

Set Free!

Pastor Cliff Bergman - Pinawa Alliance Church

January 24, 2021

Exodus 4 – 12

The number 1 issue facing humankind is not global warming nor the coronavirus. It is not the ever-increasing discord evident in so many countries of the world. There are numerous other concerns we can name and which certainly merit attention. However, the number 1 issue facing humankind is the need for people to be redeemed from their sins so that they might have a relationship with the God of this universe. Or stated very succinctly, people need to be *set free* from their sin. One event in ancient history that particularly pictured both the enslavement of sin and the means to be set free from it, happened nearly 3,500 years ago in Egypt.

Let me remind you of the setting. Jacob and his family moved to Egypt to escape the widespread famine. Eventually Joseph and those of his generation died and the relationship of God's people to those who ruled over Egypt changed. It is summed up in, "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.'" (Exodus 1:8–9 ESV). The *new king* decided to enslave the Hebrews. As the years of oppression and hardship increased, they called out to God because of the oppression and hardship they faced at the hands of the Egyptians (Exo 3.7-9). God heard their cries and chose Moses as the man who would be instrumental in their deliverance; He would send Moses to bring His people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt (Exo 3.10). In Moses' replies to God, he brought up his misgivings about the people's response and his inabilities. God assured him He would go with him and Moses set out on the journey back to Egypt. He was accompanied by Aaron whom God had sent to meet him (Exo 4.27).

The Bible is filled with imagery and symbolism to visualize and reinforce the meaning and significance of events. That is particularly the case with the enslavement of Israel in Egypt and their redemption. For example, Egypt symbolizes satan's kingdom of darkness. The Hebrews enslaved and held captive in Egypt picture people held in the grip and grasp of satan and sin. Their release from captivity and their exodus from Egypt pictures redemption from sin. And as we shall see in due course, passing through the Red Sea is a picture of baptism.

When Moses and Aaron arrived back in Egypt, they declared God's word to pharaoh, "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness." (Exo 5.1). Pharaoh defied the word of the Lord and refused to let God's people go. Not only did he refuse, but he made the task of the slaves harsher. In his defiance, the Hebrews would now need to also collect the straw to make bricks; however, the number of bricks required would not decrease (Exo 5.6-9). Not surprisingly the Hebrews blamed Moses for the added hardship (Exo 5.20-21). In response, God reassured Moses that He would bring His people out of bondage to pharaoh (Exo 6.1-8). That was followed by more encounters with pharaoh, beginning with the 1st plague when the water in

Egypt was turned into blood. The magicians of Egypt were able to replicate the first 2 miracles Moses performed, but when it came to the 3rd, making *gnats*, they were unable. The plagues were widespread and all-encompassing throughout Egypt; except for the plagues of the death of the livestock (9.4), hail (9.26), darkness (10.23), and of course the final plague (11.7), when God exempted Israel. The plagues inflicted on Egypt were not randomly chosen by God, rather they represented a judgement on the gods of Egypt. For example, *turning the water into blood* was a judgement on the Egyptian Nile god – *hapi*. The plague of *frogs* was a bit of irony regarding the frog-goddess, *Heqet*. Egyptians viewed *frogs*, which were born after the Nile flooded each year, as a sign of life and fertility; however, in this case the *sign of life* became a suffocating plague. The death of the livestock was an affront on the worship of sacred bulls, *Apis*. The plagues made it clear that the gods of Egypt were unable to keep Egypt safe (12.12). The God of the Hebrews was sovereign!

However, it is the final plague, or the final judgement on Egypt, the death of the first-born, that we will focus on; it is described in,

Exodus 11:4–6 (ESV) 4 So Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 5 and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. 6 There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again.’”

