
Judgment and Journey

Exodus 12:29-50

Introduction It is a quiet night in mid-April. The land of Egypt lies devastated. The long nine month war on Pharaoh and his idolatrous pantheon has wrought unimaginable destruction on the agriculture, infrastructure and psyche of the people. All their much trusted idols have failed them entirely. All the vaunted power of their Pharaoh and the magic of his priests has been vividly exposed as the fraud it was.

On that quiet night, the Egyptians hurried about their normal business. Twilight came and late evening passed toward midnight. People began to put crying children to bed. Remnants of flocks and harvests were carefully attended to. Lights begin to be doused as moms and dads headed to bed. Many a weary head laid nervously on many an anxious pillow wondering what great disaster would befall next.

But across the way in Goshen, the houses were brightly lit. There had been two weeks of feverish activity. Much going about talking with Egyptian neighbors. Much receiving of gold and silver jewelry. Much packing of belongings and preparing livestock for a move. All across the land, just as darkness fell, bright sharp knives slashed across the throats of unblemished, year-old male lambs. Hot blood ran into bowls. The cooking pits were stoked up high as the slaughtered lambs were spitted whole and placed sizzling over the fire. Through the windows and some open doors, men were seen with bowls and brushes of gathered hyssop painting the doorposts and lintels red with sacrificial blood. In all the activity there was a hush of fear and a rising of hope and expectancy. The smell of cooking lambs, baking unleavened bread and crushed spices rose across all Goshen. Every believing household from twilight to midnight was going through the same ritual. Strangely everyone was eating standing by the tables with their cloaks and shoes on, their staves in their hands, readiness in heart and soul to move.

In last few minutes before midnight, a deep darkness began to approach from the heavens. It moved with a leopard like stalk. Swift and deadly it rose and approached the land. Swift and deadly its fierce form prepared to strike. Wrath has come.

The Judgment of Death**(v.29-32)**

²⁹ At midnight the LORD struck down 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 the livestock. ³⁰ And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. ³¹ Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. ³² Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!"

The Destroyer Strikes**(v.29)**

All across the land of Egypt, the destroyer hovers over households, holy eyes and wrathful fangs searching. In every household He seeks to move. Searching eyes, finding no blood where required, seek out the first-born. Doom and death stalk the broad roads and the narrow lanes, the country estates and towering palaces. First a cry of fear, then a strangled gasp of dying then a chorus of grieved wailing. Unstoppable, the destroyer moves. God is on the hunt. God will end this war. In every household across all the land of Egypt, firstborn children and livestock die. The wailing ripples across the land as the horror strikes deeper and deeper into the heart of Egypt. In the golden palace, the Pharaoh's first born son, gurgles out his last breath. Yahweh has struck the hardened heart of the son of Ra and finally broken it.

But all across Goshen, the shadow hunts and finds with joy in his heart, the mark of blood. He sees that the sacrifice has taken place. A lamb was offered instead of the first born. Faith has heard and heeded. A fierce joy rises in His heart even as He goes from house to house. Occasionally, there is no mark and wrath must fall.

The believing people hear the rising cry across Egypt. They look at one another in holy fear but in with secure hearts. They are safe. No destroyer will enter their gates. Firstborns are clutched tight. Sandals are re-laced. Staves are thumped upon the floor. The final bit of unleavened bread is wiped across greasy plates sopping up the last of roasted lamb and slivered bitter herbs. Here are God's believing, trusting, bowing people safe, safe, safe under the blood while outside the wrath of God falls.

The Pharaoh Relents**(v.30-32)**

Hearing the rising wail across Egypt that became a wall of sound moving with the striking shadow, Pharaoh rushes to the bed chambers of his firstborn. There he lies across the bed, dead. In a horror of fear and anger, he runs screaming for his courtiers. "Summon, those two Jews, Moses and Aaron. Bring them here, NOW." Ah, Moses and Aaron appear in quiet trust, their own firstborn safe.

