

EXODUS PART II • CHAPTERS 5-15

THE PLAGUES, THE PASSOVER,
AND THE PARTING OF THE SEA

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Part II: Chapters 5-15

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AND THE PARTING OF THE SEA

ASBURY

THE BOOK OF EXODUS IS ABOUT THE FORMATION OF A PEOPLE INTO A NATION.

The account begins with the people (descendants of Abraham, called the children of Israel) enslaved in Egypt. In Part 1 (chapters 1-4), we read of how God was faithful to His promises to Abraham and declared His intention to deliver His people from slavery and then lead them into the Promised Land. Part 1 then recounts how the Lord prepared Moses—a man with a unique background as a Hebrew raised as an Egyptian in Pharaoh's own household—to be the man God would use to lead the exodus of the God's people from Egypt.

In Part 2, we will read of the showdown between the Lord and Pharaoh: the Ten Plagues and then the famous moment of the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army.

WHY DOES IT TAKE TEN PLAGUES?

It's clear that this isn't a fair fight—the gods of Egypt (better to say “demons”) are no match for the Lord of all Creation. So:

- Why does it take Ten Plagues?
 - Why doesn't the Lord just deliver the Israelites immediately?
 - Why the protracted contest?
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THE REASON WHY IT TAKES TEN PLAGUES

Exodus is about the formation of Israel as a people, and the formation of Moses as a leader.

What we will learn as we read along is that the Lord is using the Ten Plagues to accomplish three things:

Objective #1

Reveal His identity as the God of Creation to Israel, Pharaoh, Egypt, and the nations.

Objective #2

Get the people out of Egypt. This is accomplished by chapter 15 and the account of the Red Sea's parting. (The harder task is to get the Egypt out of the people, a task which will take the rest of the book.)

Objective #3

Make Moses into the leader of Israel.

As we read along, pay attention to how each thing that happens helps realize those three objectives.

HOW THIS READING PLAN WORKS

Remember, consistency is more important than intensity! That is, don't try and read the whole Bible in one sitting—rather, pace yourself and make a commitment to be consistent. To that end, the readings are parceled-out on weekdays only—if you get behind, catch up each weekend. Each day I've written brief commentary to help you get something out of your reading; the commentary is NOT the point, the Bible is the point. If the commentary helps you, great! If it doesn't, no worries—just skip it.

THE PROCESS *IS* THE POINT

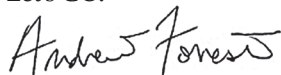
I asked above the obvious question: *Since the battle between the Lord and Pharaoh isn't a fair fight, why does it take Ten Plagues for the exodus to happen?*

Spoiler: the Lord is using the process to teach the people. In other words:

The process is the point.

That's true for our own lives as well. My prayer is that the process of reading through this second section of Exodus as we make our way to Easter will be part of God's preparation of each of us, too.

Let's GO.



✠Andrew Forrest

Asbury Church

Lent 2024

P.S. Want to receive these daily readings and commentary each weekday morning in your inbox? Sign up on my website: andrewforrest.org.

P.P.S. I'll be teaching an All-Church Bible study on Exodus on Wednesday, March 13, 6:30-8:00 PM, Asbury Sanctuary. I always close with Q&A and most of the questions in attendance come from our middle and high school students. (Dinner available beforehand, 5:00-6:30 PM. 18 and under are free on Bible study evenings!) Going to be out of town? Catch the livestream: www.asburytulsa.org.

ORDER FOR DAILY PRAYER

In a Bible study or small group?

Use the order below to provide some structure to your gathering.

1. GREETING

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

2. THE INVITATORY

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

O God, make speed to save us;

O Lord, make haste to help us;

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

3. OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. SCRIPTURE LESSON

The day's scripture is read and briefly expounded.

5. PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen.

6A. MORNING PRAYER

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day, and we ask that you drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

6B. EVENING PRAYER

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night and so thereby bring us in safety to the morning hours. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all this we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

7. CLOSING BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace;
And now may the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Be with us and remain with us now and forever. Amen.

OCCASIONAL PRAYERS

I have included below some occasional prayers that you may find helpful. Often at a birth or a death I find myself fumbling for the right words to say, and these occasional prayers have been a help to me. (I'd suggest copying to your phone the ones that seem most useful to you, so you can easily text them to others when the need arises.)

A GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

or

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR OUR NATION

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure conduct. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom, in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A BIRTHDAY

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servant *N.* as *he* begins another year. Grant that *he* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his* trust in your goodness all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A CHILD, OR FOR A BIRTHDAY

Watch over your child *N.*, O Lord, as *his* days increase; bless *him* and guide *him*, and keep *him* unspotted from the world. Strengthen *him* when *he* stands; comfort *him* when discouraged or sorrowful; raise *him* up if *he* falls; and in *his* heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A MARRIAGE OR ANNIVERSARY

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and His Church: Send your blessing upon these your servants [as they begin another year], that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he conquered death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

FOR OUR ENEMIES

O God, the Creator of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen.

FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant *N.* the help of your power, that *his* sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Rest eternal grant to *N.*, O Lord; and may *his* soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

FOR DESIRING GOD

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you forever. Amen.

FOR A PERSON IN TROUBLE OR BEREAVEMENT

O merciful Father, you have taught us in your holy Word that you do not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men: Look with pity on the sorrows of your servant *N*. Remember *him*, O Lord, in mercy; nourish *his* soul with patience; comfort *him* with a sense of your goodness; lift up your countenance upon *him*; and give *him* peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THE DISCOURAGED AND DOWNCAST

O God, almighty and merciful, you heal the broken-hearted, and turn the sadness of the sorrowful to joy: Let your fatherly goodness be upon all whom you have made. Remember in pity all those who are this day destitute, homeless, elderly, infirm, or forgotten. Bless the multitude of your poor. Lift up those who are cast down. Mightily befriend innocent sufferers, and sanctify to them the endurance of their wrongs. Cheer with hope all who are discouraged and downcast, and by your heavenly grace preserve from falling those whose poverty tempts them to sin. Though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed; though they are perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of him who for our sakes became poor, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOR HELP TO BEAR BEREAVEMENT

Heavenly Father, help us to entrust our loved ones to your care. Though sorrow darkens our lives, help us to look up to you, remembering the cloud of witnesses by which we are surrounded. And grant that we on earth, rejoicing ever in your presence, may share with them the rest and peace which your presence gives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR QUIET CONFIDENCE

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(I've selected these prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

EXODUS 5:1-5

THE BATTLE BEGINS

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’”² But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.”³ Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”⁴ But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens.”⁵ And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!”

The battle begins.

Exodus chapters 1-4 (what we are calling Exodus Part 1) is about the background and preparation of Moses to be the man the Lord will use to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery. The preparations being complete, the battle can begin.

And immediately as it begins, it begins to go badly! Pharaoh—quite reasonably, if you think about it—demands to know who this “LORD” is who is ordering him to let the Hebrews go: “Who is the Lord?” [5:2]. Remember that one of the Lord’s objectives with the exodus is to teach the nations about who He is; in effect, the Lord will use the exodus to provide an answer to Pharaoh’s question.

It’s interesting to think that the same opportunity is available to us today—difficulty and challenge can be an opportunity we can use to tell people about the Lord.

How can you use the moments in front of you today to make the Lord’s name and character more better-known?

P.S. Note that the goal of the exodus is worship (v.1). In fact, that’s the purpose of freedom everywhere—that people might be free to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20
EXODUS 5:6-21
BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

⁶The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, ⁷“You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ ⁹Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.”

¹⁰So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. ¹¹Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced in the least.’” ¹²So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. ¹³The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.” ¹⁴And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?” ¹⁵Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you treat your servants like this? ¹⁶No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.” ¹⁷But he said, “You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ ¹⁸Go now and work. No straw will be given you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks.” ¹⁹The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, “You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day.” ²⁰They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came out from Pharaoh; ²¹and they said to them, “The Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

The grand theme of Exodus is the formation of the children of Israel into a nation. This is why—as we will see—that the book continues for twenty-five chapters after the miracle at the Red Sea. Israel is free from Egypt, yes, but the people are not yet a nation. It will turn out that you can get the people out of Egypt, but you still have to get the Egypt out of the people. One of the themes to follow is how the experience of the exodus and the wilderness wanderings shapes the people into who the Lord needs them to be.

I don't want to be too hard on the Israelites here, since they are in a poor position that has just been made worse by Pharaoh's malevolence, but it is worth pointing out how quickly they despair of God's deliverance as soon as they face opposition.

To be honest, I'm often the same way—the slightest difficulty, and I lose heart.

So, let's remind ourselves today of the words of Jesus:

*"In this world, you will have trouble;
But, have no fear: I have overcome the world."*

Keep going.

P.S. Note that in v.23 Moses refers to the Israelites as "your people," not as "our people" or "my people." Remember that one of the purposes of the exodus is to shape Moses into the leader the Lord needs him to be, and he's not yet there.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

EXODUS 6:1-13

THE LORD EXPLAINS THE PLAN

6 But the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

² God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'" ⁹ Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

¹⁰ So the Lord said to Moses, ¹¹ “Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land.” ¹² But Moses said to the Lord, “Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?” ¹³ But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

The Lord has promised to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery and to bring them to the Promised Land.

Pharaoh opposes the plan;
The people despair of the plan;
Moses questions the plan.

