

January 14 : Scriptures Genesis 41-43

SUMMARY

Two full years later...

The account opens up with Pharaoh having a disturbing dream. He sees two sets of cows, healthy and sickly, and two sets of heads of grain, plump and dried. The cows and grain are seven in a set. The good cows appear first, and the sickly cows appear second, eating the good cows. Now that I think about that, it's pretty weird. Cows don't eat cows! No wonder it got Pharaoh's attention. Returning to sleep, the grain dream comes following the same line. Seven heads of plump grain appear, followed by seven heads of dried grain. Yup. The dried grains swallow the good grains. At this point, I'd be asking myself what I had eaten the night before. But we'll see throughout the Bible that God often speaks to people through dreams (see the Book of Daniel). In the Bible and many ancient cultures, dreams are regarded as prophecy. Pharaoh calls in his dream interpretation crew, but they're stumped. Pharaoh's cupbearer *FINALLY* remembers Joseph and tells his master about this dream interpretation *savant* he met in prison (41:9). Joseph is summoned, polished up to meet Pharaoh, and escorted in. Pharaoh double-checks to find out if Joseph is the dream guy. Joseph has learned humility. "I am not able to," Joseph answered Pharaoh. "It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (41:16). Ya think there's something for us to learn here? Pharaoh tells Joseph his dreams and Joseph nails them. There's an extensive 7-year famine coming, but it will be preceded by 7 years of plenty. As Joseph sees it, that's a lot of time to prepare. His God-given admin abilities kick in and he suggests a plan. Pharaoh agrees and promotes Joseph, from prison to 2nd in command. After all, why shouldn't the interpreter be the implementer? Not a bad career trajectory for Joseph, eh! So, he becomes Egypt's Administrator *par excellence*! He's given a wife and they have two boys – Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph's plan kicks in and seven years later, so does the predicted famine.

Meanwhile, back in Canaan, Jacob looks around at his food insecure family and declares to his sons, "Whaddya standin' around here for? I hear there's food in Egypt? Get thee hence." He sends the ten oldest sons but keeps Benjamin home (42:3-4). Why? Ben is the surviving second son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Remember, Joseph "died" in an animal attack some 17 years before. Jacob/Israel isn't going to risk sending Benjamin out into the cold, cruel world to die like his brother. Fast forward to Egypt. Joseph's brothers show up and bow before Egypt's second in command, Joseph! They don't have a clue who they're bowing before (42:6-7). That's *close* with the first dream fulfillment, but no cigar (42:9)! The first dream was about ALL Joseph's brothers bowing before him. Benjamin *must* be in the troupe as well. Here's the really fascinating part. Joseph sets a

plan in motion and it has to do with his little brother, Benjamin. He's going to test his betraying brothers to see if they've grown up to love and defend each other or if the "my mom-your mom" rivalry still exists. Will they protect or betray Benjamin (now Israel's favorite son) in the face of danger? Joseph will keep stepping up the pressure to the extreme until he gets his answer! At least Reuben begins to make a connection to their earlier betrayal of Joseph (42:21-22) and Joseph secretly knows what they're talking about (42:23). The game is afoot. Simeon is forced to remain in prison as a hostage...I mean, a "guarantee." The guys are given provisions and sent home. When they arrive, they realize their silver is still in their luggage (placed there by Joseph's servant). So what do they do? Go back to a despot with Benjamin or betray Simeon by leaving him to languish? See? The brotherly loyalty test!

The famine continues to ramp up the pressure. Jacob/Israel reluctantly agrees to let Benjamin go on the return trip (42:11-14). He sends double the amount of silver plus a fine assortment of souvenirs from the local Canaan tourist gift shop to placate Egypt's Administrator. Upon arrival, they present everything, fearing retribution. But the steward assures them all is well. When Joseph appears, all the brothers bow before him (43:26). THAT'S A BINGO on the first dream! Joseph can barely contain his emotions at seeing his beloved brother during the charade. Dinner is served and everyone gets well-fed and tipsy. Seriously. That's what it says (43:34). The trap is set.

INSIGHT

So many people think they have little to offer the Lord. But like Joseph, He's given all of us gifts and talents to use when He provides the opportunity. We may have to spend time "on the shelf" as he hones those gifts, talents, and skillsets, but when the time is right, we're often surprised at how the Lord can use us. Have faith, trust God, keep developing your abilities.

