

TUTORIAL
2.5

Jesus is our Passover Lamb

This tutorial looks back at the time when the Israelites were oppressed in Egypt, and with Moses leading them, God rescued them out of that oppression. In doing so, He gave us the picture of the Passover Lamb.

The Scripture referred to in this tutorial is: ***Exodus 3:13-14, Ch. 12, John 8:58, 1 Corinthians 5:7***

Last time

We remembered that God providing a way of escape for Noah and his family from the Flood, was not something they deserved, not even because of Noah's faith...it was a measure of God's grace. When it came, the rain and floodwaters crashed all around but the people were safe and secure inside the ship that God designed and shut them into. This reminds us that having put our faith *in Christ* we are safe from God's judgement because it already came onto His Son. We also remembered Abraham's faith in the promises from God. We saw, in the story of the substitute God provided for Isaac, a picture of how Jesus was our substitute sacrifice, when we had no way of escaping the results of sin.

The Israelites are oppressed in Egypt

We pick up our brief overview of the Narrative four centuries, and some six generations later. Abraham's descendants now numbered in the hundreds of thousands. They were still living in Egypt after having moved there during the time Joseph enjoyed enormous status and authority. They had not assimilated into Egyptian culture but had retained their ethnic identity and religious distinctives, worshippers of Yahweh, the God of their forefathers. Wary of them as a potential military threat, and yet reliant on them economically as free labour, the Egyptian rulers instituted an official program of oppression. But how were the Israelites to think about God and the promises made to their patriarch Abraham, then repeated to Isaac and Jacob? Had God forgotten the promise to send One to rescue man? Would He perhaps not send Him through Abraham's family line? Had Yahweh abandoned them?

When we're facing really tough challenges, feel under pressure, or when we're being attacked by others without cause, we have to keep reminding ourselves

that God is completely faithful. He doesn't change, He won't forget His promises, He's not at a loss what to do, and He never deserts us. If He didn't desert us when we were still His enemies as part of Adam's condemned line, what chance of Him doing so now that we're His children, ransomed by the blood of His much loved Son, Jesus?

God chose, equipped and sent Moses

Certainly God had not forgotten Abraham's descendants. And He wasn't indifferent at all to the things they were suffering. He would see that justice was done to those who oppressed His people. We can see a direct analogy with our own situation in God choosing someone through whom He'd work to free His people from bondage. In fact, there are a great many parallels that can be drawn between the life and work of Moses and that of Jesus.

To mention just a few: both were miraculously protected from death as babies; Moses was rejected initially by his people, and the nation of Israel turned their backs on Jesus; both performed miracles to authenticate their roles; both were used by God to free His people from bondage. This is yet another example of the way in which God, the Great Author, is writing His Narrative in real events, places and lives as part of His Revelation of Himself. This should be an exciting thought as we reflect on the fact that, as God's children, our lives too are a part of His Narrative...as we get to know Him more, align our values to His and allow His Spirit to guide us, we can actually contribute to His purpose of revealing Himself in the world.

An enormously significant event in Moses' life took place 40 years into his exile after running away from Egypt when he killed a man. It's another story that's familiar to most of us since Sunday School days - when God spoke to him from a bush that was burning but not consumed. During the ensuing conversation, Moses, insecure about whether he'd be accepted by his fellow Israelites as leader, asked who he should say had sent him. God gave His name as, "I AM" The only One who exists eternally independent of anyone or anything (Exodus 3:13-14). Only one other man in all of history could rightfully use that name for Himself, Jesus of Nazareth.

John records a conversation Jesus had with some Jewish religious leaders. He had just stated that their ancestor Abraham had been looking forward to His coming as the Messiah. When His audience questioned how Jesus, a relatively young man, could possibly know what Abraham had been thinking centuries before, He outraged them by saying that "Before Abraham was born, I AM." (John 8:58). He was asserting that He, like the Father, is eternally *there*, that He's *here*. Without need. Self-existent. Complete. Absolute. This is who our Master is...and He has said that He's always with us. *Because of Him*, and through the lives we now lead *with Him*, we have everything we can ever need.

