

Robert Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Lecture 2B

The Plagues and Passover

B. Plagues of Egypt

1. Plague of Hail & The Gradual Acknowledgment of God's Authority

We've been looking at this series of ten plagues. The result was a gradually increasing acknowledgment by Pharaoh of God's authority that ultimately ended with the release of Israel to worship as Moses and Aaron had requested in the beginning. But that didn't happen until the ten plagues and the death of the first born when Pharaoh said, "Ok, that's enough. Leave." Prior to that, if you look at this gradually increasing acknowledgment of the plagues in Exodus 9:20, you read, "The officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside." In other words, the hail was coming. They didn't just ignore that; they took it seriously and took action to protect themselves and their livestock. Those who ignored the word of Yahweh left their slaves and livestock out in the open field. Of course, the hail fell. You read in verse 24 that it was the worst storm in Egypt since it became a nation. It beat down everything growing in the field, stripped every tree, and so forth.

In Exodus 10:27 and 28 Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight. Make sure you don't appear before me again. The day you see my face again you will die." So the point is he is not really ready to do much. In Exodus 9:27 Pharaoh says, "Yahweh is in the right; I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to Yahweh for we have had enough of the thunder and hail. I'll let you go; you don't have to stay any longer." Of course, he quickly recanted from that. Then we go down to verse 34, "When he saw the rain, hail and thunder had stopped he sinned again and his heart was hardened and he would not let the Israelites go."

In Exodus 10:7 and 8, he says, "'Go, worship Yahweh your God. But just who will be going?' Moses said, 'We will go with our young, our old, our sons, our daughters, our flocks and herds because we are to celebrate a festival for Yahweh.' And Pharaoh said, 'Yahweh be with you, if I let you go along with your women and children clearly you are bent on evil. No, have only the men go and worship Yahweh since that is what

you have been asking for.” I won’t trace this much further, but you get this gradual acknowledgment of God’s authority, but after that last plague—the death of the first born—in 12:31, you read, “Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Up, leave my people, you and the Israelites. Go, worship Yahweh as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds as you have said, go and bless me.’” He wants the blessing. The Egyptians urged the people to leave the country. So Pharaoh acknowledges God’s power—at least at that point, and of course, he changes his mind and pursues them later.

2. Not Just Israel’s Release but Gaining Glory Through Pharaoh

I think what’s going on here makes it clear—what God is doing is not just something to secure Israel’s release from bondage. It does that, but it’s not just that. He could have done that, as it says in chapter 14, in one blow. But what he is doing is establishing his existence and his power so that Pharaoh has to acknowledge that. And the Israelites are witnesses to that as well.

After Israel has left and Pharaoh has changed his mind and pursues them, you get that same theme in 14:4, where the Lord says, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart; he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh.” And in verse 17, he says, “I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” So what the Lord is doing here is demonstrating his power and gaining glory for himself through these events.

3. Judgment on the gods of Egypt

I think the other thing that’s going on is a judgment on the deities of Egypt. Yahweh is showing his supremacy over these false gods of the Egyptians. That’s explicitly stated in 12:12 where the Lord says, “That same night I will pass through Egypt, strike down each first born, and bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am Yahweh.” In Exodus 18:11, when Moses recounts to Jethro, his father-in-law, what the

Lord had done for Israel in their deliverance from Egypt, Jethro says, “Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all other gods.” And a lot of these plagues had to do with things that had religious significance for the Egyptians. Pharaoh and his son were considered deities by the Egyptians. Hapi the Nile god now brought stench and ruin instead of blessing. Frogs were associated with gods of fruitfulness but now they brought disease instead of life. The sun was darkened. The sun god was Re, and the sun was blotted out. The Egyptians worshiped bulls and calves. If you look at Exodus 9:7, what a blow it must have been to the Pharaoh when he “sent men to investigate and found out that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died, but all the livestock of the Egyptians had been killed.” There’s an image on slide 8 of Amenhotep under the protection of the goddess Hathor in the form of a cow. You can’t see it that well, but there at the bottom left, you see Amenhotep drinking the milk of this cow god. The cow god wasn’t very powerful when it came to standing up to Yahweh.