January 15 : Scriptures Genesis 44-47

SUMMARY

Joseph sends the guys on their way and has his special cup secreted in Benjamin's bag (44:12). They could have kept going but chose to return. Integrity. Good! When they arrive back at Joseph's place, Joseph springs the trap! It appears Ben stole the cup. Therefore, he must remain with Joseph as his prisoner. The rest may go. *So, will the brothers betray Benjamin as they betrayed Joseph, giving him up for dead, or will they be willing to be punished as a group for Benjamin's sake?* Judah steps up to take the heat (44:18, 33). This is significant. This is a foreshadowing of Judah's future leadership role among the people of Israel. Not only does Judah stand up for Benjamin, but he also shows his utter commitment to their father, the victim of their earlier deception (44:30-31). A willingness to sacrifice self for others is a stunning testimony of the familial transformation. The test is passed with flying colors!

With this, Joseph finally reveals himself (45:1). His pent-up emotions burst forth. If there's any satisfaction Joseph gets for "payback" it's that his brothers are terrified of him (45:3). Long story short, Joseph forgives them because, dreamer that he is, he sees God's purpose in the big picture (45:7-8). Now that they're reunited, it's time to bring the entire clan to Egypt to be kept fed and safe through the terrible famine. He loads the family up with wagon-loads of provision and goodies and sends them along with the words, "Don't argue on the way" (45:24). Can you imagine the recriminations, the "I told you so's," and other sibling stuff? Some things never change! The boys return, tell their father, and prepare to relocate to Egypt. There's one final thing in this chapter that's not noted. Imagine the scene where they had to confess to their father what they did, how they hurt him, and then let him live in grief for seventeen years for their deception? This is an important life lesson, people.

So Jacob and his whole entourage leave for Egypt. Along the way, God meets Jacob to tell him that He'll watch over the family, make them into a huge nation, and bring Jacob back to be laid to rest in the covenant land (46:3-4). Jacob's 70-member family list is noted. From this small group, God will produce a nation that by some estimates will number over a million people by the time they leave Egypt! Jacob *finally* reunites with Joseph, his favored son! BINGO! Dream #2 is complete. The whole family is under Joseph's oversight.

Pharaoh gets to meet the family. Well, only five of the brothers and finally Jacob. Joseph has them say they are shepherds. Why? The shepherding profession was detestable to the Egyptians (47:34). This is a good play by Joseph because Pharaoh will allow them to

stay together in the best land in Egypt, Goshen (on the east side of the Nile Delta). The meeting between Pharaoh and Jacob/Israel is fascinating. Knowing what's coming in the book of Exodus, what we're witnessing is the meeting of two leaders of two nations that will eventually be locked in a life or death battle. For now, Pharaoh is informed of Jacob's great age (130 years) and Jacob blesses Pharaoh. Hmm... God's covenant people are already blessing the nations. First through Joseph's help in the famine and now by Israel's blessing of Egypt's king. Israel's family then settles in. The remaining section sets the foundation for the conflict in Exodus. The famine is so severe, people spend all their money, then give their livestock, then surrender their lands and themselves for food. In short, Pharaoh owns *everything* except the priesthood (47:20-22). Get that? *Owns everything!* Jacob/Israel lives another 17 years. (Cool! The same number of years with Joseph as he missed during Joseph's absence.) He makes Joseph swear to return his body to the family's covenant land to rest with his father and grandfather (47:29-30).

INSIGHT

God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (45:7-8). This wonderfully summarizes Jesus' mission. He is His Father's firstborn Son, sent on a mission to keep His "brothers and sisters," everyone in the human race, alive through a great deliverance. And through His obedience, Jesus has been "promoted" as was Joseph. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36).

January 16 : Scriptures Genesis 48-50

SUMMARY

Our section opens up with preparations for Grandpa Jacob's family blessing party. This is quite common in the Bible. Fathers bless sons, "greater" bless "lesser" and so forth. The understanding is that a blessing carries a very real impact on the one being blessed. Hey, look at Jacob. God honored a stolen blessing because it was His intent for the birthright and blessing to go to Jacob anyway. Blessings invoke God's goodwill upon another. Curses invoke divine discipline or harm upon another. Food for thought: Why do we put more stock in cursing than a blessing? If we're blessing people according to God's will, then why not wholeheartedly believe God will answer that blessing? Something to consider. Anyway, Jacob is nearing death and that's the time to pass on the blessings. First, he reiterates God's covenant promises to Joseph – offspring and land (48:4). Why? Because Joseph is now the family's firstborn son. (I'll explain how that happened in a moment.) Jacob/Israel then "adopts" Ephraim and Manasseh as his sons so they will be reckoned as family units on par with their uncles (48:5). Get this! Joseph's family line will carry a double portion inheritance within the family of Israel! That's a reference to Joseph's firstborn status.

