



The Essentials Series

Week 10 – The Struggles with Pharaoh Exodus 6:28-11:10

St. George's Episcopal Church

Spring 2015

God's Redemption Presented

- At the burning bush, God invokes his identity as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – carrying with it, for the reading, a specific recollecting of the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - At the bush God reveals two very important aspects of his nature to Moses (and us):
 - His covenantal faithfulness (4:6),
 - his holiness, which sinners may only approach on God's terms not theirs (4:5)
 - In Moses' case he had to remove his sandals on the holy ground; later approaching God will be through a sacrificial system at the Tabernacle, and then again at the Temple, and ultimately through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.
 - Moses initially refuses God through a variety of excuses, each of which God overrules.
- Moses is sent to Pharaoh, accompanied by his brother Aaron to begin the cosmic showdown
 - God promises that “the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them” (7:5).
 - Pharaoh was seen as a divine figure, and thus God (YHWH) enters into a power showdown between the forces of Pharaoh and the Egyptian pantheon.
 - Each of the plagues is intended to target a god of the Egyptians and the realm over which they (supposedly) held sway. Ultimately God is demonstrating his superiority and power over Egypt and her gods.

The Cosmic Showdown

- The sorcerers of Egypt match the miracles of God/Moses
 - When Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh the first time, they give a sign as a warning with Aaron's rod turning into a snake. But Pharaoh's sorcerers are able to do the same. However, this is no stalemate, because Aaron's serpent/staff eats the others! Pharaoh is not impressed, and thus not heeding the initial warning evokes the succeeding Ten Plagues of Egypt upon himself and his people.
 - Initially the magicians match the first two plagues, demonstrating that they too can turn water into blood and summon frogs. However from the third plague (of gnats) on they are unable to replicate God's power.
- The first four plagues seem to affect everyone, Egyptians and Hebrew alike, although the narrative gaps on the effect upon the Israelites.
 - However, at the fifth plague (livestock die) the narrative specifically indicates God making a distinction between Egyptian and Hebrew livestock (9:4), and prefigures the great exemption coming with Passover.
 - This exception holds for the seventh and ninth plagues, and also presumably the eight, although it gaps on this.
- Pharaoh affected?
 - The narrative seems to indicate that pharaoh did not suffer himself in the plagues, or if he did minimally or in a secondary way.
 - True, biblical kingship is defined by the king who lays his life down for his people. Recall Judah in Genesis who offers his own life as security to Jacob for Benjamin, and later again to redeem Benjamin from the (perceived) 'wrath' of Joseph. Contrast with David who allows his people to suffer so he doesn't (2 Sam 24:10-17)
 - Ultimately Jesus demonstrates he is the great and true king by dying to save his people from sin and death.

The final plague

- This is a tough plague to content with, where God visits death upon the firstborn, both human and animal.
 - There is a sense of justice/retribution, in that the Egyptians attempted infanticide and partial genocide at the time of Moses' birth.
 - The role of the firstborn is also highlighted here, in that the firstborn often was representative of the whole. Thus even for Israelites all firstborn children belonged to the Lord, and had to be redeemed via sacrifice (Ex. 13:1-2,11-16).
- Moses is warned about the coming plague of death in ch 11, setting up God's provision of Passover (next week!)