

Jon High. 25th January 2009. Exodus 11.

The Passover

Introduction

Background:

- God's promise to Abraham:

Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

Genesis 15 v 13 - 14 (ESV)

- Abraham's son Isaac, wife Rebekah, two sons Esau and Jacob
- Jacob (Israel)'s descendants (Joseph, his brothers and their families) - 70 people
- 400 years later a new Pharaoh worries that the Israelites are too numerous and fears that they'll join opposition armies and leave. There are by now 600,000 men.
- Pharaoh oppresses Israelites, makes them slaves.

The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied

Exodus 1 v 12 (ESV)

- Pharaoh tells the midwives to kill all the Israelite boys, but they don't. God blesses the midwives!
- Pharaoh decrees that all the Israelite boys should be thrown into the Nile. (He doesn't fear the women).
- Moses rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, brought up as a Prince by his own family.
- God calls Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery
- Pharaoh refuses to release the Israelites:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. 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. 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.'" Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord:...

Exodus 7 v 14 - 17 (ESV)

The foundation of the story of the Passover:

- God is remembering/ keeping his promises.
- God is, through the plagues, revealing his identity to Pharaoh in order for his chosen people to be released.

There then follow 9 'plagues', and on 5 occasions Pharaoh promises to let the people go:

- Nile turns to blood
- Frogs from the Nile
- Gnats
- Flies
- Egyptian livestock dies
- Boils
- Hail
- Locusts
- Darkness

The last plague - death of the firstborn and the Passover

God said to Moses: "I'm going to hit Pharaoh and Egypt one final time, and then he'll let you go. When he releases you, that will be the end of Egypt for you; he won't be able to get rid of you fast enough.

"So here's what you do. Tell the people to ask, each man from his neighbour and each woman from her neighbour, for things made of silver and gold." God saw to it that the Egyptians liked the people. Also, Moses was greatly admired by the Egyptians, a respected public figure among both Pharaoh's servants and the people at large.

Then Moses confronted Pharaoh: "God's Message: 'At midnight I will go through Egypt and every firstborn child in Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sits on his throne, to the firstborn of the slave girl working at her hand mill. Also the firstborn of animals. Widespread wailing will erupt all over the country, lament such as has never been and never will be again. But against the Israelites—man, woman, or animal—there won't be so much as a dog's bark, so that you'll know that God makes a clear distinction between Egypt and Israel.'

"Then all these servants of yours will go to their knees, begging me to leave, 'Leave! You and all the people who follow you!' And I will most certainly leave."

Moses, seething with anger, left Pharaoh.

God said to Moses, "Pharaoh's not going to listen to a thing you say so that the signs of my presence and work are going to multiply in the land of Egypt."

Moses and Aaron had performed all these signs in Pharaoh's presence, but God turned Pharaoh more stubborn than ever—yet again he refused to release the Israelites from his land.

Exodus 11 (The Message)

God is still interested in demonstrating his presence to the people of Egypt (“So that the signs of my presence...”)

Then God outlines to Moses how the Israelites are going to be saved:

- Every household was to take a lamb (if they were too small a household for a whole lamb, they were to share)
- The lamb was to be a perfect young lamb
- The lambs were to be killed, and some of the blood spread on the door-posts and lintel.
- The lamb was then roasted on a fire and eaten with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs.
- Any leftovers were to be destroyed in the fire
- The meal should be eaten with belts tight, sandals on and staffs at the ready.

And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. 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. 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.

Exodus 12 v 11 - 13

The meal's symbolism

The meal was eaten with belts tight etc as a symbol that they were ready to leave. God's promise to Moses was that this would be the last plague, and they would be allowed to leave afterward, and so they were expected to prepare for departure. This was a 'prophetic' act, in that it pointed to something in the future for which they had been promised, but were yet to see.

Similarly, the unleavened bread was a sign of the rush in which they would depart. The bitter herbs pointed to the time they were about to spend in the desert.

The leftovers were destroyed so that no-one else could consume the meal, which in itself was symbolic of the action that God was about to undertake in releasing his people from slavery.

The lamb

In the garden of Eden Adam and Eve were the pinnacle of creation - they were perfect in spirit, soul and body. When Adam and Eve first sinned, the immediate effect was death, and this death affected them in a number of ways:

Death of the spirit - Adam's communication with and communion with God was broken.

