



*The Seventh Plague of Egypt*, John Martin, 1823

**About the artist and painting:** The English Romantic painter John Martin was no stranger to death and despair. Out of the 13 children born to his mother and father, John was one of only 6 that survived childhood. He grew up in poverty, the son of a farm laborer. In 1813, John lost his grandmother, mother, father, and youngest son all in the same year. Despite his popular appeal to English society, he was never really celebrated much less even accepted by the art community. Yet he was somewhat of a revolutionary by choosing to paint very fantastic, biblical scenes and landscapes. One can't help but think John looked to the extraordinary aspects of the bible to deal with the harsh realities of life in a broken world.

His 1823 work, *The Seventh Plague of Egypt*, helps to capture the deliverance theme so prevalent in the Book of Exodus. In the painting you have these mighty structures of Pharaoh's palace, city, and pyramids all displayed in their grandeur. In Moses' day this represented to God's people Pharaoh's power and oppression towards them as he ruthlessly made their lives harsh. Yet God is breaking into these circumstances, "showing up" to bring about His deliverance. In this painting, over and above the Egyptian structures is something more magnificent, the storm of God: thunder, hail, and fire being poured down upon the oppressor and persecutor of His people. And your eye is drawn to the man standing on the left side of the painting, Moses, with outstretched arms looking to the LORD and His deliverance.

## **The purpose of Exodus:**

“The original purpose of Exodus was theological, to teach God’s people about himself and their relationship to him.” - Peter Enns, NIVAC, 25.

“Exodus is about a man, Moses. He is central to the narrative in a way in which no single character, not even Abraham, dominates Genesis...Exodus is about a nation, Israel, moving from slavery in Egypt into freedom...but ultimately Exodus is about God, about the God of the covenant who has instituted a new relationship between himself and those whom he has called to be his people.”  
- John Mackay, Exodus, 9.

“The whole story of Exodus is a covenant narrative. The God who pledged himself to Abraham and his descendants remained the faithful God. He had made promises and intended to honor them, and when his moment came, honor them he did...in a word, Exodus cannot be described simply as the book of the holiness of the Lord, nor simply as the book of the presence of the Lord, but as the book of the holy God present in all his holiness at the heart of his people’s life, their provident savior and friend, who makes provision whereby they, in all their unworthiness, may live safely with him.” - Alec Motyer, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Exodus*, 20, 23.

The setting for Exodus 1:1-2:25 is Israel in Egypt. The opening section sets the stage for the rest of the book by describing: the connection to the narrative of Genesis (Ex. 1:1–7), the oppression that has arisen under a new pharaoh (1:8–22), the preservation of Moses at birth (2:1–10) and later in Midian (2:11–22), and the declaration of God’s intimate knowledge of Israel’s suffering and God’s faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham and his descendants (2:23–25).

## **Exodus is a journey in two parts.**

Part One: Egypt Exodus 1-15 Aug. 7th – Oct. 30th

Part Two: Sinai Exodus 16-18 Nov. 6th – Nov. 20th

*Pause for Advent: Nov. 27th – Dec. 18th*

Part Two Cont. Sinai Exodus 19 - 39 Jan. 8th – June 25th

*Pause for Missions Sunday: February 5th*

*Pause for DNOW: February 19th*

## **Resources for further study:**

*Exodus: A Mentors Commentary* by John Mackay

*Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*  
(Volume 2) (The New American Commentary) by Douglas Stuart

# "OBEDIENCE DRIVEN BY A PROMISE"

## Exodus 4:18-31 ESV

Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.

And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'"

At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision. The Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

## **BIG IDEA**

Because the Christian life is full of questions, fears and doubts, we must daily listen to and rehearse the promises of God to ourselves and recommit our lives to His call.

## **OUTLINE**

1. Promised Security
2. Promised Judgement
3. Promised Freedom

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

“The book of Genesis ends with the Hebrew word which literally means ‘in Egypt.’ This, of course, provides the setting for the book of Exodus, and in reality, it is a foreboding comment because the Hebrews at the beginning of Exodus have been enslaved in Egypt for over four hundred years since the ending of Genesis. This slavery fulfills the prophecy God gave to Abraham in Genesis 15, in which he says, “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” (15:13). However, in the midst of that covenantal ceremony, God makes another promise to Abraham: “But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions” (15:14). The central message of the book of Exodus is God’s keeping of that promise by delivering Abraham’s offspring from slavery in the land of Egypt.”

- John D. Curid, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*

## **Where we have been:**

(John D. Curid, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*)

Exodus 2:1-2. Moses is born a slave in Egypt; he is born under oppression and persecution; and Pharaoh attempts to murder him.

Exodus 2:3-10. Moses undergoes a water ordeal and is delivered.

Exodus 2:11-12. Moses escapes to Midian/Sinai.

Exodus 3:1-22. God appears to Moses in a theophany on Mount Sinai.

Exodus 4:1-18. Moses hesitates and doubts, but God is faithful.

## DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Is there an Eeyore in your life? “I might have known,” said Eeyore. ‘After all, one can’t complain. I have my friends. Somebody spoke to me only yesterday...’ (Eeyore), A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh. An “Eeyore” is someone whose outlook on life is gloomy. How do you respond to your beloved Eeyore? On a scale of 0 – 10 evaluate your response (A “0” is seeing Eeyore and faking like you are on the phone. A “10” is intentional regular coffee together to share Eeyore’s burdens and share Gospel hope).

