

EXODUS: Lesson Two, The Exodus and the Passover ***Exodus 7:8 – 15:21***

Subject: Ten plagues and the Passover preceded Israel's departure from Egypt.

Main Idea: Our Deliverer is both wrathful and loving.

Principles:

1. *It is a dreadful thing to fall under the judgment of God.*
2. *Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who died in our place.*
3. *God jealously protects those who put their faith in Him.*

Introduction

In C.S. Lewis' modern classic novel, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver inform Lucy, a newcomer to the land of Narnia, that they have been awaiting the arrival of Aslan (a Christ-figure) to rescue Narnia from its present enslavement to the wicked queen. When Lucy is told that Aslan is a lion, she is concerned. "Is he safe?" she asks. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver, "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? [Of course] he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."ⁱ

This lesson covers violent chapters of Scripture in which God brought judgment on the gods of Egypt and on those who put their trust in them. Many animals were slaughtered at the first Passover. All of this was part of God's plan to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. The greater theme, emphasized in the previous lesson, is God's passionate interest in delivering His people from bondage. But why did God go about delivering Israel in such a dramatic and violent manner? The answer is that He was giving the Egyptians and the Israelites the opportunity to *know Him*. He repeatedly said so throughout these chapters. What is it that we know about our Deliverer by reading these chapters? We know that He is the Judge of the Earth, a fearsome God. But we also know that He is a God of love and mercy. Simply stated, our Deliverer is both wrathful and loving. In Mr. Beaver's words, He is not safe, but He is good. He is the King.

Through the plagues, the Passover, and the parting of the Red Sea, God revealed Himself as a God of wrath over sin. We are all sinners (Romans 3:23) and deserve His wrath. The price of sin is death. (Romans 6:23). But God also revealed His love and mercy in these chapters by His willingness to pay a high price to redeem His people and by His jealous protection of them.

Some people are confused about the God of the Bible. They either see Him as angry *or* as loving, failing to grasp the dual aspect of His nature. It is important that we come to know God *as He really is*. If we live our lives with the wrong idea that God is mostly angry, we will have difficulty drawing near to Him and experiencing the intimate relationship He offers us. If we exclusively emphasize God's love, then we will never understand how seriously God takes sin. We will never become the holy people God wants us to be.

Text messaging can be dangerous. It is very easy to misunderstand the meaning because we cannot hear the voice in which the messages are spoken. For example, I might text someone in my family, “John is joining us for dinner!” My exclamation mark tells my family member that John’s coming is significant for some reason. They might interpret this either as an indication that I am happy or very concerned about John coming for dinner. How would they know? Only by knowing *me*.

We will misunderstand and misappropriate the specific teachings of the Bible if we fail to grasp what it teaches about *the nature of the One who wrote it*. Before Israel was ready to receive the Law from God (the Law given to them through Moses), it was necessary that they understood that God is, *at the same time*, a God of love *and* a God of judgment. This prepared them to understand the intent of the Law. Therefore, in His deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, He dramatically pictured His dual nature for them, His wrath and His love.

I. **The Plagues** – Exodus 7:8 – 11:10

A. **Pharaoh’s Hard Heart:**

- i. The Question: Before we consider the narrative, we should address one difficult issue that might otherwise distract us, the issue of Pharaoh’s hardened heart. In our last lesson, God told Moses twice that He would harden Pharaoh’s heart (4:21, 7:3). How are we supposed to understand the meaning of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart? Does this phrase indicate that God would author evil and then hold Pharaoh responsible?
- ii. There are at least three things that enlighten us:
 1. *The arrangement of the phrases*
 - a. Twenty times, the text mentions Pharaoh’s hard heart. Of these, Pharaoh is stated to have hardened his own heart a number of times and God is stated to have hardened Pharaoh’s heart a number of times. On a few occasions, the wording seems to be neutral, without indicating who was responsible for the hardening.
 - b. The arrangement of the phrases that describe Pharaoh’s hardening helps us understand what happened. The first two times Pharaoh’s hard heart is mentioned (4:21, 7:3), God is said to have been the agent (hardened Pharaoh’s heart). However, it is clear in the context that these are *prophecies* the Lord gave Moses about what would take place.
 - c. Once the plagues began, Pharaoh is repeatedly said to have hardened his own heart (7:13, 14, 22, 23; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34-35, although, as stated, a few of these are possibly neutral). These statements occur between the first and fifth plagues.

