

# God Rescues His People

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn back within your Bibles to the passage we read, Exodus chapter 12, which we shall be looking at under the title, God Rescues His People.

Each year Jewish people around the world gather together in their families to celebrate the Passover. They commemorate the events recorded for us here in Exodus chapter 12, the escape of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. The rescue from Egypt still has profound significance for the Jews, but it also has significance for us as Christians. When we read about this foundational event in the history of God's dealings with His people, we're not simply learning about the history of another nation. We're learning about our own history. And that becomes even clearer when we realize that the Exodus, this first Exodus, great as it was, foreshadowed an even greater rescue. The rescue that was achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Through His death on the cross,

He rescued all who trust in Him from slavery to sin and secured for them an eternal future in the promised land of heaven. And so this passage recounts events which constitute our roots which tell us who we are and which give us our identity. And if you're not a Christian believer, grasping the significance of what was happening at that first Passover may help you understand more of the salvation of the salvation Jesus Christ came to bring. I'd like to highlight three things from this passage this morning.

These are, one, a mighty judge, two, a slain lamb, and three, a command to remember. A mighty judge, a slain lamb, and a command to remember. First of all then, a mighty judge.

When the book of Exodus begins, the Israelites are an oppressed minority in Egypt. They are slaves in the service of their Egyptian masters. For generations before, God had given their ancestor Abraham some amazing promises. He promised to make Abraham's descendants a great people and to give them a land to live in. He'd also promised to bless them and in turn bless the whole world through them. God hadn't forgotten His promises, Moses. Although many years had passed in the meantime. And so He raised up Moses to lead the Israelites.

[ 3 : 35 ] Moses and his brother Aaron went to Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, and in God's name asked him to let the Israelites go. But Pharaoh was contemptuous of their request.

He was the most powerful ruler in the world at that time. He wasn't used to taking orders from anyone. And he certainly wasn't going to take orders from what he regarded as a tribal deity. His response was, Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice and let Israel go?

I do not know the Lord. I do not know the Lord. And moreover, I will not let Israel go. I do not know the Lord. And moreover, I will not let Israel go.

Lord is a translation of the Hebrew word Yahweh. That was the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3.

Yahweh means, I am who I am, or I will be who I will be. It denotes the all-sufficiency of God to His people in every situation.

[ 4 : 59 ] Alec Motier was a Bible scholar who specialised in the study of the Old Testament.

He recounts an incident which happened shortly after he took up his first appointment as a minister. He thought it would be a good idea to go round the various organisations in the church to get to know people.

And so he went one day to the women's meeting. And he was intrigued when the speaker announced her text.

She said she was going to speak on the words in Exodus chapter 3 in the AD version. I am that I am. Alec Motier was mischievous.

And he sat back and thought, well, let's see what she makes of this. Basically, what the speaker said went something like this.

[ 6 : 09 ] She said, if you are in a situation of need, and there's something that will exactly meet that need, then the Lord will provide you with that very thing.

He will come to you and say, I am that. I am. I am that. I am. Alec Motier didn't agree with the speaker's linguistic analysis.

But he thought she'd got things spot on. She'd hit the nail on the head. And this is what he says. When his people need deliverance, he's the deliverer.

And when they need salvation, he's their saviour. I am that. I am. Who is the Lord?

Asked Pharaoh contemptuously. And it's as if God's response was, I am the Lord, the God who is faithful to his people. Watch me and see.

[ 7 : 15 ] As he sent ten plagues, one after the other, on Pharaoh and his people. But again and again, Pharaoh refused to recognize reality.

He hardened his heart against the living God. Here in chapter 12, we have the tenth and final plague, the plague of the firstborn.

All the plagues were dreadful, but this is easily the worst. The Lord had warned Pharaoh through Moses that at midnight, he would go through the whole land of Egypt and strike down the firstborn in each family and the firstborn of animals too.

It's almost too awful to imagine. Just think what it would mean. In each and every family in Egypt, there would be a death.

But Pharaoh didn't heed God's warning. He'd seen ample evidence of God's power in the previous nine plagues, but he still hardened his heart.

[ 8 : 31 ] God had told Moses Pharaoh would refuse to listen to him. You see, he allowed Pharaoh to resist him so that he might be glorified.

By the end of the long duel between Pharaoh and God, we have a much better sense of who God is. There's no doubt but that he's absolutely supreme.

He's not the tin pot deity of just one small tribe, as Pharaoh thought. He's the ruler of the universe.

In the plagues, God reveals who he is so that his name may be honoured among the Israelites, among the Egyptians and throughout the world.

And if we have a low view of God, if we fail to take him seriously, we too need to learn that that is a big mistake. In his patience and mercy, God may allow our rebellion to continue for some time.

[ 9 : 42 ] After all, Pharaoh's fight went on, went through nine rounds, and it was only in the tenth round that the final knockout blow came. But there's only one winner in the end.

The God of the Bible is no pushover. He is a God of infinite love, yes, but he's also a God of holiness and of awesome power.

We see that very clearly in this final terrible plague. Things happen just as God said they would. He struck down all the firstborn of the Egyptians and the firstborn of their livestock.