Okay, now the explanation. Reuben is the firstborn son of the first wife, Leah. Joseph is the firstborn son of the second (and preferred) wife, Rachel. Remember when Reuben "went up to his father's bed" and slept with one of Jacob's concubines? Well, that got him demoted. Jacob chose to pass firstborn status to the next-in-line firstborn, Joseph. Fathers have the prerogative as to who gets the birthright. Scripture confirms this change, "These were the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. He was the firstborn, *but his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, because Reuben defiled his father's bed*. He is not listed in the genealogy according to birthright" (1 Chronicles 5:1). See?

Jacob pulls his grandsons (now adopted sons) close and blesses them. The elder son Manasseh is to his right and the second son, Ephraim, is on his left. Something unusual now happens. Apparently, under the inspiration of God, he crosses his arms and with the "official" right hand, he blesses Ephraim as the firstborn and Manasseh as the second born. When Joseph objects, he reveals prophetically that Ephraim will take the lead and become greater than his brother (48:19). Wow! All sorts of first-second born switches!

Next, Jacob blesses his sons. There are a few things to note for now. Reuben comes first as the eldest of all the brothers. As the original firstborn, he normally would take on his father's role in the family. He would rule the household (king), he would be the intermediary between God and the family (priest), and he would serve as the firstborn

provider and protector. But he's demoted and now comes the reason (49:3-4). Joseph is already the firstborn (with the Ephraim and Manasseh double portion and care of the family, which he's already doing), so what happens to the king and priest functions? Simeon and Levi are dangerous together as shown by the bloody Shechem incident (49:5-7). They would make harsh rulers, so Jacob moves down the Leah family line to his son, Judah (49:10). Jacob prophesies that the covenant kings God has promised will come from his line. Now if Joseph cares for the family as the *firstborn* and Judah will carry the future *kingship*, which tribe will take on the *priesthood* of the family? Hold that thought for later. Jacob gives his final instructions ("bury me with my family in Canaan at Machpelah") and dies a happy man (49:33).

True to their word, Jacob's sons bless him with a tremendous funeral service and escort a huge funeral procession back to Canaan (50:12-13). When they all return to Egypt, Joseph's brothers are *really* nervous about what Joseph might do to them to pay them back for their ugliness to him now that dad is gone. Joseph tells them not to be afraid. He knows what they meant for bad, God used for great good to preserve the whole family. Joseph truly shows his firstborn son's kindness to his brothers (50:20-21). After a long and fruitful life, Joseph dies (50:26). Congratulations! You've made it through your first book of the Bible. Let's cruise on over to Exodus.

INSIGHT

"You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people" (Joseph, Genesis 50:20). Here is another remarkable parallel between Joseph and Jesus. Both the Romans and the Jewish leaders took part in Jesus' crucifixion. What they meant for evil, God intended for good – the survival of many people. It's through the horrendous "selling" of Jesus, the abuse and false accusations He endured, and His unjust sentence, that Jesus was able to gain for His Father's children a way of survival not from physical death, but a spiritual of death.

January 17 : Scriptures Exodus 1-4

SUMMARY

And here we are! Exodus opens with a short recap of Israel's sons and the number of family members that arrived in Egypt under Joseph. The kicker is this small family has, over time, grown "exceedingly numerous" and the land was filled with them (1:7). Something else has changed. The Egyptians' former gratitude to Joseph for saving them has faded under a new Pharaoh that didn't know about Joseph. All he could see was a threat by this growing people group who weren't Egyptian. What we, the readers, need to know is that there was an Old Egyptian Kingdom, a Middle kingdom, and a New Kingdom ([Read More](#)). During the Middle Kingdom period, the native Egyptians were conquered by a people group called the Hyksos from the East. "Trouble struck when a group of foreigners, the Hyksos, a Semitic-Asiatic group, invaded the Nile Delta region. These advanced warriors used new tools for war: bronze weapons and horse-drawn chariots. They defeated the Egyptians, who fought on foot with copper-and-stone weapons" (ibid). The Egyptians lived under Hyksos rule for about a hundred years. ([Read More](#)). Here's the connection. The Hyksos were Semitic, the same general family branch as the Israelites. Why was Joseph favored by the Pharaoh of his day? Because his Pharaoh was likely of the Hyksos people. Israel came to live under the Hyksos rulers in the north while the competing Egyptian rulers operated out of Thebes (800 km south). The Egyptians eventually drove the Hyksos out and retook the throne. But there was a large number of Semitic people who had taken root in the Delta (the Israelites). The Pharaoh and the Egyptians referred to as the book of Exodus opens are afraid of this large group. "Come, let's deal shrewdly with them; otherwise they will multiply further, and when war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country" (1:10). Yup. The Egyptians might lose their country or their manpower. So they needed to weaken the Israelites through oppression and draw down their numbers to keep them under control (1:11, 16). The plan was to kill the male children and save the females. Why? Destroy the potential for warriors and assimilate the people. But God had other plans. The Hebrew midwives defied Pharaoh's order (1:19) and God blessed them.

