

Exodus: What We Mean When We Say God
Part 7: Redemption Songs
Exodus 11 - 12

By Pastor Ricky Stephen

The God Who Delivers

Exodus 12 starts with the command to make the month of Passover the first month of the year. This is because Passover is seen as the dawn of a new creation. Passover is the day that something new and important was revealed about God.

God is a deliverer.

Ancient gods usually reinforced the status quo and blessed the rich and powerful. Passover shows that God is attentive to the poor and oppressed.

Let's explore our need for deliverance, the mechanism of deliverance and our role in our deliverance.

The Need for Deliverance: God with a Capital "G"

If we have a deliverer, then we must need to be delivered from something. Classic theology offers up the 'trinity of evil' as what we need to be saved from: the world, the devil, and our flesh.¹

First, the world.

There's an unholy alliance made up of worldly wealth, military might and political power. When these things align, those on top of the pile can start to think, or at least act, like they're gods. God with a capital "G".

Pharaoh is the archetype of this unholy alliance of worldly wealth, military might and political power. He literally claimed to be a god incarnate.

We are supposed to see the killing of the Egyptian firstborns, horrible as it is, as Yahweh going scorched earth. It's a one-time thing done to make a drastic point. Exodus 11:6 tells us crying like this has never been heard nor ever will again.

Anybody in power is supposed to meditate on the scorched earth of Egypt. As they do, I'd invite them to have Johnny Cash as their soundtrack:

You can run on for a long time
Run on for a long time
Run on for a long time

¹ See John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*.

Sooner or later God will cut you down.

For us in North America, it's much more likely that we are Egypt than Israel in this story. We tend to put our faith in the nations that the Bible tells us will rise and fall. Passover reminds us there is one God who signs His name with a capital G and He alone deserves our hope.

The Need for Deliverance: Realms Unseen

Second, we are delivered from the devil.

In Exodus 12:12 Yahweh says: *"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD."*

At Passover, Yahweh brings judgment on the gods. In 1 Corinthians 10, Bible teaches that false gods are demonic powers.

Our problems are not all in the realm of the things we can see. Behind the veil of the visible, there are forces at play in realms unseen. When we only fight evil in the realm of the visible, we ultimately fail.

The Exodus is not just ground warfare, its heavenly warfare as well.

It's important to know that prayer, spiritual disciplines, and soaking in Scripture are non-negotiable in our fight against evil. We don't just need practical solutions to visible world problems. As Jesus once told His disciples when they faced a demon they couldn't best: "This kind can only come out by prayer." (Mark 9:29)

The Need for Deliverance: It's Called Passover

Finally, we are delivered from our flesh, saved from our sin.

The feast remembering this event is not called "the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn." It is called Passover.

Which means that, in Jewish memory, the miracle is not the judgment, the miracle is the mercy.

Because Israel was in as much danger as Egypt that night. They needed the blood of the Lamb as a substitute for the punishment they deserved.

People like to draw caricatures of God from the Old Testament. They give Him an inflated head and blood-soaked hands, claiming He's genocidal and racists. Moments like Passover are explained as God hating Egyptians.

But the text presents it as if Egypt *and* Israel are being judged, hence the need for the lamb. The need for a substitute shows that the Passover is about sin and not skin color. It's about evil and not ethnicity.

We need to be delivered from our personal propensity toward evil and the wrath of God this propensity incurs. To deliver us, God provides a substitute.

Mechanisms of Deliverance: *Lex Talionis*

We need deliverance, but how does God bring deliverance about?

God's judgment is how we are delivered.

Passover night, with the killing of the Egyptian firstborn, is presented to us as *Lex Talionis*—which is Latin for 'Law of Retribution'. Yes, that's horrible to us moderns and it still haunts me a bit. But it's how it is presented.

Remember, the story of Exodus starts with Pharaoh commanding Egyptians to throw baby boys into the Nile. Yahweh says, in Exodus 4:22, that Israel is His firstborn son. Firstborn sons have been part of Egypt's sin, so they will be part of Egypt's punishment.

An eye for an eye (Exodus 21:24).

Obadiah gives us the clearest statement of this principle:

“The day of the Lord is near
for all nations.
As you have done, it will be done to you;
your deeds will return upon your own head.”²

This is not karma. Karma is a force. Yahweh is a person. Judgment is enacted by a person in the Bible. A person who does not let the guilty go unpunished but who is also, as Dave said last week, slow to anger (Exodus 34:6-7). So, we don't always get what we deserve, sometimes He is merciful.

