

## The God Who Delivers (Part 6 of 6)

### A Death that Leads to Deliverance

Exodus 12:29-42

Mark Vroegop

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*"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. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!" The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations." (Exodus 12:29-42, ESV)*

Today we bring to a close our second mini-series in the study of Exodus. We began our study of Exodus 7-12 in January, and we have walked with Israel and Moses through the historic Ten Plagues. Throughout our study it has been thrilling to see how foundational this book is for much of what we learn about in the New Testament, especially in regards to the gospel.

Seeing the big picture themes in the Old and New Testament is really beautiful to behold. When you can trace the plan of God in both Testaments, it makes you love the message of the gospel even more. From a theological perspective, this is called Biblical Theology. You connect the storyline of the Bible, and you are able to see its overall message.

Next weekend will be THINK|13, and our guest speaker will be Dr. James Hamilton from Southern Seminary. The focus of this weekend is on Biblical Theology and finding your place in God's story. Dr. Hamilton specializes in this thrilling area of study, and I know that you will be greatly

encouraged by his teaching, so please make it a point to be a part of this great weekend of learning and growth.

We will pick up Exodus again after Easter. After THINK, I am going to preach a series of messages entitled *The Resurrected Gospel: Bringing the Message and our Passion for the Good News Back to Life*. At the beginning of the year, I shared our vision for maturity, and part of that vision included helping us grow in some strategic areas. One of those areas is personal evangelism. We are hoping that over the next three weeks, you feel empowered and motivated to pray:

“Open a Door”

“Open my Mouth”

“Open their Heart”

This series will end on Easter, and we hope that you will use this special Sunday to invite someone who is searching for answers when it comes to his or her spiritual life. So this next five weeks is going to be a great season.

### **Lessons from Deliverance through Death**

Our text this morning is Exodus 12:29-50, and it records the final moment when Israel is delivered by God out of its Egyptian slavery. It is the culmination of the Ten Plagues, the fulfillment of God’s promises, and the redefinition of their relationship with God.

Like other parts of Exodus, this text communicates important lessons which have application far beyond God’s dealing with the nation of Israel.

#### **A Tragic Divide**

The first lesson we can see in this final plague is a tragic divide between those who, by faith, applied the blood to the doorposts and those who did not. This distinction resulted in one group that experience the consequences of being on the wrong side of a holy God and another group that was graciously “passed over.”

God had warned Pharaoh that this day was coming. At the end of the ninth plague, when darkness covered Egypt for three days, Moses gave Pharaoh an ominous warning.

*“So Moses said, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘About midnight 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. There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again.’” (Exodus 11:4–6, ESV)*

The plague would affect every family at every social level, assault the Egyptian worldview of the special status of a firstborn child, and clearly send a message that God was bringing dangerous judgment. But it wasn’t just the frightening judgment which was so significant; it was the preservation and protection of Israel that made this plague so stunning. Moses has previously warned Pharaoh about this as well:

*"But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel."* (Exodus 11:7, ESV)

Chapter 12 gives the chilling account of what happened in verses 29-30.

*"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. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead."* (Exodus 12:29-30, ESV)

This plague had a double effect. It communicated both God's judgment and His mercy at the same time. It demonstrated God's frightening power and His protective kindness. And this division between the judgment of God and the mercy of God, based upon the faith-applied blood, is a central part of the story of the Bible. The death of the firstborn is only a foretaste of what is to come.

The book of Revelation tells us there will come a day when God will pour out His judgment on the world for its rebellion. Revelation 16 says that angels from heaven will pour our bowls of wrath which will include water being turned to blood, painful skin afflictions, darkness, diseases, and hail. Revelation 16:21 even says, ". . . they cursed God for the plague of the hail because the plague was so severe." In other words, the plagues return.

And this eventually leads up to a day of ultimate judgment. Revelation 20 gives us the sobering picture of a great division:

*"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done . . . And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."* (Revelation 20:11-12, 15, ESV)

The dividing line on this final judgment will be the same dividing line that we saw in Exodus. Those who put their faith in God's word and believe in God's deliverance through the blood of a lamb will be saved. In the New Testament, that lamb is Jesus Christ. And those who refuse to believe God's word will be condemned and judged.