In chapter two, Moses is born. (This is your moment to cheer. Go ahead. Just one. Good.) His family keeps him as long as they can, his mom places him in a basket at the Nile's riverbank, Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him and gets Moses' mom to care for him. Pretty nifty. Moses grows up in Pharaoh's palace. According to some extra-biblical texts, Moses was a trained army commander for the Egyptians in his early years, yet he was very aware of his Hebrew heritage. To help his people, he kills an Egyptian taskmaster (2:11-12). News of his crime gets out. It only makes sense that Pharaoh would go after him because, you know, a military commander turning on him and leading the

Hebrew people in a rebellion. Hello! Chapter 1! Moses' only option was to beat it out of Egypt. He follows the trade route east across the Sinai Peninsula, then south along the western edge of the Arabian desert. This is the land of Midian. Remember Midian? These are distant members of the Abraham family tree (1:15; Genesis 25:1 – of Abraham and Keturah). When a bunch of tough-guy shepherds harass the 7 daughters of Jethro (of the Reuel clan). Moses comes to their aid. They tell their father, and he invites Moses to stay. I mean, *really* stay. I mean, to have his daughter Zipporah in marriage and stay the rest of his life in Midian. But God has other plans because things are getting rough for his covenant people in Egypt. It's time to bring them out as he promised (Genesis 15:13-14; 50:24-25).

Moses left Egypt when he was forty. Forty years later Moses is tending Jethro's flocks at Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai). God appears to Moses as a fire burning a bush but the bush isn't consumed by the flames (3:2). This encounter sets in motion a remarkable chain of events over the next year – the plagues of Egypt culminating in Israel's exodus out of Egypt. But they need a leader and God wants a spokesman. Moses encounters the God he's heard about but never met. God tells Moses to go back to Egypt and free His people. What's Moses' first objection? "Who am I to do such a thing?" (3:11). After all, Moses used to be a commander, but now he's nothing but a simple shepherd in his eyes. But that combination is *exactly* what God wants – someone to lead His sheep and fight off the wolves. God tells Moses not to worry, He'll be with Moses. "But," Moses asks. "Who should I say sent me?" (3:13). God reveals a new side to Himself as Israel's eternal covenant-keeping God. Of course, He does it by revealing *His name*, **I AM THAT I AM** (3:14). His name reveals Who He is, the Eternal Covenant-Keeping God. He also tells Moses this isn't going to be easy because Pharaoh doesn't know God and won't cooperate (3:19). He's going to have to smack Pharaoh and Egypt around a bit to get them to wise up and release Israel from captivity (3:20). Not only that, but the Egyptians will actually *pay* the Israelites to leave!

And here's another objection (#3 if you're keeping count). Moses realizes he isn't an army of one (4:1). Moses versus Egypt? Impossible! God shows Moses that with Him, all things are possible. When Pharaoh asks, "Oh yeah? You and whose army?" Moses just needs to have a little *staff* meeting with Pharaoh (4:5). He even gives Moses two other signs to show just to cement things. But Moses still needs a push. Okay, a *really big* push! His last and fourth excuse is he isn't a skilled public speaker (4:10). God's not buying it. He made the human mouth. He can fill it (4:11-12). And now we come to it. Moses just doesn't want to do it (4:13). Can you blame him? He's 80 years old for crying out loud and his distinguished career as a leader was short-lived. Important safety tip: Don't tick God off! He tells Moses his older brother Aaron will do the talking for Moses. All he has to do is

tell Aaron what the Lord wants to say. The Lord commands Moses to go back and do the job (4:16-17). Moses leaves. There's a strange circumcision incident (which I won't go into). Moses meets Aaron, they go see the Israelite elders, Moses does the miraculous things, and everyone knows God is still with them and they worship. End of story? Nope. It's just begun...