But note—*none of that will matter*. Neither Pharaoh’s opposition, nor the people’s despair, nor Moses’s questions will stop the Lord from fulfilling His promise.

It’s the same with us! It doesn’t matter how things *seem*, in the end, the Lord wins. We should control our feelings as not to lose spiritual perspective.

Keep going.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

EXODUS 6:14-27

YOUR LIFE IS NOT AN ACCIDENT

¹⁴ These are the heads of their fathers’ houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the clans of Reuben. ¹⁵ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the clans of Simeon. ¹⁶ These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, the years of the life of Levi being 137 years. ¹⁷ The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, by their clans. ¹⁸ The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being 133 years. ¹⁹ The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their generations. ²⁰ Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father’s sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years. ²¹ The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²² The sons of Uzziel: Mishaël, Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³ Aaron took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon,

and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ²⁴ The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the clans of the Korahites. ²⁵ Eleazar, Aaron's son, took as his wife one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their clans.

²⁶ These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said: "Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts." ²⁷ It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron.

Why does the author interrupt the action with a genealogy right at this point?

Remember, one of the themes of Exodus is about the formation of Moses into a leader. What we read here in the genealogy of Moses and his brother Aaron is proof that the Lord had been working *for generations* to prepare for Moses and Aaron.

Your life is not an accident. God has placed you in a particular place in a particular time so that you can take part and do your part in the great story of salvation.

Your life matters. Your faithfulness is important. You are an essential link in the chain.

So, how do we know what we are supposed to be doing? How do we fulfil our responsibilities?

Don't over think it—take the next faithful step today and trust the Lord with the rest.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

EXODUS 6:28-7:7

THE PLAGUES ARE FOR THE EGYPTIANS?

²⁸ On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹ the Lord said to Moses, "I am the Lord; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." ³⁰ But Moses said to the Lord, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?"

7 And the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ² You shall speak all that

I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt,⁴ Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment.⁵ The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”⁶ Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the Lord commanded them.⁷ Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

From the call of Abraham (Genesis 12) onward, the Lord has made His plan clear: one is chosen for the purpose of blessing the many.

Here, the Lord explains His plan to Moses yet again, and reminds Moses that there is more at stake than just the Israelites' freedom: the Lord is also seeking to instruct the Egyptians.

The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them. [7:5]

What this teaches me is that there is *always* more at stake than I can see.

You have no idea what hangs in the balance today. Be faithful; the Lord will use your faithfulness to bless and instruct others.

How cool is that?!

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

EXODUS 7:8-13

THE GODS OF EGYPT

⁸ Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹ “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’”¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.¹¹ Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts.¹² For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.¹³ Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

The Bible tells of an unseen realm; today, we would call it the spiritual world. In this spiritual world there are evil influences and powers—one of the terms the New Testament writers use for these kinds of powers is “demons.”

There are demonic powers at work in Egypt, which is how the Egyptian sorcerers can turn their staffs into serpents. However, the Bible is very clear that there is one Lord, and these evil powers are not equal to God—they are just fallen angels. So, there is really no contest between the Lord and the gods of Egypt. In fact, Aaron’s staff swallows up the Egyptian staffs.

Unfortunately, Pharaoh refuses to heed the lesson. Over and over again, Pharaoh refuses to turn back from his path of destruction. He is completely committed to evil, and ultimately, he, like the serpents here, will be swallowed up in the judgment of God.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

EXODUS 7:14-24

THE FIRST PLAGUE: BLOOD

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.” ¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. ¹⁶ And you shall say to him, “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness.” But so far, you have not obeyed.” ¹⁷ Thus says the Lord, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.” ¹⁸ The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.””” ¹⁹ And the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, “Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.””

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. ²¹ And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. ²² But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them,

as the Lord had said. ²³ Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. ²⁴ And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

One of the terrifying themes of Exodus is how there is a connection between sin and its consequences upon the sinner. Pharaoh had ordered the murder of the Hebrew boys in the river Nile, and now the first plague is that the Nile turns into blood.

Lord, save us from the consequences of our sin!

P.S. Note that Moses and Aaron are learning to be completely obedient to the Lord: “Moses and Aaron did what the Lord commanded” [7:20].

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

EXODUS 7:25-8:15

THE SECOND PLAGUE: FROGS

²⁵ Seven full days passed after the Lord had struck the Nile.

8 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ² But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. ³ The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. ⁴ The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.”’” ⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’” ⁶ So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷ But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

⁸ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.” ⁹ Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” ¹⁰ And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. ¹¹ The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile.” ¹² So Moses and Aaron went

out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the Lord about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. ¹³ And the Lord did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. ¹⁴ And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. ¹⁵ But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

We have already seen that the Egyptian sorcerers are not without power and are capable of doing some of the wonders that the Lord does through Moses and Aaron. Here, they can imitate Aaron and make frogs. (How ridiculous is it, however, that they—in their sorcery—simply *add* to the infestation?!)

