

## **Plunder and Passover**

**Exodus 12:33-51**

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If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 12 verse 33. We come tonight to the last night of Israel in Egypt. The commencement of the Exodus and Caleb's words very appropriately set the stage for what we are going to hear. This passage is really a passage in which God recounts his faithfulness to His word, His promises and His predictions. In fact, in God's faithfulness to His word, we're going to find much irony in this passage, things that we wouldn't expect and things which indicate in the most surprising way, the way that God exercised His sovereignty over Egypt. So with that as a word of introduction, let's hear God's holy word in Exodus chapter 12 beginning in verse 33.

### **Exodus 12:33-51**

Lord as we contemplate Your word, we meditate upon it as we hear it proclaimed, we ask that You would open our hearts, that You would help us to see Your truths for our lives. Above all, we would praise You as we contemplate Your actions of redemption on behalf of Your people. Help us then to be hearers and doers of the truth, responding appropriately to Your word of grace. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

This passage of course contains God's reiteration of the rules for the ordinance of Passover. It also contains explanatory historical notes on why the feast of unleavened bread is the feast of unleavened bread and not the feast of leavened bread. But above all this passage is a record of God's faithfulness to His word. It records the fulfillment of God's promises as you have already heard tonight. It records the fulfillment of God's predictions, and above all it records God's providence over His children, the children of Israel.

Now, in the course of recording that providence, I want you to see six things that display either the irony of God's providence or the faithfulness of God's providence in caring for His people Israel while they were enslaved.

#### **I. The oppressors beg the slaves to leave.**

First in verse 33 and 34, we see Egypt's people urged and beg Israel to leave the land. And Israel goes out with their bread unleavened. And in this passage, we see this enslaved people begged by its oppressors to depart, you've already sensed the irony. A nation of slaves begged by its oppressors to go free. This is a display of God's sovereignty. We were reminded back in Exodus 8 that the Egyptians themselves were against the freeing of Israel. It wasn't just Pharaoh and the court, it was the whole of Egypt was against the freeing of Israel. But in Exodus chapter 5 verse 1 God had given a command to Egypt that they should send them out. In other words, not only should they let His people go, but that they should send out His people. Well, here in Exodus 12 verse 33: the people of Egypt used the very language in freeing the Israelites that God had used in His command to them in Exodus chapter 5 verse 1. You remember, all along God had told Moses that when he brought Israel out, it wasn't just going to be by the skin of their teeth. It was going to be a total conquest, a total victory, and the Egyptians themselves were going to join in begging the Israelites to do the will of the Lord. In verse 34 we see here that Israel leaves in haste before any second thoughts on the part of their oppressors, just as the Lord has previously instructed them.

You know, as you look at this passage you see God as sort of a divine husband here. Have you ever decided you're going to pack up and leave for your vacation early in the morning? And by the time all the preparations are done it's 2:30 in the afternoon before you get away? Well, God, the divine husband, has given pre-instructions to the children of Israel so that when the moment comes they're already ready. They've been told what provisions to make and what to be ready to expect and so the children of Israel leave with unleavened bread bound up in their clothing as the Lord had previously instructed them. And we said, the last couple of times we were in Exodus chapters 11 and 12, the main point of these passages is this: God's victory is so complete over Egypt that the Egyptian people themselves begin to echo the language of God in sending out these slaves. The Egyptians take on the language that the Lord Himself used and it indicated how complete God's victory is.

It's kind of hard to believe isn't it? That those who were the oppressors and enemies would affirm the very language that God said they would affirm. But you know, this is not the last time this is going to happen. In Philippians chapter 2, the apostle Paul says that that at that day when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed in all His glory, that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We see just a little foretaste of that with the Egyptians begging the children of Israel to leave. They acknowledge everything that God had said that they would not acknowledge by both promise and prophecy. And so first of all we see this irony of God's providence, this enslaved people is begged by its oppressors to leave. That's the first thing.

## II. Israel leaves Egypt plundered.

The second thing is this, if you look at verses 35 and 36. In these verses we see fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. That fulfillment is not only fulfillment of what God had said in Exodus chapter 3, and keep your fingers in the Bible because we will turn back there in a moment, but it's also as Caleb has already hinted, a fulfillment of what God said in Genesis chapter 15. Turn back to Exodus chapter 3 and look at verses 21 and 22. God had promised Moses in Exodus 21 and 22 that He would not send Israel out of Egypt empty-handed, indeed he would cause Israel to find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and the Egyptians would give them much material blessing.

