

Amazing Truths of the Pentateuch (11)
When I see the Blood, I will Pass Over You
(Exodus 11:1-12:13)

Introduction:-

The Book of Exodus is one of the most important books in the Bible, not only because it introduces many themes that are important for understanding the rest of the Bible, but it tells us a story about salvation and deliverance, which gives important and indispensable background and meaning to our ultimate salvation in Christ. For example, in the New Testament, Paul could speak of Christ as our Passover Lamb, who has been sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). And Peter could also say that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as a lamb without blemish or defect, chosen before the creation of the world, but revealed in these last times for us (1 Peter 1:17-20). Let us now examine these wonderful truths, especially as they relate to the Tenth Plague, and its place within the message of the Book of Exodus. And as we do, may we find fresh wonder and blessing in the amazing salvation which is ours today.

1. First we Need to Answer the Question - Why the Ten Plagues?

Already with Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1-15), we have noted the significance of Exodus 2:23-25, where God has observed the cries of his people in their suffering and oppression in Egypt, and at the same time, has remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about living in the Promised Land. But, even though God has raised up Moses to go to Pharaoh, with the express purpose of the release of God's people, Exodus 3:18-20 reminds us that this task will not be an easy one. Here for the first time, God says these words: "But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, they will let you go." The reason for this release is stated as the worship and service of God, Israel's true king, whose relationship with them supersedes all other claims, including that of Pharaoh himself. But, this passage is equally clear that words themselves will not compel Pharaoh to release God's people from Egypt, and so God will deliver Israel by striking the Egyptians and by performing "wonders" among them. The word "wonders" used here is very significant, as it is from a root that is used of acts that only God could perform. In other words, deliverance from Egypt was going to require nothing less than divine intervention. Furthermore, within this process, Israel would not leave Egypt "empty handed", as the Lord would make the Egyptians favourably disposed toward His people (Exodus 3:21-22). Then, when Moses finally left the desert of Midian in order to return to Egypt, at the Lord's command, we read these further words at Exodus 4:21-23: The Lord said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, This is what the Lord says: Israel is my first-born son, and I told you, "Let my Son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your first-born son.' " And so, both of these early desert texts of Exodus 3:18-20, and Exodus 4:21-23, anticipate the Ten Wonders or Plagues that God would bring upon Egypt. And finally, when both Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh for the very first time at Exodus 5:1-3, with the threat of "plagues" if Pharaoh would not release the people of God to worship the Lord in the desert, Pharaoh replied, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him, and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go." This opening confession from Pharaoh also becomes very important for the rest of the exodus story, because God will act

within the plagues, for the express reason that both Israel (Exod 6:6-8), and the Egyptians (Exod 7:5), including Pharaoh, will finally know "who the Lord is" when the Lord stretches forth his hand against Egypt, and bring the Israelites out of it. And so, at the very forefront of the exodus and plague tradition, is the issue of the revelation of God, through his mighty acts and sovereign plan. Many people today are also like Pharaoh, and say, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him? I do not know the Lord, neither am I concerned about His will for my life." But if we follow the story of Pharaoh himself, we will soon discover that the Lord has a way of confronting us with the reality of His powerful presence, even through the events of nature itself. In fact, the Lord would later say to Pharaoh, at the commencement of the seventh plague of Hail, "I could have struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up, or spared you, for this very purpose, that I might show you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exodus 9:13-16). Interestingly enough, this would be followed by the worst Hail storm that Egypt ever experienced as a nation, but a provision of mercy was also made for both people and animals to find shelter before this happened. God's concern is to preserve rather than extinguish life (2 Peter 3:9).

