

YET ONE PLAGUE: A STUDY ON THE NARRATIVE FUNCTION AND LITERARY PLACE OF EXODUS 11:1-3

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ABSTRACT

The present study has the objective of exploring the nature of the narrative of Exod 11, particularly, the literary and narrative function of verses 1-3, which abruptly interrupt the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh in 10:24-29 and 11:4-8. While a plethora of suggestions have been made by the commentators of the text, no serious and more detailed analysis of the narrative elements of the passage has been carried out. That is why a closer look at these components in light of the strategies of the Hebrew narrative is proposed here. In fact, the knowledge and awareness of these strategies can help the modern reader of the Bible not only to understand the text but also to appreciate it even more.

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INTRODUCTION

If “no single period or society can do without narratives,”² the biblical culture would not be an exception. Indeed, it is not an overstatement to affirm that whatever people “say and think about a certain time or place becomes a narrative in its own right.”³ One third of the Hebrew Bible is narrative. The Bible not only contains a great amount of narratives, but it has been “generally recognized that these are of the highest artistic quality, ranking among the foremost literary treasures of the world.”⁴ The present analysis attests the veracity of this assertion.

The present study has the objective of exploring the nature of the narrative of Exod 11, particularly, the literary and narrative function of verses 1-3, which abruptly interrupt the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh in 10:24-29 and 11:4-8. While a plethora of suggestions have been made by the commentators of the text, no serious and more detailed analysis of the narrative elements of the passage has been carried out. That is why a closer look at these components in light of the strategies of the Hebrew narrative is proposed here. In fact, the knowledge and awareness of these strategies can help the modern reader of the Bible not only to understand the text but also to appreciate it even more.

While the methodology follows all steps of an exegetical paper, this study will focus on narrative analysis. This paper is divided into four parts. In the first one, a brief glimpse of the passage is provided with some of the most important exegetical issues related to its interpretation. After that, a succinct review of the scholarly research on Exod 11:1-3 is organized in order to make the reader conscious of the different proposals to interpret the passage. Then, an investigation on the narrative pattern of the eleven “signs” account (7-12) (traditionally called ten plagues) focusing mainly on the characters’ actions and the scenes is carried out in order to understand how Exod 11:1-3 fits in the broader context. Finally, a more detailed analysis of the last scene and the transition for the climax of the section which leads to Israelite exodus is performed. At this point, a possible scenario for the narrative function and literary place of the passage is suggested. In the end, it is expected that the reader will not only perceive the role of Exod 11:1-3 in the narrative but will also delight even more in the beauty and the importance of saving message transmitted by the inspired narrator of Exodus through his narrative technique.

²Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Wiley: 2015), 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1

⁴ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible, Bible and Literature Series; 17.* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 9.

TEXT AND CONTEXT

In this section, the reader will be introduced to the text and context of Exod 11:1-3 as well as the main exegetical issues behind the passage. Only the matters directly connected with the objective of this study be addressed here. In certain sense, the intention here is to prepare the reader for the analysis of the narrative elements of the passage. At first, the translation of Exod 10:28-11:10 is provided with some notes on textual issues in footnotes.

Translation of Exod 10:28-11:10

וַיַּחֲזֶק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא אָבָה לְשַׁלְּחָם:²⁷

And the Lord strengthened Pharaoh's heart and he did not consent to let them go.

וַיֹּאמֶר־לוֹ פַּרְעֹה לֵךְ⁵ מֵעָלַי הַשְּׂמֶר לְךָ אֶל־תִּסְּףָ רְאוֹת פָּנַי כִּי בַיּוֹם רִאֲתָךְ פָּנַי תָּמוּת:²⁸

Then Pharaoh said to Moses Get away from me! Watch out for yourself: You shall not see my face again. For in the day you see my face you shall die.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן דַּבַּרְתָּ לֹא־אֶסָּף עוֹד רְאוֹת פָּנֶיךָ:²⁹

And Moses said: a right thing has you said; I will not see your face again.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עוֹד נִגַע אֶחָד אָבִיא עַל־פַּרְעֹה וְעַל־מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרָיִכֶן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה כְּשִׁלְּחוֹ⁷ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וְיִגְרַשׁ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה:¹¹

And the Lord said to Moses: I will bring more one plague against Pharaoh and Egypt. Afterward, he will let you go from here. And when he lets you go, he surely will expel you altogether.

דַּבֵּר־נָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וְיִשְׁאַלוּ אִישׁ מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִשָּׁה מֵאֵת רֵעוּתָהּ כְּלִי־כֶסֶף וְכִלְי זָהָב:²

Speak now in the years of the people: let each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor articles of silver and articles of gold.

וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־חַן הָעָם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם גַּם הָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה גָּדוֹל מְאֹד בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּעֵינֵי עַבְדֵי־פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי הָעָם:³

And the Lord gave the people favor before the Egyptians. Likewise, the man Moses was very great in Egypt before the servants of Pharaoh and the people.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה כַּחֲצַת הַלַּיְלָה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם:⁴

And Moses said: Thus says the Lord: in the middle of the night I am going out in the midst of Egypt.

וּמֵת כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכוֹר פַּרְעֹה הַיּוֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשְּׂפֹחָה אֲשֶׁר אַחַר הָרְחִים וְכָל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה:⁵

And all firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even the firstborn of the female servant who is behind of handmill, and all firstborn of animal.

⁵ The Samaritan Pentateuch and Syriac version add the preposition phrase לְךָ making a parallel of with Abraham's call in Gen 12:1 "לְךָ־לְךָ."

⁶ Many manuscripts and edition bring the reading אֶל, probable representing an attempt to cope with the grammatical awkwardness cause by the preposition אֶל before the Hiphil תִּסְּףָ.

⁷ The Syriac version brings the pronominal suffix of first person instead of third person, which seems to be the best contextual option.

⁸ The noun קָלָה (end) is contextually difficult. The solution proposed by this translation is to understanding that it is using adverbially here.

וְהִיְתָה צַעֲקָה גְדֹלָה בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר כָּמֹהוּ לֹא נִהְיְתָה וְכִמֹּהוּ לֹא תִסְףּ:⁹

And there will be a great outcry in all land of Egypt which like it there has never been, nor ever will be again.

וְלֹכֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחַרְץ-כְּלָב לְשׁוֹנוֹ לְמַאִישׁ וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּן אֲשֶׁר יִפְלֶה יְהוָה בֵּין מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל:⁷

But against the children of Israel not even a dog will sharp its tongue,¹⁰ either man or beast, that you may know that the Lord makes distinction between Egyptian and Israel.

וַיֵּרְדוּ כָל-עַבְדֶּיךָ אֵלַי וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לִי לֵאמֹר צֵא אִתָּהּ וְכָל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּרַגְלֶיךָ וְאִחְרֵי-כֵן אֲצֵא מֵעַם-פְּרַעֲהַ בְּחָרִי-
אֲפִי:⁸

And all these your servants will go down to me and bow down to me saying: go out you and people that are at your feet. And after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in the heat of anger.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֹא-יִשְׁמַע אֵלַיְכֶם פְּרַעֲהַ לְמַעַן רַבּוֹת מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:⁹

And the Lord said to Moses: Pharaoh will not heed you that my wonders multiply in the land of Egypt.

וּמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן עָשׂוּ אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּפְתִּיּוֹת הָאֵלֶּה לִפְנֵי פְרַעֲהַ וַיַּחֲזֶק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פְּרַעֲהַ וְלֹא-שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶצוֹ:¹⁰

And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the Lord strengthened Pharaoh's heart and he did not let the children of Israel go out from his land.

