

“THE SERVANT OF THE LORD” – A Study of the Life of Moses**“The Last Plague” (Exodus 11:1-12:1-20)**

Pharaoh and his people were sinning against a flood of evidence. Each plague accomplished precisely what God intended. The Lord had sent nine devastating plagues of judgment yet Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his heart and tried to negotiate with God's commands. The sovereign God does not make deals with pagan rulers! The Lord responded by hardening Pharaoh's heart. God had now given Pharaoh over to his sin. Someone described that as God turning the lights out of the road to hell! The Lord would send one final plague upon Pharaoh.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold. And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people. (v1-3)

The Lord revealed to Moses that the last plague would result in Pharaoh's eventual capitulation. He would not only let them go but he, “*shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.*” The man who proudly declared, “*I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go*” (Exod. 5:2b) would now be forced to do God's will. The Lord gave Moses a number of promises in Exodus 3,

And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty. But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians. (Exod. 3:19-22)

The first promise had already been fulfilled in the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. The timing for the other promises were about to be realised. God's word can always be trusted both in terms of His promised judgments as well as His promised blessings. Indeed, if we cannot not trust His promises of judgment we will doubt the promises of blessing. This reality should move our hearts to reverence the Lord,

Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. (Psa. 33:8-10)

Not only would Israel be freed from the bondage of slavery but also the Lord would ensure that they received some “back pay” for the years of slavery from the Egyptians. This plundering of the Egyptians' wealth symbolised that God had made Israel to conquer their enemies. It seemed impossible the first time Moses stood before Pharaoh for this to occur but when God is

involved the impossible becomes possible. That is the secret, “*And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians.*” Solomon reminds us that God is sovereign over the hearts of even the unbelievers, “*The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will*” (Prov. 21:1). The Lord is still able to move people and circumstances around us in a way that truly astounds us. A person can persecute you one day and show favour to you the next when God intervenes.

Moses had been rejected on multiple occasions by Israel. Despite his weakness and fears, this man prevailed in doing the will of God. At times he stood alone. The Lord publicly honoured this frail servant, “*Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants, and in the sight of the people.*” This is a lesson to us all when we are called to take our stand for God. Even if we have to stand alone, God can turn it around, “*When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him*” (Prov. 16:7).

And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land. (v4-10)

The Lord then revealed the exact detail of the final plague to Pharaoh. All the firstborn of Egypt would die, whom the Egyptians considered sacred. This judgment would be widespread from Pharaoh’s firstborn to the firstborn of all the Egyptian animals. Now God had previously warned Pharaoh that He regarded Israel as His firstborn, “*Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn*” (Exod. 4:22-23). Pharaoh had also legislated a campaign to murder all Hebrew male babies. So he will now reap what he has sown.

This final plague would be the culmination of all the others. It would devastate the hearts of the Egyptians like no other, “*And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.*” It would also silence all those who have opposed God’s people, “*But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast.*” It is interesting that the timing of this death plague was at midnight. Ligon Duncan explains,

Ra, the sun god, was their great god. And nighttime was a picture of the battle between darkness and death and chaos against Ra, the sun god. And midnight was the pinnacle of that darkness, and so the most terrifying time for Egyptians. And God says, “That’s exactly when I’m coming to visit you. I’m coming at that point when you yourself recognize yourself most vulnerable.”

Again we must marvel at the grace and mercy of God to Pharaoh and the Egyptians in giving them space to repent. God had even given them a foretaste of hell in the darkness that

could be felt. Sadly Pharaoh's heart was still hard to the window of mercy. Even when some of his people began to acknowledge the power of Jehovah and the dignity of Moses, Pharaoh was willing to stand alone in his rebellion. Is this not a picture of a depth of depravity in the human heart? This stubbornness so angered Moses that he withdrew himself from the king's presence, "*And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger.*"

God will have the last word on every sinner. The Egyptians would discover He is not a God to tangle with. Those who resist God's grace will be judged yet He will make a way for His people to be saved. It will all happen at the same point. He had a perfect plan to spare the Israelites from the midnight massacre of the firstborn. It would involve a blood sacrifice that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice at the Cross.

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's passover.
(v1-11)

The Lord used the inauguration of the passover as the beginning of the Jewish year. The month Abib (March/April) would later be called Nisan (cf. Neh. 2:1) during the Babylonian Exile era. The Passover was not Israel's passover but, "*it is the LORD's passover.*" Therefore, it was not an ordinance that the people could make up their own rules about but they had follow the rules the Lord had laid down. In the same manner, the Lord's table in the NT is not the table of the church but the table of the Lord. He alone is sovereign over who He invites to it and how it must be conducted.