Now, you see in that language of Exodus 12 verses 35 and 36, a deliberate reflection and repetition of the language in Exodus 3: 21 and 22: "I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians and it shall be that when you go you will not go empty handed, but every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house articles of silver and articles of gold and clothing and you will put them on your sons and daughters and thus you will plunder the Egyptians." This language is, in many cases, repeated verbatim in these two verses in Exodus chapter 12. But this provision is not only part of what God had instructed and promised to Moses and the children of Israel in Exodus 3, it is also part of the Abrahamic promise, because all the way back in Genesis chapter 15, if you turn with me there to verse 14, God had said this, " I will also judge the nation whom they will serve and afterward they will come out with many possessions." In other words, God is promising Abraham that after the years of captivity his people, his descendants, his seed will be brought out of Egypt and not empty-handed, but in fact having plundered the Egyptians. God in this way is providing just provision for a people who had been economically oppressed. There were no 401Ks or IRAs or anything for the slave people. They had nothing to show for their hard labor for 430 years; God justly provides it at the hand of the Egyptians.

But there's something even more ironic going on here. What happens when an army occupies a territory? Or, let's take it back in time a little bit, what used to happen when an army occupied a territory in the days before full-time professional armies and Geneva conventions and standardized international rules of war. What happened when armies entered into occupied territory? What happens, even today, when armies of nations that don't recognize these international principles in the Geneva convention often enter into a city. What happened to Kuwait when the Iraqis invaded? What happened to Nanking when the Japanese invaded. What happened to large parts of Europe when Napoleon invaded? Well, soldiers pillage and plunder and despoil and rape. In fact, commanders of disciplined armies and of Christian nations in the past often had to exert enormous force to keep this from happening when their armies occupied other lands. I'm reminded of when the Duke of Wellington was assigned to the peninsula army in the war with Napoleon in the early 1800s. When he took

command of the army operating in the area of Portugal and Spain, he said he would tolerate no pillaging and plundering and if he caught a man stealing so much as a hen, he would hang him on the spot. This is what he had to do in order to keep the army from breaking free and pillaging and plundering and taking advantage of the people whose land they were occupying in this war against Napoleon. Well, that's what used to happen, armies used to loot and pillage and plunder. That's what happened when you won a victory over your enemy.

Well, in this case, the irony is this ragtag band of families is leaving Egypt as if they just mopped her up on the field of battle, but the fact of the matter is, they didn't mop her up on the field of battle. God did. They lifted not a finger. They were resistant to His work. They were skeptical of His promises, but God mopped Egypt up on the field of battle and so this ragtag band of families, called Israel, leaves like the victorious army would plunder. That's the irony. God made Israel to be more than conquerors through His promise and through His faithfulness, even though they were just a bunch of slaves. It's a picture again of how the story of redemption is not us, gloriously accomplishing God's will and work in purposes, but God using us in spite of ourselves and God bringing about His purposes. And so the families of Israel leave Egypt like a conquering army. Even though it was God who had done the conquering. That's the second thing we see in this passage.

### **III. Abraham becomes a mighty nation.**

If you look at verses 37 and 39 you'll see a third thing. Here we find a description of Israel departing from Egypt and we find a reiteration of the meaning of the unleavened bread. But the point of the passage is that this single family of Jacob has become a mighty nation; another irony of God's providence. When Israel goes down into Egypt she's a single family; she's the children of Jacob; she's seventy or so people and cattle and possessions. When she comes out, she's described as six hundred thousand men on foot. The numbers here are meant to remind us of the faithfulness of God in His promise to Abraham. You remember the days when Abram had no son. And the Lord said to him, "I'll make you a multitude that no man can number. I'll make you the father of nations." And here 430 years after that promise has been made, 600,000 fighting men, out of the worst possible conditions, out of the conditions of oppression and slavery, come out of Egypt. This even reflects, doesn't it, the directions of God to Adam in Eden "to be fruitful and multiply."

Now in verse 38, we are told in addition to this, however, that there was a mixed multitude that accompanied Israel. These non-Israelites came out of Egypt with Israel and in the rest of the books of Moses we are reminded frequently that they were a cause of many of Israel's stumblings. They didn't share the religion of Israel and many of them didn't share the lineage of Israel and they were often

involved, as Moses tells us, for instance in the book of Numbers in leading the children of Israel astray and a source of many other problems in the wilderness.