“Man's highest destiny is to know God and to be in personal relationship with God. Man's chief claim to nobility is that he was made in the image of God and is therefore capable of knowing him. But this God whom we are meant to know and whom we ought to know is a moral being, our sins blot out God's face from us as effectively as the clouds do the sun... we have no communication with God. We are 'dead through the trespasses and sins' (Eph 2 v 1) which we have committed.”

John Stott, Basic Christianity

The fall also affected Adam's soul. He began to deceive, to undermine, to pass blame. Eventually this led mankind to conflict, war, separation, racism, judgementalism.

Sin also caused Adam to experience physical death later in his life. Something else happens before this in Genesis however:

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Genesis 3 v 21

The full effects of sin in Adam's life were delayed somewhat, but their sin caused the necessity for them to be covered up, and an animal was killed in order to provide clothing for them. This is the first example in the bible of the demonstration of the necessity for death to provide cover for wrongdoing, and God providing that cover.

The New Testament backs up this view of the consequences of our wrongdoing:

For the wages of sin is death

Romans 6 v 23

What's happening in Egypt at this time, as we have seen, is that God is demonstrating his identity to the people. God is holy, completely without sin, and cannot tolerate sin in any way. In fact, God is rightly angry toward sin. Our relationship with him is tarnished not only due to our sin making us unable to

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approach a holy God (affecting me), but my sin also angers God, making it impossible for him to accept me.

The idea of God's anger (or wrath) is a little alien to some (how many times do people regard Christians as being people who should love and accept everyone because that's what God, and Jesus is/ was like?), but is true nonetheless.

The OT has 20 words to express God's wrath. God is angry about injustice in Ex 22, about people worshipping idols in Ex 32, about Job's friends poor advice in Job 42. God pours out his wrath against Sodom and Gomorrah because of their idolatry. The NT tends to speak more of God's future expression of wrath, in terms of the final judgement:

How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10 v 29 - 31 (ESV)

It's not only referred to in the future tense though:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Romans 1 v 18 - 23 (ESV)

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Romans 1 v 29 - 32 (ESV)

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So as God was demonstrating his identity, his true nature, his anger toward sin (and specifically in Egypt the worship of false Gods and the oppression of his people), and so death and destruction was rightly the result. God's judgement on man's activity was made plain, as he was revealing who he was.

Just like at Eden, God provided an answer for his people - the blood on their doors would show that death had already happened, and covered their sin, so death would 'pass over' them.

Man sins - God's anger toward sin - but God provides a way of escaping judgement.

The Passover

Why then should the judgement of God include all of the Egyptian children and not just Pharaoh?

There are a number of ideas about this. The most plausible is that the firstborns were the important people of the time. They were the priests, the politicians and the social leaders. Bringing judgement upon them was to bring destruction to the people who had led the people into falsehood, encouraged them to worship idols and probably advised Pharaoh on how to subjugate the Israelites.

What it means for me

There are two problems with my sin - guilt and anger. The guilt is totally mine, I am guilty of wrongdoing, and deserve every punishment for my sin. I deserve to die. I deserve to be separated from God. In order for justice to be done, there has to be a death.

Jesus in the NT:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed

1 Peter 2 v 24 (ESV)

as foretold in Isaiah:

...because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many...

Isaiah 53 v 12 (ESV)

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When Christ died on the cross, God 'imputed' our sin onto him, that is he thought of our sin as belonging to Christ. In so doing he dealt once and for all with the punishment I deserved for the wrong that I commit.

This is 'justification', where our standing before God is changed, so that he thinks of our sin as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and declares us to be righteous.

But it wasn't enough for just my guilt to be dealt with, there's still the issue of God's anger toward sin. Fortunately for us, just as in the Passover, a pattern emerges:

Man sins - God's anger toward sin - but God provides a way of escaping judgement.

John the Baptist called Jesus 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1 v 29).

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Romans 3 v 23 - 25

'Propitiation' is a word that has fallen out of usage in English, and it means a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and in so doing turns his wrath towards us into favour. That is that God's anger is fully satisfied, such that rather than being angry toward us, he now shows us preferential treatment. From forgiveness of sin to grace - receiving what we don't deserve.

The Passover is an historical event that points to this propitiation of Jesus - the blood of Christ can be seen to perform the same function as the blood of the lamb, in that God's anger passes over us at the time when everyone else is judged for their sin. The blood is a sign of protection, a sign of salvation, a sign of rescue and a sign of belonging.

No longer need we fear the wrath of God because of our sin, because when judgement comes it will pass over us due to the blood of Christ.