

Life or Death . . . At Midnight

Exodus 11-12

Introduction

Today, we are studying Exodus, chapter 11, where the plot thickens. In fact, it climaxes with the final plague.

In our last discussion, we studied the battle between the gods, as the only true God, known as Yahweh, takes on the Egyptian gods and goddesses and confounds each of them. What a fascinating thing it is to discover that at the hand of Moses by the power of God, the Egyptian gods are futile; they are impotent; they are silent to death. Moses has proven himself and his case and yet, we have noticed that Pharaoh continues to harden his heart. Of course the sovereign God is behind the scenes in that account as well.

Moses Predicts the Final Plague: The Reaction

Now, Moses will go back to Pharaoh one more time. He will predict, what we all know as, the tenth plague. The word “plague” could be translated, “stroke”. The tenth plague is the final stroke leveled at Egypt, in order that the people of Israel might go free.

Announced to Moses/Israel

Let us pick up our story up at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 11, as God speaks to Moses.

Now the Lord said to Moses, “One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely. Speak

now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold.”

There is a little misunderstanding in verse 2, if your text says “borrow”. They will actually ask that their neighbor give them articles of silver and gold. These items will be used one day to construct the tabernacle, as they cover items with gold and silver.

You might ask, “Is it really fair that they manipulate the Egyptians, who are now perhaps, in terror of them?”

If you understand that this is nothing more than back wages for four hundred thirty years of slavery, you can understand that this is justifiable. They are, in a sense, asking for wages that have been withheld for centuries. The Egyptians give it to them and they receive their wages because God is motivating their hearts to give.

Look at verse 3 and note the interesting comments concerning the way Moses is esteemed by the people.

The Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Furthermore, the man Moses himself was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, both in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.

I think the last phrase is referring to the Israelites. If you have been studying with us, then you know there was a time when they hated Moses; they despised him.

The Israelites felt like it was Moses who had brought all of these plagues and made their bondage even more difficult. You may remember that the first

three plagues that affected Egypt also affected Goshen, or the Israelites, as well. They were not overly thrilled with Moses' plan. Yet, Moses was willing to stand alone and do what he knew God wanted him to do. Ultimately, we see something we rarely see on planet earth, and that is, vindication.

There may be people who reject you; there may be family members or coworkers who do not love you very much because of your position. This is not because of your personality – let us not make that mistake – but because of your stand. If you continue to stand alone, maybe there will also come vindication here on earth. We know vindication will come in heaven.

I find it great, in this situation, that God moves in such a way that Moses, who has stood alone for so many years and perhaps, for the year in which the plagues were affecting the people, is now revered and respected by, not only the Egyptian, but the Israelite. It is worth the time to stand alone.

Announced to Pharaoh/Egypt

Continue to verses 4 and 5. Moses is speaking to Pharaoh.

Moses said, "Thus says the Lord, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones [grinding meal]; all the firstborn of the cattle as well.'"

I want to explain, at least briefly, why this was such a horrendous plague. It is not just because there was death to the firstborn, which is the hideous nature of it, but because Yahweh is still taking on the Egyptian polytheistic perversions.

Do you know, in Egypt, who was supposedly the protector of the firstborn? The Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh was considered the embodiment of the sun god Ra. He declared to the people that he was the protector of the firstborn. Not only was he the protector of the firstborn of the people, but of the cattle as well.

In this plague, God will reveal Pharaoh's impotence; his complete lack of power. This will devastate Pharaoh, as well as the land.

Look at verses 6 through 8.

"Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again. But against any of the sons of Israel a dog shall not even bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, 'Go out, you and all the people who follow you,' and after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

Let me review this final plague. There were four ingredients:

- it will happen around midnight;
- there will be national death; that is, death to all firstborn (and as we will see from the text in a moment, there will be death to the firstborn in the Israelite home where the blood of a lamb is not smeared on the doorposts and lintel of the home);
- there will be great sorrow;
- there will be an exodus.