d. *After that*, the words change, indicating that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17), as He foretold in 4:21 and 7:3. Therefore, we may fairly conclude that the Lord only hardened Pharaoh's heart judiciously *after* Pharaoh repeatedly made that choice himself. ⁱⁱ He handed Pharaoh over to the sinfulness of his own heart (Romans 1:24, 26).

2. *Recalling God's Purpose*

- a. In Egypt, Pharaoh was considered to be like a god, completely pure. Egyptians believed a person's heart was "weighed" by the gods at their death. By stating that He was "hardening Pharaoh's heart," God was informing the Egyptians (and all present-day readers) that Pharaoh was subject to *His* judgment, just like any other human being. God could do whatever He chose with Pharaoh. D.K. Stuart explains: "In effect, then, each time Yahweh is described as hardening Pharaoh's heart, the alert reader is reminded that Yahweh had, as it were, weighed Pharaoh and found him wanting. Thus God disgraced Pharaoh." ⁱⁱⁱ
- b. This explanation lines up with God's stated purpose for sending the plagues: that the Egyptians might know Him and that their gods would be judged (as inferior to Him).

3. *Hardening Toward What?*

- a. Some argue that nothing in these verses indicates that God permanently hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he could never in the future repent or gain eternal life, but that it was specifically with regard to the display of God's power and God's timing that Pharaoh's heart was hardened.
- b. In the context of discussing God's election, the apostle Paul addresses the subject of God hardening Pharaoh's heart in Romans 9. His conclusion is not one that appeals to our pride:

One of you will say to me, "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist His will?" But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

Whether God hardens hearts for specific events or with regard to salvation, the bottom line seems to be that He is God and we are not. “It is a question that reaches deep into our understanding of ourselves as creatures and of our relationship to God as our Creator.”^{iv}

B. The Power of the Magicians

- i. The Sign of the Snake: Exodus 7:8 begins with the Lord’s instructions to Moses and Aaron to throw down Aaron’s staff before Pharaoh. God would turn the staff into a snake.
- ii. Duplication of Miracles: After Aaron did so, Pharaoh’s magicians “did the same things by their secret arts” (7:11). God’s supreme power was demonstrated in that Aaron’s snake swallowed up the others. These magicians were also able to duplicate the first plague, in which the Nile was turned to blood, and the second plague, in which frogs covered the whole country (8:7). However, they found themselves unable to duplicate the third plague, in which the Lord swarmed the land with gnats, telling Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” (8:19).
- iii. Satan Has Real but Limited Power: The Bible teaches that Satan has been given power to perform counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders (Matthew 24:24, Acts 8:9-11, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11, Revelation 16:14). His power is *real* but displayed in imitation of God’s divine acts. And his power is *limited*, as we see in the magicians’ inability to continue duplicating God’s divine judgments in the plagues. For this reason, it is unnecessary to try to explain away the ability of Pharaoh’s magicians to imitate some of Moses’ miracles.
- iv. Explanation for the Magicians’ Miracles
 1. Satan desires the worship that rightfully belongs to God alone. Although it is possible that Pharaoh’s magicians used trickery, Satan often conducts his work through human agents. Demonism is the perpetuating influence behind belief in false gods, which, in and of themselves, are impotent. Satan would not have wanted the Egyptians to view God as superior to the Egyptian “gods,” since he held the Egyptian people captive and gained their worship through these false gods.
 2. Once again, we must remember God’s stated purpose of sending plagues in judgment against the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12, Numbers 33:3-4). The specific manner in which the plagues accomplished this is addressed later in this discussion. Our point here is to note that the magicians’ miracles were an indication that a cosmic war was going on!