INSIGHT

There's a phrase I heard many years ago. I don't know who it was from, but it's so good I have to pass it along. "For the first forty years of his life, Moses tried to show what a Somebody he was. For the next forty years of his life, God showed Moses what a Nobody he was. But for the last forty years of Moses' life, the Lord showed the world what He could do with a Nobody who was fully committed to Him." Be encouraged. No matter how small you feel, God can do great things through you if you yield to His teaching and training.

January 18 : Scriptures Exodus 5-8

SUMMARY

In today's reading, Moses comes nose to nose with Pharaoh and the "battle" begins. Moses makes God's demand (5:1) and Pharaoh responds with the stupidest thing someone could ever say, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him by letting Israel go?" (5:2) Pharaoh will soon find out. What Pharaoh doesn't realize is that with his refusal to release the people of Israel, God *will* introduce Himself with 10 very intense business cards called the Ten Plagues. What's interesting to note is God's demand that Israel to take a three-day journey into the wilderness for a worship service with sacrifices (5:3). Wait! Didn't the Lord want Israel's permanent release? Yes. And it will come. Keep watching and you'll watch a bargaining process that increases pressure on Pharaoh. For now, the head-strong Pharaoh jacks up the pressure first (5:4). He commands the Israelites to continue making the same number of bricks, but they now have the added burden of collecting their own straw. Hey, if they have time for a worship service, then they have too much time on their hands, right? Well, this had Pharaoh's desired effect. The Israelite foremen went to Moses to complain about the increased workload. "Thanks a lot, Moses! You've given them a way to dispatch us more quickly!" (5:21). Moses goes to the Lord and vents about not being free yet. Isn't it amazing how we want the Lord to do stuff on our timetable?

But the Lord assures Moses this is part of His plan (6:1). He assures Moses that He is his ancestors' covenant-keeping God. He *will* honor His word. He will do four things: The Lord will bring them out from Egypt (6:6). He will redeem them, an ancient way of saying that He'll bring them home and restore their fortunes (6:6). He will take them as His personal nation (6:7), and he will bring them into the land He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (6:8). Sadly, the Israelites are so broken in spirit through their harsh servitude, they don't listen to Moses. And, Moses says to the Lord, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, then how will Pharaoh listen to me, since I am such a poor speaker?" (6:12) Moses has nothing to worry about. The Lord puts His words in his mouth. *And now a brief break for another genealogy.* This one specifically traces Moses and Aaron's lineage from Levi (brother to Reuben and Simeon who preceded him) down to the two guys. This is a valuable lineage to know because of a little incident coming along in the book of Numbers – Korah's rebellion. Korah is mentioned here and is a cousin to Moses and Aaron (6:21). The chapter finishes with God sending Moses to speak with Pharaoh.

80-year-old Moses and 83-year-old Aaron appear before Pharaoh and do a little sign to get his attention – turning Aaron's staff into a snake (7:10). Well, lo and behold, Pharaoh's occultists can do the same thing (7:11). A little freaky, huh? Not to worry. To prove Moses'

God is mightier, Aaron's rod-become-a-snake swallows the occultists' snake. So there! But Pharaoh is unimpressed. Now the Lord starts throwing his business cards to introduce Himself to Pharaoh. The first plague (Nile waters turn to blood) comes with a warning in the morning (7:20). Again, Pharaoh's occultists' do the same thing. Pharaoh is still unimpressed and "hardens his heart" against God (7:22-23). The water of the Nile is yucky, but the people can still dig around the banks to get untainted water. Maybe the sand filters the yuck? Seven days pass and the next plague hits.

