



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 Capital Campaign Series: Jan. 22nd-Feb. 12th

Pause for DNOW: February 19th

Pause for Missions Sunday: March 26th

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

JANUARY 15, 2023

"DELIVERED TO COVENANT OBEDIENCE"

Exodus 20:1-17 ESV

And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

"You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Scriptures for further study:

John 3:16

Galatians 3:13

Matthew 22:34-40

Romans 5:1

Matthew 11:28-30

Romans 6:22

“But in Exodus it is also made clear that God does not just save; he sets salvation and its consequences in a particular interpretative framework: the covenant. God’s people are not freed so that they may go their own way. They are saved so that they may realize the purposes of God....this is nowhere more evident than at Sinai where the covenant King appears in awesome grandeur to his people and sets before them his requirements. Exodus is concerned with the ethics of living as the people of God.”

-John Mackay

BIG IDEA: The God who rescued us from forced slavery to sin and self now calls us by His grace in Jesus to joyful service through obedience to laws that reflect relationship more than rules and regulations.

OUTLINE

- 1.The God Who Rescues by Grace
- 2 The God of Relationships
3. The God of Slavery: From Forced to Joyful Service

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Of all the tens of thousands of texts that survive from ancient Egypt, there has not been discovered a single legislative code.... or codified law but are mere guidelines for how to live and act. The reality was that the pharaohs were the definers and executors of justice and law. They enacted new laws and changed old laws by their own prerogatives. It was the pharaoh who pronounced, “Thus says” (Ex. 5:10), and he could change or alter a law capriciously, which explains why there is no known codified law in ancient Egypt. The Lord, to the contrary, is not capricious, but he reveals his law, which stands forever.

It should be noted that the Lord reveals these laws directly to the people without any mediation of Moses or another prophet (Ex. 20:1). God does not merely speak the commandments themselves but also inscribes them with his very finger on stone tablets (31:18; 32:15–16). God gives ten commandments, and this number appears to symbolize in Hebrew culture the idea of completeness—no additions are allowed. The text further reveals that the tablets are written on both sides and completely filled, leaving no room for additions (32:15). Finally, these commands are written in stone, never to be erased.”

Van Pelt, Miles V.

A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament (p. 83). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

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. Have you ever seen a baby wrestle in its mother’s arms? What does the mother know will happen to the infant should he manage to wrestle himself free? Contrast this image with an infant who is sleeping soundly in her mother’s arms. In what ways are these two images like our response to God’s rescue and God’s law?

2. Were there any conditions the Israelites had to meet prior to God’s rescue? Which came first, salvation or the law? Despite this hugely significant order of events, we often take obedience to the Law as the basis of salvation. What are ramifications of putting “Sinai before Egypt”?

3. How do we often misunderstand God’s intentions in giving His law? What in the laws show us what God values? Compare and contrast what can be seen about what God values in the first four commandments with the last six commandments. How does Jesus summarize the law and show what God values most?

4. What is true happiness for a faithful Christian? How is “joyful slavery” essential to a happy Christian life? Why can this service be delightful? Describe the fruit or great benefit for Christians who keep the covenant of God.

“The laws of God are not simply external statutes, published and passed by some congress in heaven; rather, the laws of God reflect His very character. They are an expression of God Himself.”

-Mark Dever

“God’s law is an expression of His grace because it is also an expression of His character. Commands show us what God is like, what He prizes, what He detests, what it means to be holy as God is holy. To hate all rules is to hate God Himself who ordained His rules to reflect His nature. The law is God’s plan for His sanctified people to enjoy communion with Him.”

-Kevin DeYoung

“A transactional relationship is a marriage between two people who exchange some kind of service. They aren’t together for affection, but they get some kind of benefit or support from it. The term ‘transaction’ in this context has pretty much the same meaning as in business. Unlike transformational relationships, transactional ones don’t thrive on love, trust, or sacrifice. It rather depends on what both parties may gain or lose from the relationship.”

-Julie Cantarella

“The Commandments were not given to Israel in Egypt so that by observing them they might free themselves from the oppression they were subjected to there. Rather the Commandments were given to the people who had already experienced the Lord’s salvation. It is one of the recurring error in theology to reverse the Scriptural order of events, and put Sinai before the Exodus; to take obedience to the Law as the basis of salvation rather than as the pattern of thankful dedication to the God of salvation.”

-John Mackay

“Grace does not wait till there is something to attract it nor till a good reason is found in the sinner for its flowing to him... It was free, sovereign grace when it first thought of the sinner; it was free grace when it found and laid hold of him; and it is free grace when it hands him up into glory.”

-Horatius Bonar

PRAISE TO JESUS- Give praise to our God who loves His children, who requires nothing prior to rescuing us by grace, who values relationships with His children which are delightful, who offers meaningful service which is joyful, and rest from slavery to sin all of which is accomplished through Jesus’ delightful obedience to His Father by giving up His own life to make all of this possible for us.

