

Exodus | The Rise of a Liberator

The Plagues

Rev. T.J. Campo

11.16.14

Exodus 10.16ff

Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. ¹⁷ "Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me." ¹⁸ He went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. ¹⁹ So the LORD shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt. ²⁰ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go. ²¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt." ²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. ²³ They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place

for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. ²⁴ Then Pharaoh called to Moses, and said, "Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you." ²⁵ But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice them to the LORD our God. ²⁶ "Therefore, our livestock too shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD." ²⁷ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. ²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!" ²⁹ Moses said, "You are right; I shall never see your face again!"

We've been looking at the Book of Exodus for a number of weeks (next week will be the last teaching on Exodus and we hope to return to it next year, Fall of 2015, God willing). This book records the birth of a nation...the people of Abraham, relocated to Egypt as an extended household (12 brothers and their families). And now, some 400 years later, the original sons of Jacob have been forgotten by a new regime ("there arose a king who knew NOT Joseph") and the Israelites have become loathsome to the Pharaoh ...He's enslaved them and even tried to eradicate them by ordering that their boys be thrown into the Nile River...a river of life becomes a river of death.

But now God has sent a liberator, actually two brothers, Moses and Aaron to speak to the powers that be and command Pharaoh, in the name of YHWH, God of the Israelites, "Let My people go that they may celebrate with ME!"

We've said that in many ways, the Book of Exodus is a paradigm for the rest of the Bible. So many ideas that will be developed all the way to the final Book of Revelation are introduced here. AND so often the later writers will reference EXODUS to illustrate and picture the themes and teachings that are central to the whole Bible.

Today, and next week, the idea is judgment. When the Bible develops this idea that human beings will be judged, it will recall these events, the plagues, when God and Pharaoh face-off and in the end ONE sits IN judgment and the other sits UNDER judgment.

Let's see #1 – Notes on All the Plagues #2 – Q & A's and #3 – Take-Aways for Modern Days.

If we thought that THIS is going to be a battle between Moses and the Pharaoh, it dawns on us in the plagues (chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10) that this is really a war between God and Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh's defenses, the gods of Egypt are exposed and defeated. Many scholars believe that most, if not ALL, ten judgments are aimed at the Egyptian deities in whom the Pharaohs trusted.

The first nine are clearly divide into three sets of three. The first is the Nile turning to blood, then (2) frogs, and (3) gnats, (4) flies, (5) death to the cattle, (6) skin sores and the two we read (7) locusts and (8) darkness.

There's a prelude to the plagues, which was Aaron throwing down his staff and it turns into a serpent. Then the sorcerers of Pharaoh reproduce that sign but Aaron's snake swallows the sorcerers' snakes. If you've ever seen the golden headdress worn by the pharaohs, you know there's most often a cobra over the forehead... and the word swallowed occurs only once more in Exodus (15.12), when the Egyptian chariots are swallowed by the sea. In other words, this is a merciful warning that if Pharaoh the cobra persists, he and his people will be swallowed.

But they DO persist...and the plagues DO come and the gods of the Egyptians ARE defeated. The sorcerers can mimic the first three judgments (but NOT reverse them) and then they have to admit... "This is not a trick – this is the finger of a god".

But all the judgments show God's dominion over creation and IN the judgments God is showing both the Egyptians and the Israelites PICTURES of UNCREATION. In other words, when in Genesis, it says that God's Spirit hovered over the chaos and brought ORDER, the plagues show that the ORDER and beauty of creation are totally dependent on YHWH, the God of the Israelites, the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

And if He withdraws His hand, the beauty and order of the creation will return to chaos and disorder. Water, the Nile, a source of life will become a source of death (as Pharaoh, without God made the Nile when he had the Israelite boys killed there.)

Without the almighty and benevolent Hand of God, the things of nature leave the boundaries. From air, sea and land nature falls on us and harms us when God withdraws. Pharaoh has refused to let them “be fruitful and multiply”; he stands as a god opposing the order of creation and the True Creator is now showing how real UN-creation looks and feels.

And finally, the sun, which the Egyptians worshiped as their chief deity “Re” or “Ra” and of which the Pharaohs were thought to be incarnations... finally the sun blotted out from the sky...is the final sign to the Egyptians that the sun DEPENDS on YHWH and without His Hand, the sun returns to chaos... but for the Israelites, “Let there be light”.

For those who will not acknowledge Him – chaos and the undoing of creation. For those who are under His promise/covenant-relationship – light and order.

Now, let’s do a little “Q & A” with our passage and this four-chapter long section on judgment. What might be the issues that stick out if we read that whole section and what are we meant to hold on to as BIG IDEAS?

Well, one question for modern people is these miracles. And some people have tried to sort of explain them away or find ways to soften them. For instance, there COULD be a kind of natural sequence – the gnats come after the frogs have died. The dead frogs would have attracted the gnats and there were NO frogs to eat the gnats. So that makes sense... BUT why do we have to have EITHER a miracle OR a natural sequence? Why not both?

If there were NO miraculous element why would Pharaoh be impressed? Why would he take notice or be moved? It makes no sense without the miracles.

But ... “I don’t believe in miracles”, says the modern man. But, why not? Are you unwilling to believe in God... the first Cause? The Creator of this world with astounding complexity, which could not come from chance (Have you never asked “What IS chance?” – You have to see that “chance” isn’t an explanation for anything!) and if there IS a Creator of the galaxies and the quarks, the stars and super-novas and of sub-atomic particles, if indeed there IS a Designer...could He not suspend (what we think of as) “the normal processes of the natural order”?