He was finally acting in judgment after showing great patience over a long period. He is a mighty judge.

He will not tolerate rebellion indefinitely. He must act to punish sin. Pharaoh discovered that. And like Pharaoh, if we persist in refusing to acknowledge God, we too shall meet him one day as our judge.

[ 11 : 04 ] God is a mighty judge. That's the first uncomfortable truth we learn from this chapter. But we can't stop there.

If some are judged at the time of the Exodus, others are wonderfully saved. That brings us to the second point I'd like to highlight from this passage.

A slain lamb. We've looked at the mighty judge. Now let's look at the slain lamb. In this tenth plague, the Lord comes personally into the land of Egypt.

Look at verse 12. 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. God was about to judge Pharaoh and his people.

[ 12 : 12 ] But it wasn't just the Egyptians who were in danger. With the Lord stepping into the situation, the Israelites too had reason to be concerned about how they stood before a holy God.

That's why we have the Passover. In the midst of terrible judgment, the Lord provided the Israelites with a way of escape.

God gave Moses instructions about what the people were to do. Each family was to select a lamb or kid, a one-year-old in perfect condition. From the tenth to the fourteenth day of the month, the animal was to be separated from the flock or herd and cared for at the family home.

And then at twilight on the fourteenth day, the lamb was to be slaughtered. After that, according to verse 7, the people were to take some of the blood and sprinkle it on the sides and top of their door frames.

They were then to roast the meat and feast on it. Why did the lambs have to die?

[ 13 : 29 ] The answer is that the lambs were a sacrifice. In verse 12, in verse 27, the lamb is called the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover.

If God was to bring judgment on the land of Egypt, it wasn't just the Egyptians who deserved that judgment. The Israelites deserved it too.

The Bible makes clear that none of us is innocent in God's sight. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's standards. That was true of the Egyptians.

It was true too of the Israelites. If the holy God was to pass through the land in judgment, everyone deserved to die.

On the night of the Passover, there was a death in each Egyptian family. The firstborn died as the family's representative. But that night, there was also a death in each Israelite household.

[ 14 : 34 ] It wasn't that of the firstborn. It was the death of a lamb which died, as it were, as the firstborn substitute. The lamb died so that the firstborn and by extension the whole family would live.

Sprinkling the blood around the door frames of the houses was vitally important. Look at what God says in verse 13. 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. You see, the Israelites had to shelter under the blood of the lamb.

They had to identify with God's provision and show that they trusted his promise. Things happen just as God said in the words of verse 30.

Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

[ 15 : 50 ] But the Israelites sheltering in their houses under the protection of the blood emerged unscathed. On the one hand there was dreadful judgment.

On the other there was great salvation. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and asked the Israelites to leave.

No longer was he asking who is the Lord? He now knew who he was. He knew he was indeed a mighty judge. The Egyptians had fallen under God's judgment.

But because the lambs had been sacrificed the Israelites had been saved from judgment.

And now they were free to leave Egypt. And they did so laden with silver and gold and clothing. Only hours before they had been an oppressed minority an oppressed poverty stricken group of slaves.

[ 16 : 57 ] theirs was an amazing rescue. God had done it from beginning to end. And the central act in that rescue was the substitution of a lamb for the firstborn.

Because the lamb died because the lamb was slain the firstborn was saved and the Israelites could go.

Substitution is central to the whole of the Old Testament. It lies at the heart of animal sacrifice. A worshipper brought along an animal to the tabernacle or the temple and presented it for sacrifice.

The sacrifice of the animal was a picture of the provision of a substitute to bear the punishment for sin. Substitution also lies at the heart of the New Testament.

John the Baptist points to his cousin the Lord Jesus Christ and says behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Apostle Paul says the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

[ 18 : 17 ] God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Again and again in the Gospels we have echoes of Passover. It was in Passover week that Jesus died. John states in his Gospel that Jesus died on the day of the preparation of Passover at the time when Passover lambs were being sacrificed for the Passover meal.

That was no coincidence. The Apostle Paul makes the point explicitly in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7 where he writes Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.

We deserve the judgment of God but Christ has died in our place and we are spared the condemnation that is our due.

We are freed from slavery to sin and will be brought in time to the promised land of heaven. Substitution is at the heart of all this.

[ 19 : 40 ] The hymn writer Horatius Bonner put it like this. Upon a life I did not live. Upon a death I did not die. Another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity.

The deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt was amazing but what the Lord Jesus Christ achieved on the cross was far, far greater.

He did it for me, he did it for me, a sinner, as wicked as ever could be. Oh, how I love him now that I see he suffered and died and he did it for me.

But there's something we must do. Remember what the Israelites had to do. They had to kill the lamb and sprinkle its blood around the door frame of their houses.

They had consciously to shelter under the protection of the blood. In that way they showed they accepted the sacrifice of the lamb for themselves.

[ 21 : 01 ] They showed they entrusted themselves to the protection which the lamb's death afforded. And we too need to trust in Jesus' sacrifice.

We need to accept all he has done for sinners like us. We need to make it our own. We need to identify with Jesus in his life and death and resurrection.

Jesus is the slain lamb par excellence. And can I ask you this morning, have you identified with him?