The relationship between Moses and Pharaoh reaches a tense climax in Exod 10:24-29. After Moses made clear that the Israelites should definitely leave Egypt, Pharaoh¹¹ bursts into anger closing any possibility of further negotiation. Breaking “the immunity of a prophet,” which “in the ancient world represented a serious breach of religion and law,”¹² Pharaoh threatens Moses' life: Get away from me! Watch out for yourself: You shall not see my face again (אֶל-תִּסְףּ רְאוֹת פָּנַי)¹³ *For in the day you see my face you shall die!*”

⁹ Lit. “like it it will not add.”

¹⁰ There disagreement of the translation of this expression between the modern versions: But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue (NKJV); But against any of the Israelites not even a dog will bark against either people or animals (NET); But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel (ESV). However, the basic sense is the same: there would not be any threat against the children of Israel.

¹¹ According to 10:27, Pharaoh attitude is a result of “divine hardening” (10:27). The hardening of Pharaoh's heart has been one of the most controverting topics in the OT study. Claire MacGinnis provides an interesting summary of the history of interpretation in the Jewish and Christian interpretation. See: Claire Mathews McGinnis, “The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Christian and Jewish Interpretation,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6, no. 1 (Spr 2012). Some like Wilson Robert try to explain the text in light of the intricate idea of source criticism. See: Robert R. Wilson, “Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1979), Others like Beale seek to interpret it in light of the use of the OT in the NT. See: G. K. Beale, “An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9,” *Trinity Journal* 5, no. 2 (Aut 1984). The better solution is found in a careful consideration of the context of Exod. 4-12 and its language. In light of these factors, Dorian Cox suggestion seems to be accurate: “the Lord gave Pharaoh the strength of will necessary to go on opposing Him, in accord with Pharaoh's most fundamental desires. (...) So then, what if God and Pharaoh had not hardened Pharaoh's heart? It seems safe to answer that Pharaoh would not have been an essentially different or a better person. He would simply have experienced fewer plagues.” Dorian Coover Cox, “The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Its Literary and Cultural Contexts,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 163, no. 651 (2006), 331. However, one of most compelling explanation about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is provided by Victor Hamilton in his commentary on Exodus. He indicates twelve important consideration in taking into account the difficulty. See: Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: an exegetical commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 529-544.

¹² Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 261.

¹³ In the NET Bible notes, the committee suggests that: The construction uses a verbal hendiadys: “do not add to see” (אֶל-תִּסְףּ רְאוֹת, *al-toseph ré'ot*), meaning “do not see again.” *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Exod 10:29.

Often the formula יָסָה plus infinitive denotes repetition or continuity.¹⁴ That is why Propp suggests an iterative sense denoting “you won’t still keep seeing me.”¹⁵ However, the context makes clear that Pharaoh did not have any intention to meet Moses again. This is obvious from the very words of ruler (*For in the day you see my face you shall die*) and from Moses’ statement adding the adverb עוֹד to monarch’s words: “a right thing has you said; I will not see your face again (כִּן דְּבַרְתָּ לֹא־אֶסֶף עוֹד רְאוֹת פְּנֵיךָ:).

The dialogue is interrupted by 11:1 where God alerts Moses about the last blow against Pharaoh and Egypt. Since this is the first and only time the word plague (נִגְעָה) is used in the book of Exodus, the translation “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt¹⁶” may be misleading. The previous divine manifestations are called signs or wonders in the narrative of Exod 7-11.¹⁷ It could be argued that this is not one more plague, but the plague which will lead to the total liberation of Israel. God gives Moses the certainty that thereafter Pharaoh not only would let them go but would expel them definitely. The use of the infinitive construct reinforces this idea (יִגְרֹשׁ יִגְרֹשׁ). Indeed, the announcement that this would be the last blow against Pharaoh seems to be the only new element presented to Moses in 11:1-3. Probably Moses did not know how many signs or plagues would be inflicted against Egypt before Pharaoh’s surrender.

Exod 11:2-3 highlights that the fulfilment of Exod 3:21-22 is at hand (cf. 12:35, 36). The concept of plunder (see נָצַל in 3:22 and 12:36), which is behind these texts, plays an important role at the close of the narrative of signs (Exod 7-12), as will be seen later on in this paper. An interesting progression in these verses can be found in the agents involved in the action of asking: women (Exod 3:22); every man (11:2); and the children of Israel in the actual fulfilment (12:36).¹⁸

Apparently, the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh is retaken in 11:4 (וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה). Some translations add “to Pharaoh” to clarify the addressee. In fact, the addressee only becomes evident in 11:8 when the pronominal suffix of second person is attached to the word servants (עַבְדֶּיךָ). The content of Moses speech is the word of God (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה) announcing the death of all Egyptian firstborn. This is the first time in the narrative that God Himself will act directly without intervention of Moses or Aaron: “I am about to go

¹⁴ See: David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993-2011), 235.

¹⁵ See footnote 33.

¹⁶ See NKJV, ESV, NIV, NASB, ASV.

¹⁷ That is why Jacques Cazeaux names the section of Exodus 7-12 as “Nine signs and one plague.” See: Jacques Cazeaux, *La Contre-épopée Du Désert : L'exode, Lévitique, Les Nombres* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007).

¹⁸ Exod 3:22 - But every **woman** shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put *them* on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians (NKJV)."

Exod 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 (NKJV)."

Exod 12:36 - Now the **children of Israel** had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing (NKJV).

out” (אָני יוצא בתוך מצרים).¹⁹ In Egypt, there will not be escape, all firstborn (כָּל-בְּכוֹר) will perish. However, God will provide protection to His people.²⁰

There is not a clear transition between God’s words and Moses’ words in verse 8. In fact, Alexander suggests that there is no transition at all. According to him, since there is no indication that Moses retakes the direct discourse with Pharaoh, God continues speaking here and He is the referent of the pronominal suffix of first person in אָלִי and לִי (to me) and the personal pronoun אַתָּה (you) as well. However, the context makes this assumption very unlikely. First, it is difficult to envision the fulfilment of the prediction in 11:8b - וְיָרְדוּ כָל-עַבְדֶּיךָ אֵלַי וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לִי (all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying) - if God is the referent of pronominal suffix of first person in אָלִי and לִי. Secondly, the referent of the personal pronoun אַתָּה (you) seems to be clarified in the relative clause אֲשֶׁר-בְּרַגְלֶיךָ (lit “that are at your feet”) which qualifies the word הָעָם (people). Clearly, the expression בְּרַגְלֶיךָ implies “the ones who are under the human leadership of Moses.”

Finally, the wordplay with the root יצא (“to go out” or “get away”) corroborates the idea that Moses is the speaker in v. 8. The root appears three times in 11:8: in servant’s words (אֵצֵא- go out!); in Moses’ words (I will go out - אֵצֵא); and in the narrator’s words (Moses again) (He went out - וַיֵּצֵא). The going out of Moses from Pharaoh here is a miniature or a prelude of the going out of the Israelites after the death of the firstborn. In the same way Pharaoh was expelling him from his presence in the palace, the ruler would expel Moses and his people from the land of Egypt. This is confirmed in 12:31 where the root יצא appears again on Pharaoh’s mouth: יֵצֵאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי (go out from among my people).

The bold words of Moses in 11:8 can be understood in light of the tension present in this last dialogue (already evident in 10:28-29) and in the fact that, at this point, there was no longer place for negotiation. The heat of the debate is explicitly articulated in the mention to Moses’ anger at the end of 11:8. It is not difficult to imagine the bewildered and silent figure of Pharaoh before the audacity of the leader of the slaves. It is possible to conjecture that anger gave way to misgiving, harbinger of evil, and fear.

Verses 9 and 10 close chapter 11 highlighting one of the main leitmotifs of the narrative: the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart as God’s opportunity to exhibit His power and superiority on the Egyptian gods, including the obstinate and proud monarch. The use of

¹⁹ The use of the participle adds vividness to the action and implies imminence.

