

Let my people go!

Christ Church: 8th October 2023 10.00 am. & online
Exodus 6:6-8; 11:4-7 Psalm 78:41-55

This week we have much ground to cover between Exodus 5 (last week) and Exodus 12 (next week). The story of the ten plagues or, better, ten 'signs' when Pharaoh refused to let the Children of Israel leave Egypt nine times.

Context

Vital to understand this story in the context of the whole Old Testament narrative. God promises his people they will escape from Pharaoh and inherit the land of Canaan as in the covenant with Abraham many years earlier. READ EXODUS 6:6-8.

The ten signs

But Pharaoh blocks Moses and Aaron and refuses to let the people go. So God sends a total of ten plagues but each time Pharaoh believes he can win this contest and blocks the people's exit.

The ten are (in Exodus): the Nile turns to blood (7:14-24), frogs (8:1-15), gnats (8:16-19), flies (8:20-32), livestock death (9:1-7), boils (9:8-12), hail (9:13-35), locusts (10:1-20), darkness (10:21-29) and finally the death of all first-borns (chapters 11,12 – next week).

READ PSALM 78:41-55 for a useful summary of the plagues (in a slightly different order and two omitted). Written about the Children of Israel (much later) too easily forgetting all that God did for them to escape Egypt. See also Psalm 105.

We are told the Children of Israel were fully protected from the flies, livestock death and first-borns. Each time Pharaoh is said to 'harden his heart', though for three of them Scripture says 'the Lord hardened his heart'.

The tenth plague is prepared in dramatic form in EXODUS 11:4-7 (READ). This will be something really awful for Egypt.

But why did God do this?

We have to ask Why? This is so outside our own experience! It's surely not fair on innocent Egyptian people. It sounds like a fairy tale. And what on earth has it got to do with Christians today?

To answer that question, first ask another. Who is the hero in this story? Is it Pharaoh? Surely not. Is it Moses? Well, no. He's not a great leader at this point, and brother Aaron is doing much of the talking. The story is, and it is vital to recognise this, all about God! He has the rescue plan. He sends the plagues. He is in control.

So our question needs to be, what does this story tell us about God? And as Psalm 78 describes them as 'signs', what do the signs point to? I found three key answers in the passages we have read.

Three lessons for them, but also for us today

1: A sign of God's choice of people

Exodus 11:7 'Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel'; Psalm 78:52 'He brought *his* people out'. Exodus 6:7 'I will take you as *my own* people'.

All the way through Genesis and onwards God rejects some and chooses others. The whole story is of his rescue of *his* chosen people from those who are not his people. Not for us to ask Why?

Is this true for us? Yes! If you are a disciple you were chosen (John 15:16). Read 1 Peter 2:9,10 to understand how we're seen by God! Remember this when facing opposition, difficulty or doubt.

2: A sign of God's power and judgment

Psalm 78:42,49 This passage shows his power, his authority and his anger at evil. He told Pharaoh in Exodus 7:17, 'By this you will know that I am the Lord'. And in 9:14, 'so that you will know there is no one like me.' In Exodus 11 he has the power to kill every first-born.

Is this true for us? Yes! First we need to hold God in awe, but then to realise his power is immeasurably greater than any human tyrant, than anyone who is abusing us or troubling us at work. Read Ephesians 3:20 and 1 Thessalonian 5:1-11.

3: A sign of God's love and free grace

Psalm 78:52 Note change of tone. 'God brought his people out like a flock, he led them like sheep...' Exodus 11:7 not a dog will bark (to show how perfect was the division). Exodus 6:6 I will redeem you....

Is this true for us? Yes! In spite of all our sin we are forgiven people, we have Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection for us. Romans 5:8 'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us'.