

Sent Out Of The Land In Haste  
Exodus 12:29-50  
July 26, 2020  
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CenterPoint Church

Read Exodus 12:29-50

*"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."* (Psalm 12:6)

### **Introduction: Review of Exodus**

We've been in the book of Exodus since the week after Easter, so this is our 15<sup>th</sup> week and 15<sup>th</sup> sermon in this series. And I'm sure that all of you have listened to every single sermon, even when you were on vacation you caught up with the video or read the manuscript posted on the website. But just in case you didn't... I thought a review would be in order. But rather than me give you a review, I thought something more fun would be to have the heavy metal band, Metallica, give you a rundown of what the first 12 chapters of Exodus are about. They have a song from one of their early albums called "Creeping Death." The lead singer grew up in a Christian Science family, and knew Bible stories, or at least enough to write dark songs about them. (I'm not endorsing Metallica, I'm not telling you to start listening to them; I just want to acknowledge Biblical literacy anywhere.)

Here are the lyrics to remind us what's happened so far in the story and what's going to happen in today's passage: *"Slaves, Hebrews born to serve to the Pharaoh / Heed to his every word, live in fear / Faith, of the unknown one, the deliverer / Wait, something must be done, four hundred years. / Now, let my people go, land of Goshen / Go, I will be with thee, bush of fire / Blood, running red and strong down the Nile / Plague, darkness three days long, hail to fire / I rule the midnight air, the destroyer / Born, I shall soon be there, deadly mass / I creep the steps and floor, final darkness / Blood, lamb's blood painted door, I shall pass / (CHORUS) So let it be written, so let it be done, I'm sent here by the chosen One / So let it be written, so let it be done, to kill the first-born Pharaoh's son, I'm creeping death. (BRIDGE) Die by my hand, I creep across the land, killing firstborn man."* I'm sure I'm not the first PCA pastor to quote Metallica in a sermon; you have to admit they've nailed it pretty well. Can anyone name the first 9 plagues? (blood, frogs, gnats, flies, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness)

With that scary beginning behind us, let's look at the first four verses, which include the tenth plague and its immediate aftermath.

#### **I. The Lord Takes the Lives of the Firstborn (vv. 29-32)**

*<sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!"*

If you heard last week's sermon, you know that the Lord sent His angel of death, the destroyer, into every house that did not have blood on its doorposts. The blood of a pure, spotless Lamb caused the destroyer to pass over that house because the Lamb had died in their place. But the houses of the Egyptians did not have the Lamb's blood on them, so the destroyer came in and took a life, the firstborn of every family in the nation. And the conclusion of the sermon was that people have

always been, and will always be, saved by the blood of the Lamb, and Jesus is the perfect, Passover Lamb slain for us. Even at the end of time, Revelation 7:14 says that, *“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*

The firstborn son of Pharaoh would have taken his name, inherited the throne, and inherited the position of the new god. And just as all of the other plagues have been God’s establishing His dominance over Egypt’s false gods, so this last one is God saying that He is greater than Pharaoh’s position and that this evil, oppressive, idolatrous system of government and worship must come to an end. And everyone in Egypt participated in the false worship, so they were all guilty and punished by God. There is the note that the captive in the dungeon even lost his firstborn; earlier it had said that it would afflict even the lowest servant girl. The point is that death and judgment come to all levels of society, from the king on down to the lowliest beggar. No one is exempt, no one gets special treatment. The rich don’t get a pass to buy their way out. The poor don’t get their sins excused just because they had difficult lives. We’re going to come back to this idea of God’s judgment and punishment, and how unfair and unloving it feels. But for now, just imagine every single Egyptian household in shock and mourning as they woke up to a dead child.

One of my favorite sayings of my step mother-in-law is: “Here’s your hat, there’s the door, what your hurry?” She says it in jest at the end of our visits as if she’s kicking us out. Pharaoh kicks his guests out and he’s not joking around. God had predicted that Pharaoh would force the people out after being stubbornly unwilling to let them go for months. Pharaoh’s last request of Moses after he tells him to take everyone and everything is “bless me also.” I guess he figures if he’s not going to get his way, at least he can get in one last thing in his favor. “You owe me something for my being so generous in letting you go.” Maybe it’s not as selfish as I’m reading it, maybe he is finally fearing God and asking for protection. That won’t last long, though, as we’ll see in chapter 13.