4. Timing and Intensity of Natural Plagues

Another issue that is brought up in connection with the plagues is the question of whether or not it’s legitimate to find some sort of a positive connection between the sequence of events in the plagues. If you look at your citations, I’ve got several authors on this issue on page 14. At the bottom of the page Charles Pfeiffer makes these comments, “When Pharaoh refused to acknowledge the claims of the God of Israel, he and the entire land of Egypt suffered a series of plagues. Except for the last—the death of the first born—none of the plagues was completely strange to Egypt. The timing of the plagues—at the word of Moses—and their intensity constituted the miraculous element. The Bible consistently presents Yahweh as sovereign over all creation. The forces of nature are always subject to his control.

“When Moses, at the command of God, stretched his rod over the Nile waters they became red and putrid. This plague reflects conditions brought about by an unusually high Nile, which normally reaches flood stage in August. The waters are then saturated with finely powdered red earth from basins of the Blue Nile and Atbara, and they carry

along minute organisms, which help to color the water and create conditions so unfavorable for the fish that they die in large numbers. It may be that the extreme intensification of this phenomenon as described in Exodus 7:21, occurring at the word of Moses, produced the first plague which lasted seven days. Pharaoh, however, was unmoved by the scourge which should have convinced him of Yahweh's power.

“When Moses again approached Pharaoh and he refused to let Israel go, God told Moses to stretch forth his rod over the waters, and there came forth from the water, an army of frogs which invaded the land in such numbers that they became a national catastrophe. Frogs are not unusual in the Nile Valley. The plague of frogs, however, came at the word of Moses and was of such intensity the Pharaoh should have recognized the power of Yahweh. When the frogs died in large numbers the land again was filled with the odor of decaying flesh. But Pharaoh remained unmoved and refused to let Israel go as Moses had requested.

“Heaps of decaying frogs and fish provide an ideal breeding ground for insect pests. At the word of the Lord, Moses stretched forth his rod and smote the dust, and there came forth a large number of insects variously described as gnats, lice or mosquitoes. ” So what he suggests is that it was this sequence and these phenomena that were not unknown in Egypt, and there may have been some connections between them.

5. Santorin Eruption Explanation (?)

That idea has been taken much further by others. If you look at page 13 of your citations, under J. Block, “The ten plagues of Egypt,” Block says, “Approximately 1500-1200 BC the Santorin volcano erupted sending pyroclastics downwind toward Egypt. The pinkish-red ash fell into the Nile suggesting blood. This alkaline ash contaminated the river forcing the frogs to flee. Contaminated frogs died attracting gnats and flies. Disease microbes brought murrain to the animals and boils to man. Increased atmospheric vapor produced thunderstorms containing lightening, thunder, and hail. Additional rains increased vegetation: the scent prompted the migration of locusts. Ash and locusts blocked the sun for three days. The weight of the ash caused roofs to collapse killing

many Egyptians including firstborn. The Santorian eruption is responsible for the ten plagues.” Now that is an extreme form of this way of explaining what happened in the area on the basis of naturalistic kinds of explanations.

6. Gottwald: Heart of the Story Is the Power of Yahweh

It’s interesting to me, if you look at the next entry by Norman Gottwald, who’s a pretty radical OT critic, not an evangelical, notice what he says, “The plagues in their cumulative power can hardly be explained as merely natural phenomena, although most of them are identifiable as recurrent or occasional blights in Egypt. To rationalize them grossly is to cut out the heart of the story: the power of Yahweh. The attempt to treat the plagues as causatively related to one another (for example, the organic discoloration of the Nile attracting frogs which bred flies and led to plague, etc.) is intriguing but ill-advised.” Now if you look at various discussions of this, you’ll find people with different points along the road seeing some sort of connection to various plagues. I think in moderate forms there is no harm in seeing that. But I think what he is pointing out is very clear from the text. The important thing is that Yahweh intervened to show his power and to demonstrate his deliverance and ways that make it unmistakably clear that he is causing these things, that he’s more powerful than the gods of Egypt and that the things that are happening are happening because of his power.

