

Exodus:

The Redemption of God's People,
a Covenant with God's People,
the Renewal of the Covenant for God's people,
and the Worship Center of God's People.

IV. Comment on the Writing

- A. The Redemption of God's People, 1:1-18:27
 - 1. The situation in Egypt, 1:1-22
 - 2. The deliverer of Israel from Egypt, 2:1-4:31
 - 3. The Struggle of Moses with Pharaoh in Egypt, 5:1-13:16
 - a. The preface to the struggle with Amenhotep II, 5:1-6:27
 - b. The confrontation with Pharaoh, 6:28-11:10
 - 1) The instruction of the Lord to Moses, 6:28-7:13
 - 2) The plagues in Egypt, 7:14-11:10

As we approach this section, it seems that we can make a few general observations. Some speak of this section as composed on one sign, the staff becoming a snake, and nine judgments. The sign indicating authority and the plagues the execution of divine authority. *We looked at the sign and first judgment in the last lesson.*

- The purpose of the plagues is to inform pharaoh of the necessity of releasing the Israelites.
"...that you might know that there is no one like the Lord our God" (8:10). See also 8:22 and 9:2.
- The plagues seem to be grouped in units of three with a culminating crescendo (10).
- Each of the three units begin with the phrase "in the morning" (7:15, 8:20, 9:13).
- The initial three were annoying, the second three are bothersome and painful, and the third three are natural disasters.
- The third plague ends the magician's power of duplication, the sixth the defeat of the magicians (9:11), and the ninth the separation of Moses from Pharaoh (10:28).
- Seven of the plagues begin with a warning (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10); three appear with not warning (3, 6, 9).
- Three of the plagues came with Aaron's staff (1-3), three with no mention of a staff (4-6), and three with Moses' staff (7-9),
- The plagues seem to have occurred over a period of about nine months (the first plague accompanied the rising of the Nile, normally July-August; the seventh plague in January when barley ripens and flax blossoms; the ten plagues in April, Passover).
- Is there significance in the number of plagues? Both the Egyptians and the Israelites used the decimal counting system. Ten, therefore, denoted something complete, full, and enumerated. Thus, it signified God complete judgment.
- Pharaoh responses are interesting
 - #1: He would not listen (7:22-23).
 - #2: He agreed to let the people go but faltered (8:8).

- #3: He listen to the magicians' suggestion (8:19)
- #4: He said he would let them go to sacrifice in the land (8:25).
- #5 & 6: He refused to comply (9:7, 12).
- #7: He agreed to let the people go but faulted (9:28, 9:35).
- #8: He offered to let only the men go and confessed his error (10:16).
- #9: He said the men, women, and children could go, but not the animals (10:24).
- #10: He urged them to go (12:31-32).

a) Water turned to blood, 7:14-25

b) Frogs, 8-1-15

This plague, like the fifth and eighth, was pronounced in the court of pharaoh. Frogs were associated with the god Hapi, having the head of a frog), and the goddess Heqt (wife of Khnun), who assisted in birthing, and thus were life-giving symbols; frogs represented fruitfulness to the Egyptians assuring a fruitful harvest. Being sacred, frogs were not to be killed. Once more a life-giving source became the origin of pollution.

When the magicians duplicated this plague, they only added to the misery of the suffering as with the first plague episode.

This is the first time in the conflict that pharaoh acknowledged that the God of the Hebrews existed (v. 8). (Note: it is common in the Hebrew Scriptures that the people of God are referred as Hebrews; it was a pejorative, demeaning term used by the Egyptians for second class people. Moses used the term when speaking to Pharaoh of the Israelites).

See also Ps. 78:45 and 105:30 mentions this judgment.

c) Gnats, 8:16-19

These were most likely mosquitoes (the term literally means a winged biting insects); the magicians could not duplicate this plague (this being a new feature in the narrative), admitting defeat. It was a confrontation with Set, the god of the desert.

d) Swarms of flies, 8:20-32

This is the first plague that did not occur in Goshen. It is the first time that pharaoh is given an ultimatum (v. 23). That pharaoh would allow for sacrifice in the land shows his desperation (his first concession, v. 25). Animal sacrifice was an abomination to the Egyptians (mostly likely because Egyptians worshiped them). The confrontation is with Re, the sun god.