²⁰ There will be a clear separation between Egyptians and Israelites. The Hebrew text literally says: “not a dog will sharpen his tongue.” NIV has merit in rendering the literal meaning as “but among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.” Stuart remarks that “In Bible times the dog was the least of the animals in terms of desirability or importance because it was a dirty, unwelcome scavenger animal—its reputation being somewhat akin to that of the rat in modern times.” Stuart, *Exodus*, 267. According to NET Bible notes, “the expression is unusual, but it must indicate that not only would no harm come to the Israelites, but that no unfriendly threat would come against them either—not even so much as a dog barking.” *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

the word מִוִּפְתָּ (wonder) to refer to what Moses and Aaron had done previously “before Pharaoh” emphasizes the unique nature of the “last” plague (וַאֲנִי).

Bearing in mind this brief introduction to the text, its context, and some of the most significant exegetical issues, it is clear how Exod 11:1-3 seems to interrupt the narrative flow of the last scene. Many suggestions have been made about the reason of its insertion at this point and its function in the larger context. Below a summary of this discussion is provided and the main lines of argumentation are presented.

THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

There are two different approaches to deal with Exodus 11:1-3 and the interruption brought by these verses to the dialogue of 10:28-29 and 11:4-8. The first one, based on the assumption that the text in its present state is a composite, tries to explain it by resorting to source criticism admitting that the apparent narrative anomaly is a result of distinct hands or traditions that are being brought together by a later editor (usually assumed as post-exilic). The second approach, based on the assumption that the text in its present state is a coherent unity, seeks to explain Exod 11:1-3 in the context of the historical sequence of the facts, linguistic characteristics of the text, and its place and function in the narrative strategy. From the assumption that the text is an authorial unity and possesses historical and narrative coherence we conform to the second approach.²¹ Nevertheless, both approaches have been considered in the present analysis and they are summarized in this section.

Representing the first approach Lemmelijn affirms that Exod 11:1-10 clearly is “the result of a redactional combination of existent material from different sources or traditions.”²² He claims that “this section reveals a different literary style. Moreover, it does not show the same structure and lacks the stereotypical characteristics of the report

²¹ Lately, there has been a new attempt to revive the source criticism, which for several years was relegated to oblivion due to the growing and popularization of literary studies and the emphasis of synchronic analysis. One clear example of this attempt is the work of Joel Baden entitled “The composition of the Pentateuch: renewing the Documentary Hypothesis” published in 2012. See: John Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library* (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 2012). At the same time, new reactions demonstrating the weakness of this approach also has been advanced. One of the most recent is the work of Joshua Berman entitled “Inconsistency in the Torah: ancient literary convention and the limits of source criticism” published in 2017. See: Joshua Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2017). A good summary of the history and the main weaknesses of the source criticism and its Documentary hypothesis is provided by Gleason Archer. See: Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 88-116.

²² Bénédicte Lemmelijn, “Setting and Function of Exod 11,1-10 in the Exodus Narrative” in M. Vervenne, *Studies in the Book of Exodus : Redaction, Reception, Interpretation, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*; 126. (Leuven: Leuven University Press : Uitgeverij Peeters, 1996). 448.

of the previous plagues.”²³ He ascribes v.1-3 to E²⁴, verses 4-8 to J²⁵, and 9-10 to P²⁶. In his commentary, Propps also admits three different sources for chapter 11 suggesting that “The evidence the text is composite abounds.”²⁷ But, according to him, 11:1 belongs to E and 11:2-3 to J. In addition, he suggests an emendation affirming that part of 11:3 was originally situated within 12:36.²⁸ The weakness of the speculative nature of the documentary hypothesis combined with the narrative analysis undertaken in the last section of this paper makes this attempt to cope with 11:1-3 quite improbable. In fact, as will be seen later “what has been taken by some critics as evidence of patchy editorial work and an inconsistent text may be in fact an entirely deliberate attempt to present the high tension of the continuing confrontations of Moses and Pharaoh coming to climax in frustrating impasse and failure.”²⁹ Regarding Exod 7-12, the present analysis points to a sophisticated narrative intentionally built with high mastery.

Among they who accept the final canonical form of the text,³⁰ two groups can be distinguished. In the first one, are those who do not see continuity between 10:28-29 and

²³ Ibid., 446.

²⁴ He mentions several authors who support this idea: JOLICHER, *Die Quellen* (n. 1), p. 99; KUENEN, *Historisch-antisch onderzoek* (n. 1), pp. 147-148; STRACK - BOCKLER, *Genesis* (n. 1), p. 195; DILLMANN - RYSSEL, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 75-76, 106-107; WELLHAUSEN, *Composition* (n. 1), p. 68; BAENTSCH, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 56-57, 85; HOLZINGER, *Exodus* (n. 1), p. 31; MCNEILE, *The Book of Exodus* (n. 3), p. 61; DRIVER, *Exodus* (n. 3), p. 84; SMEND, *Die Erzählung des Hexateuch* (n. 1), p. 135; GUNKEL - STAERK - VOLZ (eds.), *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments* 1,1 (n. 1), p. 42; BEER, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 58-59; COUROYER, *Exode* (n. 1), p. 61; RYLAARSDAM, *Exodus* (n. 3), p. 911; FOHRER, *Überlieferung* (n. 3), pp. 81-82 (Ein v. 1 and N in vv. 2-3); TE STROETE, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 83, 87; HYATT, *Exodus* (n. 3), p. 129; CHILDS, *Exodus* (n. 1), p. 131; SKA, *La sortie d’Égypte* (n. 5), p. 192 (only explicitly for v. 1). See Lemmelijn, “Setting and Function of Exod 11,1-10 in the Exodus Narrative,” 447.

²⁵ He mentions several authors who support this idea: JULICHER, *Die Quellen* (n. 1), p. 98; DILLMANN - RYSSEL, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 74-75, 106, 107-108; WELLHAUSEN, *Composition* (n. 1), p. 68; BAENTSCH, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 56, 85 (vv. 4-5a); HOLZINGER, *Exodus* (n. 1), p. 1; MCNEILE, *E* p. 135 (J); GUNKEL - STAERK - VOLZ (eds.), *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments* (n. 1), p. 40 (only explicitly for v. 5); RUDOLPH, *Der „Elohist“* (n. 1), p. 275 (J+ J+Z in vv. 5p and 7b); BEER, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 58-59 (J); COUROYER, *Exode* (n. 1), p. 61; RYLAARSDAM, *Exodus* (n. 3), p. 911; NOTH, *Exodus* (n. 1), p. 53; FOHRER, *Überlieferung* (n. 3) p. 81; TE STROETE, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 83, 87; HYATT, *Exodus* (n. 3), p. 129; CHILDS, *EXO- dus(ik 1)*, p. 131; ZENGER, *Exodus* (n. 5), p. 113 (vv. 4-5); BURNS, *Exodus* (n. 1), pp. 68, 87-89; SKA, *La sortie d’Égypte* (n. 5), pp. 210-211 (only explicitly for vv. 7-8); KOHATA, *Jahwist und Priesterschrift* (n. 1), pp. 122-123, 126. See Lemmelijn, “Setting and Function of Exod 11,1-10 in the Exodus Narrative,” 448.

²⁶ Others like Brown follows the same division. See: S. L. Brown, “Exodus,” in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture: Including the Apocrypha*, ed. Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, and Alfred Guillaume, vol. 1 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), 75.

²⁷ William Henry Propp, *Exodus 1-18 : A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1999). 310.

²⁸ Ibid., 343.

²⁹ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 143.

³⁰ While there is any defense here for this position, I am assuming the mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch around 1450 B.C. which I accept as the most probable date of the exodus. In his article in the *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Norman Geisler presents a good summary of the main arguments for the mosaic authorship. See: Norman L. Geisler, “Pentateuch, Mosaic Authorship Of,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 586-588. For a more extensive discussion on the topic see: Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King : The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy : Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1963). R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament : Including a Comprehensive Review of Old Testament Studies and a Special Supplement on the Apocrypha*, Hendrickson Publishers ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004). On the date of exodus in 1450 B.C. see the article written by William Shea at The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. See: William H. Shea, “Exodus, Date of the”. in vol. 2 of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 230-238.