7. Revelatory Purpose of the Plagues

I think what we can say is that with the possible exception of the ninth plague—the darkness—and the tenth plague—the death of the firstborn—these phenomena were the kinds of things not uncommon in Egypt. That is frogs, lice, hail and locusts. These were not implausible, bizarre, fantastic kinds of events. But they were phenomena that Egyptians were familiar with on the one hand. Characterized by these five things that are on the screen on slide 9, they’re more than a series of causally connected natural phenomena because they are characterized first, by prediction. Moses often says this is what’s going to happen in advance and it happens. Secondly, there is an intensification.

It's not just a few gnats, a little bit of hail—that hail storm is the worst one Egypt had ever had. So intensification and acceleration—we don't have any clear time scheme as far as how quickly these things followed one another, but it seems they occur in rather rapid succession. You combine that with what is particularly remarkable, that is this “discrimination” of the last six. Egyptians suffered these things; the Israelites are exempt from them. Then you combine that with what really we've been talking about this whole time, and that's the “revelatory purpose.” These things are signs and wonders. They're signs that authenticate that Yahweh is who he says he is. So it seems to me those five things characterize phenomena that for the most part are not unusual, fantastic kinds of things. They were things with which the Egyptians were familiar but they performed this function of signs and wonders because they demonstrated who Yahweh was.

8. Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart as the Removal of God's Grace as well as Judgment

There's one further thing I want to reference before we go on to the next point. I want to make a few comments about this matter of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. You have three sets of texts that run through these chapters that describe the plagues. The first set is texts where Yahweh is the subject of the verb. “I will harden his heart.” You have ten references there where the Lord says, “I will harden Pharaoh's heart.” Then you have the set of texts where instead of Yahweh being the subject of the verb, Pharaoh is the subject. You have three examples of that sort, “Pharaoh hardened his heart.” The third set is where there is no source or agent mentioned; you just read, “Pharaoh's heart was hardened.” There's six of those. So you have a total of nineteen times in a relatively short span of a few chapters where we get reference to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, by the Lord, by Pharaoh, or where no source or agent is mentioned. That raises of course theological questions. What's going on here?

Before we go into that, I'll direct your attention to one other thing. If you go back to 3:19 in connection with this, when the Lord appeared to Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him, the Lord says, “I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.” In other words, he says, I know Pharaoh's not going

to listen to you. “So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.” So you see right from the onset even before Moses went back and confronted Pharaoh in chapter 5, the Lord told Moses, “I know what’s going to happen. He’s not going to let you go until I do this series of wonders.” Then when you get into the chapters that describe the plagues, you get a phrase that reoccurs a number of times. Look at 7:13. This is after the staff of Aaron became a snake and the Egyptian magicians duplicated that in some way. Then you read Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. But notice verse 13, “Yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard, and he would not listen to them.” Then the next phrase that I want to draw your attention to is “just as the Lord had said.” That goes back to 3:19. The Lord had said to Moses, “I know he will not let you go.” He’s not going to listen to you. That first sign with the staff turning into a snake, Pharaoh’s heart became hardened and he would not listen—just as the Lord had said. Go down to verse 22 of chapter 7—this is after the water turns to blood, “The Egyptian magicians did the same things according to their secret arts but Pharaoh’s heart became hardened and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.” The Lord had said from the very beginning that he’s not going to listen. Exodus 8:15—this is with the frogs, “When Pharaoh saw there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron just as the Lord had said.” Exodus 8:19, with the gnats, “The magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hard, just as the Lord had said.” You see that hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is connected to what the Lord had said from the very beginning. He’s not going to listen and then as you go through this “just as the Lord had said” is repeated.

Now to address the hardening of the heart, I gave you a handout by R. C. Sproul called “Pharaoh’s hard heart.” If you look at that, it’s a pretty good summary in brief fashion of the theological issues that these statements raise, and a lot of people struggle with it. Sproul said, “Martin Luther struggled greatly with the relationship of God’s sovereignty to human free will and sin. In fact, one of the greatest books ever written on the subject, *The Bondage of the Will*, is from Luther’s pen. When Luther grappled with

