

Truth for Today

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The Passover and the Red Sea

In a day when there is a political move to combine religions at the expense of truth, wouldn't it be strange to see events occur that reveal the one true God? Such was the case in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians worshipped at least ten gods. They had done so for many years. However, Egypt was full of Hebrew slaves. These slaves believed in one God. He was known to their ancestor, Abraham, as El Shaddai - the Almighty God. He was particularly known to the Hebrews as Yahweh – the I Am that I Am. - the ever existent and self-sufficient One (Exodus 3:14 and 6:3). Through His servant Moses, this God had demanded that Pharaoh should let His people, Israel, go. Pharaoh had steadily hardened his heart and refused to let them go. So God hardened pharaoh's heart accordingly. The result was that God poured out ten calamities upon Egypt. Each event revealed that the Egyptian gods were a sham and that the God of the Hebrews was the only genuine God - God over all (Exodus 12:12).

The final calamity is found recorded in Exodus 12. The chapter starts with the authority of God. It was the LORD who spoke to Moses and Aaron. It immediately states a new beginning. It was the LORD who stipulated that the month should be the beginning of months, that is, the start of a new year - Abib, later changed to Nisan. This is equivalent to our month of April. It goes on to outline the action that must be taken by the Hebrew households. On the tenth day, the people had to select a lamb for a household or, if the family was too small, to select one to share with their neighbours. It indicates the need that the lamb should be unblemished and be, literally, "a son of a year". That is, to be a one year old male. It was kept until the fourteenth day when it was to be killed between the two evenings.

Further directions given to the Hebrews included taking the blood of the lamb and, using a bunch of hyssop, striking the doorposts and lintel of their houses with it. The lamb was then to be roasted and eaten along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Not a bone of the lamb was to be broken. Any part of it uneaten was to be burned before morning. The people were to do this ready to travel. Their loins were to be girded. They were to wear their shoes. Their staff was to be in hand. However, they had to remain in their houses throughout that night.

The promise of God was given to the Hebrews. About midnight, he was to go throughout Egypt and kill the firstborn of all the Egyptians and even of their beasts. At the same time, he was to protect the Hebrews so that not even a dog would move its tongue against them.

Moses put it this way, "For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians: and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you" (verse 23). The force of the Hebrew word meaning to pass over is "to spare" or "to protect". The children of Israel were to be protected from the judgement of God by the blood upon the doorposts and lintel. The LORD had said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (verse 13). He cannot break a promise whether it was made to pharaoh, Moses or the Hebrew slaves.

The children of Israel obeyed God. As a result, they were saved from the judgement that fell upon the Egyptians.

So what application does this have for us today? Well, the Passover Lamb is an Old Testament picture of the true Lamb of God who would follow a thousand or more years later. He came to save those who trusted in Him and His work from the judgement of sin. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we read, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." So the Lamb is a symbol of Christ who was to be sacrificed as a substitute for sinners. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was delivered for our offences.

The purity of the lamb was emphasised. There was no sin in Christ. He did no sin. He knew no sin. Therefore, God has made Him to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. That means, Christ exhausted the judgement of God against sin. The Just One suffered once for sins in the place of the unjust in order that we could be brought back to God. Those who trust in Him shall never experience the judgement of God against sin. It is a judgement that was typified in the roasting of the lamb by fire. The latter always speaks of the testing or consuming judgement of God. The ungodly will one day suffer in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone - also called the second death and Hell.

The lamb's bones were not to be broken. Remember, at the cross, the legs of the convicted criminals were broken to hasten their deaths. When the soldiers came to Jesus they found Him dead already. Instead of breaking His legs, one of the soldiers cruelly thrust a spear into His side. So this scripture was fulfilled. So was another for the psalmist says words to the effect that the bones of a righteous man shall not be broken (Psalm 34:19-20).

The lamb was selected and kept for this special day. In 1 Peter 1:18-20 we read the parallel to this found in Christ: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you..." Christ was selected before the world's foundation. He was kept until the last times. He was then sacrificed as a lamb at the time of the Passover. His blood redeems us. God will have nothing else!

Just for a moment, put yourself in the position of one of the Hebrew firstborn. Knowing what God had said would you not have encouraged your parents to follow God's directions? After all, your life was at stake. I wonder how you would have felt if your parents said, "We don't like the idea of sacrificing an animal, we'll put a white ribbon on the door to show God that we live morally upright lives?" Maybe their response may have been, "We'll simply write what we believe on a piece of parchment and nail it to the door. God will honour that." Would they have even dared to say, "We'll tie a living lamb to the door. God will understand." How about them saying that they would write out a list of their good works and pin it to the door for protection? You would be devastated wouldn't you? You knew that it was imperative that they followed God's instructions to the letter if you were to be saved.

