

LIBERATION

Exodus 12:1-13

Years ago, the Saturday movie matinee included a western movie, a detective or romance movie, and an ongoing super-hero serial that was designed to keep people coming back each week. The theme of the serials and that of many of the cowboy or western movies was that the good guys would find themselves oppressed and threatened by the bad guys; but in the end, the cavalry or the hero would arrive and save the good guys. Everyone watching would feel good because the ending came out like it was supposed to with “good” triumphing over “evil.”

The writers could have taken their cue from the account of the Israelite people who were oppressed and mistreated by the Egyptian which culminated in their deliverance through a series of miraculous events. This whole account would have made a fantastic serial with each episode ending with one of the plagues striking the “bad guys” which would lead to everyone having hope that the “good guys” would win. However, the problem did not go away because the bad guys (i.e., Pharaoh) would not give up.

In a progressive series, the Lord inflicted the Egyptians with a total of ten plagues that were designed to show that Jehovah, the God of the Israelites was superior to the Egyptian gods. Some writers point out that the Egyptians could identify more than two thousand gods and goddesses that supposedly controlled everything. Others have written that many of these two thousand were just different names of the same gods and that there were **only** 115. In a period of less than one month, God showed His power over all aspects of physical life starting with the water which was turned to blood, an invasion of frogs, lice, and cattle disease. He showed His power over their health when the Egyptians were afflicted with boils, His power over the weather was demonstrated by a horrendous hail storm. This was followed by an invasion of locusts and that was capped off by an oppressive darkness that was directed at Ra, the Egyptian god of the sun. All of these were not sufficient to make a lasting change in the heart of Pharaoh and time after time he reneged on his promise to let the Hebrew people go.

The first nine plagues that God had used to afflict the Egyptians were bad conditions and these were costly, however, each was such that given enough time, the Egyptians could recover from the affliction. There was not a definitive “knockout punch” in these nine plagues and those who are hard hearted will resist until they can resist no more. The tenth plague would show the power of the God of the Israelites over life and death. Pharaoh had earlier asked Moses “Who is Jehovah that I should obey what He says?” This series of plagues was answering that question and the last plague of the death of the first born of man and beast was the exclamation point in the answer. We see the description and forewarning of what was going to happen in Chapter 11 of Exodus and that was followed in Chapter 12 by specific instruction of what the Israelites were to do avoid the effects of this final plague which would insure their deliverance from bondage.

Prepared – 12:1-5

¹ Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. ³ “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household. ⁴ ‘Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons *in them*; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. ⁵ ‘Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Exodus 12:1-5 (NASB95)

In the events surrounding the tenth plague that was to come upon Egypt and the provision to protect the Children of Israel, we see confirmation of God’s power over all other gods and we

see a picture of the plan of salvation that would eventually be fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

The first thing we see is a break with the past and all things starting anew. This break is similar to what we see in the words of Paul to the church at Corinth in 2 Cor 5:17 where he describes salvation in terms of “old things are passed away, behold all things have become new.” This newness for the Israelites would even change the calendar. What had been the seventh month would now be designated as the first month. What was about to happen to these people was so significant that they would reference almost everything to this event.

The rest of the world started their new year with the autumn equinox and eventually the Israelites would wind up with a dual calendar system. One would be for religious observances and the other for commerce. Something similar was done in the years following the rise in influence of the church. Calendars were changed to start counting years from the reference of the birth of Jesus. We then had designations of BC or Before Christ and AD or Anno Domini which is translated as the Year of our Lord. Now with secular influence, the numbers haven't changed but the designation has changed from AD to CE. The CE stand for either Common Era, Christian Era, or Current Era and BC has now become BCE which would place the word “before” one of the alternatives for CE. This, of course, is an attempt to move our culture further away from any acknowledgment of the importance of the life and sacrifice of Christ and the influence of the word of God. This significant change has happened in our generation and the church was asleep (or in the dark) about what was going on.

The next thing we see is the introduction of the role of the “lamb” in the deliverance and protection of God's people. The chronology was such that plans for this Passover event were underway even while the other plagues were happening. Four of the plagues had happened prior to the beginning of the month of Abib (which was designated as the first month). The instruction to the Israelites to choose a lamb was likely given early in the month so that when the tenth of the month arrived they would be ready to separate the designated lamb from the flock and prepare it for the sacrifice that would happen on the 14th of the month.

There is no mention of the Israelites objecting to the instructions that Moses passed on them during this time. Considering that they were witnesses to the plagues that were happening, they were in awe of what God was doing on their behalf. It is thought that the plague of darkness happened on the 11th of the month, one day after they chose the lamb that would be used for the Passover and, obviously, there was no place or room for disagreement in such an environment.

The lamb was to be observed for the period of time from the tenth to the fourteenth to give the people time to observe it to make sure that it met the qualifications of being without spot or blemish and it would give them time to discuss what was happening with regard to their deliverance with their family.

Some have observed that this is the same amount of time the people of Jerusalem had to observe Jesus from the time He declared Himself to be the Messiah by riding into the city on the colt of the donkey until He was arrested and eventually crucified. This is just one of many parallels that are evident between the events and elements of the Passover and all that happened in the sacrificial death of Christ. Another of the more obvious parallels is that the lamb had to be without spot or blemish and this was representative of the sinless life of Christ.

Another thing of significance is that even though the deliverance was for the entire congregation of Israel, the participation was on a household-by-household basis. We could make the argument that this is strong evidence of the importance of the family unit to having a healthy

society or culture.

