

Exodus 11

Preceding Text

(Where are we? Chapters 1-15 **Redemption - Plagues**)

When YHWH appeared in this drama, we became aware of the spiritual dimension to all these events. They are social, political, and economic, yes. But they are also spiritual. Pharaoh (and the whole social/spiritual network of Egypt) is a true hinderance for the people to worship God. Go back and read 4:22–23 and 7:16. In both instances, your translation may have “so that he may worship me,” or it will say “...serve me.” Both worship and serve are correct translations for the Hebrew word *abad* means *to work* or *to serve* and contextually *to worship*. The noun form of the verb is *abodah* which means *work* or *service*. Reread 2:23...Israel cries out because of their slavery (*abodah*), and God commands Pharaoh to let his son go so that he may worship/serve (*abodah*) me. Pharaoh should release the son of God from *servicing* Pharaoh so that the son can *serve* God.

This gives us some insight into the context of the plagues. These are not simply physical punishments, but there is a spiritual dimension going on, and it is multifaceted. From chapter 7–12 God explains his actions. He makes each plague occur, “so that they [Egyptians] may know...”, “so that he [Pharaoh] may know,” or “so that you [Israel] may know.” Know what? God’s character, God’s mission, and God’s supremacy over all other gods.

- Each of these plagues is connected to an Egyptian god. Therefore, each plague is an object lesson for Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God’s power cannot be matched by the Egyptian gods. The creator God brings judgment against those who have destroyed/oppresed his creation through an act of uncreation. This is an ultimate creation reversal.

Current Text: Themes and Background

The final plague cannot be read on its own. It belongs to the whole unfolding of the narrative. The love of God (that he has for his people) and the wrath of God (for those he is punishing) are not equal and opposite forces. God is Love – it is a definitive character of God. The wrath of God comes out of a deep and intense love for all of creation. It is a reaction to that which wants to spoil and destroy that which he has made. When God acts in wrath it is the negative side of his love and compassion. When God deals with evil forever then the wrath no longer has an object.

What we see through all these chapters is that God is a God who judges but with multiple chances for change. And if you pay attention throughout the plagues, some of the Egyptians begin to fear God and follow his instructions! It is Pharaoh who continually proves to be a bad leader due to his own stubborn heart.

We also move from pure storytelling to add elements of ritual with the description of a

commemorative ceremony. For this 10th plague the text does not move directly from warning to plague like the previous times. Instead, the text embeds a lengthy description of the festival and takes time to focus on the characters enacting the ceremony. And notice that the actual Exodus is followed not by a detailed route or the following events but by a series of regulations for who can eat the Passover meal and for regulations around dedicating the firstborn. This has the effect of moving the historical events into present time for the reader (and the following generations of Hebrews).

Engage the Text: Discussion Questions

1. What did you hear as the main point of the sermon? Or what was your primary takeaway?
2. Read 11:1–3. Think of this considering the purposes of the plagues (see “preceding text” above for a reminder). What do these verses show about who recognizes the character of YHWH?
3. Read 12:12 out loud. Why does God bother with so many plagues instead of simply creating a miraculous Exodus the very first time Moses talked to Pharaoh? (Use this text and previous texts you’ve already discussed in the series.)
4. From the plagues, we could say that an aspect of God’s character is that he is a God who judges. How does that description sit with you? What changes in your understanding of God if he does **not** judge the evil of Egypt?
5. We often want an exit strategy from our figurative “Egypt’s” to be swift and obstacle free. Yet what do we learn about how God works through this chapter?
6. What is the text telling us about God’s character, God’s revelation, and God’s mission in the world?

Read for Next Week: Exodus 14–16