Plagues 2-4 commence – frogs, gnats flies. God sends Moses to give Pharaoh a warning during the day (8:1-2). True to His word, God supplies an overabundance of the croakers. Egypt is inundated with frogs (8:6)! But again, the occultists' replicate the sign. However, this time Pharaoh asks Moses to appeal to the Lord to rid the land of the frogs and agrees to let the Israelites have their desert worship service (8:8). Here's the cool part. The occultists can replicate what Moses did, but now Moses lets Pharaoh set the day the Lord eliminates the frogs (8:9-10). Why? This begins the distinction between the Lord and the "gods" of Egypt. Well, it worked. The frogs were only in the Nile. However, the frogs on the land died by the thousands and, shall we say, stinketh. The Egyptians had to shovel their rotting little corpses out of the way. Here's a side note. One of the Egyptian gods was depicted as a frog. This is funny. What do you do when a competing God makes your god a nuisance, then kills your god, and the god starts to stink? Do you think the Lord is making a statement? Yup, you're right. Next, there's the 3rd plague (gnats, 8:16). Notice there's no warning. Here's the plague pattern. The plagues arrive in sets of three. Each set has a warning in the morning, a warning at mid-day, then a sudden whack with the 3rd in the series. It builds a rhythm: Warning, warning, WHACK! Warning, warning, WHACK! Warning, warning, WHACK! The Tenth plague is the biggest WHACK on Egypt of all. Okay, now look for the pattern in the next set of plagues. Moses unleashes the monster cloud of gnats, but this time there's a difference. *The occultists can't mimic it.* They see it as God's finger (meaning a sign of specific judgment on Egypt), but Pharaoh ignores it because of his hard heart (8:19). For the 4th plague (flies) Moses gives a warning in the morning, "But if you will not let my people go, then I will send swarms of flies against you, your officials, your people, and your houses. The Egyptians' houses will swarm with flies, and so will the land where they live" (8:21). Another difference comes with this plague. The flies will only affect the Egyptians. They won't bother the Israelites (8:22-23). Sometimes the Lord lets us go through the chastisement He's dishing out on peoples or nations. But He is more than able to make a distinction as well lest the righteous suffer along with the wicked (Remember Abraham pleading with the Lord regarding Sodom and Gomorrah?). The flies arrive and Pharaoh flies to Moses (yes, pun intended) to tell Moses his people can go worship the Lord, BUT only in the land of Egypt (8:25). "No way," says Moses. The Israelites would be sacrificing animals the Egyptians

hold sacred. There would be a ruckus. Nope. They must be gone for three days (8:28). Pharaoh agrees and begs Moses to lift the plague. Moses will, but knows Pharaoh will go back on his word...which he does.

INSIGHT

The plagues were not by accident. Each plague was an attack on an Egyptian god. What the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was doing through Moses was showing Pharaoh (and the rest of the world) Who He was and what He could do. He also showed how utterly powerless the “gods of this world” are, whether spiritual or physical. Take heart, the God of all Creation stands before you to confront your spiritual enemies and to bring you a great deliverance!

January 19 : Scriptures Exodus 9-12

SUMMARY

And the hits just keep on coming! Chapter 9 opens up with the livestock plague. There's a warning during the day followed by Egyptian livestock dropping dead. *But* the Lord again makes a distinction between the Egyptian "dead-stock" and the Israelite "livestock" (9:4-6). Yet, Pharaoh hardens his heart more. Stubborn man! The next plague comes without warning according to the pattern. Moses takes ash and throws it in the air. It becomes boils on living creatures, both man and beast (9:9). Furthermore, the occultists can't even come before Moses they're so messed up with oozy, pus-filled boils. Delightful, right? Pharaoh? He can't be bothered. Hard heart. The third set of plagues begins with a warning in the morning. This 7th plague is going to do a number on Egypt, but first God tells Pharaoh the reason for this plague. "For this time I am about to send all my plagues against you, your officials, and your people. Then you will know there is no one like me on the whole earth. *By now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague, and you would have been obliterated from the earth.* (Now that's reassuring!) *However, I have let you live for this purpose: to show you my power and to make my name known on the whole earth*" (9:14-16). God unleashes a hailstorm the likes of which Egypt has never seen. Not just ordinary hail. Hail *mixed with lightning* (9:24). There is a measure of God's mercy in this as well. Those Egyptians who heeded God's word brought their livestock in for protection. This is a great foreshadowing of how Gentiles will be welcomed into God's family in the future. His heart is toward *all* who trust Him and follow His word. Now back to Egypt. Those who didn't listen to God, though, lost both man and beast again under the icy onslaught and shattering lightning (9:19, 21). The hail will now affect the vegetation of the land (9:25). God is slowly destroying Egypt's economy as long as Pharaoh hardens his heart against the Lord. At this time, Pharaoh appears to change his mind and become willing to release the Israelites (9:27-28). But as before, once the terror of the plague stopped, Pharaoh went back to being his stubborn old self (9:34-35).

Chapter 10 opens with an interesting revelation. Pharaoh has not only been hardening his heart, but God has had a hand in it. There are a lot of discussions about whose fault the hardening is. Suffice to say, whether God or Pharaoh or both it had the desired effect. The Lord was justified in sending his wrath against Egypt to "do these miraculous signs of mine among them, and so that you may tell your son and grandson how severely I dealt with the Egyptians and performed miraculous signs among them, and you will know that I am the Lord" (10:1-2). The plagues were to be long-lasting reminders to the Egyptians and the Israelites so that everyone will recall just Who the Lord is. Remember Pharaoh's stupid question, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him by letting Israel go?"