this issue, he especially struggled with the Old Testament passages where we read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart." And there are the references. "When we read these passages, we tend to think, 'Doesn't this suggest that God not only works through the desires and actions of humans, but that he actually forces evil upon people?' After all, the Bible does say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. When Luther discussed this, he observed that when the Bible says that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, God did not create fresh evil in the heart of an innocent man." It may seem as if Pharaoh were innocent until God planted this seed of evil within him and forced him to do something bad and after he did it, God blamed him. God sent Moses to Pharaoh with this message, 'Let my people go.' Pharaoh said, 'No.' Some suggest God arbitrarily punished him. They contend that the reason why Pharaoh said 'no' is because God hardened his heart. Again, "Luther said that God didn't harden people by putting evil in their hearts. All that God must do to harden anyone's heart is to withhold his own grace; that is, he gives a person over to himself." That's really the heart of what Sproul would say. In fact, we are warned not to allow ourselves to become hardened because if we look, the whole concept of hardening is a biblical concept which is something that happens to us, and our consciences become seared the more we commit a particular sin and the less remorse we feel. Then this statement, "When God hardens the heart, all he does is step away and stop striving with us." In other words, he removes his grace. That's Sproul's analysis of what's going on here. For example, the first time I committed a particular sin, my conscience bothers me. By grace God is convicting me of evil. God's intruding into my life trying to persuade me to stop this wickedness. So if he wants to harden me, all he has to do is stop rebuking me. He just stops nudging me, giving me enough rope to hang myself. "What we see in Scripture is that when God hardens hearts, he does not force anyone to do sins. Rather he gives them their freedom to exercise the evil of their own desires."

Now I think that's a pretty good statement about the theological issue here. However, if you turn to your citations on pages 13 and 14, I've got some paragraphs here from Calvin's commentary on Exodus in connection with these statements of the

hardening of the heart. Calvin comes down a bit differently than Sproul. Page 13, bottom of the page, on Exodus 4:21, where it speaks of the hardening of the heart. Exodus 4:21 is, "I will harden his heart so that he will not let my people go." Calvin says, "Since the expression seems harsh to delicate ears, many soften it away, by turning the act into mere permission; as if there were no difference between doing and permitting to be done; or as if God would commend his passivity, and not rather his power. As to myself I am certainly not ashamed of speaking as the Holy Spirit speaks, nor do I hesitate to believe what so often occurs in Scripture, that God gives the wicked over to a reprobate mind, gives them up to vile affections, blinds their minds and hardens their hearts. But they object, that in this way God would be made the author of sin; which would be a detestable impiety. I reply, that God is very far from the reach of blame, when he is said to exercise his judgments: wherefore, if blindness be a judgment of God, it ought not to be brought in accusation against him, that he inflicts punishment. But if the cause be often concealed from us, we should remember that God's judgments are not without reason called a 'great deep,' and, therefore, let us regard them with admiration and not with railing. But those who substitute his permission in place of his act, not only deprive him of his authority as a judge, but in their repining, subject him to a weighty reproach, since they grant him no more of justice than their sense can understand."

Now he takes this a step further, I think, in Exodus 7:3, another one of these statements on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. "There is, however, no need of discussing at length the manner in which God hardens reprobates, as often as this expression occurs. Let us hold fast to what I have already observed, that they are but poor speculators who refer it to a mere bare permission; because if God, by blinding their minds, or hardening their hearts, inflicts deserved punishment upon the reprobate, he not only permits them to do what they themselves please, but actually executes a judgment which he knows to be just."

Now here I think there's a distinction between what Calvin is saying and what Sproul is saying. Now look at the next sentence. "Whence also it follows, that he not only withdraws the grace of his Spirit, but delivers to Satan those whom he knows to be

deserving of blindness of mind and obstinacy of heart.” In other words, I think what Calvin is saying, God not only withdraws grace—that’s what Sproul is saying is going on—but there’s an additional feature here. He delivers over to Satan. It’s an act of God’s judgment. He says, “Meanwhile, I admit that the blame of either evil rests with the men themselves, who willfully blind themselves, and with a willfulness which is like madness, are driven, or rather rush, into sin. I have also briefly shown what foul calumniators are they, who for the sake of awakening ill-will against us, pretend that God is thus made to be the author of sin; since it would be an act of too great absurdity to estimate his secret and incomprehensible judgments by the little measure of our own apprehension. The opponents of this doctrine foolishly and inconsiderately mix together two different things, since the hardness of heart is the sin of man, but the hardening of the heart is the judgment of God.” In other words, what Calvin is saying is that it’s not just permission but the judgment of God, the turning over to Satan. “He again propounds in this place his great judgments, in order that the Israelites may expect with anxious and attentive minds his magnificent and wonderful mode of operation.”

