Study Notes: Exodus 10:21-29
October 25, 2026: "Darkness!"
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Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

- Much like the third and sixth plagues, this plague comes to Pharaoh and the Egyptians without announcement or warning. Moses is commanded to stretch his hand toward heaven, which will cause darkness to fall on Egypt.
    - The NIV translates the Hebrew as "darkness that can be felt." This phrase is probably better understood as "darkness that will cause you to grope around." It is to indicate that this darkness will cause the people to be unable to move around or carry out daily activities.
    - The darkness may be a result of dust or sandstorms, which would explain how the Israelites are not impacted, geographically. However, this may not be the case. Regardless, the Faithlife Study Bible explains how Pharaoh and the Egyptians would have viewed this plague: "While the Egyptians would have been accustomed to the sky-darkening effect of sandstorms, blotting out the sun nevertheless would convey a frightening spiritual message. Ra, the sun god, was Egypt's supreme deity. The Egyptians took the regular rising of the sun and its traversing of the sky as proof of triumph over death. They would have considered the obstruction of the sun at Moses' command to be an evil omen."
- Moses does what YHWH commands, and for three days, darkness covers the land of Egypt. As a result no one could move about or see their neighbors. Much like some other plagues, there is a clear distinction drawn between the Egyptians and the Israelites.
- The picture of darkness and light is a common metaphor used in Scripture to represent evil and good. This plague impacts those who have not yet surrendered to YHWH, while God's people have the light in their midst.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the Lord. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind."

- After the land experienced total darkness for three days, Pharaoh summoned Moses. He told Moses that He and the people could worship the YHWH, however, he refused to allow them to take any of their livestock with them.
- Like he had done before, Pharaoh attempted to control and cause Moses to compromise in this agreement. Pharaoh would let the people worship, but he would set the parameters.

But Moses said, "You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the Lord our God. Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshiping the Lord our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the Lord."

- Moses responded by telling Pharaoh that they needed to bring sacrifices to the YHWH. They were to bring their livestock because they would need it to worship the YHWH. They had to take it all, because they were not yet sure what YHWH would command them to use.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die." "Just as you say," Moses replied. "I will never appear before you again."

- Once again, the YHWH hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he refused to let the people go. Pharaoh drove Moses out of his presence, and told Moses never to appear before him again. Pharaoh's words were a death threat against Moses, and Moses responded by telling Pharaoh he would not appear before him again.
- The New American Commentary explains that Pharaoh's command for Moses to leave was both vindictive and cowardly, but it also served as a way for Pharaoh to avoid dealing with the commands of YHWH: "Pharaoh was trying to get rid of the problem of Yahweh's demands by preventing Yahweh's chosen messenger from bringing those demands to his attention."
- It should be noted that the next chapter in Exodus appears to contradict what Moses says, because in it, Moses spoke to Pharaoh again. However, although the chapter breaks, the dialogue with Pharaoh does not. Chapter 11 is a continuation of what Moses says to Pharaoh in this encounter.