

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Wednesday Morning Women’s Bible Study
Week #9

Exodus 13:1-22

November 8, 2023

Exodus 13:1-16

1. Here is a bit of retelling of the story of what has been happening in God’s rescue of the Hebrews, and the telling has a distinctively liturgical purpose: insuring that the people remember and re-experience the saving act of God
2. Here are some of the chief theological concerns:
 - a. Provision for the future worship & life of Israel
 - b. God’s promise of this future is reaffirmed
 - c. The memory elicits liturgical activity
 - d. The liturgy corresponds to the historical record
 - e. The purpose of the memory & liturgy is so that each successive generation will re-experience the redemption accomplished by God and thus re-new their covenant with God
3. The liturgy (literally – the “work of the people”)
 - a. The human body is enlisted in the work: hand, forehead, lips – physical actions teach/reinforce spiritual life
4. The Firstborn
 - a. Consecration/Sacrifice of firstborn people & animals was a feature of much ancient pagan worship
 - b. Israel appropriated and revised this practice
 - c. God is Giver of Life: a fact expressed in the occasion of birth – this ties to basic creation theology
 - d. Gratitude is called for due to this life and blessing
5. The decisive act of God in Passover is the protection of Israel’s firstborn and the destruction of Egypt’s firstborn
6. Unleavened Bread – serves as a reminder not of the bread itself, but of what happened on the night it was eaten: the salvation/destruction of firstborn and thus the salvation of Israel
7. In other parts of scripture, as here, it is sometimes the male referred to, and sometimes all – thus male and female firstborn have a special place in affirming God’s creativity
8. The Egyptian firstborn are remembered as well: Israel is mindful of the sacrifice required by them as well in order to break Pharaoh’s power

Exodus 13:17-22

1. God is leading the people, through the work of Moses
2. God works within the boundaries of human reality
 - a. He takes them on a less-direct but more safe route
 - b. He worries that the people might change their minds if they encounter armed resistance
 - c. In a sense, God’s power is shaped and mediated by human agency
3. God is present the pillar of cloud/fire
 - a. Likely this is the same pillar, appearing differently in night/day
 - b. Often in scripture, God arrives as fire
 - c. This is a tangible presence – needed by the people
 - d. Reference here may be to the custom of leading a column of people with a fire in a brazier
4. Joseph’s bones are carried back to the Promised Land
 - a. The whole story of Israel in Egypt started with Joseph
 - b. Now...it ends with Joseph still involved
 - c. Here we are meant to see the never-failing though sometimes very slowly unfolding work of God

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. How does liturgy (worship) inform you about God’s activity in such a way as to nourish your own faith?
- B. Think about the sorrow and grief when birth does not happen, or children die. Think about the joy when it does. What is our response in both situations?

- C. Israel notes the both joyful and sorrowful circumstances of its redemption. Why is this important for Israel? Why might this be important for us?
- D. How has God acted in your life within the actual circumstances of your life or from out of the actual events & history of your life?
- E. Think of your spiritual forebears. Who has been a “Joseph” in your history?

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

Resources:

- a. Interpretation Commentary on Exodus, Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1991
- b. The Communicator’s Commentary Series, Old Testament, Exodus, Maxie D. Dunnam, Word, Inc., Waco, TX, 1987
- c. The Old Testament Library: Exodus, Brevard S. Childs, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1974