C. The Ten Plagues

i. Natural Phenomenon and the Plagues

1. Examination of the text and nature of the plagues leads scholars to surmise that the plagues may have occurred over a nine-month period of time – from the annual flooding stage of the Nile, through the harvest seasons of barley and flax, and to the Passover month of April (Nisan) – the first month in Israel’s religious calendar.
2. Some have suggested that the plagues can be explained by natural phenomenon: cosmic, geologic, or seasonal.
 - a. For example, excessive flooding during the Nile’s normal “flood season” often causes a reddening of the water by tons of red soil.
 - b. Additionally, a kind of algae called flagellates, which comes from some of the Nile’s sources, can cause a stench and a fluctuation in the oxygen level in the waters. This may have killed the fish and driven the frogs onto land.
 - c. Gnats and flies breed under the humid conditions that accompany flooding.
 - d. The flies and dead frogs could explain the boils and plagues on the livestock, resulting from skin anthrax.
 - e. The darkness may have been the result of an intense sandstorm brought in from the Sahara Desert.
3. However, we would be wrong to try and explain away the plagues as only inter-related, naturally occurring phenomenon. For example, the death of the firstborn males (12:23, 29), Israel’s isolation from some of the plagues, and the response of the magicians (7:22; 8:18-19) all contradict that notion. Moreover, to whatever degree natural phenomena were occurring at that time, they were secondary agencies, being utilized by their Creator in His timing and by His command.^v

i. The Plagues As Judgment on Egypt’s “Gods”

1. *Egypt had many gods.* The Egyptians regarded the Nile River as their supreme deity.^{vi} Heqet was a goddess with the head of a frog; Hathor and Apis were represented as figures of livestock; Sekhmet and Sunu were goddesses with power over disease and pestilence; Osiris was the god of crops; and Pharaoh’s firstborn son was considered a god.^{vii} This helps us understand how the plagues were designed to show the impotence of Egypt’s gods, including Egypt’s Pharaoh, and in contrast, God’s supreme power.

2. *The Lord made a distinction* (8:23; 9:4, 26; 10:23; 11:7).
 - a. The Lord protected the Israelites in Goshen from experiencing some of the plagues. Specifically, this is mentioned with regard to the flies, the plague on livestock, the hailstorm, the intense darkness, and the deaths of the firstborn.
 - b. Ancient Near Eastern people thought the gods only held power on their home ground. By making a distinction between Israel and the Egyptians, God was demonstrating that His power extends to lands where He is not recognized and worshipped.^{viii}
- ii. The Nature of the Plagues The misery caused by the plagues intensified over the course of them, initially causing only annoyance and inconvenience, progressing to severe discomfort, and finally, resulting in death.
 1. The Nile River changing to blood (the term “blood” could have been intended to describe a reddening in color)
 2. Frogs coming out of the Nile and entering every home and space
 3. Gnats on the people and animals (some say these were lice or mosquitos)
 4. Swarms of flies, ruining the land
 5. Deadly plague on livestock
 6. Festering boils on people and animals
 7. The most destructive hail storm in Egyptian history
 8. Locusts devouring of all remaining crops
 9. Thick darkness
 10. The death of every firstborn male

D. The Impact of the Plagues

- i. On Pharaoh: Pharaoh’s resolve *appears* to have weakened as the plagues intensified. Initially, his refusal was absolute (7:13). By the fourth plague, he considered allowing the Israelites to make their sacrifice, as long as they remained inside Egypt (8:25). After the seventh plague, he confessed he had sinned and said the Israelites could leave, if only Moses would put an end to the plague of hail (9:28). Initially, he seemed to consider allowing only the Israelite men to go (10:10-11), but after the ninth plague, he said the people could go but not their animals (10:24). After the death of his firstborn, he finally urged Israel to leave (12:31-33). But *each time* he changed his mind and was stubbornly unwilling to let the Israelites go.