What's interesting is that they seem unable to reverse their actions, as Pharaoh needs Moses and Aaron to take away the frogs.

Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Plead with the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." [8:8]

What is happening here is that Egypt is being *uncreated*, plague by plague. In Genesis, the Lord brings order to Creation through separation:

- Light from dark;
- Sky from sky;
- Water from land;
- Etc.

Disorder is chaos. Each of the plagues is a form of chaos *and ultimately only the Lord can bring order out of chaos*. So, the Egyptians are able, through dark spiritual power, to bring about chaos, but what they cannot do is reverse the chaos they have unleashed.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

EXODUS 8:16-19

THE THIRD PLAGUE: GNATS

¹⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'" ¹⁷ And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land

of Egypt. ¹⁸ The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹ Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

In the first two plagues, the Egyptian sorcerers can imitate the wonders that Moses and Aaron are doing. But here with the third plague and the gnats, Pharaoh’s men are unable to produce them. In fact, Pharaoh’s sorcerers identify what Aaron does as coming from the Lord:

“This is the finger of God” [8:19]

Remember, one of the objectives of the exodus is for the Egyptians and the other nations to learn about the Lord. Here, that objective is beginning to be realized.

And yet Pharaoh still refuses to yield.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

EXODUS 8:20-32

THE FOURTH PLAGUE: FLIES

²⁰ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²¹ Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. ²² But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. ²³ Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.’”” ²⁴ And the Lord did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants’ houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

²⁵ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.” ²⁶ But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? ²⁷ We must go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as he tells us.” ²⁸ So Pharaoh

said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me.” ²⁹ Then Moses said, “Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.” ³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. ³¹ And the Lord did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. ³² But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

With the fourth plague, the Lord demonstrates His power by distinguishing between the Israelites in the land of Goshen and the rest of the Egyptians. Remember, the Lord wants to teach Pharaoh about Himself, and here that’s what’s happening:

But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. [8:22]

Pharaoh tries to save face by telling Moses that the Israelites can sacrifice to the Lord, but only within Egypt. Moses won’t accept this compromise, and then Pharaoh says that he’ll let the Israelites go to worship the Lord in the wilderness. But, as soon as Moses leaves and the Lord removes the flies at Moses’s request, Pharaoh changes his mind.

Lord, save us from such foolish refusals to repent and change direction!

P.S. Note that the Israelites sacrifice animals that the Egyptians revere as sacred (v. 26). One of the purposes of the exodus is to teach about the Lord, and one of the main lessons is that the Lord is the Creator; everything else is creation and therefore should not be worshipped.

MONDAY, MARCH 4

EXODUS 9:1-7

THE FIFTH PLAGUE: LIVESTOCK

9 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ² For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, ³ behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴ But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of

Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.””⁵ And the Lord set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land.”⁶ And the next day the Lord did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died.⁷ And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

Pharaoh’s hard heart is described in several different ways: sometimes the Lord hardens Pharaoh’s heart, sometimes Pharaoh hardens his own heart, and sometimes Pharaoh’s heart is just hardened. The narrator also uses several different Hebrew verbs to describe what’s happening—all this adds up to Pharaoh’s remarkable refusal to yield to the Lord’s request that the Hebrews go free.

Ultimately, the Lord is giving Pharaoh over to his own desires, bending Pharaoh’s evil to the Lord’s own purposes. One of the things the Lord is doing is strengthening Pharaoh’s own will—you might say that the Lord is making Pharaoh more of what he already is. Pharaoh’s stubborn refusal to change will culminate in the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. There is a mysterious interplay between Pharaoh’s desires and the Lord’s strengthening of those desires, but nowhere do you get the sense that Pharaoh is likely to repent.

“Exodus gives no sign that Pharaoh longed to submit to [the LORD] as his sovereign and was prevented from doing so; he received numerous rebukes, explanations, and commands that imply opportunity to submit.” --Dorian Coover-Cox

One of the prayers we should pray is that the Lord would save us from our own crooked desires.

This is the ancient Jesus prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

EXODUS 9:8-12

THE SIXTH PLAGUE: BOILS

⁸ And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹ It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” ¹⁰ So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. ¹¹ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. ¹² But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

Remember, there are dark spiritual powers at work in Egypt, and Pharaoh’s men can work with them and perform some wonders, but as the plagues continue and intensify, even Pharaoh’s sorcerers become victims—here they are covered with boils.

Once again, the Lord is trying to teach them to recognize His rightful authority over all things, and to turn aside from their evil ways. The magicians seem to begin to recognize God’s power, but Pharaoh still refuses.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

EXODUS 9:13-35

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE: HAIL

¹³ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. ¹⁵ For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶ But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. ¹⁷ You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. ¹⁸ Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹ Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into

safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.””²⁰ Then whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses,²¹ but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field.

²² Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt.”²³ Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt.²⁴ There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.²⁵ The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field.²⁶ Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.

²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.”²⁸ Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.”²⁹ Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's.”³⁰ But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God.”³¹ (The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud.³² But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.)³³ So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the Lord, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth.³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.³⁵ So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

The seventh plague makes the Lord's intentions particularly clear: He wants to teach the nations about who He is. Will they be open to learning?

The Lord tells Pharaoh that He is being forbearing because He has been trying to get the attention of the rebellious world:

¹⁵ For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶ But for this

purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. [9:15-16]

What's amazing is that the Egyptians themselves are beginning to learn the lesson; when the word about the impending plague of hail reaches them, even some of the Egyptians begin to change their behavior:

²⁰ Then whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, ²¹ but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field. [9:20-21]

The plague of the hail is so powerful that Pharaoh actually seems to be provoked to repentance! It's a miracle:

²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸ Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." [9:27-28]

Unfortunately, the repentance is short-lived, as Moses predicts (v. 30).

Many people temporarily turn toward the Lord when they are in distress, only to return to their rebellious, unrepentant ways when they receive a reprieve from trouble.

Lord, save us from such hard-heartedness!

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

EXODUS 10:1-20

THE EIGHTH PLAGUE: LOCUSTS

¹⁰ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord."

³ So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me. ⁴ For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, ⁵ and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land. And they shall eat what is left to you after the

hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field, ⁶ and they shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

⁷ Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” ⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. And he said to them, “Go, serve the Lord your God. But which ones are to go?” ⁹ Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.” ¹⁰ But he said to them, “The Lord be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. ¹¹ No! Go, the men among you, and serve the Lord, for that is what you are asking.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

¹² Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.” ¹³ So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. ¹⁴ The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again. ¹⁵ They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt. ¹⁶ Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. ¹⁷ Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the Lord your God only to remove this death from me.” ¹⁸ So he went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the Lord. ¹⁹ And the Lord turned the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. ²⁰ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go.

The plagues are like an *un-creating* of Egypt. The Lord made all things and gave them a proper order and place; the Lord is king and ruler of everything. Pharaoh refuses to recognize the Lord, however, and has

arrogated to himself all power and authority. So, the plagues are the Lord's way of showing Pharaoh that he does not have ultimate authority over the creation. Each plague is an example of what happens when the order of creation is undermined. Here, the insects that have a place in God's rightly-ordered creation are allowed to upset that order, thereby bringing destruction on Egypt.

I love how Leon Kass puts it:

*After each of the first nine plagues, the chaos caused by the Lord he also soon removes: just as each plague is a reversal or undoing of creation, so its removal is a re-creation of the world order. The plagues offer a panorama of "anti-creation," mocking the attempts of Egypt's secret arts to alter nature's workings and revealing both the tragic inner meaning of human attempts to control nature through technology. Such hubristic efforts are ultimately counterproductive: they destroy order, produce chaos, and lead in the end to a world inhospitable to earthly life (think especially of the cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness). Clever men can destroy life-sustaining order: only God can create and preserve it. –Leon Kass, from *Founding God's Nation: Reading Exodus**

Even Pharaoh's men are beginning to learn their lesson:

Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?" [10:7]

Pharaoh once again temporarily repents, but his true character trumps his repentance and the Lord once again hardens Pharaoh's heart.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

EXODUS 10:21-29

THE NINTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS

²¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt." ²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. ²³ They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived. ²⁴ Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, "Go, serve the Lord; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind." ²⁵ But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. ²⁶ Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God, and we do not know with what we must serve

the Lord until we arrive there.”²⁷ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.”²⁹ Moses said, “As you say! I will not see your face again.”

Each plague is increasing in intensity, and here we have the un-creating of the very first thing the Lord did when he created all things: separate light from darkness.

Note that Pharaoh still refuses to completely let the Israelites go:

“Go, serve the Lord; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.” [10:24]

The plagues have forced Pharaoh to acknowledge the Lord's power, but he still refuses to truly acknowledge the Lord's authority. He is trying to hold onto his own power because he thinks he can outfox the Lord by being half-way or three-quarters obedient. But that's not how it works: it's all or nothing.

Where are you holding back from complete obedience today?

MONDAY, MARCH 11

EXODUS 11:1-3

FAVOR IN THE SIGHT OF THE EGYPTIANS

11 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.² 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.”³ And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

The effect of the nine plagues has been to raise the status of the enslaved Hebrews and of their leader, Moses, in the sight of the Egyptians. It's a difficult situation they are in; nevertheless, the Lord uses it.

I think one of the ways that Christians can gain favor in our world today is through perseverance and joy in the face of difficulty. None of us wants difficulty, but it can be an important opportunity.

Don't waste it.

