

Lessons from Goshen

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning as we gather, what a perfect declaration on this day, leave behind your past and your regrets. You know, this is that time of the year where for some reason, obviously the calendar change, we tend to have a renewed focus on that which should be important versus that which we have stressed that it should not have in days gone by, but here's the great news, it's not only available when the clock strikes midnight on January 1, it's available 24/7, 365, any time we realize our violation of the things of God, our sins and our past mistakes, when we confess them and lay them at his altar. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that can and will forgive us and so as a believer in Jesus Christ, we get to celebrate that kind of New Year's feel not just once a year but every moment of our walk with the Lord.

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time, Lord, thank you for the celebration not just of your goodness and your mercy, but your willingness to shed your blood on behalf of our sins. So Lord, as we come and your word is opened and we read your word and we study your word, Lord, I pray that we would be challenged by your word, particularly on this day, would it fulfill in our lives what you declared it to be in Hebrews 4, sharper than any two-edged sword. Lord, for those today that are hurting and they're bothered and they're struggling, God, I pray that your word would give them comfort during these days, but Lord, for those who are dealing with pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency, God, I pray it would be the edge of conviction that would come out of your word and that either and/or both would pierce our hearts just as you said, that would divide the bone and the marrow, the soul and the spirit. God, I pray that the next few moments would not just be a religious exercise but it would be the privilege of hearing the words of you, the one whom we have the privilege of having a relationship with through Jesus Christ. It is in his name we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Exodus 8. As you're turning to Exodus 8, I not only want to welcome you to a passage that is a part of our family of faith or our church Bible reading plan, but I want to welcome you to a passage of Scripture that is one of the most famous in all of the Bible and I would dare say, one of the most famous stories in all of human history, rightly so because it's a title

of the book of the Bible. We are right in the midst of a period known as the Exodus. It is this period where the people of Israel are finding their way out of the land of Egypt. For 400 years, they have been in captivity. For 400 years, they have been enslaved. There was a Pharaoh that rose up and according to Scripture said, "And he knew not Joseph." So for those 400 years as they were enslaved, eventually the Lord brought forth a servant by the name of Moses and he and his brother Aaron, they went unto Pharaoh with these very prophetic words, "Let my people go."

I'm sure you're very familiar with the story. Pharaoh hardens his heart. He will not let them go into the wilderness to worship the Lord, so there is a succession of judgments, of plagues that come from the hand of God. The first is the judgment of the plague of the water being turned into blood. The second is the frogs that inhabited not just the land but their very dwellingplaces. But the third plague, which we find ourselves in Exodus 8, is the plague of the lice and it was very different than the first two for this reason: in the first two plagues, the sorcerers, the magicians, shall we say the right hand men of the Pharaoh were able to imitate, they were able to duplicate, they were able in their means to somehow make it look like they were able to exhibit the same power as the God of Moses and Aaron, but when we get to chapter 8 in the book of Exodus, beginning in verse 19, we see a very different response from these magicians and sorcerers. It says,

19 Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said. 20 And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me. 21 Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are. 22 And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. 23 And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to morrow shall this sign be.

In the midst of this famous story, not only the Israelites coming out of Egypt but the plagues and the wrath of God being poured out in 10 successive judgments, we have this reference to this place, this entity called Goshen. Now this may be a word that you're unfamiliar with but you give me a few moments and I promise you're going to know more about Goshen than you ever wanted to know.

With that being said, I want to challenge each and every one of you today, I want to challenge you as an individual, I want to challenge you as a family unit, I want to challenge you as a church that we would learn the lessons from Goshen today, and I want to deal with some peculiar aspects of Goshen, then we're going to talk about a variety of things, but we're going to end up in the message today with the possibility of what Goshen could mean for your life, your family's life, and even for our family of faith's life.