- ii. On the Magicians: The magicians were initially able to duplicate the miracles but later acknowledged “the finger of God” (8:19). Ultimately, they were unable to even stand before Moses because of their boils (9:11).
- iii. On the Egyptians: A change in the thinking of the Egyptians occurred during the plagues. Following the ninth plague, Moses was “*highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh’s officials and by the people*” (11:3), and after the final plague, they were even willing to give away their silver and gold to the Israelites. Some of them even chose to accompany the Israelites out of Egypt (12:38).
- iv. On Moses and Aaron: We are given no indication that Moses knew in advance how many plagues would be necessary before Pharaoh let the Israelites go until just prior to the final plague (10:29). Yet Moses and Aaron obediently communicated every word from the Lord to Pharaoh and announced each judgment (plague), “just as the Lord commanded” (Exodus 7:10). The awe and faith of these servants of the Lord must have grown exponentially as they acted as His spokesmen and observed His mighty acts.

E. The Mercy of God

- i. Evidences of God’s Mercy
 - a. The seventh through tenth plagues were preceded by God’s announcement that He would now send the “full force” of His plagues (9:14). He reminded Pharaoh through Moses, “For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth” (9:15). God did not need to use plagues to take Israel out of Egypt; He could have simply struck dead every single Egyptian in a moment’s time. But God’s mercy is evident in the *progression* of the plagues, offering Pharaoh and the Egyptians an opportunity to repent. Moses’ announcement of *when* the fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, and tenth plagues would begin also gave the Egyptians time to repent.^{ix}
 - b. Additionally, God showed mercy by telling the Egyptians to bring their livestock and slaves in from the fields before the plague of hail hit (9:19).
- ii. That People Might Know Him
 - a. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of God’s purpose in sending the plagues. His goal was that the Egyptians and the Israelites would *know Him* (6:7, 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 10:2; 11:9; 14:4) as the Sovereign and Almighty One, superior to any other ruler or “god.” The earth belongs to Him (9:29). Therefore, although the plagues were violent in nature, we must consider *God’s mercy* in sending them.

- b. Through the plagues, God revealed Himself to the Israelites and Egyptians. We have already noted several indications that the thinking of some of the Egyptians was indeed changed: they feared the Lord enough to willingly return to the Israelites their possessions (12:35-36), some of their leaders acknowledged God's hand and feared Him (8:19, 9:20), and some were so moved that they chose to go with the Israelites when they left (12:38)!
- c. The plagues God sent were designed to evoke faith in all who witnessed them, including Pharaoh. In fact, Pharaoh had a "first row seat" in witnessing God's wonders and was given the opportunity to know God through them. Before the eighth plague, the Lord emphasized that future generations would also know Him by hearing about the plagues. Although God certainly showed mercy in His wrath, the plagues were, nevertheless, a terrifying expression of His wrath and judgment.

Summary Statement: The plagues were God's judgment on the gods of Egypt and those who put their trust in them.

Principle: *It is a dreadful thing to fall under the judgment of God.*

There are several occasions in the Bible in which mass judgment occurred, such as the Flood in Noah's day and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's time. The Bible teaches that God's judgment will occur again at the end of human history. The plagues God sent on Egypt give us a small glimpse of how terrible that time will be.

We might possibly read about these plagues without understanding the horror of them. Let us just consider the terror of just one plague, the plague of darkness. Exodus 10:21 records that darkness as tangible, so terrible that no one was able to move about for three days. Hebrew scholar Alfred Edersheim likens it to a Chamsin, a great sand-storm that sometimes hits Egypt in the early spring, only "far more severe, intense, and long":

Suddenly and without warning would the Chamsin rise. The air, charged with electricity, draws up the fine dust and the coarser particles of sand till the light of the sun is hid, the heavens are covered as with a thick veil, and darkness deepens into such night that even artificial light is of no avail. And the floating dust and sand enter every apartment, pervade every pore, find their way even through closed windows and doors. Men and beasts make for any kind of shelter, seek refuge in cellars and out-of-the-way places from the terrible plague.^x

In Moses' time, the plague of darkness was so intense that the darkness was total, and three long days and nights passed in which no one could leave the place in which they found themselves. Now imagine many months, with *one such horror following the next!* The plagues God will bring on the earth at the end of history, as described in the book of Revelation, will be like these, only greater.