Have you brought yourself under the protection of all that he did in dying for sinners on the cross of Calvary?

If not, why not? there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

[ 22 : 15 ] A mighty judge, a slain lamb, finally, a command to remember, a command to remember. what God did for his people on that first Passover night was so momentous, it was never to be forgotten. Look at verse 14.

This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord. Throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

And verse 24, you shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. Every year, the Israelites were to celebrate the Passover in commemoration of the Exodus.

Each year, a lamb was to be killed. So, verse 26, and when your children say to you, what do you mean by this service?

[ 23 : 22 ] you shall say, it is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover. For he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt when he struck the Egyptians, but spared our houses.

One of the purposes served by the Passover was to awaken children's curiosity. Just imagine how it might work. the father brings home a lamb and it lives with the family for a few days.

Just when the children have stopped arguing about what its name is going to be, and the arguing stops, just then the lamb is slaughtered.

It's hardly surprising that the children ask their father, Dad, why did you do that? And the father explains it's because of the Passover all those years ago.

The lamb is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord. It reminds us that believers have a responsibility to share their faith with their children, to teach the faith in the home.

[ 24 : 39 ] Children ask questions all the time, don't they? And we should encourage them to do so and give them appropriate answers when they do. Of course, as Christians, we no longer celebrate the Passover.

In many ways, that's a good thing, not least because we don't have the hassle of sacrificing a lamb. No, our Passover lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, has been sacrificed once and for all.

Passover. The Passover not only looked back, it also looked forward. It pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and to the great redemption he achieved there.

And when Jesus died, the deliverance which the Passover prefigured was finally realized. on the night before he died, Jesus sat round a table with his disciples and ate a Passover meal.

He told his disciples, I have eagerly desire to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

[ 26 : 00 ] for generations the head of the household had picked up the unleavened bread and said, this is the bread of the affliction which our fathers had to eat as they came out of Egypt.

Jesus repeats the familiar action. He picks up the unleavened bread, but he uses different words. He says, this is my body, which is given for you.

He's saying, look, this is really about me. He makes the point equally clearly when he takes the wine cup, another familiar part of the Passover meal and says, this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.

The focus is no longer on the first Passover all those years ago. it's on Jesus dying on the cross as the Passover lamb.

The Passover is fulfilled in the death of Jesus. And it's those aspects of the Passover meal, the eating of the bread, the drinking of the wine, which have been preserved in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which has replaced the Passover on the authority of Jesus.

[ 27 : 24 ] Do this, said Jesus, in remembrance of me. When we share in the Lord's Supper, we eat bread and drink wine, remembering Jesus' body broken for us and his blood shed for us.

It's a memorial meal reminding us of all that he has done for us and for our salvation. salvation. But it's also more than that.

We don't just look at the bread and wine. We eat the bread. We drink the wine. The Passover involved a sacrifice, but it was also a meal.

The same lamb which provided protection from God's wrath also provided sustenance for the Israelites as they set out on their journey to the promised land.

It was the meal they ate in preparation for their pilgrimage to Canaan. They were instructed to eat the first Passover in haste with your belt fastened, your sandals in your feet and your staff in your hand.

[ 28 : 42 ] The Passover meal fortified them for the journey ahead. And in a similar way, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper don't simply remind us of Christ's death for us.

They also point to his ability to sustain us each day in our pilgrimage. I like the way the Anglican prayer book speaks of our feeding on Christ in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

We feed on Christ in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving. Because by his death, Christ has secured for us not only forgiveness and acceptance before our holy God, but all we need for every step of the way from here to our eternal home.

The Victorian preacher Joseph Parker put it like this, I cannot read his future plans, but this I know, I have the smiling of his face and all the refuge of his grace while here below.

That's the spiritual food we need to sustain us in our pilgrimage. passage. So what have we learned this morning?

[ 30 : 26 ] This passage has brought before us a mighty judge, but also a slain lamb. God is a mighty judge, and we need to take that on board.

But we can be saved from wrath through the slain lamb that God has provided in the person of his son.

And having put our faith in him, we need to keep on remembering him. We need to remind ourselves daily of all that he has done.

That there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And that he is able to do in us and for us more than we can ask or even imagine.

We need to go on living in dependence on the Lord Jesus. We need to live in the good of all that he is and all that he has done.

[ 31 : 45 ] Shall we pray? We need to pray. Oh Lord, we recognize that you are a mighty judge.

How we thank you for the provision you have made for sinners like us in the person of your son. we thank you that we can come into your presence by the new and living way which he opened up through his death and resurrection.

We ask Lord that we might live in the good of all that he has done. May we live in dependence on a saviour who died but is also alive again.

A saviour who is aware of all our needs, who ever lives and who is able to give us all that we need for this life and the life to come.

we pray this in his name and for his sake. Amen. Shall we conclude our service in Psalm 85 on page 113.

[ 33 : 16 ] Psalm 85 verses 8 to 13. I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints.

He offers peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness. Love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace embrace.

Righteousness looks down from heaven, from the earth, springs faithfulness. We shall sing verses 8 to 13. I will hear what God the Lord says.

Amen. Amen.