So, after he explains all of that to Pharaoh, Moses, in hot anger, with righteous indignation, leaves the courtroom.

God Explains the Passover Plan: The Response

Now, in chapter 12, Moses will address the people of Israel and prepare them for the exodus. Look at verses 1 and 2.

Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you."

It is interesting that there is a change in the calendar. This is like telling someone during the month of April that they are now going to act like it is the month of January. Why are they to do that? Because they are now redeemed as a nation. This is a special day and, on their calendar, they view this event as the time when Israel was in a sense, born again; made into a nation.

Four Key Elements to Passover

Let us look at God's "Passover plan" and I will give four key elements.

Substitution

God says to Moses, in verses 3 through 6,

"Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household. Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.'"

The lamb is the ingredient, I believe, of substitution. It is to be killed between the two evenings; that is, at midnight.

Picture this night for a moment, as if you are there and are told that you are to take a lamb. I am sure that other revelation was also given to the Israelite so that they understood that this lamb would be the substitutionary one; the death one; the one to be slain that they might, on the other hand, live.

One individual said, rather crassly but truthfully, that in every home in Egypt that night, there was either a dead lamb or a dead firstborn. There was, in every home, the blood smeared on the lintel and on the doorposts, or there was the breathless form of a child or maybe, an older teenager or young person – the firstborn in every home.

This was a substitutionary act that they did not understand like you and I understand today. They did not have the rest of the picture; they did not know what would come later. We, however, now know that this is a beautiful picture of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. There will come a day when we will either experience death or we will stand before God with our hearts bathed in the blood of the Lamb.

Symbolism

There is another element to the Passover – not only is there substitution, but there is symbolism.

Let us look at verse 7.

"Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses . . ."

Now in the homes, there would be two beams on which they were to smear blood. The lintel was the crossbeam that was directly over the door and they were to put blood there as well. He is very explicit in how He gives instructions. Continue to verses 8 through 9a.

"They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, . . ."

Fire is the picture in the Old Testament, by the way, of judgment. In other words, this lamb went through the judgment so that they would not have to experience it. This is another picture of Christ, obviously.

The instructions continue in verses 9b through 10.

". . . [you are to eat] its legs along with its entrails. And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire."

In other words, this entire lamb is going through the judgment of fire. Note verses 21 and 22.

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said to them, "Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover [or paschal] lamb. You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning."

They were to catch some of the blood that drains from the dead animal and apply it. Continue to verse 23.

"For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door . . ."

There is another ingredient in this Passover, and that is, protection. However, in case you have missed

it, let me briefly remind you of some of the symbolic things.

- Number one, the sacrifice must be a lamb.

Christ, in the New Testament, was the Lamb of God. You may remember in John, chapter 1, verse 29, John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching and made his first declarative word to the nation, which was what?

... "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jesus Christ was clearly seen as the paschal Lamb; the "pascha"; the Passover Lamb that would shed His blood so that Israel would be redeemed and the Gentile would be redeemed.

- Number two, the lamb must be without spot or blemish.

This is a perfect picture of Jesus Christ, who, according to I Peter, chapter 1, verse 19, was,

... unblemished and spotless ...

- Number three, the lamb must be in the prime of its existence; that is, a one year old lamb that was in the prime of its life.

Interestingly, Jesus Christ died in the prime of His life, as a man of thirty-three years of age.

- Number four, the lamb's blood is shed that they might have life.

In the New Testament, I Peter, chapter 2, and John, chapter 3, as you probably well know, state that Christ's blood was shed that you and I might have life.

Security

There was no safety except behind the blood stained doors. They were not to go outside when the death angel came over that land. There was safety only behind the blood stained lintel and doorposts of that home. And today as well, according to the New Testament, there is no safety except behind the blood of Jesus Christ.

There is incredible significance to this symbolism; to this "pascha," this Passover Lamb that we see fulfilled in Jesus Christ. There is also protection; security. Note verse 23 again.