But God had brought victory to the Hebrews, and this was shown clearly as

## **II. The Lord Takes the Wealth of the Egyptians (vv. 33-36)**

*<sup>33</sup> The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” <sup>34</sup> So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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 plundering of the Egyptians. It’s not exactly what we think of as plundering, which is generally when a victorious army takes whatever they want from the people that they just defeated. The Israelites hadn’t won yet; when they asked their Egyptian neighbors for their jewelry, that was before the Passover night. The Egyptians had given them everything they asked for. Why? Either the Egyptians felt totally guilty that they’ve mistreated the Israelites for all these years, so yeah, here’s our jewelry, go ahead and take it. Or they do feel beaten already, the first nine plagues have reduced them to fear so they just hand over the jewelry. But, actually there’s a more unexpected reason: v. 36 says that the Israelites had found favor in their eyes. And there’s a real sense that these are back wages that are owed to the Israelites for their decades of forced labor.

This is the fulfillment of a prophecy that God made to Abraham back in Genesis 15:14: *“But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.”* I talked in an earlier sermon that this jewelry was used for both good and evil by the Israelites in the wilderness: they would build the tabernacle with it, but they would also build the

golden calf idol with it. That's a great reminder that whatever we get from the world can be used for good or evil. If God blesses us with wealth, we should be careful to use it in a godly way that honors Him. How easy it is to build idols out of the wealth we get from the world rather than using it for the godly purposes that build His kingdom.

The next six verses give us a sense of the size of the Israelite community and the total length of time of their stay as

### **III. The Lord Takes His People out of Egypt (vv. 37-42)**

*<sup>37</sup> And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. <sup>38</sup> A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. <sup>41</sup> At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. <sup>42</sup> 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.*

If there were six hundred thousand men as verse 37 says, there were probably closer to two million total Israelites (counting the women and children) who left Egypt. There are scholars who argue that the Hebrew word for "thousand" – *eleph* – could mean clan or tribe, because that's how the word is used at places in the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. They would say that the Bible is saying that there were six hundred clans or fighting platoons, and so the total community was much smaller than two million, probably in the tens of thousands. There are arguments on both sides – if we take the larger number then it fits with the other numbers in Exodus and Numbers; if you take the smaller number, it makes more sense when the Bible describes Israel as being smaller than the nations that it fought and that losing 36 soldiers in Joshua 6 was a severe setback. Either way honors the text of Scripture, it's more of a translation issue, but I agree with Dennis Prager, who concludes, "I can live with either understanding of the word because whatever number of Israelites left Egypt and travelled through the desert for forty years, it was all a miracle."<sup>1</sup> God had freed His people and would sustain them.

430 years is a LONG time. Think about America – we've only been an independent nation from Britain for 244 years. 430 years ago was 1590! Think about what the world was like in 1590. Protestant churches had only been around for a couple decades; Luther, Calvin, and Knox had only been dead for a couple decades. Shakespeare was just starting to write plays and have them performed. The Plymouth community in America would not get started for another 30 years. George Washington wouldn't be born for another 140 years. That's how long the Hebrew people were in Egypt. It's amazing that they've kept their identity as a distinct people for that long. But the Lord has preserved them, He has kept them from assimilating into the Egyptian culture, keeping them separate as His own people. And He has grown them, and for some reason He has made them wait. You think it's long to wait for something? You have to wait until you're 16 to get your driver's permit? Or you have to wait until you finish your bachelor's or master's degree before you get your dream job? Wait another 10 years before you can retire. That's not a long time. 430 years is a long time. But it was all in God's sovereign timing.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Prager, *Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2018), p. 148.

The last nine verses show that God has different plans for how Israel will treat outsiders than how they were treated, as

#### **IV. The Lord Takes Outsiders Into His Covenant Community (vv. 43-51)**

*<sup>43</sup> And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, <sup>44</sup> but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. <sup>45</sup> No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. <sup>48</sup> 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. <sup>49</sup> There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." <sup>50</sup> All the people of Israel did just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron. <sup>51</sup> And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.*

Why did God put these instructions about outsiders in here? Back in v. 38 it had said "*a mixed multitude went up with them.*" This means that non-Jews accompanied them, most likely Egyptians who saw this as a chance to escape their circumstances in Egypt or who felt that the Jews had the strongest God on their side. Verse 49 is very important in how Israel treated outsiders; it was very unique at the time when there were not legal protections for strangers and foreigners (keep in mind how poorly they had been treated as outsiders in Egypt): "*There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.*" One law for insider and outsider. There's no double standard, everyone has to live by the same law. That didn't mean the outsider was automatically allowed into every privilege that the insider enjoyed, they had to come to believe and commit to the faith just as a natural-born Hebrew; they underwent circumcision to establish that.