Sacrificed – 12:6-7

⁶ ‘You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. ⁷ ‘Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. Exodus 12:6-7 (NASB95)

Notice that the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel was to be involved in the death of the lamb. I can’t imagine what that implies from a practical standpoint except that it was carried with their agreement and for their benefit and in their presence. We see this same agreement and participation of the Jews in the death of the Messiah. The writings of the early church as recorded in Acts confirm this as we see in Acts 2:36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

We see also that the time of day for the slaughter of the lamb was at twilight (NASB) or evening (KJV) which in the original language would be translated literally as “between the evenings.” Historically, they had an early evening which was right after noon and a late evening that was right before sunset. That would put the “between the evenings” time in the interval of three p.m. to around five p.m. This is also the time of the death of Christ on the cross.

The application of the blood to the doorposts and lintel of the houses was the sign or evidence that the house was to be passed over. Later on in this chapter the instructions were repeated and this time the means of application was specified in that the blood was caught in a basin and a bunch of hyssop was used to apply it to the door posts and lintel. From later writings we would think that the hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood. The application of the blood in the rituals was said to sanctify the object upon which the blood was sprinkled. We also see reference to Christ blood in a mystical sense being sprinkled on our hearts in Heb 10:22

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

I had thought that the blood had been applied to the door posts of every house of the Israelites, but the wording tells that it was to be only for the house in which the lamb was eaten. So, if small households joined together for the Passover observance, then it was necessary that they spend the night when the meal was eaten because we see in verse 12:22 that “none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.” This restriction was applicable only for the original Passover and was not part of the observances in subsequent years since there would not be a repeat of the deaths of the first born of the unprotected families.

Hurried – 12:8-11

⁸ ‘They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ ‘Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, *both* its head and its legs along with its entrails. ¹⁰ ‘And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. ¹¹ ‘Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD’S Passover. Exodus 12:8-11 (NASB95)

The idea of urgency is found in several steps that were prescribed. The first is that the meat was to be roasted and not boiled in water. The fact that it was not to be eaten raw was a given, since eating raw meat was strictly forbidden as a pagan practice. Some have noted that the fire used for the roasting was a type of the suffering that Christ endured as He experienced the wrath of God that was poured out upon Him as he became sin for our sakes. We see further evidence of urgency in that the meat was to be eaten with unleavened bread. No time was to be allowed for the dough to rise. The extension of the use of unleavened bread for a seven-day

period was for subsequent years. Also, the idea of removal of leaven from the house as a symbol of the influence of the world was emphasized for subsequent observances.

The significance of cooking all of the lamb including the head and entrails seems to have significance in that it points to the fact that for our salvation to be effective, then we must embrace all of Christ. While all of the lamb was to be consumed, it was not all eaten. Some parts were not edible and these were “consumed” by the fire. Little is written in any of the commentaries regarding the actual preparation of the lamb for roasting. The following might be helpful in understanding what was done.

“For the Passover meal, the lamb was roasted whole. However, it was not done as you would normally roast an animal. For the Passover, the animal’s entrails would be removed, and wrapped around the head, forming a crown. Once the lamb was skewered, it was roasted over a fire vertically, not horizontally. This gives an excellent picture of Jesus on the cross, with the crown of thorns around His head.” (Rich Murphy, Looking at the Jewish Festivals, Maranatha Life.)

In addition to this, Justin Martyr is said to have stated “one spit went through from the lower parts to the head, and again another across the shoulders, to which the hands (or rather the legs) of the lamb were fastened and hung; and so was a very lively emblem of Christ crucified.”

The final symbol of haste is found in the way the people were to be dressed in readiness for travel. The emphasis on haste and urgency is carried over to the New Testament and is found in the writing of Paul where he stated in Ephesians 5:16 “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” and in Colossians 4:5 “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.”

Delivered – 12:12-13

¹² ‘For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against 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 live; 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. Exodus 12:12-13 (NASB95)

God had shown mercy to the Egyptians by having given them ten chances to do what He had requested through Moses. The initial request was followed by others and when the Egyptian leader defied the Lord a total of nine judgments that were intended to cause a change of heart were executed against Egypt. The tenth judgment was punitive for the Egyptians but during this time, God showed mercy for His people who put themselves under the protection of the blood of the sacrificial lamb. In the same way, God today uses natural phenomena to get the attention of people and give them a chance to change their heart. Most, like Pharaoh, either simply ignore what is happening or they actively resist what God is trying to accomplish. Judgment day is coming and the only protection that anyone will have is the blood of the Lamb of God Who was slain before the beginning of the world.

Notice that the judgment was not only against Egypt but also against the gods of Egypt. Commentators are divided as to whether the word “gods” used here means the official and rulers of Egypt or their idols. We know that each plague that had already happened showed the superiority of Jehovah compared to the so-called gods of Egypt that were supposed to be in control of the waters, reptiles, insects, weather, sun and other aspects of their lives. In the same way, the redemptive work of Christ on the cross was a judgment against all other “gods” as we see in the statement of Paul in Colossians 2:15, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

This event was the most significant thing that had happened to the Children of Israel up until that time and retained top significance until the death of Christ. One way to not forget the significance of something important is to commemorate the event with an annual observance.

This observance is still an important part of the life of most Jews today. In the church we also observe this event indirectly when we celebrate the Passion of Christ that was the fulfillment of what the Passover foreshadowed.

The Plagues

Water - blood 18th Adar lasted until 25th day.

Frogs - 26th removed on 27th

Lice - 27th

Flies - 29th Removed on 30th

Cattle pestilence - 2nd of Abib

Boils - 3rd of Abib

Hail - 5th of Abib

Locust - 8th of Abib

Darkness - 11th of Abib

Death of First Born - 15th