

Lesson 10: Exodus 5-18 God Redeems Israel

Introduction

Please excuse my voice today. I have got a bit of a cold. Last lesson at the start of the Exodus, I forgot to remind you about the Bible Project overview videos. The videos provide a creative, accurate look at each book of the Pentateuch firmly rooted in the text. You can access the videos at youtube, just search for "bible project Exodus." Or go to our observetheword.com site and click on Pentateuch resources. All the Bible project Pentateuch videos are posted there. They are only 5 or 6 minutes long and very worth watching.

We are covering Exodus 5-18 in this lesson, and we will consider our second monument of grace in the law of Moses. Monument of grace is my phrase for a passage of Scripture where God makes clear that Old Testament believers are not justified by law but through faith in God's atoning grace. If I were taking you on a tour of Zagreb, as we were passing a certain spot, I would stop and explain the significance of some statue or building or street, some monument. And that's the idea. As we pass by monuments of grace in the Pentateuch, I will be sure to point them out, so we do not miss their significance. There are more than 5 monuments of grace in the law of Moses. But I am going to concentrate on at least 5, so that we get one from each book of the Pentateuch which confirms the consistency of the message of grace throughout. So, I will let you know today when we get there.

We have two major divisions to our story in these chapters. First, God redeems Israel out of Egypt in 4:1-15:21. That story is going to end with our first major climax at the Red Sea. The second division in 15:22 through the end of chapter 18 covers the journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. And I am just going to on the significance of that journey in our conclusion in order to give most of our time to the major themes in the narrative of the rescue.

Moses initiates the confrontation Pharaoh (Exodus 5-6).

God gives Moses a lesson in leadership.

We start with the initial confrontation in 5 and 6. Moses has arrived in Egypt. He and Aaron have the backing of the Israelites. And now it is time to confront Pharaoh.

I imagine this part of the story as the struggle between the brick makers union and upper management. There is an oppressed work force, with Moses and Aaron appointed as the new union spokesmen. Pharaoh plays the role of the greedy executive. And I know this is anachronistic. It is not accurate. I am not suggesting it is. But there is this interesting back and forth between Pharaoh and Moses and the Israelites. And it is interesting that Pharaoh gives any of them a voice at all. I am just searching for some parallel to help me imagine what is going on here in chapter 5.

Remember that the elders of Israel and the people got excited by the miracles Moses could perform when he showed up after the burning bush incident. And they claimed to be on board. They have endorsed his mission. So, Moses goes, and he gets an audience with Pharaoh. Presumably this Pharaoh was the brother of the princess who raised Moses, so perhaps that is how Moses got in, through his connections. He is that weird bridge between the elite and the slaves. Moses' request of Pharaoh might surprise you. Pharaoh's response will not surprise you at all. So, let's read the first part of that encounter. This is 5:1-2.

¹ And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.' " ² But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

Well, that's what we expected from Pharaoh. He has a massive free labor force. He is not just going to be eager to let them out of his sight. The curious thing here is that Moses does not ask Pharaoh to let the people go free. He asks Pharaoh to let the people go worship Yahweh in the wilderness. And if we want to go the cynical route, we could charge Moses with lying here. He is being deceptive. I prefer to think that he is being careful and wise. He is confronting Pharaoh. And rather than come in

first with an outlandish request of freedom for the entire workforce, he asks for a concession. He asks for religious liberty and a week off.

Not only is it a lesser first request. He is just asking for a week, not complete freedom. The test is designed to test Pharaoh's heart. God makes this an issue between himself and Pharaoh. Will you grant Israel the right to go and worship me, according to how I require them to worship? Will you allow them to do honor to me?

Pharaoh rejects the request. So, when he does, he is setting himself in opposition not only to Israel, but to Yahweh. And as we might expect from the greedy upper management who has no compassion on his workforce, Pharaoh charges Moses and Aaron with trying to draw the workers away from their labor and goes with a punishment strategy. This is 5:7-9.

⁷ "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸ "But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' ⁹ "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it so that they will pay no attention to false words."

The charge sounds like Ebenezer Scrooge. You want a week off. You are just lazy. You are just trying to get out of work. So, here you go. Work more. This is an attempt to turn the work force against Aaron and Moses, so that the people "will pay no attention to [their] false words."

