

EXODUS—WEEK 8

THE PLAGUE HOLIDAY



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 12:21–13:10 — The Plague Holiday

*The Cover Picture is The Tenth Plague of Egypt by J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851)
On display in Tate Britain, London*

The last plague breaks Pharaoh's back, and he sends Israel out into the Sinai.

The LORD sets this up to be remembered forever. The Passover holiday is a tradition like no other.

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Thank you.

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1 Exodus 12:21–28

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’ ” So the people bowed their heads and worshipped. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

With the previous plagues, the Jews were automatically exempt just because of who they are and where they live. Now they have to do something to keep from getting struck. It’s difficult, and it’s gross. This messy procedure emphasizes the house-to-house nature of this plague. It’s their house that will be passed over, so it’s their house that they must mark.

It’s a good thing they’re going to abandon these houses. Splattering blood all over the entrance just kills the curb appeal.

In all seriousness, this is the beginning of the long road that leads to the cross. The grave nature of sin is a lesson that must be learned over and over. One of the ways that the LORD hammers this home is by grossing us out. Sin is so serious that only blood can atone for it.

While the Passover is far from the first bloody sacrifice in the Bible (see Genesis 22), it sets the standard. To keep from being struck by *the destroyer*, each family must make their house look like a crime scene.

Our lives look like a crime scene too. We don’t see it because we don’t want to see it. Some sins, such as sins against our fellow man, are harder to ignore; there are too many witnesses.

But many sins (e.g. breaking commandments 1–5, 9 & 10) are easily covered up—and then forgotten. That makes the horror of our sin less horrifying. How can we break out of this cycle of complacency?

Somehow, we need to stop averting our eyes from our sins. The issue isn’t our sins (plural); it’s our sin. The symptoms aren’t the issue. That takes this out of our hands; we can only control our actions.

Pray for God to reveal our sin to us and to gross us out by it, so that we will be moved to want to be cleansed. Ask the Holy Spirit to show us the darkness that lives within.

Re-invite Jesus to take over as Lord of your life and purge you of iniquity.

2 Exodus 12:29–32

And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, “Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.”

Yes, he really did end with, “*and bless me also.*” After all they’ve been through—especially after kicking them out saying, “*on the day you see my face you shall die*”—what could have possessed Pharaoh to say something that stupid?

“Sure, I enslaved you and mistreated you and wouldn’t even give you a three-day weekend to sacrifice to the LORD. Then you destroyed most of the country. So now I’m finally going to let you go.

But no hard feelings, right?”

Wow. When God said He would harden Pharaoh’s heart, that just sounded like Pharaoh would be mean.

But there’s something more to this. Might he actually be schizophrenic or something?

No. The Bible never indicates that his behavior is anything more than just a hardened, sinful heart. There’s no demon possession and no clinical psychosis. He’s not hearing voices (other than his advisers pleading with him to get a clue).

He’s normal.

This is scary. Pharaoh’s crazy behavior is just an example of plain old sin. He’s not really any different from you and me. This highlights one of the key, recurring lessons of scripture.

Sin is nuts.

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! — Romans 7:24–25a

This passage is so shocking that many commentators think Paul is writing about his pre-conversion self.

But he’s not. The verbs are all in the present tense. Paul is writing about himself at the time he’s writing. If that’s what the saved version of Paul is like, what chance have we of getting through to the unsaved? Won’t their sin block all of our arguments?

Exactly. Conversion is supernatural. It was supernatural with you, right?

3 Exodus 12:33–39

And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.

Everyone who lives near the coast should have a hurricane evacuation plan. Where would you go? How would you secure your home? What would you take?

The Israelites were going to the Sinai Peninsula. They were leaving home permanently. So, what would you take as refugees fleeing into a desert?

They took unleavened dough, plus gold, silver and clothing given to them by the Egyptians.

That’s ridiculous. The gold and silver are especially useless—like Thurston Howell’s millions on Gilligan’s Island. The passage gives the excuse that, “*they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.*”

Okay, so they’re headed out into the desert pretty much unprepared. If God doesn’t provide for them, they’re dead.

Looks like another teachable moment coming.

Technology is a wonderful thing—a great gift from God—but we learn to depend on technology and forget Him. We turn to God for help only in situations where technology feels overwhelmed.

Cancer? We turn to God. Toothache? Technology is the answer. Dementia—back to God. Presbyopia—technology again. God doesn’t provide the water; the faucet does. We just turn the handle.

Ask the LORD to renew our sense of awe and give us a humble perspective. Ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to our inadequacies. Hurricanes aren’t the only thing we need to be ready for.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. — 1 Peter 3:15b (NIV)

It’s not all about asking God to help us with our agenda. It’s all about His.

4 Exodus 12:40–49

Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. But every man’s servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.”

These Passover rules are needed because the people who fled Egypt were not all Israelites.

A mixed multitude went up with them also, — Exodus 12:38a

Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the people of Israel: — Leviticus 24:10a

Romance between neighboring peoples is inevitable, not to mention that the Egyptians must have been beyond frustrated with their own government.

There would have been many who were close enough to the people of Israel to have been warned about the Passover. Some may have even participated. Deciding to become a refugee is a bold leap, but some Egyptians made that choice.

So, in a precursor of the new covenant, God sets up some rules for this mixed multitude. Anyone can join in the Passover celebration, but they must submit their whole household to circumcision. Nothing less than a full-up religious conversion will do.

Otherwise, they’re just visitors.

Leaving Egypt had to involve a lot of heartache. Imagine failing to convince a friend to come along.

Imagine failing to convince a friend to do the Passover sacrifice!

Many of us have similar heartaches. People long to help the ones they love, but sometimes friends and family don’t want our help.

Ask the LORD to comfort those in these struggles and to glorify Himself through their growth.

5 Exodus 12:50–13:10

Thus all the children of Israel did; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.”

And Moses said to the people: “Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.’ It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’s law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.”

Passover is the mother of all holidays. It’s probably not the first annual celebration—pagan celebrations of the solstice are ancient—but Passover sets the standard.

Real holidays are an annual commemoration of an historical event: the Declaration of Independence, the armistice at the end of WWI, the Thanksgiving feast, the birth of Christ. While the celebrations are fun, partying isn’t the point. Unlike, say, the last day of school, these celebrations are to remind us of something important, something we should remember.

Passover takes a whole week. It uses unleavened bread. It has a curriculum. A unique solemnity is imposed. When God institutes a holiday, He does it right. Compare that to, say, St. Patrick’s Day, which commemorates a great saint who was very influential. Yet, when we think of St. Patrick’s Day, we think of green beer. Ouch. And then there’s what we’ve done with Christmas.

It’s amazing that God tolerates that.

We’ve let commercial interests take over Christmas and St. Patrick’s Day—and virtually everything else. That’s almost unavoidable in a free society. The church’s job is to counter that by shining the light of the gospel on all this chaos. But how?

We can’t stop all the silliness; we can only provide a serious counterpoint. There’s no secret trick. Just be genuine in your faith and how you celebrate holidays. People notice these things.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What can we do to help us see and recognize the ugliness of our sin?
2. Did your conversion feel supernatural at the time?
3. What is your favorite modern device or technology?
4. Have you ever made a bold, life-changing leap-of-faith decision?
5. Do you do anything special for holidays that serves as a witness of your faith?