Philip Ryken gives the following warning:

*We will all be there: the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the sinners and the saints. From the dungeon to the throne, no one will escape. No one will be granted an exemption. No one will receive any special treatment. The rich may travel first-class all their lives, but when they get to the final judgment God will not examine their bank accounts. Nor will the poor have something coming to them simply because their lives were more difficult. God is no respecter of persons, and he will judge*

*everyone by the same standard. He does not care what color we are, how much money we have, where we go to school, what company we work for, or even how good we are. What matters to God is whether or not we have faith in the sacrifice of his Son. Those who trust in the blood of Christ will receive eternal life. Those who do not hold on to him and to his cross will be finally and fatally lost. The great divide between salvation and damnation is marked in blood.<sup>1</sup>*

The death of the firstborn shows us a tragic divide – one that we will see again.

### **Unconditional Surrender**

The next thing we observe in the text is the way in which Pharaoh is completely beaten. After hardening his heart and resisting the will of God over and over, Pharaoh has learned the hard way that God always wins. Resisting God never works out well for human beings. And Pharaoh finally comes to a point where he must give in and give up. The overwhelming force of God's power has left him a shattered man, father, and leader.

Verses 31-32 record his conversation with Moses and Aaron. There is no bargaining, no excuses, and no conditions. Pharaoh has lost. His only option is unconditional surrender.

*"Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!" (Exodus 12:31–32, ESV)*

There are a few interesting things to note about this conversation: 1) Pharaoh wasted no time. The overwhelming force of God's judgment was obvious and frightening. 2) This is the first time that Pharaoh called his slaves "the people of Israel." 3) His statement "go, serve the Lord, as you have said" is complete capitulation to Moses' repeated demands. 4) Amazingly, he asks for Moses to bless him.

Pharaoh had come to the conclusion that he was on the wrong side of God. He felt the painful consequences of his resistance to God's will, and he knew that he needed mercy from this great and powerful God. That is why he asked Moses to bless him. The grief and regret must have been enormous. Think of it! His arrogance caused the death of a person in every home, even in his own. However, this is not true repentance on Pharaoh's part. As we'll see in our next series, it is only a matter of time until Pharaoh hardens his heart again and pursues the Israelites in the wilderness.

That is part of the tragedy and the lesson of this story. In the end, God wins because He is God. And the sooner we can get to the right conclusion about that fact, the better. Pharaoh is not unlike many people, maybe even you.

There are lots of people who tragically resist God's will, despite all the warnings, all the consequences, and all that should be obvious. They think that they can negotiate with God,

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<sup>1</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). Exodus: Saved for God's glory (347). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

bargain with Him, and pursue partial surrender to Him. They want their circumstances to change; they want the pain to stop; they want hope to return.

But Jesus' answer to that problem is not personal renovation or behavior modification. Jesus' answer is that a person must repent and be born again. To repent means that there is a radical change of mind when it comes to who God is, who you are, and what runs your life. To be born again means that you've come to an end of yourself, and you cry out for God to make you completely new – from the inside out. It means you've come to the conclusion you desperately need Jesus' help – not just to change the problems in your life, but to change who you really and fundamentally are.

And the first step towards Jesus is coming to the point of unconditional surrender.

### **Undeserved Blessings**

The next lesson turns the focus from Pharaoh to Israel, and we see the way in which their deliverance resulted in more than just freedom. They left Egypt with blessings which they could have never acquired on their own.

Verses 33-36 describe the manner in which the people left Egypt. They left quickly, but they left with blessings.

*"The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians." (Exodus 12:33–36, ESV)*

It is the last statement that is so striking: "they plundered the Egyptians." What is happening here is more than just a "pay-off." The goods that were given to the Israelite represented a military victory. They left Egypt as more than slaves; they were brought out of Egypt as conquerors. You may have heard the phrase "to the victor goes the spoil." Well, that is exactly what was happening here.

Another account of this moment is given for us in Number 33:3-4, and the picture given is of a victorious people leaving boldly while the Egyptians are terrified:

*"They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month. On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them. On their gods also the Lord executed judgments." (Numbers 33:3–4, ESV)*

This is the way that God always works for His people. His children share in His victory. From a spiritual standpoint, those who are “in Christ” are blessed with spoils of His victory. Here are a few examples:

*“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37, ESV)*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:3, 11–14 ESV)*

So there are blessings for those who are the sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ – blessings which are completely and totally underserved. In fact, the blessings only remind you about the beauty of your deliverance.

### **Promised Deliverance**

The next remarkable thing in this text comes primarily comes from verses 40-42, and we’ll look at those in detail in a moment. Verses 37-39 contain the moment we have been waiting for since we first heard about Israel’s misery. It was the moment that God promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:13), the moment promised to Moses (Ex. 3:13-22), and now it is finally here.

