



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

November 20, 2022

DELIVERED TO GODLY COUNSEL AND HUMILITY

Exodus 18:10-27 ESV

Jethro said, “Blessed be the LORD who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.” And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?” And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws.” Moses' father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.”

So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

Scriptures for further study:

Genesis 2:18

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

Acts 14:23

Titus 1:5

Titus 1:9

1 Timothy 3

John 3:29-30

“The judging of all the people proves too much for Moses. He is dead tired after keeping up the pace all day, Jethro sees what is happening to his son-in-law and offers sound advice: Get some help.”

-Peter Enns

BIG IDEA: If God’s glorious plan of redemption includes a plurality of shepherd leaders in the church, let the people of God regularly seek the counsel of their elders as much as they do their therapist, and let pastors regularly evaluate and crucify their Superman complex.

OUTLINE

1. Designed for Dependency (Exodus 17:13-22)
2. Competency & Character (Exodus 17:15-21)
3. Crucifying the Superman Complex (Exodus 17:24-26)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“From Exodus 17:8-16 and Exodus 18, we discover that Moses is unable to do his ministry alone. In the battle against the Amalekites, when Moses’ posture of supplication was so necessary for Israel’s success, he needed others to provide a stone to sit on, to hold up his hands (17:12), and actually to fight the battle (17:13). In the later scene with Jethro, Moses was told that “you are not able to do it alone” (18:18); rather, the work of judging and inquiring of God required many hands, with the result that “God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace” (18:23).”

-ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

The biblical qualifications for eldership are listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The two lists are virtually identical. As you study these texts, you’ll see that about ninety percent of the qualifications are focused on a man’s character. Therefore, the cultivation of Christlike character is essential to spiritual leadership.”

- Robert Thune

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. Are there folks in your life who ask for your help? How might you categorize the requests (for example: 10% advice to friends, 50% work related, 40% advice to family-members)? Who are the folks you turn to for help? What qualifications do your “helpers” have which makes them your source for help? Are there areas of your life where you should ask for help but are reluctant or unwilling to ask? What are the reasons for hesitation?
2. When was the last time you had dinner in a restaurant that was understaffed? How did that impact your experience? Has anyone ever told you, “You are not able to do it alone”? What was the context? How did you respond? What would it look like for you to rely more on your church family?
3. What or who are your “go-to’s” for advice and help? Why do you trust them? What were the qualifications Jethro suggested to Moses to guide his selection of leaders to help him care for the people of Israel? Is there a leader in your church whom you recognize as someone who has Spirit-filled character, and you can trust to offer counsel based upon God’s word? Have you considered the possibility that you can rely on them for more than just an occasional bible fact?
4. To what extent do you respect independence in others? Is there a point you when independence is no longer admirable? Jethro showed Moses that he needed help. This was important because Moses’ self-reliance was hurting him and the nation of Israel. Are there moments in your life where your leadership attempts looked like the efforts of Moses? How do you think about your Christian life? Are you a “go it alone” or “go together” Christian? In what areas of your life can you receive the help which is available to you from your church leaders? How can you grow as someone qualified to lead others?

“The Bible consistently speaks of elders in terms of plurality. Therefore, a properly functioning biblical church is led by a plurality of leaders. This model demands that qualified pastor-elders serve together as the spiritual leaders of the church, shepherding the flock and sharing in responsibility, authority, and accountability.”

-Robert Thune

“This office of leadership should not be entrusted rashly to anyone that offers. Nor should it be based on their wealth or rank, but rather their superiority in virtue.”

- John Calvin

“Quite honestly, the demands of pastoral ministry do not always originate from the church body. Ironically, they often originate from pastors who feel as if they are called to be superman.”

- Brian Chilton

PRAISE TO JESUS- Spend some time today praising Jesus Christ for uniting your church family through His life, death, and resurrection. Praise Jesus for your redemption in Him. You have not been left alone. The Gospel promise to you is that Jesus will never leave or forsake you; through His work you now have the Holy Spirit who lives inside of you. He is the head of the Church; in His grace, He has provided leaders to care for you by providing counsel in matters of life as it relates to the Word of God. Praise Him for this glorious provision.

REPENTANCE THROUGH JESUS- Because of the Gospel, you are not condemned for your sin but are called to confess it. If you are a pastor or ministry leader, repent for ways you have given in to the superman complex. If you are a church member, repent of the ways you seek counsel through friends, secular writings, therapists, and other things to the neglect of seeking advice from your elders.

