

## Redemption Through Judgment (The great Egyptian idol smack-down), Exodus 7-13

*The Israelites are delivered from a world of bondage to false gods by the death of a substitute, just like us through our Lord Jesus.*

**Reading:** Exodus 12:1-13. **Focus: Exodus 12:12-13** *For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.*

We are looking at the life of Moses. Today I am covering about six months of his life, his confrontation with the Egyptian pharaoh and the subsequent ten plagues, covering Exodus chapters 7 to 13. There's a lot to cover so "there's too much for me to explain, so I'll have to sum up."

**Review.** In the second millennium BC the patriarch Abraham moved and lived as a resident alien in the promised land, along with his son Isaac, and his son Jacob. During Jacob's lifetime, due to a drought, he and his family move to Egypt and over time are oppressed as a class of slaves. Hundreds of years later God raises up a descendent Moses to be a deliverer. Moses as a child had been adopted into the royal Egyptian family but had to flee the country because he had murdered an Egyptian in his anger over how the Egyptians treated the Israelites. After forty years herding sheep in the wilderness God appears to Moses and sends him back. He is now 80 years old. *(God can use not only very young people like Daniel or Ruth or Timothy or Mary, but he can does use much older people. Our age does not limit the eternal God.)*

**Moses confronts the Pharaoh** to release the Israelites to go meet with the God of Israel, The LORD (YHWH – I am who I am), in the wilderness that they might worship and serve him. Pharaoh refuses and says, I do not know your god. (Ex 5:1) In the chapters that follows Pharaoh meets the Lord in a succession of national disasters, or cataclysms, ten of them, which are usually called the ten plagues. They are natural, but also supernatural, as Pharaoh's magicians soon discover. The disasters begin at Moses' word and end with his prayers to the Lord.

Some **background on the Egyptian religion** is helpful.\* The goal of the religion and state of Egypt was a stable harmony between humanity, nature, and the gods. The king or Pharaoh was the main mediator who maintained a good relation with the gods, who assured the rhythm of life in the Nile and livestock. (So many idols were half-human, half-animal, demonstrating this hope of harmony between the natural and supernatural spheres.) . The health of the Nile was associated with Osiris; the livestock with Hathor; the sun with Re (or Amon-Re), and so on. So the ten plagues were a kind of a smack-down of the gods of Egypt, showing that there is no God but the Lord. There is a conflict of worldviews between Pharaoh and Moses. There's not a lot of room for accommodation. Pharaoh, who is not just a religious leader but also a head of state, claims to be the provider of the things that only the true living God provides.

One after another, there are disruptions of the natural order... Is this too judgmental? Innocent people and animals? But God is the Creator of all, and Sustainer. He gives to all life and breath. To him all are accountable, not him to us. He is the infinitely wise and righteous judge. With justice comes judgment. He created the world an orderly place and in judgment can turn it back to chaos and disorder. He is the Lord. (Ps 7:11). "You will know that the Lord is God." "You shall have no other gods besides Me."

Sometimes **judgment comes in this life**. Rarely does he judge in such a climactic way. There's the great flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah. But this was the deliverance of his covenant people after hundreds of years of slavery. "I will multiply my signs and wonders... by great acts of judgment... I will stretch out my hand..." he says. But more, judgment for all will come at the end. (*Learn more about this in the Revelation class second hour!*)

**Idolatry, or having false gods**, is not just something characteristic of the ancient world. Like the Egyptians we trust certain authorities and imagined powers and things to bring us life, to give us security, to define us and give us a reason to live. We may think that it is our technology or government or military or chance or evolution that secures our lives. We may think the pursuit of pleasure or entertainment or parties will give our lives ultimate meaning. (Usually we end up with a headache, unpaid bills, bondage, and broken relationships... and then we need to find another party.) Our little gods claim to have more authority and power than they actually have to produce what they promise. Maybe we think that one special relationship, that guy or girl, or even our prodigy children that will solidify our existence. Tim Keller writes,

*What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give... [T]he human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them... An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure." There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship. --Timothy Keller, Counterfeit Gods (Dutton, 2009)*

Kelly Minter, in her book *No Other gods*, wrote that when she saw a towering stone sphinx she really didn't feel moved to worship, mostly because her Western culture really hadn't sold her on that. She said she would be more tempted by a giant ice cream cone, preferably one with peanut-butter chunks.

Another way of saying this is in the words of the Apostle John (1 John 2:15-17), *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions - is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along*

*with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.* (See also 5:18-21) There are also spiritual powers behind some of these gods who will bring us into darkness and bondage.

**But Pharaoh hardens his heart.** Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart when it's his desire for people to repent? We see that Pharaoh himself hardened his heart first (as we all have). God chose to strengthen his resolve and so made him a prisoner of his own choice. It was a judgment upon Pharaoh. The real mystery is why he should *soften* those of us who have likewise hardened our hearts toward God? (Rom 9)

**Nine plagues follow, then the tenth,** which is the culmination. The death of the firstborn, which would affect every family. It would affect all the Israelite families too. Why couldn't God just spare them? We learn subsequently, and as Dan shared last week, that the Israelites were idolaters, too. Even Moses' family must participate in the Passover to be spared from the death of the firstborn.