For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord

will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you.

The words "pass over," in the New Testament translation, are an interesting Hebrew word which literally means, "to cover with wings".

I want you to get a slightly different picture than you may have been taught or have learned in your own studies. The picture is not just that God, or Yahweh, is passing through the land, but that God sends a death angel, which could be a pre-incarnate Christ, or what we call a Christophany. Yahweh is shielding the home; He is, in a sense, spreading His wings over the home where there is blood. As He protects the home, the death angel, perhaps Jesus Christ, goes through the land.

What a beautiful picture of security. For the believer who is behind the blood, it is as if God has spread His wings over your life. The believer will never fear judgment. When the death angel comes to send all those who have rejected Christ to the eternal flames of hell, as we are told in Revelation, chapter 19, there will be no doubt or fear in your heart, if you are behind the blood, because Yahweh spreads His wings over you.

So imagine, if you can, that night at midnight. Yahweh is enveloping with His wings, the homes where there was blood on the doorposts. Then, as the death angel came, there was protection.

Now note the significance of this picture. You have heard it and perhaps you know it well, but what the person was like on the inside was not the issue. The issue was, "Is there blood?" Yahweh said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

We know the hymn, but do we recognize the significance? If an Israelite had poked his head out of the window as the death angel came through that night, and explained to Him what a good man he was, he would have died. It was not that they were part of Abraham's seed, it was that God saw blood. It was not that they had been circumcised, it was that God saw blood.

I honestly believe, ladies and gentlemen, that our hands are full of things, works, deeds. There are many who believe that when the death angel comes, they will show Him what they have done.

God is interested in the Lamb's blood. In fact, He says, in Revelation, chapter 20, that those who are not

written in the Lamb's book of life are cast into eternal fire.

What is God interested in? Is He interested in what you can do? No.

Is there blood on your heart? Have you gone to the Lamb and acknowledged Him?

Submission

There is also a fourth element in the Passover and that is submission. I love this. Look at verse 24.

And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever.

Underline "for your children". It is interesting that this was not just for them, it was for the next generation as well. Continue to verses 25 through 27a.

When you enter the land which the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite [this Passover]. And when your children say to you, "What does this rite mean to you?" you shall say, "It is a Passover . . ."

Do not slough this off. Those who have children today, have the same responsibility. When your children ask you, "What does this mean?" you are to reveal to them the significance.

It is our responsibility as a church body, to raise up another generation that understands the scriptures – *Yahweh; truth*. So when your child asks, "Mommy, Daddy, why do we go to church?" Don't say, "Because I said so." Get ready; explain why. Some of you are looking at me like you want me to tell you why you are here! I am not going to. When your child asks you, "Why do we pray before we eat?" Do not say, "Because we're different from the dogs and the cats." Explain the significance; explain why you do these things. Are they rituals or do they have meaning?

In our home, we have another kind of problem. Our three and a half year old boys have not yet asked, "Why?" The problem we have is that I will pray before a meal and after we are three bites into our meal, one of the boys will say, "Hey, we forgot to pray before we ate."

Has that ever happened to you? Do you know how unspiritual it feels to tell them, "We prayed?"

They say, "No we haven't."

"Yes, we have – and I'm not praying again. Eat your food!"

They were to explain to their children, "Look, son [or daughter], this has tremendous meaning. When we smeared the blood on the doorposts and on the lintel, that was protection; that was God's plan for our salvation."

We are to express the same to our children, "This is God's plan."

Now I know, if you have been in Sunday school, you have heard about the Passover. You have the story down pat; you know exactly what happened. So when we come to a chapter like this, it is one of those chapters that pastors fear because everyone thinks, "Oh, hum, I've been through this one a half dozen times."

However, I want you to picture, for just a moment, being there. They submitted to this.