In addition to the great periods of judgment recorded in the Bible, God also allows us the natural consequences of our sin as judgment. With both, His desire is that people will repent and turn to Him. He is angry about and obligated to judge our sin. But He is also loving.

Illustration: Pastor, seminary president, and author Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a brilliant Jewish orthopedic surgeon who, in his pursuit of fame and fortune, began using the same drugs he prescribed his patients for energy to work longer hours. Over time, he became addicted to harder, illegal drugs and lost his practice, his credentials, his reputation, his home, his wealth, and finally, his family. Swindoll says, "It was as if one plague after another just beat upon him, until he was finally crushed beneath the hands of the living God." Eventually, through the witness of a pharmacist, he came to know Jesus as the answer to his problem and humbled himself before the Lord. The doctor testified that he had "come from judgment to a whole new life of grace." Swindoll comments, "...nothing in this life or the next is more serious and sobering than the wrath of God. Some [people] are broken – blessedly broken – by that wrath. Others only harden."^{xi}

Application: I must wonder, are we guilty of taking our own sin too lightly? Or do we see it as a violation of God's own holy character, as He does?

As we mature in our faith, our sins are increasingly less likely to be in the form of outward actions and more likely to exist as attitudes and thoughts. Adultery and harshly spoken words are sin. But so is pride or self-pity.

To honor God, we must recognize our sin for what it is. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us." Are we quick to recognize and our confess sin for the offense that it truly is to Him or are we more likely to attempt to justify or ignore it?

Transition: The Israelites had an opportunity to know God's love and mercy by participating in the Passover.

II. The Passover – Exodus 12:1 – 13:16

- A. Instructions Regarding Passover:** Prior to the tenth plague (the deaths of the firstborn males), Moses received instructions from the Lord for the Israelites.
- i. Change of Calendar: The impending event would be so significant that the Israelites were to adjust their calendars so that the month in which it occurred would be the first month of each year. This was the month known as “Aviv” (Exodus 13:4; the Canaanite name), but later called by the Babylonian name, Nisan (Esther 3:7). It fell between late March and early April on our present day calendars.
 - ii. The Passover Meal: Each household was instructed to select a year-old, unblemished lamb or goat to roast (smaller households shared with neighbors to prevent waste). They were to take care of the animal for four days then slaughter it at twilight and put its blood on their door frames. Finally, they were told to roast and eat the meat with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. It was to be eaten in its entirety or the remainder was to be burned before morning. The meal was to be eaten “with their cloaks tucked into their belts” (as though to leave at a moment’s notice).
 - iii. The Death of Egypt’s Firstborn: God would pass through Egypt that same night, striking down every firstborn, another judgment on the gods of Egypt. The blood on the doorpost of the Israelites’ houses was a sign. When God saw it, He would pass over their homes and they would not be touched by the plague.
 - iv. An Event to be Commemorated: God instructed them, from this time forward, to celebrate the event as an annual feast. It was to be a week of rest and celebration, commemorating the Lord’s deliverance from Egypt. The feast was to begin with the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread. This feast and the feast called Passover were closely related, occurring successively. During that time, no yeast was to be permitted in their homes. The omission of yeast was to remind them of their haste in leaving Egypt. The significance of the celebration was to be explained to their children, passing its meaning from generation to generation.

B. The Execution of Tenth Plague and Preparation for the Exodus: At midnight, the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt. Not a single Egyptian household was spared, including Pharaoh's. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron during the night and instructed them to take the Israelites and all their animals and leave Egypt. The Egyptians also urged the Israelites to leave immediately, fearful of any further disaster. The Israelites took their dough without yeast, placed it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. They asked their Egyptian neighbors for silver, gold, and clothing, and received it. In chapter 13, we learn that they also took the bones of Joseph with them (13:19), as he had requested (Genesis 50:25). 600,000 men, plus women and children, left Egypt. Many other people (presumably Egyptians and other foreigners [12:37-38]) went with the Israelites. Assuming the number "600,000" has been translated accurately (something scholars debate), the total number could easily have exceeded 2 million. We are also told that 430 years had passed between the time the Israelites entered Egypt and the day they left.