Then in the next paragraph, “He gave over as a slave to Satan a reprobate who was willfully devoted to his own destruction, that he might rush forward with still increasing pertinacity in his impiety. But, since Moses has so often used this word, I am astonished at the boldness of certain sophists who, by the substitution of the word permission allow themselves by this frivolous evasion to escape so plain a statement.” Now that’s a tough issue theologically. I think that I’m more inclined to go with Calvin and go up a notch from Sproul, but I think that both the explanations describe what’s going on theologically here.

C. Passover – Exodus 12:1-13:16

1. Several Meanings of “Passover”

All right, let’s go on to the Passover in Exodus 12:1-13:16. A few comments on the Passover. First, Passover comes in connection with the death of the firstborn and the sparing of the firstborn in those houses where the blood had been sprinkled. The term is

used in several senses. It's used for the historical event, where the angel of death passed over the houses where the blood had been sprinkled. So it's used for that event. The "Passover" is used to refer to the institutional commemoration of that event celebrated annually in Israel. It is a major festival in subsequent times in Israel. It's a commemoration of what happened on that night when the angel of death passed over. So it refers sometimes to the historical event, sometimes to the commemoration of those events. Thirdly, sometimes it refers to the sacrificial lamb itself. In Exodus 12:11 it says, "This is how you are to eat it, with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet, your staff in your hand, eat it in haste, it is the Lord's Passover." That lamb itself is called "Passover." As I just said, the commemoration of that Passover became the outstanding or most important festival of ancient Israel.

I think what that Passover festival did was to remind Israel of two very important things. I think the first thing it reminded Israel of was Israel's need for deliverance from sin. The Israelites, just like the Egyptians, were sinners and it was only God's mercy that saved them. It was only when the blood was sprinkled they were spared from the same judgment the Egyptians had experienced. If you look at page 19 of your citations, there's one line there from Vos in his *Biblical Theology*, "Wherever there is slaying and manipulation of blood there is expiation, and both these were present in the Passover." Sin is expiated; that is, sin is covered or atoned for. But I think even beyond what Vos says there, God is also propitiated; that is, his divine wrath is appeased. But that's all involved in that sacrifice of that Passover Lamb and the sprinkling of its blood. His divine wrath is appeased; his justice satisfied, and therefore the Israelites are spared from judgment. So it reminded the Israelites of their need for deliverance from sin.

Secondly, it reminded the Israelites of their deliverance from Egypt, the time of the founding of the nation. If you put this in the context of the larger movement of redemptive history, the Passover lamb ultimately looked forward to Christ. It is a type of Christ, who takes away the sin of the world. In John 1:29, you have a reference to Christ as "the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7 that "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." So certainly in the Passover, you have a

very significant event in this larger flow of redemptive history which is anticipating and looking forward to the work of Christ.

On page 18 of your citations, J. Barton Payne in *The Theology of the Older Testament*, I think expressed this quite well. He says, “In the fullness of time came the fulfillment of the Passover in the person of the Messiah, ‘For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us’ (1 Corinthians 5:7). On the very afternoon that the paschal lambs were being prepared, Jesus Christ gave his life on the cross in order that redemption might be accomplished once and for all. In his own person, he constitutes the final Lamb of God who was for sinners slain. The Savior moreover offered himself without spot or blemish (Exodus 12:5), and not a bone of his body was ever broken (John 19:36). In such a way was the Mosaic system of anticipatory sacrifice terminated that day on Calvary.

2. Christ and Passover

“Yet on the evening previous to the regular celebration of the Passover ceremony, Jesus Christ observed the ancient Passover feast with his disciples in the upper room (Matthew 26:17). This meal thereby became, at the same time, history’s last, valid Mosaic Passover and also the first Lord’s Supper; for the one was transformed into the other. The redemption that had been anticipated in the Passover is now commemorated in the Last Supper. Moreover, even as the Passover constituted the sacramental seal for both Israel’s gracious adoption by God, so that he should be their Father (Exodus 4:22), and of their resultant, communal brotherhood under the national testament; so the supper has become the sacramental seal of our union with Christ and of our union with one another in the new testament of his blood—1 Corinthians 10:16 and following. The truth of Exodus 12:13 is eternally valid: ‘The blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you; there will be no plague upon Israel, when I smite the land of Egypt.’”