But again when we come to verse 39 we see this explanation of the meaning of unleavened bread. Over and over again we see how this historical narrative has teaching purposes. God tells us what happened in order to teach us what we ought to do, and the instructions about the unleavened bread are given again to explain why unleavened bread was part of the Passover, why unleavened bread, in the feast of unleavened bread, was rooted in the meaning of the Passover. But the big picture in verses 37 through 39 is this single family of Jacob becoming a mighty nation. God has raised up a mighty army in the midst of the most trying conditions just like he does today. He's raised up a mighty army to serve Him and His interest in bringing to bear justice against the Canaanites out of the most likely subjects, just like He does today. And so again we see this irony of God's providence. Who would have picked the slaves of Egypt to be more that conquers? God did. It's amazing and it's a sign of His mercy.

#### **IV. God fulfills His promises.**

Fourthly, if you'd look at verses 40 through 42, we'll see another fulfillment that happens in God's providence, another fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. This fulfillment comes right out of Genesis chapter 15 verse 16. Here we see the Exodus of Israel, the exit of Israel; Israel is brought out of Egypt in precise accord with God's word of promises to Abraham. The timing, the circumstances, are just like He promised to Abraham. Turn back to Genesis 15 verse 16. There God says to Abraham, then in the fourth generation after their captivity, "then in the fourth generation they shall return here for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." You will have noticed by now that the Bible speaks of the period, the era of Israel's enslavement in three ways. In Genesis 15:16 it refers to it as four generations. In Genesis 15:13 and 14 it refers to it as 400 years. In this passage in Exodus, and in Steven's words in Acts chapter 7, and in the writing of the Apostle Paul, it is described as 430 years. Now these are not contradictions. The first two are general; they're round numbers, four generations, approximately a hundred years a generation, or approximately 400 years. Four hundred and thirty years is the more specific number, but the point of the repetition here in verses 40 and 41 is that God has fulfilled His word.

Now verse 42 contains something that should be very precious to you. Read it again. It says, "This is a night to be observed for the Lord," for having brought them out of the land of Egypt, this is the night for the Lord to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations. The translation in the NASB and many of the other translations put the stress on our observing the night of the Lord. It's the night that the Lord brought us out and we observe it for Him, but it is likely that the translation ought to read a little bit differently. Let me read a possible rendering of it. "This is a watch night service for the Lord watched over

you that night." Ah, we've come upon yet another irony. Ra, the sun god had to hide from the forces of darkness and chaos at night. The god of Egypt, the mightiest god of Egypt was not at work in the middle of the night, but the God of Israel, in her hour of need, was watching over her in the middle of the night to bring her out of the darkness and out of the chaos and out of the oppression and into freedom. Ra hides, but the Lord provides. Once again we see the irony in God's sovereignty over the God's of Egypt. John Currid tells us, in his commentary, that he once heard the sermon of a Missionary Baptist minister in the Delta on this passage and the sermon was called 'God Works The Nightshift' and that's exactly what it is. And you can hear that phrase being repeated about 112 times in that sermon. God works the nightshift, and that's exactly what he does for His people in this passage, the Lord works just like He promised and predicted. But you know, it's so hard for Israel to believe that. It happens in the timing just like He says it would happen. It happens in the circumstances and the ways He said it would happen, but Israel had such a hard time believing that. Well, in this passage once again, Moses is showing us that God is worth being trusted. He keeps His word. The children of Israel should have expected Him to, but because of their lack of faith they were surprised.

That's still a struggle for us. God tells us things in his word that we shouldn't be surprised about. How you ever, like me, prayed for the Lord to do something and then He did it and you were surprised? Well it happened. Well, what did you expect? Didn't you expect God to hear and answer prayer. Well, here again God is showing that he is worth being trusted.

## **V. Significance of the Passover.**

A fifth thing I'd like you to see in this passage, in verses 43 through 49. We have here direct commands from God about the Passover. In the Passover, as set forth here, it's commanded as a spiritual meal. It's spiritual meal for the covenant community in memorial of their redemption. We're taught in this passage a number of things and we can't possible do justice. There is a lot in verses 43 through 49, so allow me to give you a quick overview of the significance of these verses.

We're taught in this passage about the oneness of the Lord's people and their separation, their distinction from the world. The instructions about the Passover recorded in verses 43 through 49 stress both of those things, the unity of God's people and their distinction from the world. Look, for instance, at verse 43 and notice the interesting directive. This is the ordinance of the Passover, "no foreigner is to eat of it." You see a distinction is being made between God's people and foreigners.