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

EXODUS 11:4-10

PREDICTION OF THE TENTH PLAGUE

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. ⁷ 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.’ ⁸ And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, you and all the people who follow you.’ And after that I will go out.” And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.”

¹⁰ Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

Finally, Pharaoh's hard-heartedness—which has brought destruction upon Pharaoh's nation—will now bring destruction into his own house.

Pharaoh's willfulness is finally not animated by a public-spirited concern for his nation and its people. Indeed, he willingly abandons his country to ruin precisely in order to show his own godly supremacy; in defending this ruling principle of the Egyptian regime, Pharaoh unintentionally reveals its catastrophic meaning. As each plague passes, so does his concern for the damage it has left behind. At no point does he attempt to heal the wounded or succor his people. At no point does he pray to any Egyptian deity; at every point he acts as if self-sufficient and all-important. After the ninth plague has left his country in frightful darkness for three days, Pharaoh is at his most defiantly godlike: he says to Moses, “Get away from me; take heed to yourself; never see my face again; for in the day you see my face you will die” (11:28). Nothing that affects the land or its people moves

him; only with the tenth plague, which attacks the royal family itself, will he personally feel threatened and impulsively surrender. In sum, the contest of the plagues demonstrates the deep truth of Pharaonic politics: to be Pharaoh means being certain of your own wisdom, means being indifferent to your own people's dignity and well-being, and ultimately to their very existence. Adhering to his own wisdom and seeking ultimate control—and immortality—for himself, the resolute and self-sufficing Pharaoh is in fact an angel of death, unleashed finally against himself and his own.

—Leon Kass, *Founding God's Nation: Reading Exodus*

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

EXODUS 12:1-13

TIME BEGINS WITH THE PASSOVER

¹² The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ 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. ⁴ And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

⁷ “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. ⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰ And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

Since Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh in chapter 5, the account moves along and the plagues have fall thick and fast. But without warning in chapter 12 the action is paused for as the Lord gives detailed instructions about the Passover. Why? Why are these details important?

Remember, the Lord's objective is not merely to get His people out of Egypt, but also to get Egypt out of His people. That is, the purpose of their liberation is for the Lord to commission the Israelites to be His covenant people—His representatives to the nations—and the vehicle by which blessing would come to the entire world.

The first step is for Israel to learn to mark time by the Lord's calendar and not their own. Note that the Lord tells Moses and Aaron that from then on, the Passover would mark the beginning of each new year.

As Christians, we believe that the exodus from Egypt was a sign of the greater exodus that Jesus would accomplish through His death and resurrection. Just as the lamb's blood protects the people in Egypt, so the blood of the Lamb protects God's people from the eternal consequences of sin.

I always imagine, therefore, that the Israelites marked their doorways with the sign of the cross.

P.S. Verse 12 makes explicit what has been implicit up to this point: this is a spiritual battle between the Lord and the so-called gods of Egypt. *"I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord"* [12:12].

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

EXODUS 12:14-28

DESCRIPTION OF FUTURE PASSOVER FEASTS

¹⁴ "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat,

that alone may be prepared by you.¹⁷ And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever.¹⁸ In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.¹⁹ For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land.²⁰ You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb.²² Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.²³ 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.²⁴ You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever.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.

²⁸ Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

In 12:14, the Lord’s instructions change from telling the Israelites what to do on the actual first Passover night to telling them how to commemorate the Passover for all future generations. For the Lord, it is so important that Israel keeps the Passover memory alive that anyone who refuses to celebrate Passover will be cut off from Israel! (See vv. 15 and 19.)

Remember, the exodus is about the formation of God’s people, and central to their identity will be their acknowledgement that they were slaves in Egypt, but that the Lord brought them out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. As the account plays out, we will see that this memory works in two ways:

1. It means that Israel ought to be bold and grateful, because the Lord fights for them and has freed them for a purpose;
2. But it also means that Israel ought to be humble and merciful, because they know what it's like to be oppressed.

Here, as the tenth plague is about to strike, the experience of the previous nine plagues seems to have worked—the Lord's demonstration of His power has changed Israel:

²⁷And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. ²⁸Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. [12:27-28]

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

EXODUS 12:29-32

THE TERRIBLE TENTH PLAGUE

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. ³⁰ 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. ³¹ 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. ³² Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!”

From the very beginning, Pharaoh's actions have been all leading to this moment: the death he caused by ordering the Hebrew boys to be murdered in the Nile was always going to bring back death onto himself. This is the logic of sin—it ultimately and always leads to death.

To take a contemporary example, the very moment Adolf Hitler took power in Germany on January 30, 1933 was the moment that Germany's defeat and destruction was assured. This is because evil always ends up leading to death and destruction on those who perpetuate it. Now, sometimes the time between the act and its consequences seem long, but always the consequences will come. In the specific case of the Nazis, it was 12 years between Hitler's assumption of power and his suicide in a Berlin bunker.

