

Exodus | The Rise of a Liberator

The Passover

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11.16.14

Exodus 12.24-42

"And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. ²⁵ "When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. ²⁶ "And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' ²⁷ you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" And the people bowed low and worshiped. ²⁸ Then the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

²⁹ Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. ³⁰ Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. ³¹ Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, "Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said. ³² "Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also." ³³ The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, "We will all be dead." ³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders. ³⁵ Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; ³⁶ and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

³⁷ Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. ³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. ³⁹ They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

⁴⁰ Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹ And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴² It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations.

Today is the final sermon in the present series on the Book of Exodus. You can get the previous sermons online and we HOPE to return to the book next year during the Fall of 2015.

This episode is really the beginning OF the Exodus as this is that moment (that arrives like a thief in the night sudden) this is the moment of departure when the Israelites make their exit from slavery in Egypt.

This is ALSO the Tenth Plague... it took four chapters to cover the first NINE plagues but THREE WHOLE CHAPTERS are devoted to this final plague. And THIS moment, the plague on the firstborn and the exodus of the Israelites is to be commemorated for all subsequent generations. This is the start of their NEW calendar-year. This is the moment of New Birth for the Nation when they walk out, not slinking or creeping or sneaking out the BACKDOOR but dignified and laden with gold and treasure, ALL THE BACK-PAY for their years of slavery in hand as they walk out the front door unopposed and unhindered.

This will become THE Defining Story of their national life. There is power in STORY and in the telling and retelling of stories... more than just a teaching or a concept, THIS is the foundational narrative that forms the spine of their national identity.

In these three chapters (11, 12 & 13), and we only read a small section, two things are happening – the Exodus EVENT is taking place and the commemoration of that EVENT is commanded and regulated. In it we see something that for many in our modern society is missing – the power of a defining story and the necessity of THE defining story for the flourishing of lives, families, churches and even whole cultures.

Let's look at #1 – The Past Occurrence #2 – The Future Remembrance and #3 The Present Significance

In that mysterious tension as we saw last week but declined to EXPLAIN, where Pharaoh hardens his heart and where God ALSO hardens Pharaoh's heart IN ORDER THAT God would have occasion to show His power and justice and BE MADE KNOWN...now that process is finished and Pharaoh's defiance has cost the lives of all the firstborn of Egypt.

We first heard that this would happen way back in chapter four when God tells Moses (quote), "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'"" (4.22-23).

THIS plague doesn't come with an "or else" clause like the previous nine.

The Israelites are told to prepare for what will be a swift result, an immediate expulsion. They are to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver, clothing (as I said the "back-pay" that was owed them). They are to make bread but without yeast because (when the call comes) there will be no time for the dough to rise... they'll take the flat-bread and go.

AND they are to take a lamb and have it live with them four days and then slaughter them in

unison and paint its blood on the doorframe of each house. This will be an indicator that God will honor and destruction will NOT come to those homes marked by blood. From out of death will come life.

The lamb is to be roasted and eaten in haste, one per household; smaller families uniting with larger ones (like ancient Home Groups!)

The Israelites obeyed Aaron and Moses and then... they wait. And, after midnight, the call comes, the cries from every Egyptian home not marked with blood...from lowly servants right up to the palace.

Finally, Pharaoh has had enough. He calls Moses and Aaron and says, "Get up and get out... ALL of you... go worship this God and bless me on your way out."

Apparently, some of the Egyptians/non-Hebrews (accd to v.38) joined the Israelites and some 600,000 left that night with all their plunder and that flat dough...some of it already baked...and all their livestock. The 430 years in Egypt was over.

Again, there are things we don't understand, maybe don't LIKE about this. Why did everyone have to suffer for the sins of the king? Well, that's the nature of leadership... it happens in families, organizations, churches, nations. When leaders make decisions, the followers bear the consequences or enjoy the fruit.

For the Israelites, a long, long captivity (not the whole 430 years but a good bit) was come to an end. The sense of relief they had is indescribable. They'd lived in terror. They'd undoubtedly seen many young boys and babies thrown in the Nile and heard the wailing of many mothers...they'd seen many, many young men grow old very quickly... they'd been crushed in mind, body and spirit for generations.

And now, VERY suddenly, they were able to breathe and walk and go where they willed... They were going to MEET the God of their fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Joseph), the God they were just starting to know as they'd seen His power over all creation. They were being re-born and would soon come again through the waters of birth and new creation.

AND threaded in through this Past Occurrence is the repeated mandate that THIS defining moment was to be remembered. This would be the start of the yearly calendar. It was to be celebrated YEARLY and this defining story of their national identity was to be told and retold to all future generations.

There are, as you read these three chapters, very specific regulations about how the lambs were to be treated and how, in the future, there would be a yearly re-enactment of the bread made without yeast, a yearly festival of "Unleavened Bread".

Children would find it all very strange and would undoubtedly ask questions and parents would find a teachable-moment, new occasions to tell and retell THIS identity-STORY – “Children, this is WHO we ARE! We are the people of Abraham. We belong to YHWH and He/the LORD saved us from slavery ...when He struck our torturers but PASSED OVER the children of Israel.”

As you read the three chapters it’s almost as if the future celebration of the events is as important as the events themselves! This is a STORY whose details CANNOT be forgotten and whose reenactment can NEVER be neglected. It’s so important that even AS the events are unfolding, the future is already in mind and ensuring THE FUTURE REMEMBRANCE is utmost in the mind of YHWH as He sets His people free!