Imagine hearing, for the first time, this plan. "I want you to kill a lamb. I want you to catch blood in a basin and smear it on the doorposts and on the lintel. And then, I want you to roast it."

The text also tells us that they were told, "You're to eat with your clothes on. It's midnight, but get out of your pajamas. Get your kids dressed. Put your shoes on."

They, by the way, normally took their shoes off when they entered the home. This command was very out of the ordinary.

They were then told, "Eat with your shoes and your clothes on. Take that staff and hold it in your hand, men. Then, eat the roasted lamb. You're ready to go."

"Where are we going?"

"Well, you're going to leave Egypt."

"Is it going to happen immediately?"

"Well, we don't know."

"There's no map. Why blood?"

All of these questions were racing through their minds. However, the significant thing, men and women, is verse 28, which tells us,

Then the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the Lord had commanded . . . so they did.

"You want me to smear blood on the doorposts? I'll do it."

"You want me to put it on the lintel? I'll do it."

“You want me to eat roast lamb at midnight? I’ll do it.”

“You want me to hold my staff and eat with one hand? I’ll obey.”

Wow! So Mom and Dad and all the kids got together with another home without children to form a group of no more than ten people and ate with anticipation.

What a picture of the believer this is – staff in hand, ready to obey. That is the significant part of this. They were ready to follow.

The Plague Arrives on Schedule: The Results

So the plague arrives on schedule. Let us look at two results.

Death!

Look at verse 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.

Archaeologists have revealed that the oldest son of Ramses II, this Pharaoh, never reigned. The younger son reigned instead. We know why – this plague struck Pharaoh’s firstborn. Continue to verses 30 through 32.

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. 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. Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also.”

There are five imperatives in these verses. The first is, “Rise up”. It is as if Pharaoh says, “Go! Go! Just go!”

The wailing could be heard throughout Egypt. Why? Because they had been given warning. They had been told, “If you would smear blood, you would be saved too, when the death angel comes.”

They said, “We have our gods. And Pharaoh, the embodiment of the sun god, is the protector of the firstborn.”

So they did not surrender and there was great death.

Liberty!

In light of that tragedy, it is hard to rejoice. However, the last part of this chapter gives us the second result, and that is, liberty! Look at verses 33 and 34.

The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, “We will all be dead.” So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders.

They are packing their stuff as quickly as they can. Look at verse 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;

Skip to verses 37 and 38.

Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children [and women]. A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, . . .

Now note verses 41 and 42.

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. 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.

What a night!

I can remember the night when I, as an eighteen year old, knelt beside my bed, all alone, upstairs in my little room, and said, “Lord Jesus, I surrender my life to you.”

Unsure of my salvation, unsure if I was part of the family, I said, “It’s time to stop the battle.”

Perhaps you can go back in your own thinking and remember a time, maybe on a college campus or in the cafeteria of some corporation or in your home with your parents, when you were redeemed. I do not mean a time when you turned over a new leaf or you started becoming a moral person, but a time when you applied the blood of the Lamb on the doorposts of your heart.

I fear for people who may stand before God one day, with hands full of good things, good deeds, morality, integrity, church attendance. The problem is, my friend, the heavenly home is reserved for people whose names are in the Lamb's book of life.

How do you get into the Lamb's book of life? By applying the blood of the Lamb. I John, chapter 1, verse 7b, says,

. . . the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us from all sin.

We must acknowledge Him as our Savior.

Application – Truths To Be Learned

There are many truths to be learned from this final plague. Let me give two.

For the believer – obedience marks the lifestyle of faith

1. First, for the believer, obedience marks the lifestyle of faith.

Can you imagine more than two million people leaving in the early morning hours? The women run and take the dough from bread they planned to make and just wrap it in clothing. They put it over their shoulder and head out of Egypt. Two million people!

I heard one individual's comment, which is rather earthy, "How do you handle the sanitation problems for two million people? Where's the next meal coming from? What do they wear?"