2. Secondly, what did the first Nine Plagues Accomplish? (Exodus 7:14-10:29)

The first nine plagues can be divided into three groups of three plagues each (1) 7:14-8:19; (2) 8:20-9:12; (3) 9:13-10:29 - with the first plague in each group (the first, the fourth, and the seventh), introduced by a warning delivered to the Pharaoh in the morning as he went out to the Nile. On the other hand, the third plague in each group (the third, the sixth, and the ninth) were carried out without any warning. Further, the magicians who try and replicate the third plague, cannot even stand before Moses in the sixth plague, and totally disappear in the ninth plague, because of total darkness. Also, these three were plagues to be "felt". Thus, what was proclaimed as the finger of God in the third plague (Exod 8:19), when the Egyptian Magicians could not reproduce even the smallest of creatures, the lice or gnats, could be said all the more of all that followed. Furthermore, we may notice a growing intensity of impact and effect from plague one to plague nine, and throughout, there is both an implied and explicit distinction made in favour of the Israelites, who did not experience all that the Egyptians did. Finally, these first nine plagues begin with the Nile, and conclude with darkness. What was the point of all of this? The answer is found in the fact that the land of Egypt is dominated by two great realities, namely, the Sun, and the Nile river. Both brought life to Egypt, and Pharaoh was identified with the Sun god. Thus in the first plague (Exod 7:14-24), the life-giving water of the Nile is turned into blood, bringing death. Later, in the Tenth plague, a blood sacrifice will come to the homes of the Israelites in Egypt, bringing life. But for now, within the first plague, the whole ecology of Egypt was turned upside-down. Then in the ninth plague, darkness covers the land. If Pharaoh is the sun god, Yahweh simply reaches out and turns off the light switch. The two great realities of Egypt are completely under Yahweh's control. So much for the power of Pharaoh! In fact, Pharaoh cannot even control his own heart; Yahweh hardens it for him, although the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is better understood as a subtle interplay between the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God on the one hand, and the responsibility of man on the other hand, attributed nine times to God, and an equal number of times to Pharaoh. And so who is in charge here? Can there be any doubt? The issue of idolatry will be a constant temptation for Israel, just as it is for us today. Finally, the thick darkness that covers the land for three days in the ninth plague, then serves as a prelude to the Tenth plague, when at about midnight, the firstborn son of three categories of people, ranging from that of Pharaoh who sits upon the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl at the mill, to

all the firstborn cattle of the field, would die. A judgment upon the entire community. This is the ultimate disaster, since all the plans and dreams of a father were bound up in his firstborn son, who received a double share of the family estate when the father died (Deut. 21:17). But no such tragedy would come to the Israelites (Exodus 11:1-10). Also, it is perhaps not without significance that in the Gospels, three hours of darkness preceded the death of Jesus Christ, as the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). John's Gospel in particular links the death of Christ with the slaying of the Passover Lamb (John 18:28;19:14). Thus, the Gospel writers may have also found the link between the ninth and tenth plagues as meaningful background for the death of Christ as well - Especially Luke, who not only includes the plagues tradition within his works at Luke 11:20, and Acts 7:36, but may also give meaning to the ninth plague of darkness as one to be "felt" at Luke 23:44-48, when the crowds, finally witnessing to all of these things, return from the cross "beating their breasts", possibly in contrition, as with the humble tax-collector at Luke 18:13.

3. The Significance of the Tenth Plague (Exodus 11:1-12:13)

The Tenth Plague is the climax of the entire Plague narrative, as God himself announces at Exodus 11:1 - "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt." But what makes this plague different from the rest? For one thing, it will achieve what all the others could not, and that is Israel's complete deliverance from Egypt. But in order to do this, it will take the death of the first born son from the court of Pharaoh himself down to the firstborn son of the slave girl, and finally all the firstborn of the cattle as well. But if the Lord was going to make a distinction on this issue between that of Egypt and Israel (Exodus 11:7), why then did Israel have to follow the specific guidelines as set out in Exodus 12:1-13, in order to avoid the angel of death? Obviously, a much larger purpose and vision was being enacted here, that would have relevance for future generations as well. And this new beginning for Israel, begins with the symbols of sacrifice and redemption, with the blood of a one-year-old unblemished lamb, put upon the sides and tops of the doorframes of the homes where the lambs were eaten. And on the night when the angel of death would pass through Egypt, judgment would also be passed upon all the gods of Egypt, including that of Pharaoh himself (Exodus 12:12), who would prove to be powerless to save. And just as the plagues were miraculous signs of God's judgment on Pharaoh and his people, so the "blood" would be a "sign" and pledge of God's mercy and salvation to His people. And so the tenth plague of the Passover was to be more than a remembrance of God's deliverance of Israel from slavery and oppression. It was as well a commemoration of redemption and salvation from sin and death, concluding with the words: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). This has its grand fulfilment in Jesus Christ, who as God's Passover Lamb, saves us by his sacrificial death and blood upon the cross of Calvary (1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:17-20; Hebrews 9:22). Finally, this is also saying to us that there can be no exodus deliverance without Passover. Have we fully entered this experience today?

Conclusion:-

When God visits this world again with the second coming of Jesus Christ, both as Saviour and Judge, will he find our homes and lives covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world? For as with the exodus of old, so with the second coming of Jesus Christ, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). May that be our blessing as well, when Jesus comes back again. Amen.