REPENTANCE THROUGH JESUS- Let us repent through Jesus of the way that we have refused God’s grace and plan for covenantal relationship with himself by grudgingly trying to live by the Ten Commandments rather than embracing Christ’s invitation to come to him and exchange the labor of legalism and heavy burden of sin for soulful rest through delightful relationship with and joyful service to Jesus Christ.

CONSECRATION FOR JESUS- Because God has rescued us from forced slavery to sin and self to set us free to respond to His call through grace in Jesus Christ, let us be consecrated for Jesus Christ to joyful service through obedience to laws that reflect relationship more than rules and regulations.

“It is obvious that the majority of the Commandments are negative in form, but this is a consequence of their setting. They are given to Moses and the Israelites as they stand before God at the foot of Sinai. They are already in a position of privilege, and just as the mountain was fenced off so that the Israelites would not intrude where they had no right to go, so too the Commandments fence Israel in to keep them from conduct which would mar their continued fellowship with God.”

-John Mackay

“Divine law gives guidance as to how to be holy within a covenant relationship with a holy God. The fruit of this guidance – if it is kept – is far more than a happy life on earth. It is nothing short of an eternal relationship that begins to take a person out of the limits of temporal living for temporal pleasures and leads that person to eternal life in a setting where all the highest and noblest desires of life are actually provided instead of dreamed about...no Israelite could draw near to God without accepting responsibility to live ethically, according to the revealed standard found in the law.”

-Daniel Stuart

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. Read Exodus 20:1-2 and ask your children what these verses have to do with the Ten Commandments that follow in verses 3-17. Make sure you talk about how verses 1-2 remind the Israelites that God gave His Law after saving the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. This gives us an important truth that God's redemption is needed before we can follow God's Law. This applies to us today in that we need God to save us from our slavery to sin and fill us with the Holy Spirit before we can follow God's Law.

2. Ask your children why we stop at stop signs or red lights. Ask them to imagine if everyone decided whether they wanted to stop or not. Talk with your children about how laws like stopping at red lights are passed for the good of the people. Talk with them about how God gave us the Ten Commandments and His Law for our good and for His glory.

3. Ask your children what the first four commandments have in common (verses 3-11) and what the last six commandments have in common (verses 12-17). Talk with them about how the first four commandments deal with how to love God and the last six commandments deal with how to love each other.

4. One of the reasons God gave us His Law was to convict us of our sin and show us of our need for a Savior. Ask your children which commandments they have disobeyed. You may need to help them see how they have disobeyed you as their parents or lied or desired/coveted something that someone else has. You can mention how you have broken commandments too.

- a. Then ask your children how God wants us to deal with our sin. You will want to talk about how we are called to repent of our sin and trust in Jesus as our Savior. Talk with them about how God had to punish our sin and how Jesus took our punishment on the cross.
- b. Also talk with your children about how God fills us with the Holy Spirit after we believe in Jesus to give us the power to obey Him.

Scriptures for further study:

Romans 3:20-26

1 John 1:5-10

Matthew 22:34-40

John 15:1-11

2 Corinthians 5:21

FOR STUDENTS

- 1.Many people think of God's law as something opposed to grace. Yet the Ten Commandments are given on the foundation of God's grace. How is grace expressed in Exodus 20:2?
2. What do you think is the place for God's law in the Christian life?
3. How as Christians can we appreciate the goodness and blessing of God's law in our life?
- 4.What is the appropriate response to God's grace according to Exodus 20:2-17?
5. How does this law express love for God or love for neighbor? How might these same principles be expressed today?
6. How does this law expose our sinfulness and need?
7. How did Jesus perfectly keep this law or the principles it embodies?
8. Are you motivated to live in obedience to God's law? What or who is driving that motivation?

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. God's law serves at least two important functions. First, for the unbeliever, God's law is meant to show us how sinful we are and therefore how desperately we need a Savior. (Read also Matthew 5:17-48 for an even deeper appreciation for just how far we are from obeying God's law and how impossible it is to attain righteousness on our own.) Secondly, the law serves to help those who are believers to know God's will for our lives. Because of his grace to us, we respond with a heart of grateful obedience, as expressed in our delightful keeping of his law.

2. There are some people who believe that the Bible is just a bunch of rules and filled with all sorts of "do's" and "don't's" that are intended to take all the fun out of life for those who follow them. But we must never think of God as a killjoy. Far from it. In fact, God, like a parent, gives us commandments because he loves us, and does not want us to hurt ourselves, or others. Moreover, he promises that in obeying his law there is in fact great blessing. (See verses 6 and 12, for example.) The law is actually an expression of his great love and his desire for our flourishing! This is why someone has actually written a book entitled, "The Ten(der) Commandments."

3. In brief summary, all of these laws have to do with our relationship with God (vertical) and our relationships with others (horizontal). But take some time to reflect on each of them and identify perhaps just one area that might need special focus and attention in your life right now. Because of God's love for us, he desires that we repent of our sins and seek his renewing grace. Commit this to the Lord in prayer and trust him to help you in this particular area.