For those of you that are note-takers or those of you that are very good at listening, this first point is going to kind of lay the groundwork for all of the lessons of Goshen, it is the fact that Goshen is a very peculiar place. It's not just mentioned in the book of Exodus, it's also mentioned in Joshua, but it originates in the book of Genesis and it originates with that individual by the name of Joseph, that one who was the youngest of his brethren, the family of which we know of the 12 tribes of Israel. He was his father's beloved and there were all kinds of blessings, materialistically speaking, that were poured out upon him. There was favor given to him that his older brothers were not appreciative of and they did not like, so there came a day where they hid him in a pit. They took the coat back to their father and they told a story that he had been slain by a wild animal, what eventually turned out, though, is he was sold to the Midians and eventually to the Egyptians as a hired servant. But whether he was in the dungeons of the Pharaoh or in the palace, he not only had favor with God, he found favor with those around him and Joseph rose to great prominence, so much so that the Lord gave him a vision and he declared to the leadership of Egypt and they listened to him that there would be a famine in the land for seven years.

So under his direction, they began to put away food in preparation for the seven year drought. Two years into this experience, his brothers at the discretion of their dad, came to Egypt. They were starving to death. They were desperate for food. They were willing to lay their lives at the Egyptian authorities. They did not know nor did they recognize that the man who was in charge of the distribution of the food was their own brother whom they had sold into what they thought was death, there to redeem them of even their past sins, mistakes and regrets. When he goes back to the leadership and says, "My brethren have come. They are shepherds from what we know as the land of Israel. Where shall they dwell?" It is in that place that we first hear the name Goshen. That's important for us because Goshen in its originality was a place for the people of God to reside in the midst of a famine, in the midst of destruction, in the midst of a foreign land. We'll draw the parallels as we go on.

The second thing that's kind of peculiar about Goshen is simply the name thereof. I know this is going to seem kind of earth-shattering to you, y'all ready for the definition of Goshen? Here we go, are you ready? It is the land of. That's it. It has no specific meaning. It's not the land of the tall trees. It's not the land of the swampy lakes, hint, hint, our community. It's not the land of big rocks. It just means the land of. Why is that important? Because as you see in this story and as we'll see for our own lives, Goshen cannot be relegated to a specific GPS coordinate. It is not the dirt that made it special, it was the inhabitants on top of the dirt that gave it favor from the Lord.

The last peculiar aspect of Goshen is actually where it was located. Now you just said we don't know exactly where it is but we do have a general idea that it was in the northeastern section or quadrant of what we know as the ancient land of Egypt, and this is what's important about that designation: that, yes, it is in Egypt just as the Pharaoh told them, "You can go into the land of Goshen," but if you go back in your Old Testament and you start researching the original boundaries of what we know as the Promised Land,

now today as we take trips and I know many of us will be on those trips even in days to come, east of the Mediterranean, west of the Jordan River there is this small piece of dirt about the size of Rhode Island and we call that the Promised Land, the inhabitation where the Israelites dwell. But God's original line went from northern Syria down to about modern-day, shall we say, Iraq and Kuwait, all the way across what we know as Saudi Arabia to the northeastern part of the continent of Africa. Why is this important? Because the land of Goshen was technically in Egypt but it was also a part of God's original plan for the inhabitants of Israel, so what it represents for us is being in the world but not of the world. So we see a particular place designed for the people of God to be distinct and to be different. Wherever they find themselves in this dark world, as we'll see in just a moment, they are to be a light in the midst thereof.

So what are the other lessons from Goshen? I think here from verse 22 it says, "I'm doing this because I am the LORD in the midst of the earth." You know, that's the purpose of Goshen. The entire purpose of Goshen was for the Lord himself to declare his power in the midst of what we know as Egypt. That's why it was designed. That was its entire purpose. In fact, as you read throughout these 10 plagues that are being poured out, I think we would all agree it is a demonstration of the power of God. I mean, we see his power with the water turning to blood. We see his power with the flies and with the lice, and we see it with the animals and the darkness and the death of the firstborn, and that is an incredible display of power but I think you would agree with me that it's not just the avant-garde display of power that is incredible, but when you can take your power and you can segment it based on a specific locale.