2. What difference can reliable assurance make when you face an uncertain future? Refer to Exodus 4:1-17. This is an account of how the LORD engaged Moses’ inner Eeyore. From Exodus 4:18-21 Moses has returned to Jethro to ask permission to gather his family and return to Egypt. Moses fled to Midian out of fear of punishment as a murderer. The outcome of Moses’ task was assured by the Lord. He promised to deliver His people. What security does the Lord provide for Moses to give him assurance as he returns? What do you see about the LORD’s nature from the assurance He provides to Moses?

3. Pharaoh is said in Exodus 8:15 to have hardened his own heart. In Exodus 4:21 the Lord says, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart.” What was the LORD’s purpose in hardening Pharaoh’s heart? How would this knowledge fortify Moses? Refer to Romans 9:14-18. What did the LORD want to display through Moses?

4. What can you do when you encounter a heart that appears to be hard? As Moses returned to Egypt what symbol was proof to Moses of promised freedom? In addition to the symbol what were the signs of power did Moses have? What symbol of our own deliverance did the Lord give to us which is undeniable assurance of the LORD’s justice and love? What signs can we share with others to display the Lord’s power in us?

***PRAISE TO JESUS-*** Give praise to Jesus for the cross which is the LORD's symbol of hope and deliverance from oppression of every from; it is your assurance of God's promise and ability to save his people and to save you. Give praise to the LORD for his Word which is a more powerful symbol than Moses' staff because it is the very words of God. It is living, active (Hebrews 4:12), it can soften the hardest heart, and it is available to US in any and every moment.

***REPENTANCE THROUGH JESUS-*** Confess and repent of the times when you have been unavailable or impatient with a neighbor, family member, or church family member who was in a season of uncertain and doubt. Confess and repent of the times when you have relied on your own resources (or have been shipwrecked by lack of resources) to give you assurance instead of resting in God's promises of purpose, provision, and protection.

***CONSECRATION FOR JESUS-*** The LORD calls us daily to obey him. To obey God is an invitation to Joy in Him. Christ has set us free from slavery to sin to freedom to obey and live. He provided his Son, the cross, His Word, the Holy Spirit and His people as signs and miracles to assure and fortify us to walk into an uncertain and fearful day declaring God's message of deliverance through Jesus to ourselves, to our families, to our neighbors and co-workers. Let's take up our cross for Jesus and go!

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. Ask your children what reason God gave to Moses from verse 19 to return to Egypt. Talk with them about how God gave him the assurance that those who wanted to hurt Moses are now gone.

2. Ask your children what Moses' staff is called in verse 20. Talk with them about how it is called "the staff of God".

a. Ask them what that description for the staff might mean. Talk with them about how through Moses and his staff, God would perform many miracles. God wanted to make sure that Moses and the Israelites knew that it was really God, not Moses, that has the miraculous power.

3. Ask your children what they think it means that God called Israel "my firstborn son" in verse 22. Talk with them about how this is a special title and doesn't have to do with the birth order. This title shows God's special relationship with His covenant people. Also talk about how Jesus took on this title in the New Testament in verses such as Mark 1:11 and Colossians 1:15-18.

4. There are some tough topics for children in this passage around blood and death that you will need to use discretion in discussing. I would recommend basing your discussion on the questions, if any, that your children have about these.

a. If the issue of circumcision is asked about, then talk about how this was the covenant ceremony/procedure that God instituted with Abraham to mark God's people. In this passage we see that Moses had not circumcised his sons yet.

b. If the issue of the possible death of Egyptians or Moses' family comes up, then talk about how humanity's sin has brought death into the world. Death was God's judgment on sin. But God provided for a way of salvation through His covenants that were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus' death and the shedding of His blood. Talk with your children about how the Bible teaches that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22 and Leviticus 17:11).

## FOR STUDENTS

1. Describe a time when you took a risk in order to obey the Lord. Did you find that He gave you what you needed?
2. Does Moses finally obey God? Why? (4:18)
3. Moses takes his family with him to go to Egypt. What does that tell you about Moses' plans for the future? (4:19-23)
4. According to verse 22, how did God view the children of Israel?
5. Why did this circumcision need to happen? (Gen 17:9-14)
6. Read Exodus 3:16 and 4:31. What makes God's people worship Him?
7. What things are you thankful to God for? Does your obedience come from a desire for these things or from something else?
8. What "glimpses of Jesus" do you see in this passage?

## FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. God declares in verse 21 that he will harden Pharaoh's heart. We must understand by this that it is God's sovereignty that ultimately governs Pharaoh and all the events which are about to unfold. But we must also understand that the biblical view of things is that it is still mankind that is responsible for our own actions. The text here and elsewhere (see Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:34) indicates that Pharaoh is answerable and responsible for his own actions. And so are we. (See Romans 9:16-18) Therefore, we must repent for our own hardness of heart and seek God's forgiveness.

2. This passage speaks powerfully to the concept of identity. The Israelites might have been tempted to see their identity as those who were living as slaves in bondage to Egypt. We often do the same thing: defining ourselves by our present circumstances or struggles. But God declares here that Israel is his firstborn son (verse 23). In other words, God remembers his covenant with Abraham (and along with that the promise of a coming land inheritance), which means that Israel's true identity predates their present circumstances by 400 years. In terms of application, we too need to be reminded, as Christians, that we are his chosen sons and daughters, and that our circumstances do not define us. His love does!

3. Verse 24 comes as an unexpected and somewhat jarring turn of events. The Lord is about to kill Moses?! But we must keep in mind that God has just reiterated his commitment to fulfill the terms of his covenant with his people; but likewise, Moses must be prepared to fulfill his part of the covenant, which in his case entailed circumcision. We might do well to remember that our salvation is based entirely on God's gracious covenant with us, but as believers, we must also still endeavor to be serious about obeying him and living a life of faithfulness to our God.