Because pharaoh refused to obey God’s command to let His people go, the Lord would inflict a final judgement on Egypt. About midnight the Lord would pass through the land and every firstborn would die. It mattered not whether a person was part of a prominent and high-ranking family or was a slave and of low position. the death of the firstborn would be indiscriminate. Nor was it limited to humans; the firstborn of the cattle would die as well. There was only one way to escape the judgement. God provide a provision to exempt people; He instituted what is known as the *Passover*. Those who believed God and followed His instructions would be spared.

The Passover

The *Passover* is rich with symbolism and meaning. Not only regarding the specific events of that night in Egypt but in looking forward nearly 1,500 years to Jesus laying down His life on the cross of Calvary as the ultimate and final sacrifice. The Passover is described in Exodus 12.1 – 13.

Preparation for the Passover began with each household selecting a lamb on the 10th day of the month. If the household was small, two households would share. The lamb could be chosen from the sheep or the goats but couldn’t be just any lamb; it was to be a male, 1 year old, and without blemish, or free from any defect. They could not choose a sickly or frail animal; rather, it was to be a choice lamb, the very best lamb in their flock.

The families were to keep their lamb until the 14th day. It is very interesting that they didn't choose the lamb on the day of the Passover, but 4 days earlier. Consider what likely happened during those 4 days. The family, particularly the children, would have become more attached to this lamb which had been singled out. That changed relationship is apparent in the references to the lamb in the verses below.

Exodus 12:3 (ESV) Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.

Exodus 12:5 (ESV) Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats,

In 12.3 the lamb is simply, *a lamb*. However, the terminology in 12.5 becomes much more personal when it becomes, *your lamb*. And in Exodus 12.6 you will note they were to *kill their lambs at twilight*.

At the end of 4 days, at twilight they took that lamb which they had become personally attached to and killed it. Then they took its blood, which is synonymous with its life, and put it on the door jams and lintel of their homes. Having done so they were to stay indoors, symbolizing they were under the blood of the lamb. And then they roasted the lamb over a fire and ate it along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They were to eat quickly and be dressed ready to leave. While they were doing so, the Lord would go through the land of Egypt and *pass over* the homes of those with blood applied. However, in the households of those without blood applied to their door frames, the firstborn died. That night God judged Egypt and her gods for their refusal to obey His command and let His people go (Exo 12.1 – 13).

The ceremony God instituted that night is so rich with meaning that it was to be celebrated annually. It was to be a reminder of God's supernatural deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt and as means to teach the next generation of its pivotal importance. Undoubtedly children were present that night in Egypt as they celebrated the 1st Passover. In the future, children would be present as well. Even today in Passover celebrations, a child asks the question, "*What is the meaning of this night?*" Embedded in the Passover is the importance of teaching truth to the next generation through our choices.

Exodus 12:25–27 (ESV) 25 And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. 26 And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27 you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

It is unlikely the Hebrews in that first Passover understood all the truths embedded in it and understood its prophetic message. Reflect on the following observations:

1. The Lamb Pictured Jesus

The Passover lamb looked forward to Jesus Christ, the *Lamb of God* who would leave the glories of heaven to cloth Himself with humanity for the very purpose of dying for the sins of His people. He would be a male, entering the prime of His human life, sinless and free from any blemish – God’s Son, His cherished Son.

Isaiah 52.13 to 53.12 pointed forward with graphic detail to the day when Jesus would lay down His life at Calvary. The passage is often referred to as, *Jesus as our Suffering Servant*. In it Jesus is compared to a *lamb* led to slaughter. “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; *like a lamb* that is led to the slaughter, and *like a sheep* that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7 ESV).

Years later, on one occasion John the Baptist was questioned about his identity and asked if he was Elijah or the Prophet people were waiting for. John assured them he was neither, nor was he the long-awaited Messiah. On the following day, however, the answer to those questions that were at the forefront of the minds of many in Israel, was answered.

John 1:29 (ESV) The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, *the Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the world!

He clearly identified Jesus as the *Lamb of God*, the One who had been pictured in innumerable Passover celebrations over the years since the first Passover in Egypt.