(5:2). Well, Pharaoh is in the middle of an intense introduction. Moses announces the next plague – a humongous swarm of locusts (10:4). This is going to be terrifyingly bad for Egypt. Their flocks and herds have taken a big hit. Egypt's ripened grain has been wiped out by the hail. Now the next grain to mature is going to be eaten by locusts. By the time the Lord is done, Egypt will be devastated. Pharaoh's advisers know this and tell him to accept Moses' demand, but Pharaoh declines when he hears it's not just the men, but everyone including the Israelites' herds that Moses wants for the worship service (10:9-11). Pharaoh wants to keep the women and children back as hostages. So, God sends the locusts (10:14-15). The plague is so severe, no green thing is left in the land. Utter desolation! Pharaoh relents. God blows the locusts away. Pharaoh hardens his heart...again. Same old Pharaoh. Then comes the unannounced 3rd plague of the 3rd set – a darkness so thick "it can be felt" (10:21). If you've ever gone on a cave tour you know exactly what this is like. At some point during the tour, the cheeky guide turns out the lights and you're plunged into absolute darkness. Go ahead, wave your hand in front of your face. Nothing. After a few moments in the cave, the darkness does start to get oppressive. Furthermore, without light, we lose all track of time. A minute becomes an hour, an hour becomes a day, and after that, it seems like an eternity! Imagine being in that situation for three solid days...except if you're an Israelite. They had light where they lived (10:23). What an amazing God we serve! Pharaoh calls Moses for another bargaining session. Moses, Aaron, the men, women, and children may go, but not the flocks (10:24). Moses holds fast and this is unacceptable to Pharaoh. He hardens his heart again and sends Moses out.

The Lord now announces the final and most devastating plague – the death of the firstborn (11:4-5). By now you should understand why the death of the firstborn is so awful. The hopes and dreams of the family are invested in the firstborn from birth. Many firstborns rise to positions of prominence. With the death of the firstborn plague, Egypt will be thrown into social and cultural upheaval as well as being economically crushed. Well, Pharaoh asked who the Lord was and why he should let the Israelites go. Pharaoh will know shortly. God also promises the plague will not touch the Israelites because He will again make a distinction. But this one will be different. God isn't going to unilaterally spare the Israelites. They will have to do something to be protected themselves as we'll learn in chapter 12. Meanwhile, the Israelites are to ask their neighbors for treasures (11:2-3). The Egyptians probably were more than willing to contribute if it would appease the Israelite God and encourage Him to back off His judgments.

Now we find out God's plan to protect the Israelites. It is the Passover observance. A lamb must be taken inside, kept for four days, then sacrificed. Its blood must spill into the basin (the trough in front of the doorway), and on the sides and top of the door frame,

marking the house as belonging to the Lord (12:7). The Lord will pass over that home to the next unmarked home (12:13). Everyone must stay inside, behind the blood-marked door. The Lord commands the Israelites to commemorate this soon-to-happen event throughout their generations (12:17). Passover is the first day of the 7-day long Unleavened Bread celebration and it occurs in late March to early April because the biblical lunar calendar shifts back and forth from the Gentile solar-based calendar. Okay, back to our Passover account. Moses summons all the Israelites elders, gives them the instructions, and everyone prepares for the horrific event. At midnight, the Lord fulfills His word. He strikes the firstborn of Egypt down (12:29)! A cry goes up across all Egypt and Pharaoh cries for Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt for their worship service (12:31). The Israelites are ejected from the land so quickly, they don't even have time to properly prepare their bread for traveling (12:39). Hence, the celebration of the Unleavened Bread. The Israelites collect their treasures and head out. God proves Himself faithful. As he promised Abraham, God delivers His people from Egypt about 400 years after His word. The rest of the chapter reiterates the Lord's command to the Israelites how to celebrate Passover.

INSIGHT

God uses pictures to teach spiritual truths and reveal His plans. The Passover event laid the foundation of a future event where the Lamb of God would take a person's place and cause Death to pass by. That Lamb is Jesus. When Jesus was celebrating the Last Passover with His disciples, He made a point of revealing to them that He was, as John the Baptist called Him, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). That Last Passover reminded His disciples of all the events of ancient Passover and gave them the full meaning for every future Passover celebration to come. "And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'This is my body, which is given for you. *Do this in remembrance of me.*'" (Luke 22:19).