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We know what happened next. Moses eventually went and demanded, on God's behalf, that the king - the Pharaoh - of Egypt would let the Israelite people go. When he refused, God allowed a disastrous natural event to overtake Egypt. In the aftermath, the king said he'd let the Israelites go and worship their God outside the borders of his territory. But as the disaster receded he changed his mind. This pattern was repeated nine times, with the Egyptian areas being devastated while the Israelites were not affected...Yet another illustration of how God always protects His own people and does not allow His righteous judgement to impact them. Eventually, the final act in this epic drama played out. Despite the Pharaoh's remarkably stubborn resistance against God, he was always destined to lose. God was going to take the life of every first-born child from every house, in a move that would finally convince the Egyptian monarch that he could not win. In his blind arrogance he had taken on the all-powerful Creator God, a most unwise thing to do!

As we know, God gave His people, the Israelites, a way to escape the tragedy that was about to overtake every Egyptian household. He gave very specific instructions about the lamb that was to be killed. God was again embedding in His Narrative an illustration, or *picture* of the Promised Redeemer.

Of all these *pictures* the Passover lamb is the most vivid. We'll remember of course that Jesus was crucified right around the time the Passover was being celebrated some 14 centuries later.

The early believers under the New Covenant would recognize this and, in fact, in one place Jesus is directly called *our Passover Lamb* (1 Corinthians 5:7). So God gave detailed instructions (Exodus 12). A lamb was to be carefully chosen by each Israelite household in Egypt. Not just any lamb but a really healthy, well formed, young, male. After being kept near the house for a few days to make sure it wasn't sick or failing, it would be killed at the designated time with its blood to be smeared on the doorframe. God, seeing in the blood evidence of death having already come and of that family's faith, would bypass them and protect them from the death that would otherwise have struck.

The parallels with Jesus, the true *Lamb of God*, are obvious, but nonetheless amazing. Still a young man at the point of His death, He had shown through His 33 years of obedience to God that He was the perfect sacrifice. At exactly the intended time, Jesus was crucified and His blood flowed out.

When we believed in Jesus' death, we entered into and so were permanently identified with that death, marked as it were by His blood...it's like we hide behind it for protection. So God sees that and because He's totally satisfied by His Son's sacrifice for us, He will never bring death to us. It simply cannot happen. Of course that doesn't mean we won't physically die. But instead of death being the start of eternal separation from Him with all its terrible implications, death for us means being with Him forever...being really alive.

God is our Rescuer

The events following the Passover are just as well known. But it's worth pushing through the Sunday School familiarity and even triviality that often gets attached to the stories and remind ourselves briefly just how dramatic it must have been. And also to mine the seams of truth God placed there to encourage and instruct His people down through the centuries. We thought last time about the powerful metaphors here.

The enormous group of Israelites were now on the move in the wilderness. But with their backs to the Sea and the king and his army bearing down they had no way of escape. How did they get into this situation? God makes it very clear in His Narrative that *He* had been leading them...visibly in fact, with a column of cloud during the day and fire at night. God's words to Moses make it very clear that He had brought the Israelites to this seemingly impossible situation to reveal something about Himself. He was going to show His glory and His power...to the Egyptians, to His people, the Israelites, to numerous others and to us, His children under the New Covenant.

There are some really important lessons for us to note here that should be both a challenge and an encouragement. Let's note a few:

- *God is always ultimately in control.* Even when things seem to be going totally wrong, and when we can't see His hand in a situation, we need to be confident that He is achieving His purposes.
- *God is always delighted to lead His people.* As great as it was for the Israelites to have something tangible in front of them, our situation is even better. We have the whole of God's Narrative, the example of Jesus, and His Spirit living in us to guide us.
- *God is more than able to deal with anyone who sets themselves against Him or who attacks His children.* We should be prepared to stand up for truth and for His name, but we do not have to defend ourselves or take justice into our own hands.
- *God never deserts His children, or leaves them to cope on their own.* And He always provides a way of escape. It might not be exactly what we picture being the best solution, but He will always produce an outcome that is for our best and that helps us and others know Him better. We know that God did exactly this for the Israelites. When all seemed lost, He opened up a way through the Sea. And then when they were safely through, He closed the water over the Egyptian army.

The Israelites were left praising God and expressing their gratitude to Him. We, His children today, have a great many things to thank Him for as well.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. In your own thinking how do you resolve the apparent contradiction between God creating us as humans with the freedom to make real choices and yet, on the other hand, Him orchestrating events and using people's lives to reveal Himself through His Narrative?
2. As we think about God calling Moses to a specific role and then his response, how does that relate to you and your experience? What degree of clarity do you feel you have right now about how God wants you to contribute to His purposes in the coming years? Are there major areas you currently see as limitations? What about your gifts and strengths?