3. Five Keywords on the Theology of the Passover

What I want to do from here is go to what J. A. Motyer speaks of as five key

words in the theology of the Passover. I quoted rather extensively from Motyer in your citations—pages 15-18. I think he puts this so well that we should take the time to read through this together. The bottom of page 15 is an introduction about what he’s going to say about the Passover. Here’s what Motyer says, “So far so good. But if in fact it is the last judgment, the contest of the firstborn, that is going to bring the people of God out from the land of Egypt, why the Passover? If this tenth plague is the plague which settles the issue, why the Passover? And the answer to that question is this: because when the wrath of God is applied in its essential reality, no one is safe. There were two nations in the land of Egypt, but they were both resistant to the word of God; and if God comes in judgment none will escape, unless God makes some prior decision which will guarantee the safety of those whom he has chosen to save. And therefore, it is in the mercy of the covenant-keeping God that he says, ‘These are the people to whom I have made promises. Now if my promises are real I must make provision for them which will guarantee that they will inherit promises and not inherit judgment.’ And the provision which God made was the Passover lamb and its blood, and the smearing of the blood, and the safe sheltering of the people in the place where the blood has been shed. Don't you see that this is the same God who dealt in a parallel way with Noah? ‘Here,’ said God, ‘is a man to whom I have made promises of mercy. Therefore I will wrap him round with a circumstance, which will guarantee that, when the blow falls, it will fall upon him unto salvation.’ So he wraps his people round with the blood of the lamb. Now how did that work out in the land of Egypt?”

a. Propitiation

Now he talks about the theology of the Passover and the five key words of the theology. The first word is “propitiation.” “The chosen setting for the Passover is a setting of divine judgment, a setting of the wrath of God. This is a true covenant setting, for this was the setting of God's dealings with Noah. God purposes to come wrathfully into the land of Egypt. He says so in chapter 12, verse 12, ‘For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and I will smite...’ God is coming in judgment. And any

Israelite who was abroad that night, having failed to heed the Passover regulations, is implicated; the fact that he is an Israelite does not exempt him. The teaching of verse 23 makes that clear, ‘For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood upon the lintel and on the two side posts the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses.’ So apart from the Passover blood, the destroyer would enter. All alike are under the wrath of God that night. Nevertheless it says in that key verse 13, ‘The blood shall be to you a token upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over.’ Not ‘when I see you,’ but ‘when I see the blood, I will pass over.’ The blood is a token to me that you are there; but it is ‘when I see the blood that I will pass over.’ Putting the matter bluntly, there is something about the blood which changes God. The God who comes in wrath looks upon that household with absolute satisfaction. There is nothing there to move him to wrath any more, and he passes by. That is the truth which is safeguarded by the word ‘propitiation,’ that which appeases divine wrath. There is something about that blood which appeases the wrath of God, so that wrath is no longer operative against that household. No other word but ‘propitiation’ will do. There is no reference in this narrative to any subjective state of the people of God, and therefore words like ‘expiation,’ which signify the wiping away of sin in the heart of man, will not suffice. For the narrative takes no notice of subjective factors in the people of God. It simply says, ‘God is coming in his wrath; when he sees the blood he passes by in peace.’ It is therefore the blood of propitiation.” So that’s the first key word of the theology of Passover.

b. Security or Salvation

The second word is, “security or salvation.” “As long as the people remain where the blood has been shed, they are secure. Verse 22 reads, ‘Ye shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of this house.’ There is no safety except there; there, there is safety (verse 23). When he sees the blood

the Lord will pass over and will not suffer the destroyer to enter. The people of God are secure from destruction while they shelter in the place where the blood has been shed. So the blood has a manward movement. God-ward it works propitiation, manward, security.”