C. Further Commemoration Instructions: The Lord instructed Israel that, as a commemoration of what had occurred, they were to practice the dedication of every firstborn male, both humans and animals, from this time forward. Rather than being sacrificed, *human* firstborn males were to be redeemed by their parents by payment. Donkeys (unclean animals) were also to be redeemed. The firstborn human males were to serve the Lord, an obligation that was later transferred to the men in the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3). Their children were to be told that the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the dedication of the firstborn were to be continually observed because of what the Lord had done for them (the successive generations) by bringing that first generation of Israelites out of Egypt.

D. The Significance of the Passover

- i. Lessons On God's Deliverance: The Passover was designed to teach Israel about God's deliverance of His people.
 1. *His Deliverance is Costly:* The fact that death was required for Israel to be delivered from Egypt helped them understand that they were being redeemed at a great cost.
 2. *His Deliverance Involves Substitution:* The Israelites understood that the lamb died as a substitute. The lamb died so that their firstborn son would not.
 3. *His Deliverance is Personal:* The impact of the animal's death was intensified for the family by the fact that they were required to give it special care, as they would a pet, for four days before killing it. This made the animal's sacrifice more difficult for them and more personal.

4. *His Deliverance is Acquired by Faith:* Participation in the first Passover was an act of faith.
 - a. Never before had God asked His people to do anything so seemingly strange. Animal sacrifice to satiate the “gods” was a known practice. But placing an animal’s blood on the doorposts of their home? They must have wondered about such an unusual demand.
 - b. There was no guarantee that placing the blood of an animal on their doorposts would protect them, except faith in what God said. Participation was an act of faith. The spiritually astute may have recalled Abraham’s test of obedience, in which God instructed him to sacrifice his cherished son Isaac, but provided Abraham with an animal substitute at the last moment. Those who made this connection may have understood that the God of their fathers had previously demonstrated substitutionary sacrifice.
5. *His Deliverance is Complete:* As a result of demonstrating their faith, they were “passed over,” safe from His judgment.
 - ii. The symbolism of the Passover is hard for anyone familiar with the New Testament to miss. Jesus was crucified at the exact time of Passover. The slaughtered animal foreshadowed the death of “the Lamb of God” (John 1) for our sins. Those who, by faith, receive His substitutionary death on our behalf will be “passed over” on the future Day of Judgment.

Summary Statement: The Passover was to be commemorated annually to remind God’s people of their salvation by faith in a substitutionary sacrifice.

Principle: *Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who died in our place.*

Some people claim that the Biblical practice of animal sacrifice proves God to be uncaring about animals. But this is a serious misunderstanding. God is concerned for every sparrow that falls from the sky (Matthew 10:29). “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). Death grieves God (John 11:35). He was grieved by the deaths of the many animals that were sacrificed. The very point is that the death of these animals *was* a costly sacrifice, but one God was willing to make *because of His great love for us!* Ultimately, He demonstrated His great love for us even further by coming to earth and dying for us *Himself*, in the person of Christ.

Illustration: For many months, a father prayed the Lord would show him how he could win the love and acceptance of his rebellious children. One night, an armed burglar entered the family home. The eldest son's cries alerted the rest of the household to the danger. Rather than fleeing, the burglar advanced threateningly toward the family. The father quickly threw himself in front of his wife and children before successfully convincing the burglar to leave. That night forever changed the relationships between the father and his children. Their memory of the danger faded over time, but the memory of his willingness to sacrifice himself never did.

Like this father, our Heavenly Father wants *us* to know His love. Our sin nature and the trials of life may cause us to doubt that God, if He exists, could really be loving and good. So God made a tremendous sacrifice in order to prove the depth of His love for us, personally coming to die for us and pay the penalty we owe.

