

Liturgy & Narrative in Exodus 12:1-13:16

The liturgical practices set forth in Exodus 12:1-13:16 are that of a rite of passage, Israel's transformation from captives into a free nation, once again taking their rightful place as the chosen people of YHWH. It was mentioned that the instruction regarding the Passover meal comes before the event itself (Fretheim, 138). In this regard, the liturgy itself is part of the narrative, preceding the final of the mighty acts of God against Egypt on behalf of the Hebrew people. The process of celebrating Passover is done in a hurried manner, to ready the Israelites for their forthcoming flee from Egypt. The specific steps involved in preparing for and partaking of the meal are in fact themselves means of grace by which the Lord will spare their firstborn. Therefore, Passover is both preparation for imminent action, as well as a festival of remembrance upon each subsequent occasion.

It is clear that this event is the marking of a new chapter in the story of the chosen people. God instructs Moses and Aaron in 12:1-2 that this is to be the "lead month" ushering in the new year. It is a *double entendre* in that it has significance not only in the calendar year, but also theologically in the way YHWH is moving in the history of Israel (Durham, 153). Not unlike how we now measure chronology in reference to Christ's birth, using *Before Christ* (B.C.) and *Anno Domini* (A.D.), this is to be the dawn of a new age in the grand story of God and his people. There is also typology with Christological implications: the perfect lamb without spot or blemish, the smearing of the blood where vertical and horizontal planks intersect, and the fact that none of the bones of the sacrifice were to be broken – all foreshadow events to come much later in the New Testament.

There appears to be a theme of a dual-atonement in the original Passover story. Firstly, there is the death of the animal, to be smeared upon post and lintel, and secondly there is the death of all Egyptian firstborn – human and animal alike. Whereas Pharaoh sought to eventually wipe out the Israelites entirely, via the genocidal act of killing every male Hebrew child, God’s counter-strike is not intended to utterly annihilate Egypt, but to serve as a sternly solemn reminder of who is really in control (Fretheim, 141). It is interesting that not by the firstborn Aaron, but by the second son Moses, does God choose to deliver his people. Yet, both sons play an integral part in the deliverance.

In the aftermath of the tenth and final plague, Pharaoh goes back on his previous threat to Moses, that he would never see his face again – beseeching Aaron and Moses to take the people of Israel away from Egypt, finally agreeing to their terms. The whole of Egypt is in turmoil, in that there was not a single household which was unaffected by death. For fear of their lives, they entreat the Hebrew people to depart from them, as if any prolonging of their presence would bring further destruction upon Egypt. In this way, the words of the Lord are fulfilled, and Israel “plunders” Egypt – being given gifts of precious metals and stones to expedite their departure (Durham, 168).

There is a bit of ambiguity over the purported number of Israelite men who departed from Egypt, with scholars offering up their own spin on the interpretation (Durham, 172; Fretheim, 144). Since no conclusive explanation has been or will ever be brought forth, that is all I will speak of it here. What *is* important is that God delivered his people by a mighty hand, and gave them specific instructions on both how to prepare for, as well as remember, this deliverance. Henceforth, each Hebrew person is to confess the provision of God, as if they *themselves* were present for the Exodus (Fretheim, 147).