Allow me to demonstrate. There is a man a little bit later in Scripture by the name of Gideon. Gideon is a warrior and a general for the Lord. He's going into battle. He has 30,000 men set aside to go into the battle. What does the Lord say? "You've got too many, Gideon. We need to knock this down just a little bit." Eventually the Lord gets him down to 300 men. Now I don't want to fault Gideon, I think I would have made the same response, "God, I had 30,000, now you want 300. You're going to have to demonstrate something for me because I'm not seeing it the way you are." So what did God do? This is incredible, he says, "Alright, here's what I want you to do," his conversation with Gideon, "Go outside tomorrow and there is going to be dew covering the entire ground in your front yard but put a rug out there and that rug is going to be completely dry." Now that's a demonstration of power, not just that you can bring the dew but you can dictate where it lands. Well, Gideon's impressed but he's convinced so in further dialog the Lord says, "Okay, tomorrow the land will be dry, the fleece or the rug will be wet. Not only can I segment where my power is displayed, I can reverse it if I so need to."

What we see here with the purpose of what we know as Goshen is the Lord is declaring that he is capable and he is able and he is all-powerful in all matters of his creation and those that reject what he says, as we see in this passage, suffer the unfortunate consequences of his judgment, but to those who heed and those who listen, the challenge for us, there is this place called Goshen, it is the demonstration of his power not just to pour wrath out but to provide an area of what we say protection and provision.

Speaking of provision, turn to chapter 9 as we continue with what we know as these plagues. I want you to see how Goshen was a place of provision. It says,

1 Then the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. 2 For if thou refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still, 3 Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain [or disease]. 4 And the LORD [listen to this] shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all that is the children's of Israel.

Fast forward to verse 7.

7 And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

What we see when we talk about Goshen, not just the exodus experience but the parallel, the challenge to our own lives, it is the provision of God – hear me clearly – not necessarily the prosperity of God. I think one of the great perversions we have of contemporary Christianity today is what we commonly call the prosperity Gospel, this idea that somehow, some way if I'm doing the right things or I'm walking with the Lord, I will have an abundance of wealth, I will have an abundance of favor upon my life. You do not see that as the story throughout Scripture, in fact, the Apostle Paul who I think we would all dare say did pretty well following Jesus Christ, according to 2 Corinthians 12, he had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan that he begged God three times, "Please take this away from me!" But the Lord said, "Oh, no, no, no. It's because of that that you honor me and you give me glory and I am exalted in your life."

You see, provision is God giving you what you need, prosperity is you're getting what you want. There's a big difference. What did he give the Israelites? He gave them what they needed. They continued and I know and I apologize if I offend those of you that are vegetarians but I'm a native Texan and, man, a good dead cow is good any day to me. But nonetheless, these cows that provided food and nourishment and sustenance for them, you notice in the story that the Egyptian cows didn't come into Goshen and double their cow herd but they had all that they needed, so much so that Pharaoh was flabbergasted by this.

Later in the Scripture we are introduced to a prophet by the name of Elijah and Elijah demonstrates the provision of God because he goes into the home of a widow and this widow has one son and he tells her that he's hungry and he needs nourishment as a prophet of God and he's asking for some food and here's what she tells him, "I only have enough food for one meal. My son and I are going to eat that meal and then we're going to lay down and we're going to die." Elijah says, "Give the food to me and the food will continue and you will live." And you read the story and they did not run out of food for

days. In somewhat of a contemporary context, in the second century BC there was a leadership within the Roman system that went and they defiled what we know as the Jewish temple. There was a family of the Maccabeans who rose up and refuting them and rebelling against them, the only problem is they only had one day's worth of oil for the lamp and it lasted eight days, hence the celebrate of lights that you and I know today as Hannukah.

You see, the Lord when it comes to Goshen, when it comes to that place where his people are gathered together, we discover that it's not necessarily a place of prosperity but it is always a place of provision and we also discover that it's a place of protection. Now when you come to verse 22 of chapter 9, this is my favorite of the plagues, and before you think I've lost my mind, "You mean you have a favorite plague?" I will explain that in just a moment. I don't like any of them but this is the one of the plagues that I have probably had some semblance of observance in my own life. Verse 22,

22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.