11:4-8. They admit that Moses returns to Pharaoh on a different occasion to deliver the words of 11:4-8. In order to explain the discrepancy concerning the abrupt retaking of the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh caused by their conclusion, a lot of different suggestions have been made. For example, Durham mentions that “the original introduction to 11:4-8 was omitted on purpose in the combination of the array of themes now surrounding the tenth mighty act.”³¹ The SDABC speculates over a possible divine command to return to Pharaoh: “it is certain that Moses would not have returned except upon an explicit divine command.”³² On the other side of spectrum, Garret proposes that since “the text never says that YHWH sent Moses to deliver this message to Pharaoh,” Moses returned to Pharaoh’s presence on his own accord. According to him, Yahweh only “told Moses to address the Israelites.”³³

Propp resorted to a grammatical explanation affirming that “Moses played on his words by giving them a durative sense - “*you won’t still keep seeing me,*” as opposed to “*you won’t ever see me again, even once.*”³⁴ Although Mackay considers a less “probable” explanation, he mentions a very “creative” solution:

One explanation is to treat that as a later occasion but still within the three days of darkness. After receiving the divine message of 11:1-2, Moses again returned to warn about the last plague, but was not a matter of anyone seeing the other’s face, because darkness still shrouded all proceeding.³⁵

The basic problem with these interpretations is in their inability to see the unity between 10:28-29 and 11:4-8. As the later narrative analysis will demonstrate, the dialogue belongs to the same scene. While Propp’s suggestion of a durative sense is grammatically possible, it seems improbable in light of the analysis of the narrative flow and may constitute a mere attempt to harmonize discrepancies in what he considers the same source.

In the second group are those who see the continuity between 10:28-29 and 11:4-8 admitting that both parts belong to the same dialogue.³⁶ Basically all agree that 11:1-3

³¹ Durham, *Exodus*, 149.

³² Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 546.

³³ Duane Garrett, *A commentary on Exodus* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, MI: 2014).

³⁴ Stuart provides a good summary of Propp’s opinion: “As Propp points out, the Hb. expression here, *וַיֹּדֶעַ פַּרְעֹה*, reflecting the idiom + *עוֹד* + *יִפְעַל* infinitive, can mean to do something one more time (the punctiliar sense), or it can mean to keep doing something (the durative sense). Pharaoh may have meant the punctiliar; but Moses played on his words by giving them a durative sense — “you won’t still keep seeing me,” as opposed to “you won’t ever see me again, even once.” Propp also draws attention to the opinion, first advanced by Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel, the fifteenth-century rabbinical commentator, that “see the face of” is actually an idiom for “have an official audience/meeting with” and does not mean simply “lay eyes upon” (cf. Gen 43:3, 5; 2 Sam 3:13; 14:24, 28, 32; 2 Kgs 25:19; Jer 52:25). Stuart, *Exodus*. To original source see: Propp, *Exodus*, 341-342.

³⁵ John L. Mackay, *Exodus* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2001), 192.

³⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 130; John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, and Charles M. Mead, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Exodus*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 33. Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, ON; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 132. H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Exodus*, vol. 1, *The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls

is a parenthetical statement. But there is no accord about the reason for its insertion at this point of the narrative. In some cases, no explanation is provided.³⁷ In other cases, the interpreters try to figure out an historical place for 11:1-3 in the narrative. For instance, Keil and Delitzsch support the idea that “the announcement made by Jehovah to Moses, which is recorded here, occurred before the last interview between Moses and Pharaoh (Ex. 10:24-29)”.³⁸ They add that 11:1-3 “is introduced by the historian in this place, as serving to explain the confidence with which Moses answered Pharaoh” (Ex. 10:29). In his turn, Sarna suggests that “Moses received this communication in the palace just as he was about to leave.”³⁹ Hoffmeier and Alexander agree with the idea that God “may have provided this revelation on the spot”⁴⁰ speaking to Moses while he is in Pharaoh’s presence.⁴¹

While these explanations about the place of 11:1-3 can be feasible, their confirmation is beyond the possibility for modern interpreters without any clear indication of the text. It is difficult to affirm with certainty if Moses’ answer in 10:28-29 is a result of God’s revelation before the last audience of Pharaoh. For, although the elements present in 11:1-3 are resumptive and do not represent a new revelation, Moses did not know how many signs would antecede the final blow against Pharaoh. In the same way, it is difficult to assert for sure if Moses’ answer is a result of the climax in the tension between Pharaoh and himself. The explicit mention of Moses’ anger could confirm this scenario. If this is the case, Moses’ words denying a possibility of another meeting with Pharaoh is a personal initiative resulting from the heated debate with the stubborn ruler. In this scenario an additional divine revelation before the complete exit of the palace would be necessary.

Again, no matter how plausible both scenarios can be, it is complicated to confirm it from the present state of the text. A more objective way to explain the insertion of 11:1-3 at this point is to analyze its narrative place and function.

Company, 1909), 238, 245. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 324. James K. Hoffmeier, “Exodus,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 47; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 52. 11:1-3 these verses are parenthetical (Tremper Longman, 422).

³⁷ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 130. Janzen, *Exodus*, 132. Lange mentions pragmatic reason without being specific. Lange, Schaff, and Mead, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Exodus*, 33.

³⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 324.

³⁹ Sarna, *Exodus*, 52. The layout of Egyptian palaces of Moses’s time can contribute for this picture. In his article, Bryant Wood provides a reconstruction of the Royal Citadel at Ezbet Helmi, which is available on the Appendix 1 in the end of this paper. Bryant Wood, “The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no.2, September 2005, 485.

⁴⁰ Hoffmeier, *Exodus*, 47.

⁴¹ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 206.

ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVE ELEMENTS OF THE ELEVEN SIGNS ACCOUNT (EXOD 7-11)

The narrative of the eleven signs⁴² is formed by eleven different scenes describing the interaction between God's representatives, namely Moses and Aaron, and Pharaoh. Each scene outlines God's actions against the land of Egypt as a result of the stubbornness of its monarch. Such actions ultimately demoralize the Egyptian deities and the Pharaoh himself as well. They culminate with the Israelite exodus from Egypt. While the focus of this study is on the transition from the ninth to the tenth sign, an attentive analysis of this whole section will be helpful to delineate the narrative patterns of this segment in order to realize how the last two signs conform to the general form of this entire section of the book of Exodus.

The present analysis will not focus on interpretative issues as the meaning of the hardening of Pharaoh or historical matters as the date of the Exodus or the identity of the Pharaoh. Notwithstanding these issues are important, they are addressed in other studies and contribute only indirectly to the central objective of this article, which is to understand the apparent narrative break in the transition between the ninth and the tenth sign. Rather than dwelling on these interpretative and historical matters, we will pay attention to acts and scenes that constitute the narrative flow of the passage.

The literary limit of this section is clearly demarcated by an *inclusio*. Right before the performance of the preliminary sign in the presence of Pharaoh, God reaffirms the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and its consequences, which becomes the *Leitmotiv* of the narrative of the eleven signs: *And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments* NKJV (Exod 7:3-4). Furthermore, the narrator provides a summarization where the obedience of Moses and Aaron is highlighted: *Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as the LORD commanded them, so they did* (7:6). In the last part of the narrative these two elements reappear almost in verbatim. In 11:9 God says to Moses: *Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.* In

⁴² In this analysis, the term "sign" is preferred over the "plague." The expression "ten plagues" is not found in the Bible. In fact, there is a rich terminology in reference to God's actions in the narrative of Exod. 7-12. Smith lists six terms: מוֹפֶת (Exod. 7:9), אֵלֶּיךָ (Exod 15:11), אֹת (Exod. 7:3; 8:19; 10:1,2), מִקְרָתִי (Exod. 9:14), אֵלֶּיךָ (Exod. 11:1), אֵלֶּיךָ (Exod. 12:13). See: James E. Smith, *The Pentateuch*, 2nd ed., Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), 271. The most frequent word used in reference to miracles performed by God in the narrative is אֹת (sign). We can agree with Smith when he affirms that "the terminology thus suggests that the plagues were miracles designed to point to the almighty power of God; and they were acts of judgment against Egypt." Smith, *The Pentateuch*, 271. In order to avoid confusion with the more known terminology, in this paper the first sign is called preliminary sign (following its nature and purpose), and the others are called signs following the more popular numerical designation from one to ten.