The Pharaoh expels them from the land. "Go, get out. Take your children and flocks. Go worship your God. Away from here. And in your worship, ask your God to bless me too."

What a stunning arrogance. He ejects them and sends them on their way. He does so, not in humble awe of the power of the LORD. Rather he sends them away like

a plague, like a leper. Then, asks to be blessed? No, this is sarcasm. Be a blessing to me by getting out! Even in relenting to the irresistible power of God, he is rebellious. He has demanded the service of Israel. Now, he recognizes them as a nation in calling them Israel. And he recognizes their true service by sending them to worship Yahweh. He does this because he is utterly smashed by the power of God. Yet from his crouching, shattered state, his heart remains unbowed, stiff and hard.

The Exodus from Slavery

(v.33-42)

So the people of God now begin to stream out of their homes. A long pilgrimage lies ahead. But at this moment, there is the joy of freedom as the dawn breaks and the slaves are set free.

Egypt's Final Humiliation

(v.33-36)

³³ The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." ³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. ³⁵ The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. ³⁶ And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

A once proud people are now humbled one last time. Their much prized slaves are being thrust out with haste. There is no time to waste. Go now. If you delay any more how will they survive? How can they possibly resist such a deity?

And the Israelites find themselves curiously unprepared. They have been preparing large bowls of dough. The period of time where they could touch no leaven has passed. So they planned to let the bread rise, bake it and then pack it for the journey. But no, they need to leave as soon as possible. So they cover the bowls with the prized linen cloth of Egypt and load it up for the journey to bake later.

A once rich nation is now plundered one last time. Their much prized gold and silver jewelry has been quietly accumulated by God's people. In the throes of these hours as the people of Egypt press for Israel's departure, they thrust upon the Jews their remaining wealth, possibly as a bribe for them to leave and possibly as an offering to their victorious God. Just as a conquering army plunders the land it has subjugated, God plunders Egypt as a final testimony to the achievement of His victory. He has conquered Egypt and His people profit.

Israel's Initial Journey

(v37-39)

³⁷ And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. ³⁹ And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

In the dawning hours, the long procession forms. Lanes wide throngs of freed slaves now gather and march with all their hosts and all their livestock. At the head of their train march Moses and Aaron, the staff of judgment and the staff of life in hand. Over two million people stream along in a procession up to 10 miles long. This is the single largest migration of a people group in history. Surely,

songs of freedom ring out. Surely, prayers of thanksgiving go up. From Rameses to Succoth, maybe upwards of 2 million people are on the move. And trailing along with them come believing Egyptians who have feared God and have faith in His Word and attach themselves to this mighty train of the redeemed sons and daughters of Abraham.

Finally as they cross the borders of Egypt and begin to gather an encampment, the ovens are set and the fires are lit. The bowls of unleavened bread are taken and uncovered. In the growing twilight of the first day of freedom, all across the camp, unleavened bread is rolled out and placed in the ovens. At the close of the dawning of this first day of the New Year, the new age, all across God's exiled and alien people, a feast of unleavened bread is eaten. Yes, it is a simple meal. Yes, there may be growing concern about how to provision themselves over the coming three day journey. But, now, this is a blessed moment of simple fare.

God's Perfect Providence

(v.40-42)

⁴⁰ The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. ⁴¹ At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴² It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

This is the very perfect providence and timing of God. Exactly 430 years, just as God had predicted, to the day, the exodus begins. All the hosts of God's people are delivered. Not one is lost.

God is watching over them. The very Presence that had prowled the land and slaughtered the firstborn now hovers over His people in protecting care. He will watch over them in the exodus. He will watch over them as they come to Mt. Sinai. He will watch over them through the wanderings. He will bring them to the land. His promises unfold according to His purposes, whether revealed or hidden. His promises will come true. In response to that watch care of God that night, a night of watching by God's people was established.