Application: Jesus said, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Self-sacrifice for the sake of another person is understood universally as a measure of love. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was willing to die in our place that we might be able to measure God's love for us. Life can easily confuse us about this. But God set "the record" straight. The next time we are tempted to doubt God's love for us, will we remember to check His record?

Transition: It seems unlikely that the Israelites would have understood all these events in the way that we who have the New Testament do. But God will judge each person according to what they do with the information they have (Romans 2:6, 12-16). Immediately following the plagues and the Passover, the Israelites had an opportunity to learn more about God's jealous love. They witnessed it firsthand when He fought for them at the Red Sea.

III. The Parting of the Red Sea – Exodus 13:17 – 15:21

A. The Lord's Route

- i. The Longer Route: We learn that the Lord chose an indirect route for Israel to reach Canaan in order to avoid Philistines' territory. The Lord knew if they faced war too quickly after leaving Egypt, they would be tempted to return.
- ii. The Pillar of Fire and the Cloud: The Lord personally guided Israel, appearing to them in a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. The pillar never left them. This pillar is synonymous with the "angel of the Lord" (Exodus 14:19 and 23:20-21). The glory and physical presence of Jesus accompanied the Israelites! In addition to giving direction and the comfort of His presence, the cloud was broad enough at the base to shelter the Israelites from the scorching desert sun during the day. The pillar of fire provided light and warmth in the cold desert night.

- iii. The Locations Named: The locations named in Exodus 13 and 14 have not yet been positively identified. The text indicates that the Lord led Israel in a direction that would have caused Pharaoh to think they were confused. They moved three times (from Sukkoth to Etham to Pi Hahiroth), backtracking to the last location (14:2).

B. The Chase

- i. The Egyptians' Change of Mind: The Egyptians' grief was set aside in consideration of the reality of having lost the services of the Israelites. 14:5 indicates this occurred "when the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled." But this does not imply an immediate decision on his part to follow the Israelites. Most likely, over a period of days or weeks Pharaoh and his officials received reports about great difficulties related to losing their slave labor in the northern delta region where the Israelites had resided.^{xii} Therefore, Pharaoh and his officials "changed their minds" and went after them (14:5-8).
- ii. The Israelites' Terror: When the Israelites saw them approaching, they were terrified and "cried out to the Lord," then complained to Moses. They found themselves trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. Moses replied: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (14:13-14).
- iii. The Lord's Deliverance
 1. *The Wind*: At the Lord's instruction, Moses raised his staff toward the sea, symbolizing the beginning of the Lord's action in clearing a path for Israel through it. The Lord sent a strong wind that drove up "walls" of water (14:21-22, 29). This term implies that Israel was not simply crossing a bog or a stream, but deep water. Moses identified the body of water as the "Red Sea" (or Sea of Reeds [13:18; 15:4]). Scholars debate whether or not it was the same body of water known by that same name today. The wind also must have dried the exposed land so that the Israelites could walk on it without becoming stuck in the mud.
 2. *The Pillar*: The Lord also fought for Israel by positioning Himself (in the form of the pillar) between them and the Egyptians. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to one side and light to the other, keeping them separated. It is not clear whether one side could see and the other could not, only that they could not see one another.

3. *Crossing the Sea*: The Israelites thought they were trapped. But their predicament was by God’s design. He intended to bring glory to Himself through it, demonstrating His power and jealous love for His own. Once the path through the sea was cleared, all Israel crossed on dry ground. By the time the Egyptians began to pursue the Israelites, the last of them were already on the other side. The Lord slowed their progress by throwing the army into confusion (14:24) and causing the wheels of the chariots to jam (14:25). By the time the Egyptians realized that the Lord was working against them, it was too late! Moses stretched his hand back over the sea at God’s command, and every single Egyptian chasing the Israelites drowned.