When the plague ended, pharaoh reneged on his concession revealing that he had had no change of heart.

e) Death of livestock, 9:1-7

Again, in the narrative of the plagues, the judgment is aimed at an Egyptian deity. The god Osiris cannot save the beasts in which he is said to reside! In duration, it is one of the shorter plagues, slightly longer than the second and sixth. This is also an attack on Hathor, the god with a cow head and Apis, the bull god (gods of fertility).

Again, a specific time is set, "tomorrow." When pharaoh asked Moses to pray that God would remove the plague of frogs, Moses ask for the exact time to do so ("tomorrow," v. 10) and it was done. The specificity is overwhelming in both cases!

f) Boils, 9:8-12

This is the first plague that is unannounced; Moses and Aaron simply throw dust into the air. It is also the shortest in duration.

This is the first time in the plague narratives that it is stated that pharaoh did not harden his own heart, God did! The magicians could not replicate the plagues after the second one; here they are specifically said to be afflicted.

The lesson of this plague is that God has absolute control over the physical health of people. Physical suffering consequent to sin comes to all regardless of their position and status. The Egyptians are helpless in the face of this as now God began to touch human life; greater judgments on human wickedness lie ahead. It is an attack upon Sekhmet, the god of health, and Sunu, the god over pestilence.

g) Hail, 9:13-35

This blow destroys the flax and barley, a major disaster to Egypt's economy. Rain was almost unknown in Egypt, and hail and lightning were harmless. Pharaoh repents for the third time. Pharaoh now is struck by the judgment and acknowledges that he is at fault. However, the context shows that his penitence was short-lived. What exactly he meant by this confession is uncertain. On the surface, his words seem to represent a recognition that he was in the wrong and God right. Nut is the sky goddess (the god of storms) and Osiris the God of crops and fertility.

The point of this plague can be summarized as follows: God demonstrated his power over the forces of nature to show His sovereignty – the earth is the Lord's. He can destroy it; He can preserve it. If people sin by ignoring His word and not fearing Him, He can bring judgment on them. If any fear the Lord and obey His instructions, they will be spared. A positive way to express the point of the chapter is to say that those who fear God and obey His word will escape the powerful destruction He has prepared for those who sinfully disregard His word.

h) Locust, 10:1-20

The Egyptians' dreaded locusts like every other ancient civilization. They had gods to whom they looked for help in preventing such catastrophes.

With confrontation that resulted from the onslaught of the plague, pharaoh confesses he has sinned and adds a request for forgiveness. But, his acknowledgment does not go far enough for this is not genuine confession. Since his heart was not yet submissive, his confession was vain. This is pharaoh's second and third concession (8:25, 10:11, 10:24); the first allowed sacrifice within Egypt, the second was to leave but the males only, and the third was all but the flocks could leave. On each occasion pharaoh was seeking to profit through the concession. As above, the focus is upon Nut and Osiris.

For the first time pharaoh's counselors seek to have him concede to Moses' demands.

i) Darkness, 10:21-29

The ninth plague is that darkness was fell on all the land, except upon the Hebrews. Here God is attacking a core Egyptian religious belief as well as portraying what lay before the Egyptians. Throughout the Bible, darkness is the symbol of evil, chaos, and judgment (and blindness its manifestation). The plague here is not blindness, or even spiritual blindness, but an awesome darkness from the outside. It is particularly significant in that Egypt's high god was the Sun God. The Lord God was now striking down Lord of the Sun (Re, Nut, and Hathor). If Egypt would not let Israel go to worship their God, Egypt's god would become darkness.

Pharaoh is willing to make what amounts to his most generous concession, but to leave the livestock behind meant a good number to watch them and if they chose not to return their livelihood would be lost to the Egyptians. It was very limited.

Moses is told never to return to pharaoh meaning that negotiation was finished (v. 27). Moses agreed but death would visit pharaoh.

j) Death of the first-born: Announced, 11:1-10

Israel cried out to pharaoh because of pharaoh's oppression; now the Egyptians will cry out because of God's judgment. This is the final, and most severe, of the plagues.

The most interesting interpretative issue in these verses is the meeting by Moses with pharaoh (v. 10). The text tells us that after the ninth plague he would not speak to Pharaoh again (10:29). Perhaps the best interpretative option is to see the phrase, "I will not see your face again (10:29)," as an official appointment while this one was not official "during the night," 12:31).

That the promise of a final plague is specific as to its occurrence is interesting. In the ancient mind, what we call midnight meant the deepest, darkest time of the night, a time in sleeping when people are most defenseless and vulnerable.