The tactic has some success. The laborers complain to their Jewish foremen at the impossibility of the work load. The Jewish foremen then complain to Pharaoh, who only chastises them for their laziness and reinforces his command of no straw, more bricks. And just as Pharaoh planned, the Jewish foremen then accost Aaron and Moses, saying in verse 21, "May the LORD look upon you and judge *you*, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." Pharaoh turned the Jewish laborers against their chosen spokesmen, which had the desired effect of draining the will from Moses. So, how he is overwhelmed and doubtful and without hope and defeated. So, Moses pours out his fears to God, verses 22-23.

²² Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? ²³ ⁹ "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."

You get the sense that Moses and the people expected immediate deliverance. They are not prepared for a long fight. I think we have here a classic tactic in how to break a movement. Put heat on the followers, so they will turn on and dishearten their leaders. This is a timeless illustration of how Satan opposes plans God gives his people by demoralizing the followers, and so, unnerving the leaders. The leader comes with a vision. The people love the vision. "We believe! This is great!" But who has counted the cost? Who is ready for the opposition, the long struggle, the sacrifice? Isn't it normal to often get knocked back before we are going to be able to really move ahead? Whose ready for that? Moses has a double burden. The people he is leading do not believe in him anymore. He is trying to lead a people who have lost trust. We also see that Moses really does care for the Israelites. So, his burden is not just on how they see him, but their suffering hurts him. He feels deeply the pain that his vision and his action have brought onto his people. He feels responsible. And while it is certainly commendable that Moses cares deeply for his people, he has forgotten a truth that spiritual leaders need to keep taped to their bathroom mirror. This is not your vision. This is not your people. Moses is taking more responsibility than is his due. He needs to remember who called him to this task. He also needs to remember the difficult truth that a right vision for a noble task often requires inviting others into struggle and pain. Leaders call others to sacrifice.

God does not chastise Moses for his weaknesses, which reminds me of our lesson on Abraham in Genesis 15 when he asked God, "How will I have descendants if I cannot have children?" God sees the heart when we struggle with the vision. He saw Abraham's heart and gave him encouragement.

He sees Moses' heart and is going to give him encouragement, as well. God reminds Moses that the vision is God's vision and the people are God's people. This great commission given to Moses is anchored in a promise that God made 400 years before in covenant with Abraham. This is not all about Moses. This is about God. And God says in 6:3-6,

"I am the LORD;³ and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty [and by my name Yahweh, did I not make myself known to them?¹] ⁴ I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. ⁵ Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶ "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷ Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

God reminds Moses that he is playing a role in a much larger story that God is still in the process of writing. Moses can lay the burden of the people in the hands of God. And Moses can trust that God is going to bring Israel out of Egypt.

The theme of knowing God is introduced.

Moses trust in God depends on his personal knowledge of God. I'd like to turn now to that theme as one of the main themes of Exodus. The theme of knowing God.

There is an important phrase in verse 3 which brings out the theme but also introduces an interpretation challenge. Your Bible probably translates verse 3 something like this, "and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.*" The implication of that translation is that God did not reveal himself by the name Yahweh to the patriarchs in Genesis. Instead the revelation of this name Yahweh or "I am who I am" came new to Moses at the burning bush. And since the name Yahweh first appears in the written text way back in Genesis 2, we have to assume that Moses went back and used the name Yahweh in his writing, even though it was not a name that had been revealed at that time, sort of like going back to Isaiah 53 and writing in the name Jesus when we see the suffering servant.

Hebrew scholars like Douglas Stuart point out a second option for interpreting the text. We could read it this way, "I am the LORD;³ and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty [and by my name Yahweh, did I not make myself known to them?]" The debate of translation comes from the possibility that certain statements in Hebrew can be translated as questions, even if those statements do not have the interrogatory particle that would normally indicate it is a question. In English we can turn a statement into a question by raising our voice at the end of sentence. "I did not make myself known to them?" There is a raised tone at the end. That makes it a question. It is the same as "Did I not make myself known to them?", which has a question word at the beginning and also a raised tone at the end. Stuart refers to Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 23:5; 2 Kings 5:26; Jeremiah 18:6; Jonah 4:11; Job 11:11; 30:25, all as examples where the Hebrew question particle is not used, but the sentence is translated as a question. It is an understood question. So, to give just one example in Numbers 23:19, states, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