11:10a, is found a summary encapsulating all signs (*So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh*). The closing clause in 11:10b finishes the section remarking on the fulfillment of God's word: *and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land*.

Since that "discerning the inner shape of a literary unit often starts us on the road to insightful interpretation,"⁴³ a brief description of the narrative elements of each scene that forms this major literary unit is provided below. Next, some remarks regarding the implications of this form analysis are made to address the singular characteristics of the last two signs.

Preliminary sign (7:8-13)

Instruction: The Lord speaks - (v.8-9)
what they should do (v. 8-9)

Obedience: Moses and Aaron act (v.10)

Counterfeit: magician enchantments (no Pharaoh's speech) (v.11-12)

Heart hardening: Pharaoh as agent (v.13)

Personal meeting with Pharaoh

First sign (7:14-25)

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.14-19)

What Moses should do (v.14-15)

What Moses should say (v.16-18)

What Aaron should do (v.19)

Obedience: Moses and Aaron act (v.20)

Sign fulfillment: (v.21,24)

Counterfeit: magician enchantments (no Pharaoh's speech) (v.22)

Heart hardening: Pharaoh as agent (v.22)

Time indication: seven days (v.25)

Personal meeting with Pharaoh

Second sign (8:1-15) - Frogs

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.1-5)

What Moses should do (v.1a)

What Moses should say (v.1b-4)

What Aaron should do (v.5)

Obedience: Aaron acts (v.6a)

Sign fulfillment: (v.6b)

Counterfeit: magician enchantments (v.7)

Required audience: Pharaoh asks for relief (v.8-11)

Dialogue description: Pharaoh - "Entreat the LORD"... permission to sacrifice to the Lord (v.8)

Moses - When? (v.9)

Pharaoh - Tomorrow (v.10)

Moses - The Lord will fulfill His word (v.10b-11)

Going out from Pharaoh: Moses and Aaron (v.12)

Relief provided: The Lord fulfills his word (v.13-14)

Heart hardening: Pharaoh as agent (v.15) - He does not fulfill his word.

Personal meeting with Pharaoh

⁴³ Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), 2.

Third sign (8:16-19)

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.16)
 What Aaron should do (v.16)

Obedience: Aaron acts (v.17a)

Sign fulfillment: (v.17b)

Counterfeit: magician enchantments (v.18a)

Counterfeit failure: (v.18b)

Magicians speak to Pharaoh: This is the finger of God (v.19a)

Heart hardening: Pharaoh as agent (v.19b)

No Personal meeting with Pharaoh

Fourth sign (8:20-32) - Flies

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.20-23)

What Moses should do (v.20a)

What Moses should say (v.20b-23) [difference between Israelites and Egyptians]

Sign fulfillment: (v.24)

Required audience: Pharaoh asks for relief (v.25-29)

Dialogue description: Pharaoh - *Go, sacrifice to your God in the land* (v.25)

Moses - *not here, three days' journey into the wilderness*

(v.26-27)

Pharaoh - *I will let you go... Intercede for me* (v.28)

Moses - *relief granted, but do not deal deceitfully anymore*

(v.29)

Going out from Pharaoh: only Moses is mentioned (v.30a)

Moses prays to God (v.30b)

Relief provided: The Lord fulfills his word (v.31)

Heart hardening: Pharaoh as agent (v.32) - He does not fulfill his word.

Personal meeting with Pharaoh

Fifth sign (9:1-7) - Livestock Disease

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.1-4)

What Moses should do (v.1a)

What Moses should say (v.1b-4) [difference between Israelites and Egyptians]

Time indication: tomorrow (v.5)

Sign fulfillment: (v.6)

Israelites animals are checked: (v.7a)

Heart hardening: Pharaoh as agent (v.7b)

Personal meeting with Pharaoh

Sixth sign (9:8-12) - Boils

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.8-9)

What Moses and Aaron should do (v.8-9)

Obedience: Aaron and Moses act (v.10a)

Sign fulfillment: (v.10b-11) - mention of affected magicians

Heart hardening: Lord as agent (v.12)

Personal meeting with Pharaoh - performance without dialogue

Seventh sign (9:13-35) - Hail

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.13-19)

What Moses should do (v.13a)

What Moses should say (v.13b-19)

Long divine discourse

Direct and strong threat (v.14-15)

Divine sovereignty - "to show my power" (v.16-17)

Plague announcement (v.18)

Instructions for Egyptians (v.19)

Obedience: some Egyptians act (v.20-21)

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.22)

What Moses should do (v.22)

Obedience: Moses acts (v.23a)

Sign fulfillment: (v.23b-26) [differentiation between Israelites and Egyptians v.26]

Required audience: Pharaoh asks for relief (v.27)

Dialogue description: Pharaoh - *I have sinned this time ... Entreat the LORD ... I will let you go* (v.27-28).

Moses - relief granted (v.29) + *I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God* (v.30)

Note on damage extension: (v.31-32)

Going out from Pharaoh: only Moses is mentioned (v.33a)

Relief provided: The Lord fulfills his word (v.33b)

Heart hardening: Pharaoh as agent (v.34-35) [twice]

Personal meeting with Pharaoh

Eighth sign (10:1-20) - Locust

Instruction: The Lord speaks (1-2)

What Moses should do (v.1a) - Go in to Pharaoh

Obedience: Aaron and Moses act (v.3-6)

Thus says the Lord... (v.3b-6a).

Going out from Pharaoh: only Moses is mentioned (v.6b)

Suggestion of Pharaoh's servants: Let the men go (v.7)

Moses and Aaron return: (v.8a): *They were brought again to Pharaoh*

Dialogue description (v.8b-11a): Pharaoh: "Go... but "Who are the ones that are going?" (v.8b)

Moses: everyone including animals (v.9)

Pharaoh: Not so! Only men can go (v.10-11)

Moses and Aaron are expelled (v.11b)

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.12)

Obedience: Moses acts (v.13a)

Sign fulfillment: (v.13b-15): detailed description of the damage

Required audience: Pharaoh asks for relief (v.16): *I have sinned... please forgive my sin entreat the LORD your God.*

Going out from Pharaoh: only Moses is mentioned (v.18)

Relief provided: The Lord fulfills his word (v.19)

Heart hardening: The Lord as agent (v.20)

Personal meeting with Pharaoh

Ninth Sign (10:21-29)

Instruction: The Lord speaks (v.21)

What Moses should do (v.21): *Stretch out your hand toward heaven*

Obedience: Moses acts (v.22a)

Sign fulfillment: (v.22b): [differentiation between Israelites and Egyptians]

Time indication (v.23): three days

Required audience: Pharaoh asks for relief (v.24a)

Dialogue description (v.24b-26): Pharaoh: "Go, serve the LORD," except flocks and herds (v.24b)

Moses: Flocks and herds need to leave too (v.25-26)

Heart hardening: The Lord as agent (v.27)

Dialogue description (continued) (v.28): Pharaoh: *Get away from me! For in the day you see my face you shall die!*

Moses: *I will never see your face again.*

Tenth Sign (11:1-12:36) (chiastic structure)

A Announcement of Pharaoh's permission to let Israel go (11:1):
And the LORD said to Moses...