The firstborn in Egyptian and Israelite cultures was significant, but the firstborn of pharaoh was most important. Pharaoh was considered a god, the son of Re, the sun god, for the specific purpose of ruling over Re's chief concern, the land of Egypt. To manifest himself, the supreme god assumed the form of the living king and gave seed, which was to become the next king, the next "son of Re." Moreover, the Pharaoh was the incarnation of the god Horus, a falcon god whose province was the heavens. Horus represented the living king who succeeded the dead king Osiris. Every living king was Horus; every dead Egypt heir embodied the hopes and aspirations of the Egyptians. To strike the firstborn son of Pharaoh was to destroy this cardinal doctrine of the divine kingship of Egypt. Such a blow would be enough for pharaoh, for then he would drive the Israelites out. This is an attack on Min, the god of reproduction, and Isis, the goddess that protects children as well.

Applications:

1. God's commands come with His comforting promises to sustain and provide for us. When God gives us a difficult task to performed, He provides us with the strength of His promises. When God commands a duty, He provides what we need to do them. Moses is commanded to speak to Pharaoh pointedly, the most powerful of Egyptians, one revered as a god, yet He promises Him success. Pharaoh will let the people go. Have you found this to be true with you? Do you fear that God will ask of you something that He is not willing to do through you?
2. Our God is powerful; He can humble nations. When I think of these chapters, it strikes me that God's purposes are frequently multifaceted. The plagues were to move a rebel to allow God's people freedom from bondage, but it was also to judge a nation for its sinful actions. Has God brought disaster into your family, personal life, among your friends to teach the lesson that He alone is God? Have you learned that lesson yet? A wicked monarch learned that too late for himself, his son, and his nation, yet it is never too late for you and me.
3. It is important to know that miracle working is not the providence of God alone or He through His servants. The supernatural forces of evil are real, and they can employ people to perform miracles as well. A miracle does not vindicate the performer as divinely inspired or sent. The criteria of divine miracles are that they glorify God, they point away from the performer to one greater, and they are conducive to spiritual growth. If the devil can do what God can do, the fact of doing does not prove that it is of God. Does it promote the worship of God and the extension of His honor, or does it emphasize the person doing it and promote their self-advancement?
4. It is a fact that God hardens hearts unto obstinacy and rebellion as well as soften them. What we know from our passage is that God does things to promote His will; He hardened Pharaoh's heart to punish Him and cause Him to see the power of the God of the Hebrews, the only true God, and allow the release of God's people. Pharaoh is justly condemned because he spurned the goodness of God and willingly chose a path of disobedience to God's servants. God hardened his heart, and he hardened his own heart. Are you not glad that God softened your hard heart by showing you the beauty of your redeemer? God can do as He pleases and all that He does is just and right. While He is right to judge. He is also just to forgive us. Have you praised Him lately for acting graciously toward you?
5. Repentance is not real if it is only to avoid negative consequences. It must be heart-felt, not fear motivated. Repentance is not singularly a Christian virtue. How many of our repentances have not been genuine? Have you ever repented to avoid negative consequences and not because of heart-felt contrition for dishonoring God? True repentance not only is about being inwardly regretful; it is a Godward attitude of sorrow for disobedience.
6. God can protect His children when disasters surround us. He can bring light into a world of darkness. God's people may suffer inordinately, but they will be delivered. We all have experienced "Egyptian bondage" in many forms and have endured hard taskmasters. Are you not glad that God did not leave you in "Egypt," but has brought you out putting you on the path to a land of promise? Are you in bondage to a harsh taskmaster of some kind that you need deliverance from even now? Would you like to be delivered from a bad situation but do not know where to turn?

7. It is also clear in our passage that while we suffer with circumstances that come upon us as a people in a civil society, we do not suffer as the unbeliever does. The Nile plague affected everyone, and we suffer because of others at times. However, darkness plunged Egypt into a suffering abyss, but there was light in the homes in Goshen. Locust devoured crops in Egypt, but not in Goshen! God sent Moses to Egypt with a message of judgment, and, at the same time, he sent Moses to Goshen with a message of hope, promise, and deliverance. Even when we suffer, we do not do so as those without promise and hope. We have a God who loves us and is all- powerful, able to affect the outworking of His love; our God is not like the gods of the nations. Do you take comfort in this? Do you lose hope even if your “Nile” turns into pollution?