¹ "The most likely translation of 6:3 is not that of the NIV ("but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them") but rather a question, "and by my name Yahweh, did I not make myself known to them?" In Hb. interrogatives are only sometimes marked by the so-called interrogative particle. The construction used here is common enough for interrogatives beginning with "is it not" or "did he not" or the like that require a positive answer ("is it not the case that x is y?" interrogatives)." Stuart, D. K. (2006). Exodus, New American Commentary Series Vol. 2. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Taking Exodus 6:3 as a question, “but by my name Yahweh, did I not make myself known to them?”, ties into the theme of knowing God, which is carried through Exodus. It has been said that the most important thing about you is how you answer the question, “Who is God?” We cannot live life the way life is meant to be lived without knowing how to answer that question rightly. Like Moses in Exodus 3, we think the primary question is, “Who am I?” We are very hung up on our own identity. When in reality, the central question to life is, “Who are you O Lord?” We can only come to understand our identity by understanding our identity in relation to God. We need the knowledge of God to understand who we are. That is the primary question, “Who is God?” So, how do you answer that question? God is teaching Moses here that we answer that question according to how God has revealed himself. “Do you want to know me? I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I am the God who has revealed himself in history.”

Backtracking to Moses’ first interview in front of Pharaoh at the beginning of chapter 5, remember that Moses made the issue one of honoring “Yahweh, the God of Israel.” And remember how Pharaoh responded, “Who is Yahweh that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I do not **know** Yahweh, and besides, I will not let Israel go?” Pharaoh claims no knowledge of Yahweh. And he rejects any desire to have any knowledge of Yahweh. While Moses is called to trust in his knowledge of Yahweh.

God tells Moses here in chapter 6, “I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷ Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall **know** that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” Not only does God plan to redeem Israel from Egypt, but he plans to do it in a way that communicates who he is, “You shall know that I am Yahweh, your God.” And that phrase, “you shall know that I am Yahweh,” occurs 11 times, from this, the first one in chapter 6, through chapter 14, 11 times. It is not a common phrase in the Old Testament, so we should be especially alerted to its repetition here. This is a theme of this narrative, that you shall know that I am Yahweh. Pharaoh may claim at the beginning to not know God. Not to worry. God is about to make himself known.

God demolishes the Gods of Egypt (Exodus 12-15a).

Knowledge of God in Exodus is also connected to the theme of spiritual warfare. Last night, reading a book called *Babylon: Mesopotamia and the Birth of Civilization*, the author reminded me of something my Old Testament professor had taught me. Writing about the Sumerian hundred year’s war he observed, “the conflict between Lagash and Umma was a conflict between the god Ningirsu of Lagash and the god Shara of Umma. Men fought and died and cities were destroyed, but the actual argument was between the gods (Kriwaczek, 89).” The ancients believed the real battle was taking place in the realm of the gods. And this ancient near eastern worldview is not that far off the true biblical worldview. War amongst men mirrors spiritual activity. Habakkuk’s revelation of faith, in chapter 3 of Habakkuk, comes when he finally realizes that the Babylonians are not merely human invaders but instruments of God’s wrath. It is God who is going to war against Judah. In Daniel, Daniel is told by an angel that he was delayed because of opposition from demonic powers called the prince of the kingdom of Persia and the prince of Greece (Daniel 10:13, 20). This idea is also present in Exodus. In Exodus 12:12, God tells Moses, “I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD.” Moses restates this idea in Numbers 33:4, writing, “while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn whom the LORD had struck down among them. The LORD had also executed judgments on their gods.”

The biblical worldview understands “the gods” of other peoples as false belief systems, so their idols are empty, but also as demonic spirits. God does not do battle with equal, evil powers. There is no equal. God is the only “I Am.” Everything else is created, including angels and demons. As such, the outcome is never in question. Evil exists only as God permits created beings to continue to exert their own wills, whether human or demonic. When God chooses to act, the end is sure. Against Egypt, God has chosen to act. He is doing battle not only against Pharaoh and his army but against false strongholds of belief and the demonic powers behind them.

And though in the text Moses does not implicitly connect the plagues to the gods and goddesses of Egypt, the comment that God went to war against the gods of Egypt, makes it really hard to ignore some obvious connections. Isis, goddess of the Nile, floods the land every year by her tears for Osiris. In the first plague, God turns the Nile to blood. Heqet the Egyptian goddess of fertility was represented as a frog. The second plague floods the land with frogs. The third plague of gnats and fourth plague of flies are hard to connect. Maybe we should think of Set, the god of the desert and storms and Uatchit the goddess of the Sun's burning heat and the Nile's marshes. The death of cattle in the fifth plague seems more directly a dig at Hathor, the sky goddess often depicted as a cow. Sekhmet, the goddess of healing, was unable to stop the sixth plague of boils. The sky goddess Nut was unable to control the hail, thunder, and lightening of the seventh plague. And where was Osiris, the god of life, death and crops along the Nile, when the locusts of the eight plague devoured those crops? The sun god Ra was blacked out during the ninth plague. And then with the final plague, Pharaoh's claim to divinity comes under attack. When Pharaoh's father died, he claimed to become the god Horus, son of Isis and Osiris. Taking the throne, his son the new Pharaoh became the incarnation or image of Horus on earth. Striking down the son of Pharaoh in the tenth plague, God strikes down Horus.