c. Substitution

The third word is “substitution.” “Is there any clue in the narrative as to why the blood has such amazing efficacy that it can propitiate a wrathful God and that it can secure a people who well merit that wrath? What is the inner secret of the efficaciousness of the blood of the lamb? We can see the answer to this most clearly if we remind ourselves that the judgment of God was in terms of death. He came in to slay, and the judgment of God was going to take a token but dreadful form in the death of the firstborn of the family. The judgment of God was in terms of death; but a death had taken place in every Israelite's house already. The narrative is perhaps more truthful than the narrator intended when he says in verse 30, ‘There was not a house where there was not one dead’—in every Egyptian household the death of a firstborn, in every Israelite household the death of a lamb. In every house there was a corpse—in the Egyptian house the corpse of the firstborn, in the Israelite house the corpse of the lamb which had been reverently carried into the house. We cannot resist the word substitution; for there was a death in every house, and in the houses of Israel it was the lamb that had died. The narrative rubs our noses in the exact equivalence of that lamb to the people of God. See verse 3, ‘In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household: and if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbor next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man's appetite ye shall make your count for the lamb.’ This is not just a broad equivalence—a lamb for a household; no, they must count heads and then stomachs. Count the number of people and then say how much they will eat, so that the lamb represents exactly the number and the needs of the people of God. And the narrative caters for human fallibility in this matter, in case they may over-estimate; it says, ‘If

anything remains till the morning, burn it with fire, for there is to be no other use or significance for this lamb than that it has represented the number and needs of the people of God. That was the lamb that died; that was the precious blood under which they had sheltered, the lamb that was exact in its measurement to the measurement of the number and needs of the people of God. If that's not substitution, then you must be very hard to please! But you may be mathematically inclined, and you may say, 'Ah, but in the houses of Egypt none died but the firstborn son; and therefore if the lamb had not been offered, none would have died but the firstborn son in the houses of Israel; therefore at most the lamb substituted for the firstborn sons.' But have you forgotten that when God committed himself to propositional revelation to Moses, he said, 'Thus shall thou say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, my firstborn'? The lamb is equivalent to the firstborn of God."

d. Deliverance or Accomplished Redemption

There are two more words. The fourth word is "deliverance or accomplished redemption." "The death of the lamb did not make redemption possible for the people of God; it made redemption actual and inevitable. Redemption was accomplished by the death of the lamb. You may put the matter this way without any shaping of the narrative: before the lamb died they could not go; after the lamb died they could not stay. We read that the Egyptians were urgent upon them to make them leave. The death of the lamb effected redemption. That is why, incidentally, through the remainder of the Old Testament the focus of attention is often on the Red Sea and what happened there rather than upon the Passover lamb in Egypt, because it was the event of the Red Sea that sealed finally that which God had done in the land of Egypt. God maneuvered his people into a corner, the sea on one side and the Egyptians on the other, and there was that great word which Holy Scripture always speaks to people who have not yet entered into the fullness of redemption, 'Stand still and see the salvation of God.' And the waters opened before them and they went through; the Egyptians trying to follow were drowned; and they saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 'Then they believed God' (Exodus 14). Then they

knew for certain that they were redeemed from the land of Egypt and that their bondage was finished and done with; the redemption had been accomplished and applied.”

e. Pilgrimage

The last word is “pilgrimage.” “The Passover was the supper to be eaten as a breakfast. Exodus 12:11 reads, ‘Thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste; it is the LORD’S Passover.’ Why do we eat it in haste? Because it is the Lord’s Passover, because there is that about it which demands that you eat it as those who are already committed to pilgrimage. You can’t eat the Lord’s Passover and live in Egypt. You can only eat the Lord’s Passover if you have made a free commitment to go walking with God in pilgrimage out of this place wherever he shall lead you. So the Passover begins to be the fulfillment of the word which God spoke to Abraham, ‘Walk before me and be thou perfect.’ There has to be the walk with God. The people who went into safety through that door plastered with the blood of the lamb came out through the same bloodstained door into pilgrimage. The blood which ushered them into safety ushered them out to walk with God, and they had to eat it as those who were committed to that pilgrimage endeavor.”

So that’s kind of a lengthy quote from Motyer. I think he’s really built a theology, you might say, of Passover in a pretty good way, and those are five key terms that are embedded with theological significance of what’s happening here for all the people of God.

Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt
Final edit by Katie Ells
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt