



LIFE OR DEATH . . . AT MIDNIGHT

Exodus 11–12

God's final plague on Egypt humiliated Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt, delivered His chosen people from oppression, and vindicated Himself as the true and only God. The death of the firstborn still stands as a powerful statement of God's power, sovereignty, and glory.

In our study so far, God has brought plagues into the land of Egypt that effectively destroyed the reputations of Egypt's false gods—including the god who protected their crops and the Nile River god, who provided water. And did you know that throughout Egypt, the people believed that the sun god Ra—their chief god, represented by Pharaoh himself—was supposed to be the protector of life?

Now the God of Israel is about to deliver one final blow to Egypt and its gods. But before we get to that event, let me pick up the narrative here in chapter 11 and verse 1:



Man bringing lamb for sacrifice

The LORD said to Moses, “Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry.”

Now some have argued that asking the Egyptians here for silver and gold was unkind and manipulative; but if you understand that this is nothing more than a token of back wages for four hundred years of slavery, it's about time they got paid. And the Egyptians handed it over without any complaint, because God was actually motivating the Egyptians' hearts to give.

Now, verse 4 reads:

Moses said [to Pharaoh], “Thus says the LORD: ‘About mid-



night I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 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. (verses 4-5)

After Moses explains this last plague to Pharaoh, Moses leaves the royal palace and will never return.

The Lord then speaks to Moses at the beginning of chapter 12:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.” (verses 1-2)

There’s going to be a change in the Hebrew calendar. Why? Because they are about to be redeemed as a nation. This is the beginning of their freedom, so God tells them to revise their calendars to reflect this historic date of redemption.

The Lord then gives instructions for His people in preparation for the final plague on Egypt. He also gives instructions regarding a special event that is to be held annually to celebrate and remember this moment as a nation. Let me give you four key words that describe the elements of God’s “Passover plan.”

The first word is *substitution*. God tells Moses in verse 3 to instruct every Israelite household to take into their home on the tenth day of this new first month an unblemished, one-year-old lamb—sharing a lamb is allowed for smaller households. And then on the fourteenth day, each family is to kill that lamb at twilight.

This lamb’s life will be a substitutionary offering for their lives. Now we must realize that they did not understand the meaning of all this like you and I understand it today. We see it as the marvelous picture it is of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, the final, unblemished Lamb who died for you and me.

Now the second word is *symbolism*. Verse 7 says, “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.”

The lintel is the crossbeam that is directly over the door. The Israelites are to dab a little blood from the lamb on that entire doorframe. Then verse 8 tells us that the Israelites are to “eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”

Fire is the symbolic picture in the Old Testament of judgment. So, in other words, this lamb goes through the judgment of God so that each person will not have to experience it. This is also another picture of Christ, who faced the wrath of God the Father’s judgment for our sin and guilt.

The third word here is *security*. Verse 23 explains why the blood of the lamb is to be painted on the doorposts:

For the LORD will pass through to strike 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 enter your houses to strike you.

God is going to shield that home that is marked by the blood of the lamb. The Lord will spread His wings, so to speak, over that house so that its firstborn is protected from the judgment of the death angel.

So here in this first Passover, as well as in the annual celebration that flows from it, we see substitution, symbolism, security, and now, fourthly, we see the



element of *submission*. We read in verse 24, “You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever.” And beloved, the nation of Israel is celebrating Passover to this very day.

Now with that, God moves into Egypt to keep His terrifying promise of death to those not covered, as it were, by the blood of the lamb. We read in verse 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.

It is fascinating, but not surprising, that archaeologists have discovered convincing evidence that the oldest son of Amenhotep II, the pharaoh at this time, never reigned in Egypt as would be customary; a younger son, Thutmose IV, took the throne instead. No reason for this is given in Egyptian history, but we have the answer here in God’s Word—he died in the tenth and final plague.

The final devastating plague taking the lives of the firstborn of Egypt has its intended effect—the humbled pharaoh releases the Hebrew slaves. In fact, the Egyptian people are anxious to see the Israelites leave after all they have suffered through the plagues as a result of their presence. So, in verse 41, we read, “At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.”

Try for a moment, my friend, to think of the logic behind the Passover. Humanly speaking, there doesn’t seem to be any. Take a lamb, and kill it and eat it, and apply its blood to the doorframes of your homes.

Why not just put a lamb on the front porch? Why not imitate a lamb by becoming meek and mild?

The Lord was presenting a picture of salvation. Jesus shed His blood and died as a substitute in our place.

But you see, in His perfect plan, the Lord was presenting a picture of salvation. Jesus shed His blood and died as a substitute in our place. And when we believe in Him and in faith apply His shed blood to our hearts, we are saved from the guilt of sin and the wrath of God.

What was the Lord communicating to Egypt through the final plague? What was He teaching Israel? How do these truths apply to your life?

Why was it important for the work of Christ to be pictured in the Old Testament era even though the people probably did not fully understand the portrait? Why are these pictures important for you today?

¹ gospel = the good news of Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice

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