In this epic power confrontation God reveals himself while, at the same time, unmasking the false gods of Egypt. Will Pharaoh now know God? Well, that brings us to another theme of the narrative, the power struggle in a man's heart. With Pharaoh the text leads us to wonder, could he ever have come to know God?

God hardens Pharaoh's already hard heart.

On his way to Egypt after receiving the call, God told Moses, "I will harden [Pharaoh's] heart so that he will not let the people go (4:21)." Three different Hebrew verbs are used on 20 different occasions from chapter 4 to 14 in reference to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Does this mean that God worked both to reveal knowledge of himself to Pharaoh and, at the same time, prevented Pharaoh from yielding to that knowledge? Did God actively prevent Pharaoh from saving faith?

There are different ways to understand the work of God on Pharaoh. I will give you my thoughts as one option. Eleven of the twenty references to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart name God as the subject. God is the one working to make his heart hard, impenetrable. Another six times Pharaoh's heart is the subject. So, as in 7:14, "Pharaoh's heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go." These references could indicate the state of Pharaoh's heart apart from God's action or could assume the hardness is a result of God's action. But then four occurrences, in 8:15, 32; 9:34, and 13:15, have Pharaoh as the one who hardens his own heart.

So, I ask myself this question. What would it mean for Pharaoh's heart to soften? Well, since the references to the hardening of heart all have to do with whether or not to let Israel go, softening of the heart in these instances would result in a giving in to the command of God. That is not the same thing as trust in God. To give up, to admit defeat, to let Israel go, that is one thing. To bow down, to yield the heart, to worship. That is a whole other story. Pharaoh gives us a picture of a human being vacillating, not between faith and rebellion, but between giving in and not giving in. Moshe Greenberg describes Pharaoh this way, "The opposition of Pharaoh is the archetypal opposition of human power, of human authority to the claims of God. Under pressure it will show flexibility and accommodation, even reversing itself – first by crying for help, then by confessing guilt and making concessions. But after all its retreats, it clings to its last redoubt, a core of self-assertiveness and independence, to surrender which would mean the end of its claim to ultimate, self-sufficient power. Here it resists, careless of the cost, unto death."² Left to himself, there is no reason given anywhere in the text to expect that Pharaoh would turn in faith to God, ever. God did not need to harden Pharaoh to make him resistant to submission. Pharaoh was always going to resist to submission.

What was God's purpose in hardening the heart of Pharaoh? Was God out to damn a man who left on his own would repent and believe? No. In Exodus 9:16, God says, "For this very purpose I raised

² Hamilton, V. P. (2005). Handbook on the Pentateuch. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” Pharaoh is not a neutral being. Pharaoh is a sinful, fallen being, who believes that he is a god. He starts this tale with a hard heart, reflected by his very first words to Moses, “Who is Yahweh, that I should obey his voice?” By his own free will Pharaoh hardens his heart against God. In fact, we are not told that God hardens Pharaoh’s heart until 9:34-35, well into the sixth plague, where we are given both sides of the same coin at once. Verse 34 says, [Pharaoh] sinned again and hardened his heart.” Right after which verse 35 says, “And Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.”

I believe that the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh by God was a strengthening of an evil will to continue on in fixed rebellion. God strengthened Pharaoh according to an already wicked and resistant heart. God gave him the fortitude to carry out his stubborn will to the end of the tenth plague. God would not allow his opponent to bow out. He declared that Pharaoh would see this through, so that the spiritual, religious, and intellectual strongholds of one of the world’s human superpowers might be unmasked and the true glory of God made known for the salvation of all who would turn from the false powers and the false gods to the worship of the one true God.

The text makes clear God’s plan to spread the knowledge of his glory, power, and goodness. Let’s read some of those texts.

First, God intended his saving action as a testimony to the Israelites.

Exodus 10:1–2

¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”

Exodus 14:31

³¹ When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

Second, God also planned his saving action as a testimony to the Egyptians.