January 20 : Scriptures Exodus 13-15

SUMMARY

Chapter 13 opens with the Lord's command regarding Israel's firstborns, both man and beast. The theme of Passover is now intimately connected with the concept of the firstborn son. In recognition of what God did to the Egyptians, He commands all firstborn males to be dedicated to Him (13:1, 11-12). The Lord also reiterates the Unleavened Bread commands. After this small aside, we pick the account up with the Israelites fleeing Egypt. But it wasn't a mad dash. The text says they were led out in military formation (13:18). Gee, who could have taught them that? Perhaps a former Egyptian military commander named Moses? Yup. God leads His people with His presence in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Shade by day, warmth and illumination by night. He led them by the "back way" because if the Israelites traveled the common road from Egypt and across the Sinai Peninsula to Canaan, they might balk. Why? There were Egyptian and Philistine outposts along the route. So into the Sinai wilderness, it is! By the way, just before the Israelites leave Egypt, they make a stop to pick up Joseph's bones just as he had asked them to do at the end of Genesis (13:19). The entourage of 600,000 men (12:37), plus women, plus children (if you're keeping score that's easily over a million people!), plus animals, they all scoot across the Sinai wilderness to the tip of the east fork of the Red Sea (check out your maps at the back of your Bible or online).

The Lord has them turn right (south) to travel along the west bank of the Red Sea (14:2). They reach Pi-hahiroth and camp next to the Red Sea in front of Baal-Zephon. The text says they were boxed in. Yes, they were. This spot is a canyon that opens to the Red Sea. That means they have the sea before them, canyon walls on either side and soon the Egyptian army will come up from behind them! *And now things get really exciting!* Pharaoh and his men realize they've lost their manpower. After all, who would help rebuild a decimated Egypt? And the Israelites appear to never be returning. So Pharaoh and his army set out to retrieve their slaves. As the Israelites see the army approaching, they begin to panic. But stalwart Moses, God's trustworthy servant, assures the people that the Lord will fight for them (14:13-14). (What would you think if *you* were in the peoples' place?) And now comes the climax! God moves behind the Israelites to protect them while Moses obediently raises his staff of God's authority. The wind rises, the water parts, the wind helps dry the seabed overnight, and at roughly four a.m. the Israelites surge ahead between the walls of water (14:22). God holds the Egyptian army back long enough for His people to make it through the liquid chasm. The Egyptians, realizing their prey is getting away, plunge into the split sea in pursuit. The Lord causes their wheels to pop off (14:25, I love that part!) and bogs down Pharaoh and his army in the middle of the wettest

trap they've ever faced. At that moment when the dawn was breaking, God tells Moses to raise his staff once again and the waters fall in on the army, drowning them all. "Not even one of them survived" (14:28) the text says. What a jaw-dropping scene. In a matter of a few hours, Israel witnessed two of the most memorable miracles on earth. The parting of the Red Sea and the obliteration of an entire army!

Miriam, Moses' sister who had helped Pharaoh's daughter with Moses eighty years earlier, composes a song by which to remember the whole event (15:1-21). The song praises the mighty act of God they just witnessed and anticipates the response of the surrounding nations when they hear what the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob just did (15:14-17) for His people. Woe to those nations when God brings His people into the Promised Land! Through Pharaoh's resistance, God indeed introduced Himself to the world, "Lord, who is like you among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders?" (15:11). (Take a deep breath here and pause for a moment. Okay, read on.) Israel now enters into the Lord's School of Trust. It's too bad the chapter breaks up the following accounts of the poisoned water, the need for food, the need for water, and protection from enemies, but Israel's lesson starts here and segues into the others in chapter 16. God's first lesson is He can keep His people healthy despite any circumstances they face, such as tainted water. With just a piece of wood, God purifies the water for the multitudes and their livestock to drink. But He wasn't teaching them about His miracle-working power. They had just seen that. His primary lesson is "If you will carefully obey the Lord your God, do what is right in his sight, pay attention to his commands, and keep all his statutes, I will not inflict any illnesses on you that I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you" (15:26). God is all they need for life. All that is required is they obey Him for that is their side of the covenant which will soon be enacted at the base of Mount Horeb in chapter 20.

INSIGHT

I love this line, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to break camp" (Exodus 14:15). It's like God was saying, "Stop yapping and git!" We often hear how we need to wait on the Lord. And so we wait, and wait, and wait, and wait, and that's not bad. There are times when we should wait. But listen for His voice! There are times when we need to get up off our behinds and take action. Waiting and doing are both important to the Lord.