

January 29:

Few passages demonstrate with greater clarity that historical accounts in the Scriptures are shaped by theological concerns than those recounting the ten plagues in Exodus. That is where we find ourselves in our reading today: Exodus 8:1-9:35. These two chapters cover plagues two through seven.

If you read through the ten plagues, you discover some patterns. First, we notice that #'s 3, 6, and 9 are communicated with greater brevity than the other plagues (e.g. none of these three include anything about warnings given to Pharaoh). This suggests that we have three groups of three plagues each, with the tenth set off by itself. It is the climax. We might even say the others built up to it. Next, in the first plagues the Egyptians magicians were able to copy the miracles. But as things progressed, not only did they fail to copy the miracles of the plagues, by the sixth plague, they could not even stand before Pharaoh since they themselves had been so impacted. Finally, beginning with plague four, distinction was made between Egyptians and the Israelites in the land of Goshen—to the point that during the tenth plague, those who were under the protection of the Passover lamb (mostly the Hebrews) were spared. All these patterns show us that God was working through the plagues to reveal Himself—what He is like, especially His might and salvation. What is more, He was revealing His covenant faithfulness to His people. These are lessons we should take away from our reading of the plagues. Though our mighty God will not overlook sin, though He will judge sinners, nevertheless, He also saves sinners. And to those whom He saves He shows Himself faithful and works mightily in their behalf.

One more lesson has to do with the shape of the Bible itself. We said that historical narrative in the Bible is theologically-shaped. By this, we do not mean that the events did not happen or that they are inaccurately told. We do mean that the way in which God inspired His authors to tell the events was in such a way that their organization and the material included helps communicate the significance of the events. What is more, God ordained the events so that they could be recounted to reveal who He is. As such, we see redemptive history (what God is doing in history to save His people) and revelation (the Word telling about those events) are intricately connected.

Psalm 24 most likely was written in celebration of David bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem—where eventually it would reside in Solomon's temple. This accounts for the discussion of who can ascend the holy hill and be in God's presence (the very thing the ark symbolizes). This psalm teaches several important truths for us. First, the entire earth belongs to the Lord, as well as all which is in it. Next, only those who are holy can be in God's presence. This is ultimately fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ and His death in behalf of His people (1 Peter 3:18). Finally, God is king, He is glorious, He is strong, and He is mighty! Allow this psalm to increase your knowledge of God and awareness of how we can approach Him.

Proverbs 6:1-5 remind us of the very practical instruction found in the book of Proverbs. It includes, as we see here, even something so practical as the teaching that those who put

themselves in the position to cover a loan another defaults on is unwise. It is not wise, since it can put you in a bind. It is also unwise since it can encourage the other person to be irresponsible, thinking it is fine if they don't pay their loan.

Matthew 19:16-30, the main passage in our New Testament reading, tells of a rich young man who asked Jesus, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Though the rich young man told Jesus he believed he had kept the commandments of God, Jesus knew he had not really dealt with God from the heart and with the humility of a child (see 19:13-15). Jesus told Him to sell all He had, give it to the poor, and follow Him. Jesus was not teaching that such an action would earn salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Instead, He was addressing that one area of life within the young man which showed more than anything else he was not ready to trust Jesus truly and to follow Him. His riches were more important to him than Jesus and his eternal life. This is why Jesus went on to teach that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. They don't think they need it and their riches are more important. Yet, Jesus goes on to say that "with God all things are possible" (v. 26). In other words, God can reach one who is rich.

The passage ends by revealing to us those who follow Jesus and lose out in this life because of it, will be richly rewarded in the age-to-come. So, as Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:19-24, we should seek our pleasure and treasure in Him and His kingdom, not in the stuff of this world.