B Announcement of Plunder (11:2-3)
 Instruction: *Speak now in the hearing of the people...*

C Announcement of the Last Sign (11:4-9)
Dialogue description (continued): Moses (to Pharaoh): Thus says the LORD... (v.4-8a)
Going out from Pharaoh: only Moses is mentioned (v.8b)
Heart hardening: summary and closing - The Lord as agent (11:9-10)

E Passover Instruction (12:28)

C Sign fulfilment (12:29-30)

A Pharaoh's permission to let Israel go (12:31-32)

B Fulfillment of Plunder (12:33-36)

This description is useful to discern the different narrative elements that form each subunit of the pericope. Each sign is delimited to a narrative scene that begins with the phrase יהוה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה (“Then the Lord said to Moses⁴⁴”) introduced by the wayyqtol of אמר followed immediately⁴⁵ by an imperative.⁴⁶ The only exception is found in the opening of the preliminary sign, where the phrase is followed by a clause introduced by a temporal כִּי. The closing element for every scene is the mention of Pharaoh's hardening. Apart from the second sign, all references to the Pharaoh's hardening follow the same pattern: wayyqtol verb (כבד or חזק) + subject (usually Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart, or the Lord) + וְלֹא-יְהוּה: or וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-הָעַם: שָׁמַע אֶלְהֵם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה. This very balanced pattern used by the narrator to open and close the scenes that form the narrative is helpful to define the limits of each scene, including the last one where the last two signs seem to be put in the same scene.

Limits of the scenes

Opening	Instruction (the Lord speaks)	Wayyqtol of אמר + Imperative וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה + Imperative
Closing	Heart hardening	wayyqtol of חזק or כבד + subject (Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart, or the Lord) + reasoning of the hardening (וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֶלְהֵם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: or וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-הָעַם:)

⁴⁴ The expression and to Aaron is added in

⁴⁵ In 7:14 the phrase: כָּבֵד לֵב פְּרַעֲהַ מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעַם: (*Pharaoh's heart is heavy; he refuses to let the people go*) is inserted before the imperative. The asymmetric adding of this element in the scene of the first sign that effectively humiliate the Egyptian pantheon is a way to emphasize the Leitmotiv of the section.

⁴⁶ The imperatival forms are הלך (7:14); בוא (8:1; 9:1; 10:1); אמר (8:16); שכם (8:20; 9:13); לקח (9:8); נטה (10:21).

Aside from the opening and closing of the scenes, there is no exact uniformity in the elements present in the narrative units. At least, the mention of obedience to God's commands by Moses (sometimes also Aaron) and an indication of the fulfillment of the sign are present in all scenes. This pattern of obedience and fulfillment seems to have its theological importance in the book of the Exodus. The counterfeit element is present from the preliminary sign to the third one (in a total of four scenes). As the signs become more complex, God limits the magicians' ability to perform counterfeit acts. Some elements are restricted to one or two sign scenes. For instance, time indication is provided only in the first (7:25), fifth (9:5), and tenth (11:4) signs. The only words registered besides those of Moses and Pharaoh are from Egyptian magicians to their ruler: *This is the finger of God* (8:19a). This is very enlightening as it shows that already in the third sign (8:16-19), when the magicians' enchantments fail, there are Egyptians recognizing that the God of Israel was behind those wonders. This fact emphasizes even more the stubbornness of Pharaoh that ultimately led to the tragic outcome for Egypt in the last sign. The only time that a Pharaoh's command to check the Israelite settlement is registered is in the fifth sign when a clear differentiation is made between Egyptian and Israelite livestock (9:1-7). Since any natural cause could explain this selectivity, the adding of this narrative element is important to reinforce the Pharaoh's heart hardening.

At this point, it would be instructive to address one of the most important narrative elements of these units, namely, the dialogues between Moses and Pharaoh. In fact, all scenes, except in the third sign (8:16-19), imply a personal meeting between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh. But, actual dialogues happen only between Moses and Pharaoh. Although it is probable that in every personal meeting a kind of interaction may have taken place, direct discourses between Moses and Pharaoh are registered just in the scenes of the second, fourth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth signs. The dialogues are quick, but theologically rich. Narratively speaking, they put forward the main leitmotiv of the section: the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. They describe a hesitant Pharaoh whose attitude of resistance only results in God's glory as the signs become increasingly powerful and devastating. Of special meaning for the understating of the awkward insertion in 11:1-3, is the fact that whenever a direct dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh is inserted in the narrative scene, it is result of a required audience by Pharaoh and without exception is followed by a mention of the going out of Moses from Pharaoh's presence and a reference to a relief provided by the intervention of Moses. Indeed, these dialogues are presented in a very formulaic and precise way within the sequence of narrative elements in each scene.

Sequence of narrative elements in scenes with the presence of dialogues

Opening	Instruction: The Lord speaks
Scene	Variant elements in order or presence can include: obedience, sign fulfilment, counterfeit, time indication, etc.
	Required Audience
	Dialogue
	Going out from Pharaoh
	Relief Provided
Closing	Heart Hardening

Having in mind this general view of the literary limits, the elements that compose each scene, and how these narrative elements are organized, it is possible to move forward to a more detailed analysis of the ninth and tenth sign, whose peculiarities can contribute to an understanding of the narrative flow of the transition between the last two signs, where the passage for this research is inserted (11:1-3).

THE SCENE OF THE TWO LAST SIGNS (10:21-12:36)

In order to comprehend the narrative flow of these last two units, it will be necessary to review the elements which compose them and how their sequence relates to the previous scenes. The following discussion will suggest that the ninth sign and the announcement of the tenth are inserted in the same scene. The scene of the ninth sign opens with the usual instruction where God clarifies what Moses should do (10:21). Then, Moses acts in obedience to God by stretching his hand towards heaven (10:22a). Immediately after, there is the mention of sign fulfilment combined with the remark about the differentiation made between Egyptians and Israelites (10:22b-23). Next, Pharaoh asks for relief (10:24a), which, from the previous analysis, will be naturally followed by a dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh, taking place in 10:24b-28. In it, the interactions between both characters reach a climax. Pharaoh affirms to be willing to let Israel go, but without their flocks and herds. Moses refuses the offer saying that nothing may remain at Egypt, including their livestock.

Following the refusal of Moses, there is a mention of the Pharaoh's hardening. But curiously there is no mention of the going out of Moses from Pharaoh's presence, which is the narrative pattern of the closing of each scene where a dialogue is registered. The lack of the formulaic mention of the going out of Moses from Pharaoh's presence and the retaking of the dialogue in 11:4-8 clearly indicates that the narrative scene has not finished yet. When the dialogue is resumed in 11:4-9, Moses is not coming back to the presence of Pharaoh. In fact, the dialogue is within the same scene.

The closing of the narrative scene occurs only in 11:9-10. All usual narrative elements for a scene closing are present there. Moses resumes his speech after 10:28 announcing the last sign and the final blow against Pharaoh: *About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; ⁵ and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die...* (11:4b-5a). This would be the final and more devastating blow against the Egyptians, which would result in a “groaning” *such as was not like it before, nor shall be like it again* (11:6b). But God would protect His people and no damage would reach the Israelites or even their animals (11:7).

Exodus 11:8 is very enlightening and its understanding has important implications for this study. Firstly, the language of v. 8 clarifies that the speech resumed by Moses in v.4 is being said directly to Pharaoh. This is indicated by the use of the pronominal suffix of second person masculine singular in עֲבָדַיְךָ (your servants), who is the subject of the verbs יִרְדּוּ (they will go down) and וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ (bow down). This reinforces the unity between 10:28 and 11:4-8. Secondly, the unity is reinforced by the irony used by Moses in the last part of v.8. In 10:28 Pharaoh says to Moses: Get away from me! (לֵךְ מֵעִלַּי). The narrator uses the imperative form of הֵלֵךְ. In his reply in v.8 Moses affirms that after the tenth sign Pharaoh’s servants would beg⁴⁷ his exit from Egypt saying: *Get out you and all people* (צֵא אֶתְּךָ וְכָל-הָעָם). Moses uses here the imperative form of יֵצֵא. He finishes his speech saying directly to Pharaoh: *after that I will go out* (וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן אֵצֵא). In other words, Moses was saying: “you are expelling from your presence now (10:28) (לֵךְ מֵעִלַּי), but in few hours your own people will ‘expel’ us (not only me) from the land of Egypt (11:8) (צֵא אֶתְּךָ וְכָל-הָעָם); only after that I will go out.” This is the final confrontation between the powerful monarch and the leader of the slaves.