Exodus 7:3–5

³ “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴ When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. ⁵ The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”

Exodus 9:20–21

²⁰ The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses; ²¹ but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field.

Exodus 14:4

⁴ “Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.”

Third, And God planned his saving action as a testimony to the peoples of Canaan.

Exodus 15:14–15

¹⁴ The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. ¹⁵ Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

Exodus 18:11

¹¹ “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.”

Joshua 2:9–11

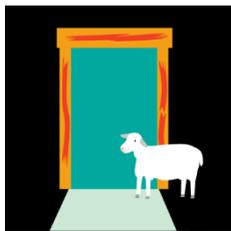
⁹ [Rehab] said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹ When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

What has God revealed? What has God made known? God hardened Pharaoh to bring out the madness of human defiance, even to the devastation of his nation, even to the death of his son, even to the destruction of his army. I am reminded of Psalm 2:2, “The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed.” Pharaoh gives us an ugly glimpse into the heart of every man, magnified by his high position of power and influence. This is man shaking his fist at God, crying out, “I will be captain of my own soul though I lead myself and everyone around me to destruction. I will not yield to truth and goodness. I claim my right to be my own god.” Strengthening Pharaoh reveals to us something about the rebellion of the human heart.

At the same time, we come to greater knowledge of God, of his power and the inevitability of his victory over evil. God is truly God. There is no other. God makes himself knowable and invites all men to know him. This is what we just read in these passages. One of God’s purposes for engaging the false beliefs systems and fake gods of this mighty human empire is to shake people loose from their bondage, that they might turn and know God. This is not only for Israel but also that Egypt might know God. And not only for the Egyptians, the gift of knowledge is also for the peoples of Canaan, that like Rahab, some might yield to the knowledge of the Lord and confess with in their hearts, “the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” The liberation of Israel from Egypt involved a vast display of the might of God, containing power to wake men and women to the knowledge of him.

In the tenth plague of Egypt, God reveals something even more about himself, something beyond his might and power. In the midst of his judgments, God gives the Israelites a redemptive analogy to help them understand his mercy and grace.

God establishes the Passover as an ongoing monument of grace.



This liberation of Israel came at a cost to God that no one then expected or even could have imagined. He keeps the knowledge of his own sacrifice to himself.

The last plague, the death of the firstborn, is an example of what some scholars call intrusion ethics, when the just judgment of God intrudes into the usual course of human events. Romans 3:23 tells us, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Soon after, Romans 6:23 tells us, “The wages of sin is death.”

Paul is only affirming the curse God proclaimed on Adam and Eve, “In the day you eat from it you shall surely die.” Sinful man cannot live in the presence of a holy God. The result of sin must be eternal death, eternal separation from God. This is the just judgment that already hangs over the head of every human being. As John wrote in 3:17-18, “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world but that the world should be saved through him...he who does not believe has been judged already.” Jesus did not come to judge because the judgment had already been established.

God typically allows human beings to live out their lives, usually meeting their end through old age or sickness or accident or human evil. And then, after death, the judgment for sin is carried out.

Intrusion ethics points out that God would have been just and faithful to his word if he had demanded the lives of Adam and Eve immediately. It is God’s right at any point to allow his justice to intrude into the world and demand the punishment of death for the sin of any human being. This is what happened at the flood. This is what happened to Ananias and Saphira. This is what happened in each of those rare instances when God chose to forego his patient mercy to bring forward an

immediate execution of justice. When God takes the life of every first born of Egypt, he is not taking innocent life. He is not acting unjustly. The Israelites has suffered unjustly for years under wicked Egyptian oppression. The payment for sin is due.

But it would be wrong to think that the Israelites do not owe that payment themselves. God has not chosen Israel out because they are more righteous than the Egyptians. God can liberate the Israelites from Egypt. But for God to make them fit to be his own, the penalty of sin demanded by God's own justice must be paid. The Passover ritual confirms that truth. This is the Monument of grace that I want to point out to you in the book of Exodus. So, here it is, Exodus 12:6-13.

⁶ 'You shall keep [a lamb] until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. ⁷ 'Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ 'They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ 'Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, *both* its head and its legs along with its entrails. ¹⁰ 'And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. ¹¹ 'Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD's Passover. ¹² 'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. ¹³ 'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; 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.