If you remember how we "fence the table" of communion – putting a verbal not a physical fence around the communion elements. We ask that you be a member of a Bible-believing church or pursuing membership in order to take the elements of communion. This is a direct parallel to God's requirement here: the only way that you were allowed to participate in the Passover meal was if you were part of the covenant community of Israel, meaning that you had received circumcision (at least the men). No foreigners or hired workers were allowed to eat unless they submitted themselves to that ritual. God is very serious about marking out those who are His, and one of the ways that we do that is by asking people to commit to church membership. That's why I required even my family members to take the New Members Class. It's important that everybody know about the church and the denomination that they are joining, and be ready to commit their time, talent, and treasure to it.

#### **Conclusion: The Problem of God's Judging Evil**

I want to return to what I said I'd come back to earlier: We have to acknowledge at some point that this account of God's bringing judgment on the nation of Egypt is very troubling to many people. Many people would say that this proves how awful and unjust the Bible is, that God would kill innocent children as a way to judge a nation's sins. They can't believe in a God who takes life. It's one thing to take Pharaoh's life from him because Pharaoh has committed a lot of sins; he's ordered the killing of babies so he deserves punishment. But to take his son's life because of the father's sins seems like an over-reaction. Not to mention the fact that God is taking the life of every firstborn in Egypt, even the captive in the dungeon and the cattle in the fields.

Let's back way up, though, and examine our underlying assumptions about how much we think God should or shouldn't punish people. When Adam and Eve committed the first sin, what did God say would happen to them? Genesis 2:17 – "*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall*

*not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* Yet they ate it and they did not die that day. God let them live. Why didn't He wipe them out? He would have been totally justified to end their lives right then and there. But He didn't, why not? GRACE! He gives them what they didn't deserve – even one more day of life was grace. Similarly, God tells us in Romans 6:23 that *“the wages of sin is death.”* But you and I sin and God doesn't immediately take our lives from us, though He could. It's grace that allows us to live a second longer than we should. God could have wiped out the Egyptians and punished them for their sins at any point in time and been totally justified, just as He could with us. But in His grace He kept them alive and waited patiently until in His sovereign wisdom He brought the punishment that they justly deserved. (R.C. Sproul's video “What's Wrong With You People?” on youtube)

A couple of weeks ago I talked about how God uses the difficult times in your life to get your attention, to call you to repentance. He will be patient for a time, but not forever. Exodus 10:3 – *“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?”* Well, Pharaoh waited until things were as bad as they could get. I beg you, don't wait! There is one law for the native and the stranger, one spiritual rule that all people are either saved by believing it or condemned for denying it: it's the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Romans 6:23 verse: *“but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Romans 10:9 – *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Humble yourself now, turn your life over to the Lord and receive His love and mercy. Not just to avoid His punishment, though that is part of it, but so that you can receive His blessings:

-When you receive the gift of salvation, you leave the life of slavery to sin just like the Hebrews left behind in Egypt.

-As God sets you free, He also lavishes gifts upon you, just like the gifts that the Hebrews plundered. Ephesians 1:7-8 - *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the **riches of His grace**, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.”*

-And He leads us out into the wilderness where we learn and are tested just like the 40 years in the wilderness that Israel is going to experience.

-And ultimately, we are bound for the promised land, and it's even better than Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey. Heaven is the culmination of all of our dreams and desires, greater than any earthly mind can conceive!

My friend, Jon, was an elder at our last church. He and I had played golf together and talked many times about life, family, and ministry. As a young man he had gotten a seminary degree and worked as an assistant pastor at a PCA church. But then he got into government work and had a great job, and they relocated to Virginia where he got involved in our church and became an elder for the past five years. He talked about getting back into ministry later in life, maybe leading a small, older congregation. But a week and a half ago he went to play golf after work, and halfway through the round he collapsed and had a massive heart attack and died two days later. His death was a tragedy in one sense – he was in his early 50's, he left behind a wife and three children. It's very sad for his loved ones, of course, his wife losing her husband of close to 30 years; his children will not have him there to guide them through life, to walk his daughters down the aisle, to help his son navigate being a husband and father. But it's also a celebration, Jon walks in glory now! Jon is in the presence of our Lord and Savior because he acknowledged Jesus' saving work on his behalf, and Jesus' blood covered him and paid the penalty for his sins. Amen!

Benediction - Numbers 6:24-26 - *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”*  
*“Come as you are, Grow in grace and truth, and Go as Jesus says.”*