The word "passover" means "to pass" or "to leap over." The detail of the passover is very important because it points to Jesus Christ and God's passing over redeemed believers from judgment by shedding of His blood (cf. Isa. 53:7). The NT reveals this direct connection, "*Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*" (1 Cor. 5:7). That is why it had to be an unblemished male, "*Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year.*" Christ would be tempted with the full power of sin yet would be without sin (cf. Hebrews 4:14-16). The lamb must not have any broken bones (Exod. 12:46b). Likewise, Christ died in accordance with the OT prophecy that, "*He keepeth all His bones: not one of them is broken*" (Psa. 34:20; cf. John 19:32-36).

The passover lamb would be kept with them for less than four days and then its blood would be shed and sprinkled on the doors of their homes as a covering. In like manner Christ would publicly minister amongst God's people for less than four years and then have His blood shed as a covering for His people from God's judgment. Peter tells us that believers are redeemed, "*with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Peter 1:19).

The sprinkling of the blood on doorposts pictures the application of Christ's atoning work to our hearts (cf. 1 Peter 1:2). Each person had to have the blood sprinkled on his door for the judgment to be avoided. Intellectual assent was not enough. In the same manner, our appropriation of Christ's atoning blood must be personal, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

The Passover meal was to be eaten together in a state of readiness and anticipation, *And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's passover.*" In the same manner, the Lord's supper is to be eaten together by God's people with hearts anticipating the Lord's return to deliver His people from this world, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death **till He come**" (1 Cor. 11:26). It is no wonder that John the Baptist cried when he saw Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. (v12-13)

This final plague was more than just a punishment upon the wickedness of the Egyptians to Israel. The Lord was also demonstrating His sovereign power and total defeat of the deities that the Egyptians trusted in, "against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment." They would be seen to be impotent when confronted with the power of Jehovah.

No one should make the mistaken assumption that the Israelites were spared because they were "better" people than the Egyptians. The Israelites were equally deserving of God's judgment for their sins. Indeed, if the Israelites were righteous then there would be no need of the passover sacrifice! The only real difference between the Israelites' firstborn who lived and the Egyptians' firstborn who died was based on sovereign grace alone. Every time Israelite parents looked at their firstborn son from that day onwards they were reminded of God's grace. The lamb's blood on the doorposts was a divinely planned and provided means of deliverance founded upon God's sovereign grace, not Israel's merits. Salvation was, and is, totally of God.

The Israelites might not have understood how exactly the shedding of the passover lamb's blood preserved their lives. What every Israelite required was faith in God's word. It was not a multiple-choice option for discussion but there was only one way of salvation that required total obedience. Being an Israelite by ancestry did not spare you from God's judgment. The critical thing was the shed blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts of your home, "for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). If there were no blood, then God would judge that home by taking the death of the firstborn. Likewise today salvation is not passed in our DNA. If a person has Christian parents yet refuses to seek the application of the shed blood of God's lamb to forgive his or her sins, there is no escape from God's judgment. That is an eternal truth. All of us need God's lamb for, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be

done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread. (v14-20)

God instituted the Passover as a permanent feature of Jewish religious life. It was to be a yearly reminder not only of God's great deliverance from Egypt but also of the coming sacrifice of Christ. This event was intended to serve as a means of gospel instruction for the future generations of Israel, "*therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.*" Likewise the NT ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table are teaching opportunities that we must not only celebrate but also learn from them.

The Israelites were forbidden from having leaven in their homes at this time. This was because God had ordained that leaven, which works silently and secretly in the dough, should symbolise impurity and corruption in the spiritual life of mankind. Guzik opines,

Leaven was also a picture of sin and corruption, because of the way a little leaven influences a whole lump of dough, and also because of the way leaven "puffs up" the lump - even as pride and sin makes us "puffed up." Significantly, God called them to walk "unleavened" after their initial deliverance from Egypt. Symbolically, they were being called to a pure walk with the LORD.

In the same manner, because Christ is our Passover lamb, we are called to walk holy lives free from the leaven of sin. That is why Paul exhorted to those in sin, "*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*" (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

This Passover story reminds us again that God is a holy God who takes sin seriously. The wages of sin is death! Someone has to pay for it. Even the bloody rituals of Passover with the slaying of the innocent lamb were designed to convey the horror of sin's consequences. God is abundant in grace and mercy but that is only one side to His character. The same God who gave the blessings of Eden to the first couple also cast them out in judgment from the garden and cursed the ground. If God overlooked sin, He would not be God.

The Passover story is not some historical footnote in history that has no relevance to us today. It reminds us of God's amazing grace. Sadly in the church today we have got so used to God's grace that we think He owes us it. We even get angry when we receive something else from Him. We sing about amazing grace yet frankly for most of us it doesn't amaze us! Be amazed at it afresh.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did the Passover Lamb represent?

2. Why did the blood of the lamb have to be shed and applied to the doorposts?

3. What was the spiritual significance in removal of all the leaven?

4. What have you learned from this chapter?