23 And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. 24 So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail.

So again we see that this place known as Goshen is not only a place wherein the midst of famine or in the midst of destruction that food was provided for them, but when there are hailstones falling from the sky and fire running along the ground, they are protected from the effects thereof.

In the spring of 1992, I got to personally witness what we commonly refer to as the Great Hailstorm of Waco, Texas. I witnessed there with my own eyes chunks of ice falling out of the sky the size of softballs and small basketballs. I saw cars completely impaled. I saw people knocked out. I saw buildings that were just ravaged and windows were nowhere to be found. The birds of the air, the trees, it completely ravaged this community in which it took place. I don't know what the hail looked like in this story but when you begin to look at the plagues, I don't think God was relegated to ice the size of softballs, there might have been hailstones the size of Volkswagen bugs coming down. I mean, I don't know but it says it smote everything, it destroyed everything.

Then there's this part that's added to it that's very unique, it says that fire ran along the ground. Now there are many occurrences in Scripture where the Lord rains down fire whether it be Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis or the Second Coming in the book of Revelation, but it doesn't say that fire came down, it says fire ran along the ground, and in

verse 23 it says it thundered. Now I know I'm not a meteorologist and there are some of you that are, but last time I checked when you have thunder, you also have lightning? And so in the midst of this storm with this massive amount of frozen water descending on the land of Egypt, the fact that it says that fire ran along the ground, it leaves open the possibility that not only were people running for their lives from that which was coming from above, but there could have been that which was running along the ground because water is a pretty good conductor of electricity which lightning consists thereof. But in the land of Goshen, there was no hail. There was no fire around the ground. They were completely protected from a judgment, from a plague that would have been so destructive in their lives.

So Goshen demonstrates the power of God by providing for his people, by protecting his people, but it also serves in the prophetic. If you'll turn to chapter 10, the ninth of the 10 plagues is the plague of darkness and there in verse 22 of chapter 10, this is what we hear, this is what we read about this plague. It says,

22 And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: 23 They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.

Not only were storms suspended in Goshen, not only was disease suspended in Goshen but what we know as light and darkness was supernaturally demarcated and divided in Goshen. But the reason its prophetic is not only the fact that the Israelites only wanted to go to the wilderness three days to worship their God, not only does it picture three days that Jesus said he would be in the heart of the earth for the sins of humanity, but you get this idea of the gravity of the darkness, they couldn't even see anything or anybody in front of them, yet in Goshen everything is wonderful. You see, it's a picture not just of the plagues upon the earth, it's a picture of eternity. You see, the Bible declares that one day when each of us breathes our last breath that there will be one of two places that we will spend for all of eternity, either a place the Bible calls hell or a place the Bible calls heaven. That place the Bible calls hell is pictured time and time again as a place of darkness. Now some of you say, "Yeah, but it also says it's a place of fire too and fire brings light." Yes, but Jesus even called it brimstone which is basically an Old Testament word for sulfur which burns clear, a place of total absence of light. But what happens in Goshen? It's perfectly fine just like in Revelation 21, it says one day there is going to be a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem, and it says there is no need for the sun therein for Jesus is the light thereof.

You see, Goshen is prophetic not just in the sense of the judgments of God and the protection and provision of God, but it also shows us that there is coming a time that based on what we've decided for Jesus Christ, it's either an eternity of absolute darkness and misery or a wonderful opportunity of what he called everlasting life. But the last lesson from Goshen is what I want to call the possibility. You look at everything from its name, to its location, to its purpose, its provision, its protection, and even its eternal prophetic element, the possibility is that Goshen does not have to be relegated to a small

piece of land in northeast Egypt thousands of years ago. I dare say that you and I as believers in Jesus Christ, we can experience a little bit of Goshen today. Why? It wasn't the dirt they stood on, it was those who trusted the Lord that were standing on the dirt. What made those in Goshen so significant, their amount of wealth? No. Their amount of earthly prosperity and popularity? No. Do you know what the inhabitants of Goshen possessed? One simple thing: they heard and heeded the word of God. That was it.

