it is the Egyptians who cry in their distress, but there will be no relief for them.

God's sovereignty, and also His compassion for the enslaved Israelites, would be manifested in an appointed distinction between them and their captors. The same language is used here as in 8:23 and 9:4 (all these passages use the verb which means 'to make a distinction').

What is notable here is the reference to the absence of barking dogs in the Israelite communities. Presumably the idea is that with no crying out of people in this community, no dog would be disturbed and begin to bark.

It is clear now that Moses was addressing Pharaoh throughout this speech, as he speaks to him directly regarding the changed attitude of his officials. What was going to happen was spelled out to him, for his officials would reach the point where they would go looking for Moses in order to tell him to get out of the country, along with all his followers.

After doing obeisance before Moses, the officials will tell him to get out of the land along with his followers. Following that, Moses gave the assurance that he would leave. At that point of the interview, the relationship between Moses and Pharaoh was so strained that Moses went out in anger. This can be understood as an expression of God's anger, or of Moses' anger at the stubborn sinfulness of the Egyptians.

Verses 9 and 10 form a summary statement of what had happened. Moses was warned by the Lord as to the outcome of his mission, and the necessity of wonders to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelites (see 3:19-20). God, through Moses and Aaron had performed all these before Pharaoh, but his heart was so hardened by the Lord that he still refused to permit any exodus of the Israelites from his land.

In our next study we will examine Exodus 12:1–28.