The Bible’s presentation of miracles isn’t to say that they happen all the time but that at special moments in the history of the world when God is revealing something about himself that He uses miracles. If you can believe in God, then it’s also possible to believe in miracles (even if you

haven't seen one... after all you believe in lots of things you've never seen.) Talk to someone, if miracles are a "modern difficulty" for you... lots of good books and materials out there you'd find intellectually satisfying.

A second question is a general "WHY?" Why did God use these plagues? Couldn't a God who made all things find a better way to do whatever He was doing...and what WAS He doing?

At the start of Ch. 10, God tells Moses what He's doing...and this goes a long way to explain WHY He does it this way. Listen:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."

God wants to be known. He wants the Egyptians to know Him. He wants the Israelites to know Him. He wants THAT generation to know Him. He wants every generation to KNOW HIM.

For God to be known, since He IS the Source of all Truth, Beauty and Goodness, for Him to communicate Himself to others IS the highest form of generosity. Imagine if there were a vision that was so beautiful that anything you had EVER seen was only a one-millionth as beautiful...but I WOULD not share it with you. That would be the most selfish thing a person could do. And God is the opposite of selfish...and therefore, He wants to share ultimate Beauty with His creatures...especially that one creature, the apex of His creation that was made for fellowship with Him, i.e. humanity.

To make Himself known – this is the most generous thing God could do. To glorify God and enjoy God forever – THIS is God's purpose and this is what He's doing in Exodus and in the whole Bible.

Did you know, for instance that IN the Book of Ezekiel, that phrase, "that they may know that I am the LORD" that occurs over 70 times! That's God's purpose. And here in the Exodus account, He is making Himself known in His justice and IN HIS MERCY to that generation and to all who would come after. That's why He chose these signs, the undoing of creation...and through them to bring OUT a people, a birth of a nation, a New Creation, the people of Abraham who would make God known to every generation.

Last, what's up with this Pharaoh? Why are we told, and if you read the whole plague account, you'll be scratching your head, WHY ARE WE TOLD that this king hardens his heart but sometimes that "YHWH, the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart"?

And the reason for that is ... hmm... I seem ... to have left my notes in my office... Truth IS... I just

don't know all the "ins and outs" of how the psychology of human rebellion and the glory and self-revelation of God work together. I don't know how Pharaoh was hardened by God...and yet also fully culpable for that hardness... I don't know the mysteries of human volition (why we do what we do) and I sure don't know the mysteries of God... after all... He's NOT a Tame Lion... but He is good.

A few things we can say. The passage ends with Pharaoh against the ropes, beaten and battered...and yet still shaking his fist at God... And then the "man of this world" speaks to God's agent, Moses and he rages, "Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!" Those words sound familiar!

I looked it up...at least five times in the first books of the Bible it makes reference to seeing the face of God and dying... and here, in a way that isn't too veiled, the man of sin, is saying, "MY FACE IS THE FACE OF GOD". It's a statement of fury and blasphemy.

Pharaoh was believed to be an incarnation of God... and he was saying "I am TOO holy for you to look upon my face". And yet... Pharaoh is NOT ultimate Truth, Beauty and Goodness. To know Pharaoh is not satisfying to the hungry soul... to worship Pharaoh is vanity of vanities and a LIE... to put our trust in man is lie... to look at the smiling faces LYING to the faces and hope to find meaning there is a LIE...

BUT ...there is a Face... radiant and holy... to see that Face...should reduce sinful people like YOU and ME to ashes... the Holy Face of God...and yet... that Face actually DID become incarnate...was revealed IN FLESH... the Face that is brighter than a billion stars became a Baby so we could look at Him and be saved from judgment.

I know we're two weeks from Advent but this is my favorite Christmas Carol (from the 5th AD):

Oh, that birth forever blessed
When the Virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bare the Savior of our race,
And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed His sacred face
Evermore and evermore.

How dare you, Pharaoh? How dare you speak as if YOUR face were too holy for a fellow sinner to behold... God hardened your hard heart...so He could reveal His own untamed power in judgment BUT IN THE FULLNESS of time, the Holy Face of God bowed down to the earth and became Human in a Baby so we could look upon Him and be saved.

What I take away from this is that we all are being watched. Life is meaningful because we will all give an account, will all be judged by the watching eye of Him who searches every heart and cannot be fooled.

There will be, an ULTIMATE and FINAL judgment when nature is fully un-done and RE-CREATED... and then a Man will be crowned Lord of that New Creation... the Second Adam... who has already appeared and showed that He had authority over all the forces of nature. The Land and Sea and Air were all subject to Him... He turned dirt into new eyes for the Blind Man... He calmed the Sea and the Winds. He even spoke to the spirits and the animal Kingdom when that unbroken donkey did NOT buck and kick but seemed to joyfully submit to carry the Lord of the New Creation as He, Jesus Christ, rode into Jerusalem to be judged on behalf of everyone who repents and simply believes in Him.

There's a lot in the plagues I don't know and about Pharaoh and the psychology of sin ("More things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy") but I do know this: if YOU are NOT hardened toward God...if there is any inkling in YOU to seek the LORD...then DO...Don't toy with God and don't play at repentance. He wants to reveal Himself and will reveal His mercy to any who seek it in the Face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4.6). Pharaoh could not repent... but if you can, if your heart is not too hard to repent...then do. Live in repentance and be saved from judgment and know the Living God.

Let's Pray.

Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. (Isa 55.6-7)