

Exodus 11:1-13:16

The Passover

The story in the Old Testament

Announcing the tenth plague (11:1-10)

Last week we looked at the nine plagues.

We saw the patterns emerge.

Today we reach the tenth plague.

The tenth plague represents the climax of the plague narrative.

In Exodus 11:1 God himself announces – ‘I will bring one more plague.’

He explains to Moses that it will have sure results.

This plague will be so severe that Pharaoh will ‘send’ Israel away.

In fact, he will be more than that.

He will forcibly ‘drive’ them out.

His reluctance will be reversed and he will become an adamant advocate of their departure.

However, the departure of the Israelites will come at a high price.

The Israelites will ask for Egyptian gold and silver.

They will leave with Egyptian economic support.

Like a proper and responsible slave master, Pharaoh will give his wealth so that these newly released slaves might make their way in the world (cf. Deuteronomy 15:1-11).

In verses 4-8 there is no hiding the terror of what is about to happen.

God here is like a father defending his children.

Israel is his firstborn son and Pharaoh has treated his firstborn son terribly.

Pharaoh has put God's firstborn son under threat.

And God will passionately react in judgment.

His poor and humbled son will be exalted.

And Pharaoh, who has exalted himself, will be brought very low.

Regulations to be observed (12:1-28)

And with this we turn to chapter 12.

Ever since chapter 7 we have been watching this great drama unfold.

We have seen plague after plague.

And we have watched the reactions of Pharaoh.

Now we take a brief interlude while we look at some regulations about ritual practices.

We are given all sorts of details about the Passover meal, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the festival associated with these events.

The first thing that God says in this passage is that from now on the events that are about to occur are to be the events that they remember at the beginning of every Hebrew year.

These events are to shape every year of their history from now on.

Every time they think of a new year, they are to think of the events of the Exodus.

This event is to shape all their future.

In verse 2 God describes the process that they are to go through in preparation for this event.

This process will also be the one they go through every year when they remember these events.

Every household is to take a one-year-old male lamb.

It is to be a lamb without defect.

If any household cannot afford a lamb for themselves they can share a lamb with a neighboring household.

At the appointed time they are to take that lamb and slaughter it.

Its blood is to be drained into a basin (12:22).

A hyssop branch is to be dipped into the blood.

And that branch is to be used to paint the tops and the sides of the door frames to their houses.

This painting of the door frames will indicate that these households are placing themselves under God's protection.

It marks their household as being distinct from Egyptian households.

They are then to roast the meat of lamb and eat it with bitter herbs.

Perhaps the bitter herbs are there to remind the Israelites of their 'bitter' service (1:14 – same Hebrew word) in Egypt.

They are also to make some bread without yeast.

The reason the bread is without yeast is because the journey they are about to make is to be made in haste.

There will be no time to wait for the dough to rise.

Those who eat are the one time slaves.

Now they are to be ready to go...

Ready to travel...

Ready to depart from the empire...

And ready to be delivered.

Then, in verse 11 we are told that this meal is to be called the 'Passover'.

And while the Israelites are celebrating this meal, the Lord will bring judgment on Egypt and their gods (12:12).

Verses 14-20 go on to describe the details of another feast associated with the Exodus – the feast of unleavened bread.

These verses are quite explicit.

We are told three things in these verses...

- that it is very important to have unleavened bread,
- that future generations should copy this feast, and
- that anyone who breaks this practice and eats with leavened bread shall suffer serious consequences.

Verses 21-27 focus on the details of the blood and the Passover.

Finally, verse 28 ends by telling us that Israel chose to accept God's purpose.

Israel obeyed.

They did just what the Lord commanded.

Departing Egypt (12:29-42)

In 12:29 we leave regulations and return to the story.

In verses 29-30 we are told that God's threat is made good, just as it was with every other plague.

In every household in Egypt some mysterious plague strikes the firstborn children.

And loud wailing issues throughout the land.

Again Pharaoh acts.

This time it is with a sense of real urgency.

He calls for the Israelite leaders at night.

Pharaoh has totally capitulated.

He has totally caved in to God's will.

He and his people simply urge the Israelites to leave as quick as they can.

And they do, but not before they plunder the Egyptians.

But it is not without the willing help of the Egyptians.

And so it is that the Israelites leave Egypt with dignity.

Their exaltation is the humiliation of Egypt.

No weapon has been in their hand.

And yet their victory is complete.

Verses 37-39 tell us that there were about 600,000 men plus women and children plus other people groups plus livestock.

We don't know whether these figures simply mean there were very large numbers of people or whether they are to be taken literally.

If it is to be taken literally they we are probably referring to 2 million or more people plus their livestock.

The logistics of moving such a group of people must have been incredible.

And yet move they do.

They had been 430 years in Egypt.

And that night, like every night, the Lord watched on.

He kept vigil.

And he brought them up out of Egypt.

Additional regulations (12:43-13:16)

In 12:43-49 we are given additional passover regulations.

Non-Israelites are allowed to participate in this great event.

However, if they do, they must become Jews.

And they show their willingness to do this by being circumcised.

After all, Israel is a covenant community.

They are people with a history of relationship with God.

They are the children of Abraham, the children of promise.

13:3-10 repeats and expands on regulations about the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

13:11-16 talks about the future consecration of firstborn children.

The repetition of these regulations just serves to indicate how important these things are for Israel.

They are to be a nation who find their center in these events.

These events are to mark them out as different.

What other nation has had a God deliver them out of slavery without so much as a sword being raised in anger?

What other nation had experienced such deliverance?

But before we finish looking at this section, I just want to concentrate on verse 13.

Notice what God is saying.

A lamb's blood is shed so that the plague let loose on Egypt will not touch the houses of those who slaughtered the lamb.

In other words, the blood of a lamb indicates that a particular household is a Jewish household.

God has spared this household.

It is his household.

Because of this...

And because Israel is God's firstborn...

Every firstborn in Israel belongs to God.

This is what is meant in 13:1-2.

Then, in verse 11-13 God explains this a bit more.

He says that because every firstborn son belongs to God every firstborn should be given to God.

If it is an animal, this obviously means offering it to God in sacrifice.

However, in the case of sons, they are redeemed by sacrificing an animal in his place (verse 15).

And every now and then it might be necessary to redeem something like a firstborn male donkey because of its importance in the household.

They should make sure when this happens that they redeem it according to the regulations given in Exodus 13.13.

And every time they do, the Israelite should remember that they too were redeemed by the blood of a lamb.

Some New Testament Perspectives

With all of this background in mind, I want you to travel with me into the future.

Let's go to the New Testament and see what they make of the Passover events.

Matthew 26:17-30

First, let's go to Matthew 26:17-30.

But before we do, I want to tell you that we know from John's Gospel that Jesus died at the very same time that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed.

However, Matthew 26:17ff tells us that Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples.

My own opinion on this is that Jesus knew he was going to die.

And because he knew this, he decided that he would celebrate the Passover in secret a day early.

This would explain the fact that we have no mention of a lamb in the story we are about to read.

Lamb's had to be sacrificed by the priests in the temple and since this would not be done until the next day, Jesus celebrated the Passover without a lamb.

And as the meal goes on, this assumes a special significance.

Let's have a look at what happens on this particular evening at this particular Passover.

First, Jesus tells his disciples that one of them will betray him.

Then, in verse 26 Jesus takes some bread.

He gives thanks.

He breaks it.

And he tells his disciples, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

Then he takes a cup of wine.

Again he gives thanks.

And then he distributes it to his disciples, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'

The words 'blood' and 'poured' out are sacrificial words.

They have clear references to the Passover in Egypt.

And what Jesus is saying is rich in meaning.

You see, in the book of Exodus we learnt about the Old Covenant.

We learnt that Israel's relationship with God was forged through the shedding of blood.

And Jesus is making clear that the New Covenant is no different to the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant required the shedding of the blood of a lamb.

And the New Covenant will also require the shedding of blood.

However, the blood that will be shed this time will not be the shedding of the blood of a lamb.

It will be the shedding of his own blood.

It will be his own blood that will be poured out.

And it won't just be for Israel this time.

It will be the pouring out of blood FOR MANY.

Not only that, it won't just be so that Israelite sons will be redeemed from dying with Egyptian firstborn.

No.

The shedding of this blood will be so that MANY will be redeemed from SIN.

This pouring out of blood...

This death...

Will be FOR MANY, FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

This language is picked up by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7.

Look at what Paul says:

For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.

Revelation 5

- The story

Now I want you to turn to the book of Revelation with me.

The book of Revelation is a book that uses images to speak deep theological truths.

Revelation 4 has opened the door to heaven for us and given us a rich picture of God.

He is the God who created all the world and who is worthy of all worship.

Revelation 5 opens with the hand of this Almighty God stretched out.

And as we look at that hand more closely we see that in it there is a scroll.

It is a scroll that has writing on both sides and is sealed with seven seals.

It is a scroll that contains the secret plans and purposes of God.

And our curiosity wells up within us.

What is God about in his world?

What is his hidden mind on our world?

Where is history headed?

How will it work itself out?

Who is worthy to open such a scroll?

And we long to have a peek inside.

We yearn to read the scroll and so we cry out with the angelic beings:

Who is worthy?

Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?

Who is worthy to know the secret plans of God.

And who is deserving enough to execute the hidden plans of this Almighty God of all the earth.

We look around.

The court looks around.

A search is engage in.

And no one is found.

No one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth can be found to open the seals.

And the Apostle John weeps on our behalf.

For, like us, he knows the importance of that scroll.

Like us, he knows that it needs to be opened.

And then a voice booms out through the courtroom:

Do not weep!

See!

The lion of the tribe of Judah – the root of David – he has conquered.

He can open the scroll and its seven seals!

And all this seems appropriate.

After all, we have heard of the great king David, the famous Israelite king.

We know of this lion of Judah.

Who could better than his descendent?

And so we turn and look around.

We eagerly scan the courtyard for this lion.

But our eyes can find no king of the beasts.

There is no flowing mane.

No fierce eyes.

No frightening roar.

And no flashing teeth.

All we can see is a lamb.

It is young and white ... small and vulnerable.

It is about as far as you can get from a lion.

But then, as we look closer, we notice that it is not so white after all.

There is fresh blood around its throat.

Its throat has been slit.

It has been butchered.

And yet it remains standing.

This lamb is not dead as it should be.

In fact, it is very much alive.

And it stands in the centre of the throne, occupying a position of prominence.

And so we begin to wonder.

Could this lamb be the lion we are looking for?

And then our suspicions are confirmed.

For the lamb advances.

With boldness unmatched he approaches the throne.

The God who is holy holds no fear for this lamb.

He marches up to the throne of the holy and majestic Creator of all the earth.

And with fearlessness he takes the scroll.

And as he does the courts ring with praise:

*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered
and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language
and people and nation.*

*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will
reign on earth.*

And then the court blossoms with noise.

Thousands and thousands join in.

Ten thousand times ten thousand angels burst into song.

Together they praise the lamb:

Worthy is the lamb who was slaughtered, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might, and honour and glory and blessing!

And if that were not enough, all of creation starts up.

Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea spur the song into a crescendo.

To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!

- Its meaning

Well, what does all this mean?

What do these symbols mean?

What is the passage about?

And what is its relevance for us?

Well, let's have a look in a bit more detail and see if we can make some sense out of it.

First, the scroll.

The scroll is a scroll that holds all the plans of God for his world.

It is therefore a scroll of destiny and a scroll of judgment.

But it is a scroll which can only be opened by a special person.

This special person must have two qualities:

1. He or she must be worthy.
2. He or she must be able.

Both of these qualities must be combined in one special person.

And the text promises us that there is such a person.

The one worthy and able is the lion from the tribe of Judah.

Immediately our thoughts are driven to Jesus.

He was descended from great King David.

He was born of the tribe of Judah.

But when he looks around the court he finds no lion.

Instead of a lion – the symbol of strength and power and fierce rule, he finds a lamb – the symbol of weakness and vulnerability and sacrifice.

The message is clear:

The power to stand and take the scroll...

To break its hard-set seals...

To execute the plans of God...

Belongs to one alone.

It belongs to Jesus Christ who has been sacrificed.

To Christ who has overcome the power of death.

To Christ who has paid the ransom for human sin through the shedding of his own blood.

He is the one who has enabled humans to enter heaven.

He is the one who has given us boldness to approach the living God who would otherwise be unapproachable.

- The centre of Christian Theology

At this point we have arrived at the centre of Christian theology.

Let me explain.

You see, the Bible is clear that you and I are created persons.

We are not accidents of fate.

We are not some weird and accidental combinations of genetic history.

We are persons.

We are made and formed by the almighty God of history.

And as a created persons we belong to God.

We were made by him to be his...

To live in relationship with him.

To love him.

To worship him.

We are his.

But the facts according to the Bible are that you and I have not lived our lives in the light of this reality.

The facts are that you and I have spent our lives either shaking our fist at God or simply ignoring him.

We have not worshipped him as God.

We have not taken his advice.

We have not lived as created beings.

No.

Instead, we have lived in independence.

We have done things our own way, without acknowledgment of him.

We are our own rulers.

Now it doesn't matter whether this action has been one of defiance and or simply neglect.

It has been an act of rebellion.

And as such it deserves punishment.

You see, the facts of Easter are that Jesus died because of you and because of me!

Jesus became a human being because of us!

The God of all the earth was born and worked and ministered because of us!
He made his way to the city of Jerusalem because of us!
He prayed in agony in the garden of Gethsemane because of us!
He held his tongue and his power to rescue himself before Pilate and the Jews because of us!
He watched them hammer nails into his hands and feet because of us!
He hung on the cross because of us!
He died because of us and in our place!
He took the punishment that was for us and the anger of God which was for us!
He allowed his blood to be shed so that ours did not have to be.
But the story doesn't end there.
You see, the facts of Easter are that Jesus rose from the dead.
Death could not hold him.
He rose again.
And in doing so he demonstrated that he is indeed the Lord of life.
That he has conquered death.
That he is the giver of new life.
You can see what I'm saying with all this, can't you?
Reality is that God is the Lord of all the earth.
Reality is that he has send Jesus his Son into the world for us.
Reality is that this Jesus died for us.
Reality is that he rose in order to demonstrate that he had dealt with our independence and sin and rebellion once and for all.

There is no greater reality in this world.

So ... in the face of this reality, let me urge you to do the only appropriate thing.

Let me urge you to fall to your knees.

Worship him.

Adore him.

Remember him.

Thank him.

Join with heaven and earth this day and cry out with all your being:

Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

To him who sits upon the throne and to the lamb, be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever.

You see, the book of Exodus and the story of the plagues stands as a grim reminder.

You see, the Bible is clear that unless we take the death of Jesus for ourselves we will have to face God without Jesus on the day of your death or on the last day.

And if you face God without the blood of Jesus then all God will see is your sin.

And he will judge you.

And he will banish you from his presence forever.

He will banish you from everything good that he has given you all your life.

And you will live without relationships with him and without relationship with others.

You will be banished to an existence without God and without his gifts.

So, let me urge you to flee this day to the reality that is found in Jesus.

Let me urge you to accept his death on the cross as being a death for you.

Let me urge you to accept his forgiveness.

Let me urge you to change your attitude from one of independence to one of trust.

This is what it means to become a Christian.

In the book of Exodus you showed that you wanted to align yourself with God's people and God's purpose by killing a lamb and sprinkling its blood on the doorpost of your house.

In today's world you show that you want to align yourself with God's people and God's purpose by looking to Jesus.

By seeing his blood shed for you.

And by saying to God, 'I want his death to be a death in my place.'