The redemption of Israel will cost God the death of his Son. John the Baptist understood this when he saw Jesus coming and cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)!" Jesus would be the true Passover lamb. The Israelites did not understand this. They only knew to obey in faith, that if they put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their house, then the angel of death would pass over. The Israelites sons were not more righteous. They too deserved the judgement of the angel of wrath for their own sin. But by faith they could place themselves under the blood of the lamb. That blood did not take away sin. It was a pledge by God that he would one day make the necessary payment. And he did. The redemption of Israel out of Egypt is based not only on the spiritual power of God but also on his grace and his mercy that would one day be realized on the cross.

The Exodus is achieved.

After this final plague, the Egyptians urge the Israelites to leave. And so, they do. On the way out, they plunder the Egyptians as a victorious army would, requesting and receiving gold, silver, and articles of clothing (12:35-36). 13:18 tells us that "God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt." They marched out like an army, but in this last act of following God, Moses seems to have made a terrible mistake. Instead of taking the coast road up to Israel, he chose to head out into the wilderness towards Mt. Sinai. And the consequences are potentially devastating.

Moses leads the people into a dead end with their backs up against the Red Sea. Before he realizes the danger, Pharaoh hardens his heart, changes his mind, and musters his army. The chariot battalion of one of the mightiest military forces on the face of the earth gallops into view. The Israelites have nowhere to go. They are stuck. They had been marching like an army but that was just pretend. They are slaves. They cannot face Egypt. How quickly our hearts fail us, even so soon after experiencing the miracles of God? So, they turn on Moses in 14:11, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?...Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?'" They turn on their leader. But Moses had not forgotten what the Lord had just done. He turns to the people and cries out with bold faith,

¹³ ...“Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”

And so, God did. He fought for them. He opened the Red Sea and took them through, just as he had taken Noah through the waters of the flood. Then he brought the waves down on the Egyptians, obliterating their army. In the years of wandering there would be no threat at their backs from the Egyptians. That danger of that army has been taken care of.

Conclusion: The Israelites begin the process of discipleship (15b-18).

God has redeemed Israel out of Egypt. The above passage used the word salvation for the first time in Exodus. “Stand by and see the salvation of Yahweh...Yahweh will fight for you while you keep silent.” I am again reminded of Genesis 15 when God cut covenant with Abraham. God walked through the covenant pieces taking the curse upon himself while Abraham slept passively to the side. Here Israel is to stand passively to the side silently, watching. They have no hand in their own salvation. That is a consistent theme through Scripture. Acceptance before God comes by grace through faith alone in the atoning salvation of God.

What is the human response to God’s grace? That is chapter 15, the hymn of Moses, which starts,

¹ ...I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.

² “The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation;

This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will extol Him.

The right human response to God is worship that comes out of a grateful and awe-inspired heart. God enjoys song, though he does not want only song. He wants the worship of life. He wants the Israelites to walk in faith and present themselves to him. Our salvation, in terms of justification is 100% dependent on God. But God does not want flabby, whining, spoiled, stunted children who never grow. God saves us not to keep us as we are but to see us transformed. We see God’s desire for the Israelites come out in the next three chapters 16-18. Up to this point God has asked nothing from the Israelites. Now he expects them to participate in the journey. This is the way of discipleship. God saves and then invites us to participate in our transformation and growth. The Israelites now given tests of faith. They have to trust God for food and water. They have to start participating in battle to fight for themselves. They have to begin to organize themselves.

We have a great king and a newly formed people. The right question Israel should be asking now is, “How then shall we live in relationship with our savior King?” They need a covenant. And that is where we are going in our next lesson, to Mt. Sinai.

Reflection Questions

1. When you read through chapter 5, what stands out to you in the interactions between Pharaoh, Moses, and the Jewish foremen? What had you not noticed before? What is going on in each one’s heart and mind?
2. Observe 6:28-7:7. What stands out to you as interesting or important or confusing in these verses?
3. How does 6:28-7:7 connect to:
 - a. Moses’ despair and God’s encouragement in 5:22-6:10?
 - b. The theme of knowing God?
 - c. The theme of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart?
4. How do you understand the interplay between the state of Pharaoh’s already hard heart (ie. 7:13-14), Pharaoh hardening his own heart (ie. 8:14, 32), and God actively hardening Pharaoh’s heart (ie. 9:35)?
5. What are potential spiritual strongholds of false belief in your culture, ideas that people hold on to despite the destructive consequence?
6. How does the Passover illustrate the grace of God? What 3 to 5 points would you emphasize in explaining to someone how the Passover stands as a monument of God’s grace?