Paul, in writing to the believers at Corinth described Jesus as our Passover Lamb. “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” (1 Cor 5:7b ESV).

2. The Lamb Was Without Blemish

The lamb chosen for the Passover was to be without blemish, the best of the flock. That pointed forward to the fundamental requirement of a sufficient sacrifice for sin – the one who died not only needed to have led an exemplary life, but needed to be much more than that; he had to be sinless. There was only one in the entire universe who qualified and that was Jesus Christ; God Himself was the only One who was sinless. He was completely without blemish.

Peter wrote this about Jesus Christ,

1 Peter 1:18–19 (ESV) 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, *like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*.

Or consider the following declaration about Jesus, our great High Priest,

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, *yet without sin*.

The requirement that the Passover lambs were to be without blemish pointed forward to the requirement of the ultimate sacrifice for sin; He had to be without any sin.

3. Not a Bone Was Broken

One of the many things that validates the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible is the accuracy of prophecies made hundreds of years earlier. The first Passover was celebrated approximately 1,500 years before the crucifixion of Christ. Perhaps the first participants in the Passover wondered why they weren't allowed to break any of the bones of the lamb, something they likely didn't pay attention to on other occasions when they ate lamb. Why this little, seemingly unimportant detail? Because when God gave the instructions, He was looking ahead to the future when the *Lamb of God* would be sacrificed.

A practice that was often followed when people were crucified was to break their legs if they did not die soon enough. They did so to prevent the victims from raising their bodies so they could breathe; thus, breaking their legs hastened death. It was that practice that was followed on the day Jesus was crucified. The soldiers were instructed to break the legs of the three who were crucified. "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs." (John 19:33 ESV). Instead, they only pierced His body with a spear. In both decisions they unknowingly fulfilled Scripture from centuries earlier. "For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken.' And again another Scripture says, 'They will look on him whom they have pierced'" (John 19:36–37 ESV).

The portion of Scripture that was fulfilled when the soldier did not break Jesus' legs is found in, **Psalms 34:19–20** (ESV), "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken."

Jesus Christ was not just crucified as Scripture predicted, but His crucifixion met every detail laid out centuries earlier. This affirms the trustworthiness of Scripture. Neither of these actions were central to the efficacy of Jesus' death on the cross, but they were central to the fulfillment and reliability of Scripture. This example serves to underpin the confidence we can have in the Bible on every subject it addresses. Very simply: what the Bible says is true!

4. The Shedding of Blood Was Necessary

A key part of the Passover was taking the blood from the slain lamb and applying it to the doorposts and lintel of the doors of people's homes. One may have questioned the need to do that, arguing that it served no practical purpose. However, it was a sign their obedience to what God directed them to do and trust in His word to them. The blood would make all the difference in what happened that night. The blood was a sign that a home was filled with God's people; it showed the Lord where His people were and when He saw the blood, He *passed over* them as He struck the land of Egypt (12.13). The appearance of the blood was a *sign* they were trusting in Him and His Word and would be protected and exempted from the destruction Egypt faced.

The first blood to be shed was when God killed some of his animals to make a covering for Adam and Eve in the aftermath of their disobedience in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3.21). That act conveyed that sin required the shedding of blood to cover it. The last blood to be shed to provide a covering for sin was that of Jesus when He died on the cross. The blood is important because blood is essential to life as pointed out in,

Leviticus 17:11 (ESV) For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

Without the shedding of blood, it was impossible to provide forgiveness for sin.

Hebrews 9:22 (ESV) Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Earlier I drew attention to,

1 Peter 1:18–19 (ESV) 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but *with the precious blood of Christ*, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

The blood on the doorposts was a sign that the lamb had died on their behalf.

5. The Lamb Was a Substitute

The lambs that died that day in Egypt died as a substitute for the people held in bondage. They died so that the Lord would *pass over* them and their firstborn would live. The lambs had done nothing wrong; they certainly weren't responsible for Israel's enslavement nor for the refusal of pharaoh to set them free. They died for the benefit of another – the firstborn of the Hebrew people.