So it is today. God commands: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." He offers no other way of salvation for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. Also, it is written, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." However, the blood of animal sacrifices no longer suffices. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son that alone cleanses from all sin. Isaac Watts wrote:

*Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away its stain;*

*But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Took all our guilt away
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.*

*Our souls look back to see
The burden Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
For all our guilt was there.*

*Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove,
And bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing redeeming love.*

In the recorded history of the Passover, Pharaoh represents the devil. Egypt represents the world system that opposes the will of God. The Hebrew slaves symbolise a people in bondage to sin and death. In Hebrews 2:14-15 we see the significance of all this: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Christ) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." The power of death is broken. The devil is a defeated foe. The Christian is set free by the Son of God Himself (John 8:36) and serves God in newness of life.

The verses previously mentioned illustrate the force of the word "redemption". There is a good deal about redemption in the Old Testament, and one of the words used for it there has the meaning: "freeing, whether by avenging or repaying." In the New Testament, the word has the same meaning: "a setting free" or "loosing away", usually as the result of a payment. If we consider a hostage situation, the victim may be set free when the required ransom is paid. This is redemption by payment. In the blood of Christ we see the payment of a ransom because He shed His blood as a ransom for many. As we come to the subject of the Red Sea, we find another form of redemption; redemption by power. Just as Pharaoh and his hordes were destroyed at the Red Sea, so the devil (the captor) was defeated at the cross of Christ.

Let us look at this episode in more detail. At the northern end of the Red Sea are two sections that form a V shape. The east most one is the Gulf of Akaba, about 112 miles long; and the west most, the Gulf of Suez, about 200 miles long. It is the latter that the Israelites crossed, probably further north than the gulf now extends. It is to this branch that the Suez Canal has been attached, opening a passage to the Mediterranean Sea.

About two million Israelites left Egypt following the LORD who led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were soon found encamped by the sea shore near places called Pihahiroth and Baalzephon. Pharaoh thought they were trapped. between the sea and the mountains. With his army and his chariots he followed hard after them in order to bring them back into slavery. When they realised their danger, the Israelites were terrified. Unbelief told them that they would die in the wilderness if they didn't return to Egypt.

However, Moses said, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (14:13-14). The angel of God and the pillar of the cloud then went between the Israelites and the Egyptians. To the Israelites the cloud (a symbol of God's presence) gave light, but to the Egyptians, it was a cloud of darkness. The LORD instructed Moses to hold forth his rod over the sea in order to divide it. He did so and God caused a strong east wind to blow, and the waters were divided, and all the Israelites went over on dry land with walls of water on both sides.

In spite of the ten plagues and the loss of so many firstborn in Egypt, Pharaoh had not yet learned the power of Israel's God. God fought for the Israelites. God embarrassed the Egyptians, took off their chariot wheels, and so hindered their progress. The warriors soon realised that the LORD was opposing them. It was, however, too late to retreat. Once the Israelites were across, Moses again stretched forth his hand over the sea, and it returned in its strength. The pursuing Egyptians were all drowned.

The faith of the Israelites was strengthened by the destruction of the Egyptians. They feared the LORD once again, and believed His servant Moses. Delivered from the Egyptians, the Israelites sang the song of redemption, praising the One who had redeemed them by purchase and by power. "I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God..." (15:1-2). We, as Christians can do the same. We know that we are cleansed from our sin by faith the blood of Christ. We know that we are delivered from the hands of the world and the devil through the death of Christ. In fact, we know that God is for us. He is our Ally. In Romans 8:31-32 we read: "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" In the 8:35-39 we find that nothing and no-one is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Champney had the Red Sea in mind when writing:

*Jesus our Lord, with what joy we adore Thee;
Chanting our praise to Thyself on the throne,
Blest in Thy presence we worship before Thee,
Own Thou art worthy, and worthy alone.*

*How hast Thou triumphed, and triumphed with glory,
Battled death's forces, rolled back every wave!
Can we refrain then from telling the story,
How Thou art Victor o'er death and the grave?*

*"Lord, what is man?" we would break forth exclaiming;
Jesus, the crowned One, the Lamb that was slain!
Joyful we own Thee, Thy praises proclaiming;
Death Thou hast vanquished by rising again!*

*"Lord, what is man?" Yes, with deep adoration,
Gladly prolong we this wonderful theme;
Jesus, divine One, Thou Head of creation,
Head of Thy church, which Thou camest to redeem!*

What a victory! Are you on the victory side? Are you a child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Romans 8:15-18 state: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear: but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ..."

Of course, you may not have put your trust in Christ. So whose child are you? 1 John 3:10 has the answer to that question. Those who are born of God are children of God and are marked by love and righteousness, whereas those who are not Christ's are called children of the devil. Which would you have upon your gravestone - A child of God or a child of the devil?

The hymn writer, SW Gandy, sums up the Passover and the Red Sea episodes in this way:

*His be the Victor's name,
Who fought the fight alone;
Triumphant saints no honour claim;
His conquest was their own.*

*By weakness and defeat,
He won the meed and crown;
Trod all our foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down.*

*He Satan's power laid low;
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death by dying slew.*

*Bless, bless the Conqueror slain,
Slain in His victory;
Who lived, who died, who lives again -
For thee, His church, for thee.*

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