*“And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.” (Exodus 12:37–39, ESV)*

Notice that they traveled out quickly and therefore had no time to leaven their bread. We will look more at this when we get into chapter 13. Further, they had no provisions for themselves. While they had a haul of goods from Egypt, they lacked food and water. They will be forced to trust the Lord.

The text tells us that they traveled from Ramses to Succoth, the nation was 600,000 men<sup>2</sup>, and it was a mixed multitude. In other words, there were some non-Israelites who left with them. More on this later.

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<sup>2</sup> The number 600,000 men presents a slight problem because if it is taken literally, the population of Israel would have been well over 2 million people, and that number does not appear to be in line with the population of Egypt and surrounding areas during this time period. The ESV Study Bible has a great article on the challenge with numbers on page 260-261. It seems likely to me that this number is 1) symbolic of something we don’t yet understand, or 2) was intended to mean 600 groups or clans. The word translated as “thousand” in Hebrew can have a wider range of meaning to include these definitions. With this reading, the population would have been in the tens of thousands range not in the millions.

The main point of this text is the connection between Israel's departure from Egypt and four hundred and thirty years. God had told Abraham in Genesis 15:13-14 that Israel would be afflicted for 400 hundred years<sup>3</sup> after which they would be delivered. Therefore, for generations to come, the Passover and Exodus events would be monuments of the way in which God keeps His promises.

This is one of the sub-plots of the book of Exodus: God makes and keeps His promises. We first heard this in Exodus 2:24 when "God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." God had not forgotten His promises. And throughout the book of Exodus we have heard God continually make promises about delivering His people (see 3:8, 3:20, 3:21-22, 6:6, and 7:5). God continually promised that they were going to be delivered out of Egypt, and now God had made good on His promise. Even though it seemed dark and dreary at times, God had proven His ability to keep His word. For the rest of their lives, this moment of deliverance will be a rallying cry to trust God. Based upon His historical promise-keeping character, Israel was to trust God.

Do you realize that the essence of Christianity and the hope of salvation is based upon God's ability to keep His promises? When you put your faith in Christ, when you receive Jesus as your Savior, you are banking your eternal destiny on the belief that the Bible says, "*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 8:1). You are believing that John 1:12 is eternally true and believable: ". . . to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God." So believing that God keeps His promises is the starting point of the Christian faith.

But it is also how you live the Christian life – every day. You believe the promises of God for you. You believe that all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28), that His mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23), that no temptation will overwhelm or crush you (1 Cor. 10:13), that His grace is always sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9), that there is no use worrying, because God loves us (Matt. 6:25-33), and that there is never too much trouble in one day (Matt 6:34).

I know it is a bit "cheesy" but the older I get the more convinced I am of the wisdom of the statement: "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." And the Bible is filled with examples that are meant to encourage our faith in God's promises.

### **Spiritual Identity**

The final spiritual lesson that we find in our text this morning is about spiritual identity. The Exodus and the Passover celebration marked the people of God forever. From this point forward, they would have a new identity. Verses 43-50 record specific instructions about how the meal was to be celebrated and by whom. Let's look specifically at verses 48-49:

*"If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no*

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<sup>3</sup> A number that is likely rounded for narrative purposes.

*uncircumcised person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.” (Exodus 12:48–49, ESV)*

Notice that no one could participate in the Passover unless he was circumcised or unless all the males of the home were circumcised. This symbol meant that a person had identified himself and his family with God’s covenant community. In fact, even if you weren’t a native born Israelite, you could participate in the Passover, but only if you were circumcised. In other words, as important as their physical identity was, there was a spiritual reality in play here that was really important. Other people could be a part of God’s people but they had to fully identify with Him. They had to receive a new spiritual identity.

From a symbolic perspective, this is why baptism is so significant. It communicates that a person has been given a new spiritual identity. Going into the waters of baptism testifies of what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 – *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.”* The waters of baptism testify that a person’s identity is now fundamentally marked by a participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It triumphantly declares – “I have been delivered!”

So you can see, I hope, why this moment is so important for Israel and for the rest of the New Testament. For the last six weeks, we have been waiting for this moment. Israel waited for over 400 years. And I hope it emboldens your faith to see this deliverance finally come. It is a comfort, but it is also a warning. God keeps His promises, and if you are covered by the blood of Jesus, that is really good news. If you are not covered by the blood of Jesus, it is a frightening thought – an issue that would be good for you to settle today.

Our text ends with this beautiful statement: “On that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:51).

God is a God who delivers!

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