C. The Significance of Crossing the Red Sea: Some refer to the crossing of Israel through the Red Sea as a “dry baptism.” Believer’s baptism is a public declaration of something that has already taken place in our lives privately. We have been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20) and have been brought to life again as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Entrance into the water symbolizes death to our old way of life. “Egypt” is a symbol of the believer’s old life. When we pass through the cleansing waters and are resurrected into a new life, we show that we are severing ourselves from our old patterns of behavior and by faith, intend to live a Christ-honoring life. The Israelites, likewise, passed through the waters. God intended that Israel would put “Egypt” behind them and enter a new life as His children.

D. Celebration: Moses and the Israelites sang to the Lord. Exodus 15 records one of the three songs in the Bible written by Moses (see also Deuteronomy 31:22 – 32:45 and Psalm 90). The song is primarily about the Lord, declaring, “Who is like you?” (15:11). The Lord had “become their salvation” (15:2). Now, Israel knew Him this way by experience. Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, was a prophetess (15:20). She led the women in singing and dancing.

Summary Statement: When the Israelites left Egypt, they began a journey that symbolizes the pilgrimage of every believer, our walk of faith. Their step of faith, by participating in the Passover, was rewarded by the opportunity to see God’s jealous love and protection of them.

Principle: *God jealously protects those who put their faith in Him.*

Illustration: My father-in-law just died recently. Distracted by the process of grief and things that were immediately demanded of us, we later realized that we had forgotten to contact his bank to stop his retirement funds from automatically transferring into an account that could only be used for his care. This was a benefit to him while he was alive. However, we all understood that any money left in it once he died would be forfeited. We were supposed to have stopped the movement of money as soon as he died, so that it could go to my mother-in-law, but we had forgotten. Once we realized it, my mother-in-law and I called the banks. I was reminded of the Israelites' predicament, believing they were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, because we found there was little we could do to salvage the money for her benefit.

After a moment of silence between us, in which we contemplated the situation, my mother-in-law calmly stated, "Well, there is nothing I can do but trust the Lord." That is the response of the person who has spent many years walking by faith and knows immediately what to do when "trapped." They know God can "part the sea."

Application: Like the Israelites, those of us on the pilgrimage of faith today certainly find ourselves trapped in circumstances, from time to time. We might find ourselves "trapped" by illness. Perhaps our marriage seems irreparable. We may be unable to find work. Will we stand still and trust God to clear the path? Stillness isn't necessarily inaction on our part. The Israelites had to put one foot in front of the other and walk through the Sea. Stillness is the inner assurance that God loves His own fiercely. He goes before us and will clear the paths He wants us to take.

Conclusion

God used dramatic means by which to impress the Israelites with the wonders of His love and His judgment. They were beginning a journey of faith with their frightening but good God. He may act in quieter, less dramatic ways to make Himself known in our lives, but He still wants us to know Him *as He is*: a God of judgment and a God of love. May we ever stand in awe of Him, the God of wrath! May we increasingly draw near to Him, our loving Deliverer!

ⁱ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/aslan>

ⁱⁱ Kaiser, Walter Jr. (1994), Exodus. In K.L. Barker and J.R. Kohlenberger III (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Abridged Edition* (p. 72). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

ⁱⁱⁱ Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (Vol. 2, pp. 149–150). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{iv} Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (p. 683). Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity Press.

^v Kaiser, Walter Jr. (1994), Exodus. In K.L. Barker and J.R. Kohlenberger III (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Abridged Edition* (pp. 76-85). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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- ^{vi} Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 310). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- ^{vii} Hannah, J. D. (1985). Exodus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 120). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^{viii} Kaiser, Walter Jr. (1994), Exodus. In K.L. Barker and J.R. Kohlenberger III (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Abridged Edition* (p. 78). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ^{ix} Kaiser, Walter Jr. (1994), Exodus. In K.L. Barker and J.R. Kohlenberger III (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Abridged Edition* (p. 79). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ^x Edersheim, Alfred. *The Exodus and The Wanderings in the Wilderness* (p. 36), In Vol 2, The Bible History, Old Testament, <http://www.levendwater.org/books/v2bhot.pdf>
- ^{xi} Swindoll, Charles R. (1999). Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication (pp. 189-190). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publications.
- ^{xii} Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (Vol. 2, p. 332). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.