The closing the last scene comes in the end of v.8: *Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger* (וַיֵּצֵא מִמֶּנּוּ בְּחָרִי-אָף). As it is the case in the previous units, right after this mention of the going out of Moses, the leitmotiv of Pharaoh’s heart hardening is reaffirmed, although with a certain intensification. The two phrases that were alternatively used in the closing of the previous scene are put together in this point: וְלֹא-שָׁמַע (he did not heed) and וְלֹא-שָׁלַח (he did not let go). This is more one indication that the narrative of signs is reaching its climax and its closing.

As can be seen, the announcement of the tenth sign is carried out in the same scene of the dialogue of the ninth sign. Hence, there is no contradiction between 10:28 and 11:4-8. While this suggestion can explain the relationship between 10:28 and 11:4-8, it does not elucidate the insertion of 11:1-3, which seems to break the narrative flow of the last scene. The following discussion will deal with the narrative function of 11:1-3.

⁴⁷ This is implied by the use of verb שָׂחָה in the phrase “They will bow down to me, saying” (וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לִי לֵאמֹר).

THE NARRATIVE FUNCTION OF EXOD. 11:1-3

The insertion of 11:1-3 can be explained from two different perspectives: literary form or narrative function. From the literary point of view, 11:1-3 is inserted in chiasmic structure, one of the most common literary device in the biblical narrative, where “correspondence of parts in size and position [is organized] about an axis.”⁴⁸

A Announcement of Pharaoh’s permission to let Israel go (11:1)

B Announcement of Plunder (11:2-3)

C Announcement of the last sign (11:4-10)

D Passover instructions (12:1-28)

C’ Sign fulfilment (12:29-30)

A’ Pharaoh’s permission to let Israel go (12:31-32)

B’ Fulfilment of Plunder (12:33-36)

The narrator is centralizing the Passover instructions as the key element of this unit. Since the Passover becomes the national spiritual festival remembering the powerful acts of God against Egypt and His mercy towards Israel, this is not a surprise. The element ABC and C’A’B’ are arranged around the axis D. This arrangement has literary purposes other than the rigid order of events, although the historical sequence is not being denied; it only helps to explain the criterion for material selection and organization.

One important point to be observed is the asymmetry present in the last part of the chiasmic structure: ABCDC’A’B’ instead of ABCDC’B’A’ as one could expect. Walsh highlights the hermeneutic importance of asymmetry in the biblical narrative by affirming:

Asymmetry can be one of the most forceful stylistic devices in biblical Hebrew narrative. It is not to be confused with absence of symmetry; it refers rather to deviation within an otherwise clear symmetry. ... It is the tension between pattern and deviation that affords asymmetry its expressive power.⁴⁹

According to his model, the structure deviation found in 11:1-12:36 (ABCDC’A’B’) can be classified as asymmetry of transposition “where the order of subunits in one sequence does not correspond exactly to that of the other.”⁵⁰ Usually, such deviation

⁴⁸ Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 7.

⁴⁹ Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 101.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 102

plays a role in the narrative strategy of the author. In 11:1-12:36, the inversion between ABC and C'A'B' leads the fulfilment of the Israelite plunder on Egyptian to the very end of the narrative of signs.

This narrative strategy reinforces the idea that the accounts of signs is also an account of an actual battle between God and Pharaoh and Egyptian gods. After the outcome of the combat, the victorious side takes the spoil. In this case, God is the victorious and what His people need to do is trusting and taking the spoil. This very same pattern is found in the conquest when Israel placed her trust in God. In addition to that, the mention of the plunder also encloses the cycle of Moses as the leader of the exodus and reinforces the divine faithfulness in fulfilling His word in every single detail. In the last part of the narrative of signs Moses is making clear that everything God had said to him in his call at the fiery bush is being fulfilled: (a) the initial and persistent Pharaoh's heart hardening (Exod 3:19); (b) the fact that after all signs Pharaoh finally would give his permission to let people go (Exod 3:20); and (c) the fact that they would not "go empty-handed" - "*So you shall plunder the Egyptians*" (Exod 3:21-22). Such plunder has not to be taken as unjust result of war, rather the plunder can be considered a way of payment for so many years of forced labor. Finally, even though the plunder itself is the last thing to happen in the actual historical sequence of events, the asymmetry of transposition by creating a deviation of the expected sequence of narrative events helps to create a focal point in the understanding of the passage.

In short, from a formal and literary point of view, the insertion of 11:1-3 in the middle of dialogue is strategically embedded in a structure that centralizes the Passover instructions highlighting the important theological overtones of the festival in his historical and salvific context. And, at the same time, it helps to create a focal point on the narrative of the Israelite plunder of Egyptian, as an expression of the cosmic victory of God over Egyptian gods, a reminder that God's word is trustworthy and a tangible manifestation of the reverse created by the exodus: prisoners are being expelled, slaves are freely leaving the land with their hands full of wealth.

From the functional point of view, Exod 11:1-3 can be seen as an intercalation which in the general plot has the function to create a pause. By leaving the dialogue of 10:28 unfinished, the pause deepens the impasse and creates a deep suspense. In a burst of anger, Pharaoh threatens the life of the prophet who, in his turn, replies saying that he never would see the face of the monarch. But, what to say about the exodus? What will happen next? Israel continues in the Egypt and Pharaoh's hearts remains hardened. Besides creating suspense, the pause prepares the reader for the next part of the dialogue where the final stroke against will be announced. In certain sense, the pause also prepares the reader for the climax and closing of the last scene.

From the theological point of view, the pause plays an important role, which illustrates how literary structure and narrative organization convey theological truths.

The suspense created by the pause only highlights the human limitation to solve their own problems. There is no place for any further negotiation. As Durham so well describes:

As happens so often in the biblical narrative, every human endeavor stands exhausted, and every apparent alternative has been used without success. What is left? What can even God do? The dream of freedom lies smashed. Yahweh's deliverer may have difficulty delivering even himself. All Yahweh's promises remain unfulfilled. He has proved his Presence, but to what avail? The expectations of the Israelites have been brought to nothing.⁵¹

The impasse led the reader to realize that only God can remove Israel from this "blind alley." When the human hope vanishes, God comes up to save His people. That is what happens right at this point. The resumptive elements of Exod. 11:1-3 emerge to remember God's promises. It is exactly during the human impasses that the divine promises should be recalled more than ever. The pause represents the moment of confusion and perplexity when human faith is tested. In Exod. 11:4-8, God announces that he will act by himself. This plague will be inflicted without any intervention of Moses or Aaron. No human action is required but the sacrifice and the spreading of the blood "on doorposts and on the lintel" of their houses (Exod. 12:7) - an act of faith in the divine plan. The salvation is completely at God's hands.

Humanity is living in the pause between Gen 1-2 and Revelation 21-22. This is a moment of bewilderment where God's people are to remember His promises and His power to break the deadlock created by the sin. It is a time to remember that God has not changed. As God went out into the midst of Egypt at that time, Michael will stand up at the end (Dan 12:1) to finish definitely the pause. At the pause, his children are called not only to remember God's promises, but trust in them.

EXCURSUS

From the present analysis, it is clear that there is no contradiction between Exod 10:28-29 and 11:4-8. Although it is not possible to determine when the revelation of 11:1-3 took place (before or during the dialogue, or even right before the definitive exit of Moses from Pharaoh's presence), it is evident that both pieces of dialogue belong to the same scene.