Now for those of you who are wondering, Goshen was not just resided in by Israelites. Did you know as you read the story there were Egyptians who understood, "That place over there is okay. I'm getting out of Egypt." So it was a place where people would come to for refuge. It was a place where people came to get out of the darkness, to get out of the disease, to be in the light and the protection and the provision of God. But what was the one thing that made it unique? It was possessed by those who heard and heeded the word of God. Allow me to challenge you today with a challenge that Joshua gave the Israelites. They walked through what we know as the wilderness, they go into the Promised Land, they cross the River Jordan. Joshua 24, I'm sure many of you have this on screensavers, you have this on rocks in your yards, you have this on pictures in your house, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Can I give you a challenge today as we roll into this new year, as for me and my house, we will be Goshen. As for me and my family, we will be Goshen. As for me and my church, we will be Goshen. As for me and my workplace, we will be Goshen. Because in that place because we believe in and do the words of God, it's going to be different there than it is everywhere else. Every single one of us through Jesus Christ has the possibility of Goshen in our lives and do we not all as we make resolutions, as we make goals, are we not really desiring provision and protection? Yet the Lord says you can write down all that that you want but if you'll just heed my words, your home can be Goshen, your business can be Goshen, your entire community, your school can be Goshen. So today, as for me and my house, we will be Goshen. How about you and your house?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Today as we continue our time together, maybe the Lord has shown or demonstrated to you some areas in your life that look more like Egypt than they do Goshen. We celebrated before we opened the word of God today that you can leave your past and your regrets behind through the blood of Jesus Christ and maybe today as a believer in Jesus Christ this is a time of renewal, this is a time of surrender, this is a time of submission to his will, his way and his word, but maybe today you don't sense that, or maybe today you're just wondering how and what and when and where, and I want to be very clear, the only way to experience Goshen, the only way to experience forgiveness, the only way to experience the provision of God is a relationship with him through Jesus Christ. There is no other way. Maybe you're that person today, whether physically here on our campus or somewhere as a part of our media ministry, that's come to that point or come to that place in their lives where you say, "Do you know what? I can't go down this path anymore. I've heard about the person of Jesus, I realize my sinful condition and I need to be redeemed, I need to be saved, I need to be forgiven." You say, "Well, what do I do?" The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Can I encourage you today just to call on the name of the Lord, just to cry out to him. You say, "Well, I don't know what that looks like." Let me be

honest, there's no magic formula, it's just having a conversation with the Lord, technically you can call it prayer. There is no magic word, there is no set of subsequent sentences that must be said, just the cry of your heart. So let me encourage you today, maybe this is the conversation you need to have not out loud and not even the same words that I would say but maybe something like this, you say, "God, today I realize I'm on the wrong path. I realize I'm headed down the wrong direction. I realize that I've messed up and according to your word I've sinned. I have gone against your word. I have gone against your desires for my life and I realize that your word says the wages of my sin is death but the gift of Jesus Christ is eternal life. So Lord, today I believe. I not only believe that I'm the problem, I believe that Jesus is the answer. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sins on the cross. God, today I believe Jesus rose from the dead three days later, that he loved me so much that he was willing to endure all that so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the world's problems but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. The best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe today you had one of those Goshen moments, maybe today is the day you ask Jesus Christ to save you of your sins, maybe today you realize like the young girl earlier, you need to publicly profess your faith, your baptism, or maybe today the Lord has said this local church is your Goshen. We'd love to have a conversation with you. We'd love to celebrate with you this day.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time, thank you. Thank you that you're a God of mercy, you're a God of love, you're a God of forgiveness, you're a God of grace. Lord, as many of us have spent the last few days looking back and looking ahead, we realize that if we would be honest with ourselves, God, if you do not lead just as Psalm 127:1 says, if you don't build the house, we build it in vain. Help us, O God, today to desire Goshen more than Egypt in our lives. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.