God says, "Go!" and they just go. *That* is the lifestyle of faith. A lifestyle of faith is willing to change, to move, to follow, whatever it may be.

I see dust being kicked up by two million people dancing all the way out of Egypt. In their hearts, though, they are probably wondering, "Why?"

I think Moses was probably the one who was weighed down with the thoughts, "Lord, where's breakfast?"

Obedience, however, as seen of them, marks the lifestyle of faith.

For the unbeliever – surrender marks the beginning of life

2. For the unbeliever, if you have never trusted Jesus Christ, surrender marks the beginning of life.

Try for a moment, my friend, to think of the logic behind the Passover. There is none. There is none except in the genius of God's mind as He devised the plan with all of the things that would not make sense.

"You mean that I will be saved by blood; the blood of the lamb? That doesn't make sense! Why don't I begin to imitate the character of a lamb and be meek? Why don't I just put a lamb on the doorstep? That's unmistakable."

"No. Kill it. Apply the blood."

Why is it, in the New Testament, that God's plan is so reversed, according to our human logic? He says, "I don't want you to do anything. I just want you to take the blood of the Lamb."

It does not make sense. Where is the logic? Yet, that is the plan of God. He sent His Son to die and shed His blood and, by accepting that sacrifice as our way into heaven, we can also be saved.

I recently read again, the story of John Wilkes Booth, who, as you know, assassinated Abraham Lincoln. Few people know what happened to Booth after the assassination. I love history and in my readings, I came across the story.

John Wilkes Booth joined up with his co-conspirator, David Herold, and the two headed out of Washington. Two thousand soldiers galloped out of Washington after them, knowing, basically, where they were headed. Finally, a detachment of twenty-five soldiers, along with two detectives, tracked them down. They were hiding on a plantation in a tobacco barn that was filled with tobacco leaves and hay.

The Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, had ordered that these men be kept alive, so the soldiers were hoping that they would surrender. Booth was fairly determined to fight his way out, but his companion decided to surrender. So Herold held out his hands through the slats of the barn door and the soldiers, who had now surrounded the barn, manacled him and dragged him out and tied him to a tree. The story records that he began to babble his innocence,

knowing that he would be hanged, until they finally said, "Be quiet or we'll gag you."

They then centered their thoughts on Booth, who was still in the barn. Finally, one of the lieutenants, Lieutenant Edward Doherty, decided the best way to handle the situation would be to smoke the quarry out with fire. So he had one of the soldiers make a straw rope, light it, and throw it into the barn. The hay and the tobacco leaves instantly became ablaze with fire. Booth, the story told, leaned toward the slats of the barn door to get away from the flames. However, one soldier noticed that while Booth was struggling with a crutch with one arm, he was trying to raise his carbine with the other, as if to fire. The soldier, Sergeant Boston Corbett, impulsively and against orders, raised his and fired. The bullet struck Booth in the back of the head. He slumped forward and they dragged him out of the barn to escape the flames.

The story tells that the soldiers dragged Booth onto the porch of the home. It seemed he was dead, but they dashed water on his face and his lips began to move. They all leaned forward to hear what this

dying man would say. He said, "Tell my mother I thought that I was doing the best that I could do."

Then Booth asked the soldiers to raise his paralyzed arms so he could view his hands. History records that his last words, as he looked at his hands, were the words, "Useless. Useless."

As the sun was rising, two hours after Corbett shot and struck Booth in the head, John Wilkes Booth died.

My friends, for you, salvation will begin when you view your hands and say the words, "Everything that I do to gain salvation; all of the works that I do; all of the acts that I do are useless, useless."

That is surrender to the plan of God. God, in His divine counsel, had a Lamb, whom we know as Jesus Christ, die; go through the fire of judgment, so that our acceptance of Him and His shed blood would give us eternal life.

As a believer, do you have that obedient mark such that you are willing to move if God says?

If you do not know Christ, would you accept Him today?

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