The Lord, however, desires that no man should perish. (2 Peter 3:9) And so, with each of the nine previous plagues, the Lord has given Pharaoh the opportunity to repent. However, in the deeply mysterious interplay between the Lord's foreknowledge and our freedom, the Lord has also known that Pharaoh would never repent and has therefor given Pharaoh over to his own rebellious and stubborn desires.

Leadership matters. The leader's actions affect the lives of others. (This is why leadership is such a weighty responsibility.) Here the leadership of Pharaoh has brought destruction on his own people. (The same thing happened with Adolf Hitler, whose murderous evil brought back evil on the German people as a whole, particularly as the Red Army made its terrible advance into Berlin in 1945.)

The best way to understand the tenth plague is to see that human rebellion always leads to death. But, the biblical story doesn't end with the Passover; in fact, the story of Israel continues and then culminates with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So, whenever you think of the death of the firstborn and the tenth plague, you should also think about the mystery that God gave up His only Son for a sinful world.

MONDAY, MARCH 18

EXODUS 12:33-36

THE PLUNDER OF THE EGYPTIANS

³³ The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." ³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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.

The exodus is the formative event in the history of Israel, and the Israelites' experience as slaves, liberated by God, shapes their future laws.

Here, when they are delivered from slavery, the Israelites take with them some of the wealth of Egypt. Years later, note the law that Moses gives them regarding freed slaves:

¹³ And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed.

¹⁴ You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to Him. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.
[Deuteronomy 15:13-15]

In the same way, we ought to always remember that the Lord has been merciful to us, so we ought to show mercy to others.

To whom can you be merciful today?

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

EXODUS 12:37-42

THE EXODUS

³⁷ And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.

³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. ³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. ⁴¹ At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴² 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.

I love the note in v. 38 that “a mixed multitude also went up with them.” To me, this detail is a mark of the Lord’s desire to save all people—here you have non-Hebrews who have joined themselves to God’s people. It’s a beautiful forerunner of what will happen with Jesus—how people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue will be drawn to Him (Revelation 7:9).

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

EXODUS 12:43-51

7 RULES

⁴³ And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. ⁴⁶ It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸ 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 uncircumcised person shall eat of it. ⁴⁹ There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.”

⁵⁰ All the people of Israel did just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

The Lord gives seven rules here to make it clear to the Israelites how they should keep the Passover, and why it matters. Note that only the covenant people are to keep it—either you are all-in, or you’re not.

Did you see that note about not breaking the bones of the lamb? In the Gospel of John, the author makes a point of connecting that verse to the sacrificial death of Jesus:

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,” ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.” [John 19:31-37]

This reference back to Exodus in the Gospel of John is a great example of the principle that every word in scripture matters.

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

EXODUS 13:1-16

THE FIRSTBORN BELONGS TO GOD

13 The Lord said to Moses, ² “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.”

³ Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴ Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. ⁵ And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. ⁶ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. ⁷ Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. ⁸ You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ ⁹ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰ You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.

¹¹ “When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, ¹² you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord’s. ¹³ Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. ¹⁴ And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ ¹⁶ It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt.”

Note again the importance of deliberate remembering: Israel must deliberately remember that they were slaves in Egypt, and that the

Lord brought them out. Here the Lord gives Moses specific practices Israel must adopt so that they will remember.

There are two implications:

1. It's really easy to forget. This is one of the reasons why weekly worship is so important for God's people—you have to build practices into your life that help you remember the truth.
2. **The purpose of this remembering is to help Israel keep the law—to live rightly (v. 9).**

What practices do you need to build into your life today? What have you been neglecting?

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

EXODUS 13:17-22

WHEN THE CIRCUITOUS ROUTE IS BEST

¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” ¹⁸But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. ¹⁹Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.” ²⁰And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²²The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

The Lord takes Israel out of Egypt by a circuitous route. Why? Because the direct route wouldn't have worked.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” [13:17]

What if the same idea applies to your life? What if the Lord has been leading you on the route that's actually *best*?

P.S. Note that though the Israelites are taking the circuitous route, they are not lost: they follow the Lord for each step.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

EXODUS 14:1-9

THE LORD SETS THE TRAP

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. ³For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ ⁴And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.” And they did so.

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” ⁶So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, ⁷and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. ⁹The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

Why does God permit evil?

It is *the* question of existence. And, the Bible never really answers that question, though the implication is that without the freedom to turn aside from God, love would not be possible for God’s rational creatures. That is, we have to be free to say “No” if we are to be free to say “Yes.” But, these are just suggestions and speculations—the answer to the question of evil is still a mystery.