**Israel is saved not out of judgment, or through judgment, but by judgment,** the death of the innocent representative. The Lamb is substitute. The blood on the door signifies the angel of death that the death has already taken place in that house. [Illus. back burning.]

Prairie fires were one of the most terrifying threat to pioneers. The threat continues today with fires in Oklahoma, Texas and Colorado. Kansas seems to have diminished the threat by fighting (future) fire with (intentionally set) fire. In areas today controlled burning or back burning helps reduce the grass and material that could feed a brush fire or forest fire. Prairie fires could move as fast as 600 feet per minute and burn as hot as 700 degrees Fahrenheit. A prairie resident or traveler often had no more warning than seeing a long line of tan smoke on the horizon. At night, the warning came in the form of a distant glow or perhaps the smell of burning grass. The experience Amanda Burks had on an 1871 cattle drive from Nueces County to Kansas happened in Indian Territory, but it could as well have been in Texas. "On one occasion," she later wrote, "a prairie fire ran us out of camp before breakfast. We escaped by fleeing to a part of the plains which had been burned previously, called a 'burn' by people of that section."

So by faith we place ourselves in the only safe place, where the judgment has already fallen. For the Israelite it was the Passover lamb, which pointed ahead for us to Jesus, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

**Moses preached a kind of gospel.** What is the gospel according to Moses?

- 1) There is only one true God, Creator and Judge over all, who made us to know him, commune with him, serve him, and enjoy him forever. "Let My people go that they may serve me."
- 2) God will judge all the false gods of this world and the hardness of human heart with great judgment, either in this life or in the next. "He will come to judge the living and the dead."

3) The only escape is to come under judgment by the judgment upon another. The blood of the Passover Lamb caused the Angel of Death to pass over because death had already struck that home.

4) The proper response is faith, to place the blood of the Lamb upon your door and then be dressed in preparation for departure as the people of God for another land.

**What is different?** The acts of power through Moses were acts of judgment, but when Christ came his acts of power were of mercy... healing, feeding, delivering, providing for the poor, raising the dead. Why could he do this? Unlike Moses, Jesus had no sin or idolatry of his own, but would become the Lamb himself. The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" (John 1:29) Jesus would take upon himself all judgment that we deserve for our hardness and rebellion and so he extends forgiveness and mercy.

**Application: faith.** At the beginning of the series David Kingston gave this definition of faith: "Intellectual conviction of a truth combined with actions flowing from that conviction." And we might add, "biblical faith is believing what God has said and acting upon it." Let's look at two NT verses by way of application:

- **Hebrews 11:27, 28.**

*By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.*

A) **Courage to face fear and speak up.** Pharaoh was the world, the power, the state. Moses was an old shepherd, a leader of slaves. Moses didn't raise up an army or engage in guerilla warfare or burn buildings. He spoke God's word. And so we need to do today. Exclusive claims then and now. "I don't know your God, I don't need your God." Do we need to get a robe, and staff, and grow a beard like Moses (Charleton Heston photo.) I really don't think this is the right image. More like this ("Freedom of Speech", Norman Rockwell). We need to humbly speak up and gently and respectfully share the claims of Christ against the false gods of the world. (1 Pet 3:15)

B) **Endurance.** Faith which endures. 6 months, a long contest. Cf. Eph 6:1ff. (The blessing of a multi-generational fellowship!)

C) **Seeing the unseen.** Faith which sees the unseen. Means we become more interested in the words of the unseen God than the images of the seen world. This directly affects what we think about and what we look at.

D) **Applying the blood.** Trusting and applying the work of Christ to our lives.

- **1 Corinthians 5:6-8**

*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

E) **Embracing a new identity** (from slaves → sons, hosts) and destiny (Unleavened bread). Faith includes repentance as a way of life. (*Luther and penance: #1 of 95 Theses by Martin Luther, 1517. "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."*) Our whole way of life is oriented to the new creation. And repentance is part of that. It's the flip side of faith, because we have turned *to God from idols* (1 Thess 1:9, 10).

**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** <sup>9</sup> For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Some of us may want to **put Jesus on the altar of our hearts but not remove the idols** that are there. If repentance, confession, and moral change is not part of our life we have to ask if we in fact know the true and living God. "You shall have no other gods besides Me."

**Ultimately, all of us will end up in one of two places:** 1) worshiping and serving the only true and living God through Jesus who will give us freedom and the good he designs for us, and so we will have reasonable happiness in this life, along with suffering and troubles, but will consummate with eternal joy and happiness, or 2) we will choose for ourselves idols and gods who will give us what we want in this life, which we may or may not get, but in the end will bind us and fail us and so we will be ultimately lost. These are the only two destinies presented in the Bible.

### **Can we confess this together?**

*What is my only comfort in life and death?*

*That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; yes, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, wherefore by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready, henceforth, to live for him.*

(The Heidelberg Catechism, 1563)

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\*See *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation*, by Henri Frankfort (1948, Dover reprint, 2011)