So ...why IS THAT? What does God know about these events and about our nature and about the identity of a people and their future survival and their distinctive uniqueness and their USEFULNESS to the world – what does God know that WE MAY NOT?

Well, for one thing, “He knows our frame that we are but dust.” (Psa 103) We’re weak and ungrateful and... let’s face it...we just forget. We forget our anniversaries... we forget favors that people do for us...forget the sacrifices made by parents and others for our welfare. God knows the frailty of human memory!

Further, to COMMAND this remembrance is equivalent to commanding that future generations receive. In other words, the event, the liberation, the fact that the Israelites are spared death and this plague PASSES OVER...that’s grace but the way it’s to be received and appropriated and enjoyed... the way future generations will TAKE AND EAT is by remembrance... is BY FAITH.

We receive grace by faith. As oxygen is received by the lungs; as fragrance is received by the sense of smell; as images and sights are received by the eyes; as sounds are received by the ears SO IS GRACE RECEIVED BY FAITH. The lungs are the organ of reception for oxygen and FAITH is the organ of reception for GRACE. We receive grace by faith.

AND faith is exercised in the context of story. We receive grace when we hear the story of God’s saving acts and believe. That’s why THE SAVING ACT itself is important and right there with it, almost equal in importance is the mandate to tell and retell that story so that they themselves and that future generation MIGHT hear the story and receive GRACE by believing the STORY.

And IN THIS story ...a story of God’s past entry into the course of human events, (the appearing of YHWH in signs, in judgment, in mercy, in liberation, in the new birth of His people) AND in the mandate for future remembrance there’s a facet... or feature...or component of the story that can’t be missed (because it’s so prominent/repeated AND because of the increasing attention it gets as the whole STORY OF THE BIBLE UNFOLDS) and that feature...is the place of the FIRSTBORN in God’s plan.

This is where the past event, the ongoing/future remembrance is directly significant to our present.

In Exodus 4.22 God said, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I said to you, Pharaoh, 'Let My son go that he may worship Me'". Immediately after God said this to Moses and when Moses failed to make his own FIRSTBORN son distinct from the Egyptians by not circumcising that firstborn son... the very next passage (4.24) is that episode we find hard to understand, when God sought to kill Moses because of this failure. God took it REALLY seriously...and now we see WHY!

When Pharaoh killed the Israelite children and when he enslaved God's firstborn (Israel), God took it very seriously. This is God's child, His son, His firstborn. This is the Apple of God's Eye...His darling... this is God's Beloved...This is the MEANS by which God would reveal Himself to planet earth, the Son, the firstborn, His Israel.

But in the whole scope of the Bible we learn that it really ISN'T all of Israel...as an ethnic group... that is the Seed of Abraham (Gal 3.16) ...It's actually only ONE ...from the lineage of Abraham... a singular Person who embodies Israel...the One perfectly obedient, utterly loving, spitting image of the Father and the exact representation of His image, THE BELOVED SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED... the Firstborn from the dead, the Firstborn over all creation, thE Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, Jesus Christ. (Col 1.15, Rev 1.5)

We...and indeed...all the Israelites before us...WE are latter born sons...but HE, Jesus Christ HE IS THE TRUE SON OF GOD AND THE FIRSTBORN... the True Israel.

And the astounding beauty of grace is that...when God's True Firstborn appeared...when He came in the fullness of time to be born of a woman and born under our LAW... then God, the Father, did not spare His FIRSTBORN...in order to save US, His latter-born adopted sons and daughters.

We remember the long list of favored latter-born sons in the Bible: Abel (over Cain), Isaac (over Ishmael), Jacob (Esau), Joseph, and David and Solomon and Gideon and more... We ARE the latter-born sons who were spared because the True Firstborn Son, the perfect image of the Father (Heb 1.3) was substituted for us.

He became our Passover Lamb...He stood in our place that, marked by His blood, our life might come from His death. His life of spotless love and perfect harmony with God's will AND His sacrificial death AND His resurrection IS OUR EXODUS! He's given His favored status to us.

He's liberating all who remember...all who receive... all who REMEMBER and CELEBRATE His final and perfect Exodus. HE'S LIBERATING us to come out from slavery and know YHWH as Abba Father. Now to obey NOT as slaves but as beloved children!

Where once was only fear of punishment, of failure, of shame, of exposure, OF death, NOW the very Heart of God lives IN us and “you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8.14-16)

And this is OUR Story... this is OUR more perfect Exodus. This is OUR defining narrative that not only makes us a people and distinct from the world but also a community, a family, brothers and sisters in a New Birth...on a life-long pilgrimage...together!

And this is why we remember, week by week, this Good News and even act it out in a New Passover meal that sees and feels and tastes and eats this Story that nourishes and sustains us.

It’s the Power of a Story... if people have no story they have no identity. But the Christian trades in the story of the American Dream...or the non-story of the universe and life as a cosmic accident... or the story found on the cover of Cosmopolitan Magazine or the beer-commercials... or the University or the shopping mall or the sports stadium and the Christian gets caught up in a grand Story of Exodus: God come in Jesus Christ, the firstborn slain for the latter born to liberate the world.

We celebrate this story week by week... and if you have not yet made it YOUR story, we, in the name of Jesus Christ invite you to join us.