Mechanism of Deliverance: Off-Ramps on the Highway to Hell

Because, for Yahweh, judgment is about restoration. Judgment is how He delivers people. He's just as interested in saving Egypt from itself as He is in saving the Israelites from Egypt.

The highway to hell has plenty of off-ramps.

We see this whenever Yahweh judges anybody. He always warns them, He tells His prophets. He says, in our story, to Egypt—if you let my people go this will not happen. He builds this big bright neon signs says “Exit 1km.”

² Obadiah v15.

And there are little hints in our text that some people took that exit. During the plagues narrative we are told some Egyptians come to ‘fear God’. In 12:38 we are told ‘many people’ or a ‘mixed multitude’ went up with the Israelites—maybe even some Egyptians mixed in there.

Yahweh is forgiving and gracious (Exodus 34:6-7).

Mechanism of Deliverance: The Blood of the Lamb (or *Lex Talionis* Revisited)

The character of Yahweh being both just and merciful creates a tension. How can both justice and mercy be satisfied?

The Apostle Paul will tell the Romans that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Sin must be punished because sin ‘de-creates’ the world, as we explored last week. Even the littlest sin done in the middle of nowhere with no one around can destroy the world.

Justice and mercy are satisfied by allowing for a substitute—in the Old Testament through animal sacrifice, in the New Testament through the blood of Jesus. Through a sacrifice the destructive power of sin gets to destroy, and the sinner gets to move forward freed from sin’s power.

This is why Jesus chose to go to the cross on Passover weekend. It is why he is called “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Justice and mercy were definitively satisfied on the cross of Jesus Christ.

Our Part in Deliverance: Sit Down, Shut Up, I Got This

What are some things we can learn about our role in deliverance through this passage?

The Israelites are called Yahweh’s “Divisions” which is a military term. But where was this ‘great army’ on the night of their deliverance?

They were hiding in their houses. Because Yahweh told them to.

This resonates with Psalm 46:

“Come and see what Yahweh has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease

To the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

He burns the shields with fire.

He says “Be still and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth.” (Psalm 46:8-10)

A less than gentle interpretation of “be still and know that I am God” is: “Sit down, shut up, I got this.”

There are moments when faithfulness to God will look, to others, like passivity.

Sometimes obedience to God looks like doing nothing.

Our Part in Deliverance: Tables in Enemy Territory

Psalm 23:5 says, “You set a table for me in the presence of my enemies”, and it could very well be about Passover.

Because the Israelites are asked to feast in celebration of a victory not yet won.

Praise, worship, and celebration are weird and cognitively dissonant at times. How can we be spending time worshipping God when there are wars going on? How can we sing when our own problems aren't yet settled? How can we eat the meal remember Jesus when people are starving?

How can we feast when our slavery isn't yet ended?

Maybe you feel surrounded. Maybe you feel like you've been enslaved for 400 years too. Maybe you're restless to fix all these problems in the world.

Great.

Set the table anyway. Sing the praise anyway. Go home tonight and lay your head on your pillow and sleep anyway.

Because it's not your fight. It's not your world. It's not your story.

Are You Ready?

But be ready. The Passover was a feast they ate while they were surrounded, but it was eaten while they were dressed and ready to go.

The first third of Exodus is about getting the Israelites out of Egypt. The rest of the book is about getting Egypt out of the Israelites. They get on that long road to freedom and things get bad, fast.

Because freedom is harder than slavery.

So, are you ready? Are you willing to leave behind your slavery and follow Yahweh into the wild? Will you let Him deliver you?

Discussion Questions

Open Up:

Where in your life, or in the life of someone close to you, have you experienced God as a deliverer?

Dig In:

1. Of the unholy three—the world, the flesh, and the devil—what do you think we are forgetting to let God deliver us from? What do we focus too much on?
2. Read Exodus 12. What other details or questions come to mind as you ponder this text? What is the major focus?
3. How do you reconcile a loving God with something like the slaying of the Egyptian firstborns?

Prayer and Sharing

What do you need deliverance from?

Talk openly about the things you need to be delivered from and discern together: is this something God is asking me to get up and fight about? Or is this something I am called to 'sit down and shut up' about?

Pray into these things.