CONSECRATION FOR JESUS- Rededicate yourself today to being a part of the body of Christ and submit yourself to those godly leaders with character and competency whom God has appointed to help you see and embrace how the Word of God intersects with the intricacies of life.

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. A repeated theme in the book of Exodus thus far is that God intends that all people would know that He is the LORD. Ask your children to read Exodus 18:1 and 18:8-11 and ask them what Moses and Jethro say about the Lord. Make sure to talk about how Moses and Jethro mention how great the Lord is. You will also want to talk about how Moses and Jethro were led to praise and worship the Lord after they talk about the great deliverance the Lord had provided.

2. Ask your children what Jethro pointed out to Moses in verse 14 and what Jethro said to Moses in verse 17-18. You will want to talk about how Jethro asked why Moses was judging and settling disputes among the Israelites all alone. Also point out that Jethro said that “What you are doing is not good.”

3. Ask your children what qualifications from verse 21 Jethro tells Moses to use for selecting additional leaders to assist in the settling of disputes. Make sure to point out that the leaders should worship, or fear, God, and the leaders should have good character to be impartial mediators.

a. Talk with your children about what it means to have good moral character. One way to discuss it is to say that our character is how we act when no one else is around.

b. Read Galatians 5:22-24 and talk about how God intends for us to show the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Make sure to point out that these are the fruit of the Spirit and not the fruit of our own power. We can only have good character in our lives by the power of the Spirit.

4. Ask your children if they prefer to work on a project at school or play a sport or game alone or with others. Ask them why they prefer that.

a. Talk about how this passage and others in the Bible show that God intends for His people or His Church to be led by multiple leaders. Ask them why they think that God would design it that way. Talk about how God knows that in our sinful nature we need others to help us discover Godly wisdom because on our own our sin leads us to be self-centered.

FOR STUDENTS

1. In the second half of Exodus 18, we see Jethro give wisdom and preparation for right living before God. In Exodus 18:13-14, Jethro observes Moses and the people and asks a perceptive question. Based on Jethro's question, who does he see at the center of every decision, and what does Jethro see as the problem (Exodus 18:18)?
2. How open are you generally to the advice and input of those around you?
3. You may be innocent as it pertains to civil laws of this land, but no man is innocent as it pertains to God's moral law. Discuss.
4. How does Jethro point us forward to Jesus? Consider how he came to Moses, what he confessed, the wisdom he offered, and the summary analysis he gave of "if you do this..." Read and meditate on Matthew 11:28-30.
5. How does Exodus 18 excite you about the next time you share the Lord's Supper with your church?

**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. Read Exodus 18:1-6. Here we are told that Moses had two sons whom he had named “Gershom” and “Eliezer.” Their names were significant because they described Moses’ life and experience up until this point. Moses is conveying that while he has felt like an alien in a foreign land, he has also experienced God to be his deliverer and helper. In many ways, this is a great summary of our experience as believers here in this life. There is a sense in which we recognize that we are never truly at home here in this world. But while we do feel like foreigners at times, we also trust that God is with us, and that He will faithfully lead us on our journey home.

2. Read Exodus 18:7-12. Jethro is a Midianite priest, which means that he is a worshipper of some other (false) deity. But the text also tells us that he becomes delighted with enthusiasm (verse 10) when he learns of all the good things the Lord has done for Israel, and he even exclaims, “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods” (verse 11). Like Jethro, most people would consider themselves to be “spiritual.” But that is not enough. We must come to a true understanding and belief in the one true God.

3. Read Exodus 18:7-12. Moses welcomes his father-in-law “into the tent” (verse 7), and there he describes for him all that the Lord has done for Israel. You might even say that Moses is basically witnessing to Jethro. For those of you who are believers, let me encourage you to engage in more “witnessing in the tent,” that is inviting people into your life and into your home and telling them of what God has done in your life.

4. Read Exodus 18:13-27. Jethro wisely recommends to Moses that he delegate leadership responsibilities to “capable men who fear God” (verse 21), and that Moses, for his part, should focus on “teaching people the decrees and laws, and showing them the way to live and the duties they are to perform” (verse 20). These verses offer a kind of profile for us of healthy spiritual leadership in the church. Why is this important to you? Let me strongly encourage you as a new believer to first of all be involved in church. But make sure that the church in which you are involved is a church where the leaders “fear God” and where they faithfully teach you the word of God and instruct you in the will of God for your life.