

Campus-Wide Bible Study Fall 2013

Week 4

Exodus 8:8-32

For an opening prayer and introductory notes to the leader, see the OPTIONAL supplemental material document on the website.

Read Exodus 8:8-32 and pages 37-40 in Goldingay aloud.

Leaders: Use the provided questions as guides to your study of the text. You can choose which questions to focus on—some are better for groups who have new believers or first time bible study participants, others are for people who have a good knowledge of the Bible. You do not need to answer all the questions! Your role as the leader is to keep the conversation focused on the Bible passage or on the application of the passage to the lives of the members of your group.

Discussing the Text:

This week we find ourselves in the thick of the plagues as God and Pharaoh continue to compete for power, glory, and the service of the Israelites. Back in 5:2 Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go?” but now Pharaoh is asking Moses to pray to the Lord on Pharaoh’s behalf. What a turn of events!

- Look closely at Pharaoh and Moses’ conversation in verses 8-15. What is Moses’ attitude in verse 9? Mock humility? Submission to Pharaoh?
- What do these verses imply about God’s power and vision and love? What can they teach us about prayer?

In verse 19 when the Egyptian magicians could not produce the gnats they tell Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” It is ambiguous if they are acknowledging the Israelite’s God or if they are simply attributing this action to an unknown god. Either way, Pharaoh refuses to listen to their testimony due to the hardness of his heart.

- Why do you think Pharaoh refused to listen? Did he see God at work and choose to ignore God’s power? Did he still think he was more powerful and could outwit and out-manuever the Hebrew God?
- God “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” — we have to find some way of interpreting such sayings that preserves the portrait of God’ holiness. In the case of Pharaoh, we have to notice that the book of Exodus does tell us that Pharaoh’s hard heart blocks God’s revelation and, for a time, God’s rescue attempt. But the text doesn’t actually tell us clearly who did the hardening. Did God harden Pharaoh’s heart (Exod. 10:1), or did Pharaoh harden his own heart (9:34), or did Pharaoh’s heart simply harden all by itself (9:7)? Exodus doesn’t answer this question unambiguously. The narrator’s interest lies elsewhere, namely, in how God will rescue people when a hard heart is blocking the road out of Egypt.

In 8:28, for the second time in chapter eight, Pharaoh asks Moses to pray for him.

Goldingay writes that praying for Pharaoh, “is a way of turning the other cheek. It declines to acknowledge the power differential between the superior person and the subordinate person; indeed, it reverses it” (40).

- How could praying for enemies and oppressors be a reversal of power? What does it say about God’s power and love that we are charged to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44)?
- How is this charge empowering to those who are called to pray?

Linking to Christ:

- In our passage this week Pharaoh experiences the results of Moses’ prayer, sees God’s power displayed, refuses to listen to Moses and Aaron and his own magicians, asks Moses to pray for him two separate times and hardens his heart again to close out the passage. Perhaps these actions could be labeled as insanity. When Jesus is being crucified in Luke 23 he says in verse 34, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” Commenting on this verse, Walter Brueggemann writes, “On behalf of that world that has now sentenced him, he enters a plea of temporary insanity.”¹ What does it say about the power and depth of God’s forgiveness that Jesus can enter a plea for mercy and forgiveness on behalf on an insane world that is crucifying its redeemer?

Discussing the World:

One of the principles that Pharaoh demonstrates here is that it is easier to acknowledge God’s power when it is convenient for him or impossible to ignore. It is more difficult to serve and love God day in and day out, especially when God’s power is turned against you and your interests. Perhaps we could understand this as the difference between believing in God as an intellectual concept and following the Risen Christ who calls us to take up our crosses and follow him.

- When are you tempted to just go through the motions with God? Is that ever okay?
- Talk about a time that God has called you to repent. How did you respond?
- How can we sympathize with Pharaoh and his hardness of heart?

When was a time that God acted very concretely in your life as a result of prayer?

- When did God say “no” to one of your prayers or desires? What can this tell us about God’s care and concern for us?

In verse 19 the Egyptian magicians are able to see God at work and Pharaoh is not.

- What keeps people from seeing God’s action in the world?
- What causes you to doubt people’s testimony about God working in their lives or in the world?

When have you had to pray for an enemy or forgive someone who hurt you?

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001. 96. Print.