What is not a mystery, however, is how evil is defeated. In the biblical story, the Lord allows evil to fall into the pit of its own digging, so to speak. The account of Pharaoh in Exodus is a good example of how this plays out: Pharaoh’s stubborn, rebellious heart and murderous rage lead him right into the heart of the sea and to his own destruction.

Israel is here the bait, and the Lord sets the trap. And Pharaoh, who has refused every possible opportunity to repent, *is about to choose his own destruction.*

Lord, save us from such a fate.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

EXODUS 14:10-18

"TELL THE PEOPLE TO GO FORWARD"

¹⁰When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." ¹³And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

¹⁵The Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

The people are understandably afraid.

Pharaoh's army is bearing down on them, and their backs are to the sea. They are trapped.

And so what does the Lord say? "Go forward."

The Lord will fight for them and the Lord will defeat Pharaoh, *but they still have to move forward.*

I think there is a lesson here for us. The Lord is inviting us into His work, and though the battle is His, we aren't meant to be merely passive passengers, but active participants.

Go. Move. Take the next step.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

EXODUS 14:19-31

RED SEA ROAD

¹⁹ Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴ And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, ²⁵ clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Finally, the trap the Lord has set is sprung, and Pharaoh and all his army are destroyed through their own arrogance and hubris. Egypt will never again enslave God's people.

What I find beautiful are the ways the biblical author wants us to see parallels between the Red Sea parting and the creation of the world. Just as the Lord caused dry ground to appear in Genesis 1:9, so do the people

of Israel walk through on dry ground at the Red Sea (v. 22). Just as it is the Spirit-breath-wind of God that moves over the waters of creation and brings forth life, so here it is the Spirit-breath-wind of God that drives back the waters and makes life possible for the Israelites. And, just as each night ends with a morning in Genesis 1, so here the night of the Red Sea crossing ends with a new dawn:

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. [14:27]

All along, the Lord has been shaping His people. The result of the astounding miracle of the Red Sea Road is that Israel has been saved from Egypt *and* acknowledges the Lord and His servant Moses.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses. [14:30-31]

What if one of the ways that the Lord uses difficulties in our lives is to get our attention so we will acknowledge him?

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

EXODUS 15:1-18

THE PURPOSE OF FREEDOM IS WORSHIP

¹⁵ Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,
“I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and His rider He has thrown into the sea.

² The Lord is my strength and my song,
and He has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

³ The Lord is a man of war;
the Lord is his name.

⁴ “Pharaoh's chariots and his host He cast into the sea,
and His chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

⁵ The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.

⁶ Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

⁷ In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;
you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

⁸ At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;

the floods stood up in a heap;
 the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.
⁹The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake,
 I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.
 I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.'
¹⁰You blew with your wind; the sea covered them;
 they sank like lead in the mighty waters.
¹¹"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
 Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
 awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?
¹²You stretched out your right hand;
 the earth swallowed them.
¹³"You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have
 redeemed;
 you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.
¹⁴The peoples have heard; they tremble;
 pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.
¹⁵Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
 trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
 all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.
¹⁶Terror and dread fall upon them;
 because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone,
 till your people, O Lord, pass by,
 till the people pass by whom you have purchased.
¹⁷You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
 the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode,
 the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.
¹⁸The Lord will reign forever and ever.

What is freedom *for*?

This is one of the questions the Book of Exodus is answering. From the very beginning, we see that the purpose of the exodus is to allow the people of God to freely worship:

Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" [5:1]

And now, after their deliverance and the Red Sea crossing, the first act of the newly-freed people is to worship.

Most people around the world do not enjoy the civil freedoms that we enjoy as Americans. We are remarkably free.

So, what are you doing with the freedoms the Lord has given you?

FRIDAY, MARCH 29

EXODUS 15:19-21

THE LOGIC OF GOOD FRIDAY

¹⁹For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. ²⁰Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. ²¹And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Today is Good Friday, the day we mark the crucifixion of the Son of God.

On the one hand, Good Friday looks like a victory for evil.

But on the other hand, what looks like a victory for evil is actually its decisive defeat.

This is the logic of Good Friday:

The Lord allows evil to overreach and thereby destroy itself.

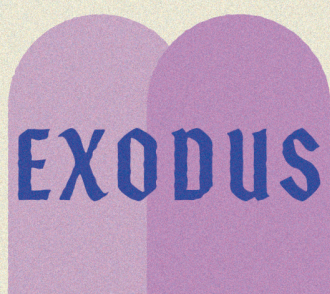
The Cross is a sign of the victory of God because the Lord won through losing. This is the way of Jesus, the taking up of the Cross.

What happened with Pharaoh at the Red Sea is a sign of things to come. All along, the Lord has been allowing Pharaoh to choose his own destruction, and that choice culminates in the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

The reason this encourages me is because it means that the reason the Lord is still permitting evil because He is working it into His plan.

It's Friday, but Sunday's coming.

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