However, even after Moses and Pharaoh made clear that an additional meeting was no longer at stake, they met again in Exod 12:31. Here Pharaoh requires an audience. In the previous requests for audience with Moses and Aaron, Pharaoh would seek for

⁵¹ Durham, *Exodus*, 143-144.

relief, but now using the same language of the preceding calls⁵² the narrator writes down Pharaoh's capitulation. Egypt is devastated, death had touched everything from plant, animal to human sphere. This time, instead asking for relief, he surrenders.

This new meeting between Moses and Pharaoh has been pointed by some as an evident contradiction both regarding Pharaoh's threats and Moses' statement in Exod 10:28-29. The idea that Pharaoh just sent a message is not supported by the language employed here.⁵³ Furthermore, the assumption that as the meeting happened in the middle of night, they hardly saw each other seems to be a cheap attempt of harmonization. Houtman lists some suggestions for the apparent impasse

1. Moses did not see Pharaoh again in his palace; 2. Pharaoh came to him;
3. Pharaoh went to the house of Moses and Aaron and called to them in the darkness or he had a message brought to them; 4. mentally to 10:29 is to added: unless you call me; 5. Moses no longer goes for his own volition; 6. Moses nor Pharaoh are precise they say, both speaking in the heating of the anger; 7. 10:29 (J) and 12:31 (E) are not of the same literary layer.⁵⁴

At this point, it is possible to agree with Cole when he affirms that "it would be unfair to hold either Moses or pharaoh to words spoken in the heat of anger."⁵⁵ The tension in 10:24-29 and 11:4-8 is evident and explicitly stated. Furthermore, it should be remembered that "throughout 7-10 Pharaoh repeatedly displays a willingness to change his mind in the light of altering circumstances. He is anything but consistent as regards what he says and does."⁵⁶ In fact, the content of the last dialogue is a blatant contradiction of the very words of Pharaoh in 10:24 where he declares that all people could go out, except the flocks and herds. Clearly, he is relenting: *Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone*; (Exod 12:32). Finally, it be also called to mind the fact that this last meeting is an extraordinary event and, in essence, totally different from the previous audiences recorded in Exod 7-11.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the narrative flow of this last scene demonstrated that the insertion of 11:1-3 is not evidence of the existence of different sources or poor editorial work by later hands. In fact, it is result of a thoughtful and intentional plan of Moses, whom under inspiration was trying to convey important truths thought the way he organized his work. The awareness of the literary and narrative strategies used in the Hebrew Bible helped to

⁵² The use of the same phraseology used during the narrative implies an actual meeting of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh Exod. 12:31 - וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וְלְאַהֲרֹן (He called for Moses and Aaron).

⁵³ See footnote 51.

⁵⁴ C. Houtman, *Exodus* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 129.

⁵⁵ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 108.

⁵⁶ Alexander.Exodus, 200.

understand the place and function of Exod. 11:1-3.

In the Old Testament, the mastery in building narratives which engage the listener or reader in the plot transmits in an appealing way important truths about God, humanity, and His salvific plan such as the divine superiority over the false gods, the human incapacity to solve the problem of sin, the divine faithfulness of fulfilling all His promises, and the centrality of the sacrificial blood in the plan of salvation.

The study the Exod. 11:1-3 in light of narrative strategy of Moses confirms the words of John Sailhamer: "the biblical books are not hastily written documents or mere historical records. These books are carefully constructed works of literature. They are not merely the literature of a bygone era and people-they have, in fact, proved themselves to be classic works of literature."⁵⁷

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⁵⁷John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, *Library of Biblical Interpretation*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 3

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APPENDIX 1

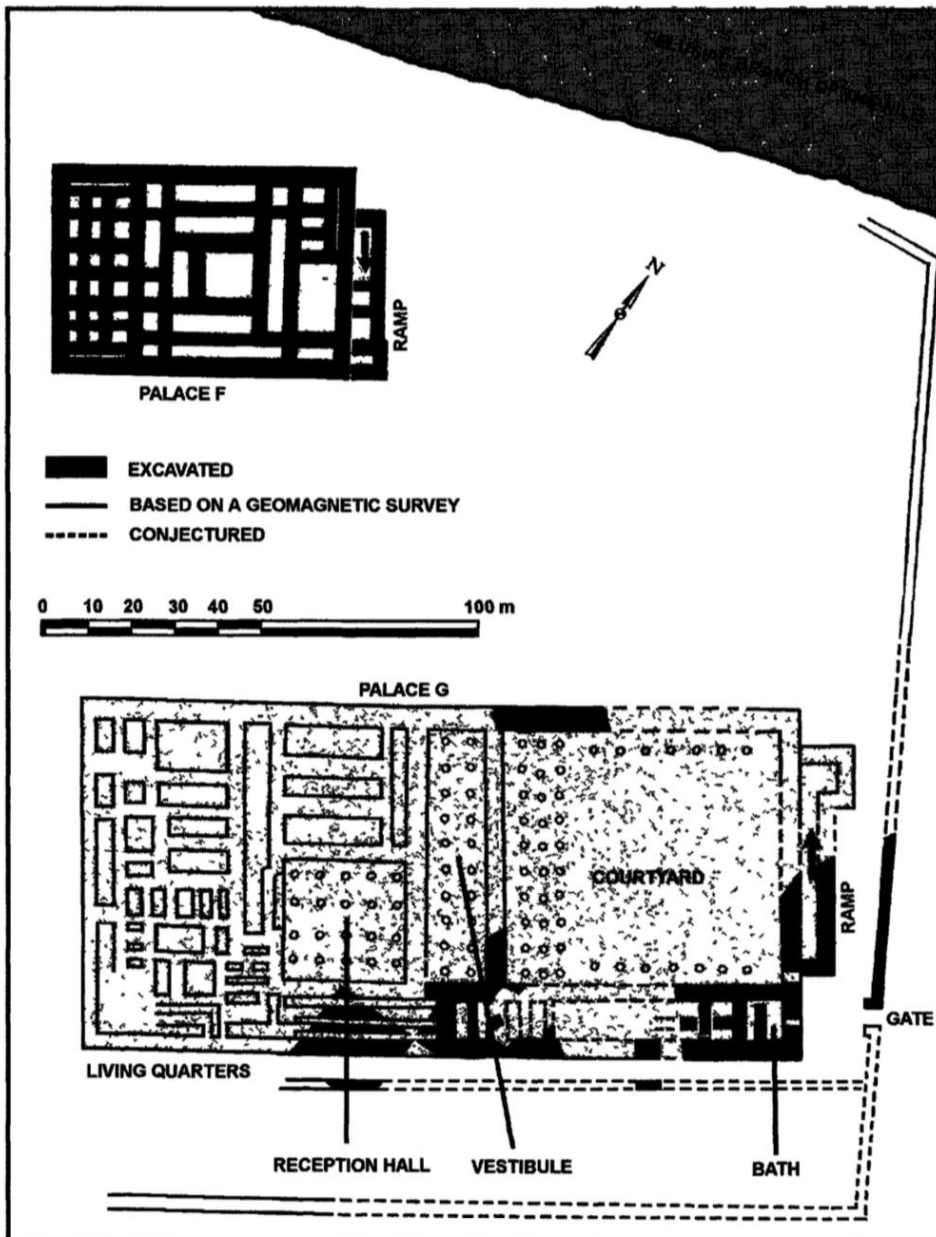


Figure 1. Royal citadel of Moses' time at Ezbet Helmi. Excavations by the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Cairo under the direction of Manfred Bietak have uncovered a walled-in area of ca. 10 acres enclosing a complex of buildings made of mud brick, including two major palaces, workshops, military areas, and storage and cultic facilities from the early 18th Dynasty. (Based on Bietak, Dorner, and Jánosi, "Ausgrabungen 1993–2000," figs. 4, 33, and 34b.)