Now, don't jump to a conclusions, this isn't based on bigotry. There is a religious distinction, a spiritual distinction being made. You'll see this also in verse 48, "If a

stranger sojourns with you and celebrates the Passover of the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it." You see this is not ethnic discrimination going on here. This is not, 'if you are not of our bloodline you can't participate.' No, if the stranger desires to sojourn with the people of God, even if he has no Abrahamic blood in him, fine, let him be circumcised, let his family be circumcised, and then let him come and celebrate the Passover with the Lord. You see, these words make it clear that only those who are in covenant with the Lord, as evidenced by having received circumcision, are to take the holy meal. The holy meal itself distinguishes God's people from the world. Contrary to the God of political correctness, the God of Israel discriminates, He makes distinctions between those who are His and those who are not His people and He insists His people themselves honor that distinction. That's why when we invite people to the Lord's Table, we invite those who have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who have identified themselves with His people. And so one of the functions of this Passover meal is to preserve the moral and spiritual purity of His people by making it clear in their minds that they are spiritually distinct from the world. They're not ethnically distinct, because in this passage it doesn't matter what your bloodline is. You want to follow the Lord; you be circumcised and you follow Him and you're part of the covenant community. But they are spiritually distinct from the world.

Notice also the regulations of verses 46 and 47; they're illuminating in another direction. Look at these verses, "It is to be eaten in a single house you are not to bring forth any flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this." These commands, in contrast to the stress we just saw on the distinction of Israel from the world, are given in order to enforce the unity of Israel and her families. These commands are given to bring about the unity of Israel in its celebration of God's deliverance. I'd like you to see four things that indicate that in these instructions.

Notice that it's to be one lamb per house, one lamb per house, so you have to invite enough people in in order to be able to eat a whole lamb with not much being left over. So you have to have fellowship, you have to bring folks into that household, so that that lamb can be eaten. Secondly, notice that no part of the lamb is allowed to be taken outside of the house, so everybody has to eat together. This is no individualist isolated sort of spirituality, you know, me, Jesus and my Bible and my own private mystical experience. It's all of the people of God together taking fellowship at this covenant meal; everybody has to eat together. Thirdly, notice that the lamb's bones are not to be broken. Now John points this out in another context in his gospel for a different reason, but here very simply notice that this prevents part of the lamb from being removed from the house. You can't break its bones, so if you're going to eat that lamb you're going to be in that house because the lamb's bones aren't going to be separated or broken. Fourth and finally, notice that everyone in the covenant community is to participate. This is a command for the communion of the saints, so even in the worship of the redeemed Lord in the Passover meal, the people of God are

what? Drawn together in unity. And so this passage, verses 43 through 49, in its commands not only emphasizes that the people of God are distinct from the world, but it also emphasizes their unity. You see, the Passover is not merely an ethnic celebration or even a national celebration, it's a spiritual feast that brings together and, in a sense, creates a people.

## **VI. God saves His people to worship Him.**

Finally in verses 50 and 51, we see this: obedience to God's commands and the deliverance of God are recorded together and Moses uses very classical idiomatic expressions in order to do this. These phrases, you see here in verses 50 and 51, you've already seen them a dozen times in the book of Exodus. You've seen them to a certain extent in Genesis and you're going to see them a lot more in the rest of the book of Exodus and in the rest of the books of Moses. The language is emphatic. These verses are designed to do two things: Verse 50 is designed to stress the importance of our obedience, and verse 51 is designed to bring home to us the faithfulness of God to His work. He brought out the sons of Israel just like He said He would. So the obedience of Israel is recorded right along side the faithfulness of God in redemption.

Now it's done so not to say that the obedience of Israel caused the faithfulness of God or caused the redemption of God, because it clearly didn't, but it does show, doesn't it, that just as God saved Israel to worship, so also He saved her to obedience, or to put it in the language of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Why? Because one of the goals, we might even say a prime goal of our salvation is that we may be conformed to the image of God through the shed blood of His Son who was His express image in this world in His life and death.

God's people are saved to worship and obey, and in one sense to ask whether holiness accompanies salvation is to ask whether salvation accompanies salvation. Of course it does. Because God saved us that we might reflect Him, or in the language of Paul — we were created in Christ Jesus for good works. May God bless His word. Let's pray

Lord, your word is rich, we never ever can live up to its glory but we are always fed full by its truth. Change us then by the truth of Your word and receive all the glory for it. In Jesus name, Amen.

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