Some would wonder about the historical accuracy of this text. How could a migration of this size be unnoticed in Egyptian history? Imagine just the simple logistics. The Bible does not say. Some think the word thousands could be translated clans, so that it would be 600 clans. The problem is then that Moses has just not made any sense. Why would you say 600 clans of men, not including the women, etc? Given the evidence of the vast size of the nation moving through the wilderness and the extraordinary measures taken in their camping and moving, it is best to leave this as it is – and remember, every believing household was delivered!

The Memorial of Redemption

(v.43-50)

At each step and stop along the way of the exodus, God gives further instructions for the memorial feast. This is the way God has chosen to unfold His redemptive plan. In the moving of history, through the giving of revelation, God unfolds in ever greater clarity His redeeming work.

⁴³ And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ No foreigner or hired servant may eat of it. ⁴⁶ It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸ If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. ⁴⁹ There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you."

⁵⁰ All the people of Israel did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ And on that very day the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

In What it Required

(v.43-47)

First, God gave what was required of the participants. The Passover was only for those who were a part of God's people. In the Old Covenant, this was signified by the rite of circumcision. Only those who had entered the covenant could partake of the memorial meal. It was exclusively for God's people. It was exclusively for those who had been circumcised and were a part of a covenant household.

Second, God gave two further requirements of the sacrifice itself. It must be eaten in one household and not shared around. The bones of the sacrifice must not be broken. Since these are very specific instructions, what do they mean?

For the Israelites themselves, they were to learn that the lamb was a sacrifice for the household who believed. They were to see themselves as uniquely and distinctly a redeemed people. The sacrificed lamb was offered for a particular people. Initially, the lamb was for the clan. Then the lamb is for the household. As the Old Covenant is further revealed, these are picked up and once a year, the sacrifice is for the nation. But never is a sacrifice not offered with a particular beneficiary in view. Therefore, while the sacrifice of Christ is for all the people groups, not just Israelites, it is still particular to the redeemed from all the people groups.

In the "not break a bone" is a shadow of which Christ is the reality. He fulfilled what was portrayed here and in the Psalms. Contrary to the common practice of completing the crucifixion by breaking the legs of the criminal and allowing them to suffocate to death, Jesus' legs were not broken. The soldier, seeing that Jesus was already dead, certified His death by plunging the spear in His side. The blood that then poured out of His riven side was evidence that He had poured out His life.

In Whom it Invited**(v.48-49)**

A Gentile, called here a sojourner, could partake by taking circumcision. Taking circumcision was a public acknowledgment of bowing to Yahweh and joining to God's people. In celebrating the memorial meal, this Gentile who was now publicly identified with God's people, was celebrating his own redemption. Certainly this provision became an invitation to the Gentiles who had already and would continue to attach themselves to the people of God.

The ramifications here for us are important.

- The Passover is replaced now by the Lord's Table. We now celebrate our own redemption through the death and resurrection of the Lord.
- Like Passover, the Lord's Table is to be celebrated and entered into only by those who have truly become one of God's people.
- Like circumcision, baptism is the way a person in the New Covenant publicly identifies themselves as one of God's people.
- We are the sojourners of this text: we are the Gentiles who have become a part of God's people. We are invited to participate in the memorial feast if we are willing to publicly declare our trust in and union with God in Christ.
- We therefore invite all who have publicly professed Christ through baptism and have joined with God's people to share in the memorial feast. No unbeliever should partake of a memorial since they have not experienced the saving reality.
- Unlike the Old Covenant where circumcision is restricted to males and thus establishes households of faith, the New Covenant requires that the sign and symbol of belief be taken by each individual. There are no covenant households today in the sense of the Old Covenant. Yet, God often grants saving grace to the children of believing parents. What a grand thing it is when a physical family gathers around the table and all are members of the gathered church, the community of faith.

Notice the final sentence of verse 49. In celebrating the memorial feast, no exceptions are to be made. The same rules are to govern all who wish to participate. Whether a native Israelite or a Gentile, all who wished to celebrate the memorial feast had to be circumcised.

The Old Covenant references to the sojourner are picked up in the New Covenant and applied to all believers. The great blessing of the New Covenant is that the sojourner is not a casual attachment to the core of God's redeemed people. All of God's redeemed are sojourners. So, in hearing of the very great mercy in the Passover and its celebration feast, let us rejoice that now, a greater mercy is grandly displayed as all who gather at the memorial table are all sojourners.

In Those who Obeyed

(v.50)

What a great sentence this is. All who heard obeyed. Now this was no easy obedience. Surely there were those gathered and going with Israel who were not circumcised. Even the Jews may have had the uncircumcised among them, just as Moses had not circumcised his own son until almost struck down by God for his disobedience. So, in many households, there were males who needed to be circumcised in order to be identified as the people of God and to join at the memorial feast and celebrate redemption. And we think getting people to be baptized is hard!

On that day, the 15th of Aril, 430 years after going down into Egypt, God brought His people up out of slavery, passed over them through the shed and sprinkled blood and delivered them from out of Egypt starting toward the Promised Land. On that day, He required faithfulness to the covenant so that all who celebrated the memorial feast would at least publicly be one of God's people, whether native or sojourner.

Let us also carefully take heed for all what God requires in the initial step of believing obedience. Circumcision did not save. Baptism does not save. But without either, one should not partake of the memorial feast.

Conclusion To fully deliver His people, God must exercise His wrath on the unbelieving idol worshippers. He will yet do so at the end of this age. Our final deliverance from sin includes the deliverance from the presence of sinners. In that day it will be something to celebrate (Revelation 19:1-5). But now, this is a great motivation to witness. God saves His people by faith. Those God saves by faith must believe the gospel. In order to believe the gospel, they must hear the gospel. In order to hear the gospel, we must declare it to them. Will you? Do you?

To fully exonerate His Name and His holiness, God must punish those who deny and dishonor Him. Here is what is actually at stake – God's very great name and His very great glory. He will defend His reputation and will declare His fame. Those who deny and dishonor God will suffer the consequences. As I observe Christendom today, it is not only outright pagans who dishonor God, but many who profess His Name as well. This is why we do all we know how corporately and personally to honor the name and glory of God. We will uphold His Name. We will make Him look large in all we are and do. We will glorify Christ.

To make His Passover distinct and the celebration holy, God fenced it in the Old Covenant with a requirement of circumcision. We teach that all who profess belief in and submission to Christ should make that public through baptism. Observing texts like ours today and others as well, has led us to teach these things to you. We want you to weigh the Scriptures. We want you to have a heart inclined to hear and heed our teaching. We pray that you will become convinced in your own minds. And until then, we will love and live together in harmony and peace as we walk together as God's people.

May we celebrate the New Covenant, not only by coming to communion with celebratory gladness and gratefulness, but also with holy lives. May we live with sincerity, purity and truth as people redeemed by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we affirm that we are sojourners, citizens of heaven and ambassadors for our great King. As a gathered community of King, may our life together be filled with all those expressions of love for Christ and love for one another that put on display for a lost and dying world the very great love, mercy and grace of God.

The Passover and exodus are types of the redemptive work of Christ. Our problem with God is not our lack of wholeness, our lack of psychological stability, our self-esteem or self-image problems. Our issue with God is our sin and our rebellion against Him. We are separated from God by His own act of judgment. He has made provision so that our sin, its price and penalty, have been paid for and His wrath satisfied. He now commands all everywhere, including you this morning, to repent. Will you believe in His death and resurrection, bow to His Lordship as sovereign over your life and call on Him to save you? If so, then we will be safe on the day of judgment, depart from this fallen world and arrive in grand array in the Promised Land of heaven and the new creation. Come, oh, come today.