Their death pointed forward to a much greater sacrifice on behalf of others. When Jesus voluntarily died on the cross at Calvary, He died so that those who trust in Him and His sacrifice do not need to die for their own sins; He died in their place. He died as a substitute for others. It is referred to as the *substitutionary atonement* of Christ. The following verses highlight it.

Romans 4:25 (ESV) who [Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Romans 5:8 (ESV) but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Galatians 2:20 (ESV) I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6. The People Faced a Choice

After Moses instructed the children of Israel what they were to do to prepare for the final plague Egypt would face, the people had to personally decide how they would respond. We have examples from before that day, as well as after, that make it clear the people didn't simply do something because Moses told them what to do. The people faced a choice! First, they needed to decide whether they would select the best of their lambs. Remember, they had witnessed 9 prior plagues, most of which they had to endure. All those plagues were intended to move pharaoh's heart, but in each case, he refused to let them go. While we have the benefit of looking at this event from the perspective of how it turned out, they didn't. They only saw failed attempts and increased hardship.

The children of Israel needed to exercise a step of faith to be redeemed; they needed to trust the Lord and believe that what He said, would actually happen. And they needed to initiate that faith 4 days in advance. When the 4th day arrived, they had to decide whether they would follow-through. At twilight, would they kill their innocent lamb and apply its blood around their doorway? Those who chose to do so were spared, while those who didn't, weren't. It didn't matter which tribe of Israel they descended from, nor their status in the community, nor how good they had been, nor how bad. None of that would determine the outcome – only whether by faith they applied the blood. It is apparent one didn't even need to be a Jew to be spared, for we are told a “mixed multitude went with them.” (12.38). The choice of the people determined whether they would be set free from slavery or not.

Conclusion

Reflect for a moment on that first Passover and as you do may you grow in your understanding of this pivotal event in the history of Israel as they were redeemed from bondage in Egypt. One of the things that stands at the forefront is the sovereignty of God – He is sovereign over life and death. Pictured in the Passover are so many truths about who Jesus is and why He came. First, sin requires a sacrifice, but not just any sacrifice as specific requirements must be met. May you gain greater appreciation of what Jesus Christ did on the cross at Calvary. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ and shedding His blood at Calvary is the singular solution of the greatest need facing humankind – forgiveness of sin and separation from the God of this universe. It is the only way to be set free from the grasp of sin and Satan. May the underpinning of your faith be strengthened as our world launches more assaults on Christian truth and people of faith. The reliability and trustworthiness of the Scriptures is apparent through the fulfillment of prophecy by Jesus Christ as our Passover Lamb.

If anyone reading this hasn't placed your faith in Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross for your sins, do so today. Don't delay! We are regularly reminded of the fragile and temporal nature of life. Those who chose to trust in the Lord and His Word that fateful night in Egypt were spared from the death of the firstborn. By contrast those who didn't, faced the death of their firstborn. Just as surely, those who ignore, reject, or dismiss the claims of Christ and His invitation to turn to Him and trust in Him and His sacrifice for sin at Calvary will be left to pay for their own sins. They will discover their own efforts, or commendable qualities or deeds, will be inadequate. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23 ESV).

On the other hand, those who by faith have sought forgiveness from Jesus Christ for their sins and are trusting in His sacrifice have the assurance that they are redeemed and will spend eternity in heaven. They have been set free from their sin. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8–9 ESV).

I have included two songs, the first, in light of the passage of Scripture seemed an imperative, while the second follows from the theme.

When I See the Blood sung by Walt Mills

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofirF05WQVc&ab_channel=WaltMills-Topic

Are You Washed in the Blood? sung by the Antrim Mennonite Choir

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9oW91Iv8D8&ab_channel=SESamonte