



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

October 16, 2022

DELIVERED TO GOD'S LEADERSHIP

Exodus 3:17-14:4 ESV

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.” And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.

Scriptures for further study:

Genesis 50:24-25

2 Peter 1:3-4

Matthew 28:20

1 Corinthians 3:16

Isaiah 55:9

Proverbs 3:5

BIG IDEA: When life's journey takes an unexpected and uncertain turn, only the light and shade of God's promises, presence, and character can steady the heart in hope and propel footsteps towards faith.

OUTLINE

1. God's Promise
2. God's Presence
3. God's Character
4. Hope and Faith

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Although the Lord has clearly shown through the plagues that he can bring his people victoriously through the land of the Philistines, he mercifully chooses to take them on another route that will not lead to immediate armed conflict. However, this route will result in Israel being hemmed in between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army of chariots (see 14:5–9) and will call them to a different sort of challenge.”

-ESV Study Bible

“Because the Israelites were still within the boundaries of Egypt throughout the time of these encampments there was ample opportunity for observation of their travels and activities by Egyptians in the vicinity. The Egyptians has a powerful and well-organized military with responsibility for keeping abreast of any activity on the nation's borders, and it is hard to imagine that reports would not have been promptly sent to Pharaoh himself. All this constituted a divine ruse not to trap the Israelites by Pharaoh and his army.”

– Daniel Stuart

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. Has your GPS ever re-routed you in the middle of your journey? How did you respond when that happened? Did you take the new route or disregard it? Did you have any backseat commentators in the midst of the changed travel plan? How did you assure yourself and those traveling with you? Did the unexpected route eventually lead you to your destination?
2. Joseph lived and died in Egypt at least 400 years before Moses was born. Moses fulfilled the promise of the sons of Israel to Joseph by taking his bones with them on the Exodus. What visible hope did this action instill in the Israelites?
3. What were the signs of God’s presence with the Israelites? What was the total impact of a sign during the day and a sign at night? How can these Old Testament signs be an assurance of Jesus’ promise of His presence with us today? How is God’s presence with us today different than His presence with the Israelites?
4. What does God’s revelation to Joseph show us about God’s character and His commitment to His people? What visible sign do we have today when our journey through life is not going as planned or hoped? In what way is the Bible an expression of God’s character and commitment? How can God’s Word serve as a constant in the midst of unexpected detours and unanticipated circumstances?

“The Lord does not always take his people by the route they expect.”

– John Mackay

“The story now takes an unexpected twist...God leads His people on a path they may not have expected – the longer route rather than the shorter route.”

– Peter Enns

“When you look at the Cross, what do you see? You see God’s awesome faithfulness. Nothing – not even the instinct to spare His own Son – will turn Him back from keeping His word.”

– Sinclair Ferguson

“His presence ensures that his people are guided in the way he considers appropriate and are provided with the means to make their travel possible even at night. Furthermore, this provision was not intermittent, but constant.”

– John Mackay

“Indeed, all the people alive at the time of the Exodus were departing the land of captivity to live and die in the land of promise and to be buried there. According to God’s promises to Abraham, reiterated to his sons and grandson, Israel belonged not in Egypt but in Canaan, and this verse reminds the reader that from the beginning it was the plan for this to be so.”

-Daniel Stuart

PRAISE TO JESUS- Praise Jesus today for his presence with us. Praise Jesus for being the constant no matter how many detours life brings our way.

REPENTANCE THROUGH JESUS- Repent of the times when you responded to the unexpected turns and unplanned events of life in unhealthy ways. Repent of the times when you looked to your plan to deliver you rather than to God. Repent of the times when you didn’t obey God because His plan didn’t look like yours, and you were afraid.

CONSECRATION FOR JESUS- Be consecrated to Jesus to continue to walk in trusting and confident faith because Jesus lives in you and because He will never leave you. He has worked out salvation for you and He is using the twists and turns in this life to continue working out your sanctification through trust and obedience.

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. If your children attended VBS last summer, ask them what they remember about the story of Joseph. Ask them if they remember how God used Joseph to save His people during a famine.

- a. Explain to your children that the Israelites were now headed back to their Promised Land, and we read in Exodus 13:19 that Moses would bring the bones of Joseph with them in order to bury him in their land.

2. We learn in this passage how God is leading the Israelites every step of the way on an unexpected journey to the Promised Land. He would not lead them on the most direct route God promises to be with them on this journey.

- a. Ask your children what were the signs of God's presence leading the Israelites in Exodus 13:21-22. Make sure to talk with them about the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.
- b. Ask your children what they use to comfort them when they get scared. Tell them about what you used when you were their age such as a special stuffed animal or a blanket.
- c. Read Matthew 28:20 and Hebrews 13:5. Ask them what promise God makes for us in these two verses. Talk with them about how God promises to be with us always.
- d. Ask your children what difference it makes to know that we will never be alone, but that God will always be with us.

Scriptures for further study:

2 Corinthians 5:7

Isaiah 41:10

FOR STUDENTS

1. Read Exodus 13:17-22. Imagine that you are one of those slaves who had barely heard of the Lord and now you are in the wilderness being led by a pillar of cloud and fire. What do you think you might understand about God from this?
2. What has God provided as a light to give us guidance and direction?
3. What did Moses take with him when he left Egypt (13:19), and why was that significant? (See Gen 15:13-16 and Gen 50:24-26.)
4. How does the Passover in Exodus deepen your appreciation of your Passover Lamb?
5. How will the Passover in Exodus shape how you approach the Lord's Supper, and where you focus your mind as you eat and drink?
6. Why is it exciting to think that the God of the pillar of fire still guides us today through His Spirit?

**Selected questions borrowed and adapted from *The Lamb of God* by Nancy Guthrie and *Exodus for You* by Tim Chester

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. This passage has a lot to say about the importance of trusting God. Here, God leads the Israelites on a route that is longer, and a road that gives every appearance that the Israelites are wandering aimlessly. But nothing could be further from the truth. God is leading them with purpose and He is fully in control. Have you put your ultimate trust in God and given Him control of your life? And do you believe that He has a good and purposeful plan for your life, even when it doesn't always make sense?

2. Four hundred years earlier, Joseph had believed that one day God would lead his people out of Israel. In fact, he was so sure of this, that he left instructions for the Israelites to make plans to take his bones up out of Egypt. As Christians, we too believe that God is going to make good on all His plans to bring us out of this world and to the promised land. Except that we believe He will not just move our bones but actually give us new "bones" and raise us from the dead! We believe in eternal life and in the resurrection of the body! What do you believe about your future?

3. This is one of many passages that inform us that God led Israel by means of a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. This raises the question of how God guides us today and how it is that we should go about making important decisions. Contrary to popular worldly opinion, we do not "follow our hearts" or let our feelings be our guide. Rather we look to God to guide us by means of His word, the Bible. This is primary. But along with this, we should also seek to know God's will through prayer, through the inner conviction of the Holy Spirit, through the counsel of godly people we know, and sometimes through providential circumstances. If we truly desire God's guidance, He will provide it to us!

4. Once again, in Exodus 14:4, God states that His ultimate purpose in leading Israel out of Egypt and destroying Pharaoh and His army is so that God might gain the glory for Himself. This is the fundamental truth of life, and hopefully this is the primary purpose of your life as well, that God gets all the glory.⁴