

STUDY NOTES FOR LESSON FIVE

Exodus Chapters 11-13

BY A MIGHTY HAND: EXODUS 11

The duel between Moses and Pharaoh reached the boiling point in the last chapter. The final verses of chapter 10 contain what Pharaoh intended to be his last words to Moses—a threat that if he saw his face again, Moses would die. Some are confused by these “last words” because chapter 11 seems to contain further words from Moses to Pharaoh. It is actually one continuous dramatic scene, with the first three verses of Chapter 11 a parenthetical explanatory note. (More on that later.) Moses had been ordered out. “As you say,” he replied, and turned to go. But God had one more message. So perhaps he turned, halfway out the great hall, and thundered God’s final warning in a powerful voice: “Thus saith the Lord, about midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the first born in the land of Egypt shall die...” Moses then leaves and the record says he went “in a great anger.”

That Moses would be angry is certainly understandable. He did not hate Egypt or the Egyptians. He had been one of them during the first 40 years of his life. The woman who treated him as his mother was Egyptian. He had no desire to see Egypt destroyed. Thus his indignation against the man whose terrible pride was bringing all this destruction on a people Moses cared for. In this incident Pharaoh is again typical of the destroyer, the prince of darkness, who does not care for his followers but would that all men might be “miserable like unto himself.” 2 Nephi 2:27

ONE MORE THING

Verses 1-3 of chapter 11 are explanatory verses. As he was leaving his audience with Pharaoh, God stopped him and gave him one more message to deliver. So he turns and delivers verses four through eight in the throne room. A more chilling prophecy of doom cannot be imagined. About midnight,¹ Moses says, God himself will visit Egypt, and all of the firstborn of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the maid who works in the kitchen. All will be taken by God, as he sends the angel of death to do his work. Such a terrible catastrophe will cause a cry to go up, “such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.” But no Egyptian will raise a finger against the Israelites in retaliation. Not even a dog would bark, a miracle, considering what things would go on in that night.

Moses prophesies that after the terrible disaster occurs, the king’s servants would bow before Moses and beg him to take his people and leave. “And after that,” he says in a final shot across Pharaoh’s bow, “I will go out.”

THE RICHES OF EGYPT

Part of the revelation given to Moses in verses 1-3 of chapter 11, is an instruction to tell God’s people to “borrow” of their Egyptian neighbors, “jewels of silver and jewels of gold.” Why should such a bold plan succeed? Moses inserts a matter-of-fact explanation in the text—because the “the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt...in the sight of the people.”

We remind the reader once more that the Israelites were not really instructed to “borrow” from their neighbors. That implies a promise to return the borrowed things later. The Hebrew word simply means *ask*. They are to ask their Egyptian neighbors and

associates to give them “jewels” of gold and silver, presumably jewelry made of these things.

Perhaps the Egyptian people felt they were repaying the Israelites for their years of slavery. More likely they saw this as an offering to Israel’s God that would keep Him from sending further plagues upon them. They did anything they could to persuade the Israelites to leave quickly for they feared they would all die if they didn’t leave. (Ex. 12:33)

This “spoiling” of Egypt had been prophesied to Abraham. The record of this prophecy is found in Genesis 15:13-16. God tells Abraham that his posterity will be strangers in a land not theirs, and serve there for four hundred years. “And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.” Taking the riches of Egypt with them served an important purpose, for these things were later used to build the Tabernacle to God. The Lord blesses his people to be able to use the wealth of Egypt (which equals *the idolatrous world* in scripture symbols) for His own purposes.

A NEW BEGINNING: EXODUS 12

In this chapter, Moses explains the great work of deliverance God is about to do in their behalf. He gives specific instructions which enable every Israelite to participate in the experience, thus marking it in their memories with special force forever. God began by starting a new calendar for His people. Instead of the Egyptian calendar they had been using, they would begin a new year with the month Abib (later called Nisan) as the first month of the year for them². This signified the beginning of a new life of freedom.

This chapter contains detailed instructions for a new festival or feast day that they would celebrate each year afterward. There are guidelines for the first hurried Passover as well as for the commemorative Passovers that would be held in later years.

They are to “take to them a lamb” on the tenth day of the month Abib, one per household; and “ye shall take it out from the sheep” and “ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month.” Then on the fourteenth day the whole congregation is to kill their lamb at evening. The head of each household would then take the blood of the slain lamb and sprinkle it (“strike it”) upon the door posts and lintel to mark it as a household of faith, thereby insuring that the angel of death would *passover* that home.

THE PASSOVER FEAST

Each family was to roast the lamb and the whole family was to eat it that same night. They were to eat it with bitter herbs, signifying the bitterness of slavery, and with bread that is unleavened, because there would not be time for their bread to rise in the usual way. They are even told what to wear during this meal; each of them is to eat in the clothes they would normally wear to go outdoors, “girded, [and] your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand.” These rather odd instructions are a combination of directions for the coming night when the Exodus itself will take place, and the “ordinance” or holiday that they are to celebrate in honor of it from that day forward. In recognition that this was the first of what would be thousands of such passover feasts, Moses gives the Israelites the beginnings of a “haggadah³,” or script, to be followed at passover meals. When the children asked why they are eating this special meal in such a certain way, or if they ask, “What mean ye by this service?”; then you must say, “It is the Lord’s passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.” (Exodus 12:27)

THE POWER OF SYMBOLS

Consider the power that is in a symbol. God uses the elements of the Passover celebration to remind the participants of the historical events of Israel's dramatic escape, making a new collective memory of shared stories and symbols that shape the nation of Israel forever after. These images would provide the language they used, and we still use, to get our minds around big, abstract concepts like mercy and redemption. These are the stories and symbols that came to the new world with Lehi's family and became part of the collective unconscious of the Nephites. That is why the prophet Alma could plead with the people to be cleansed "through the blood of the lamb," and they understood. That is why Nephi in exasperation with his brothers' lack of faith reminds them of the parting of the Red Sea. If God had that kind of power then, why not now? he asks.

It is hard to teach abstract concepts without referring to concrete things. That is why God, the master teacher, built his mercy and redemption curriculum on symbols. They took a spotless lamb into their homes for four days and then the father of the family slit its throat and caught its blood in a basin. With a crude paintbrush made of hyssop cuttings he swabbed the blood on his doorposts. Then the lamb was roasted and eaten, and early the next morning, the people left in a dramatic escape from bondage. When Pharaoh chased them down, God demonstrated His power to deliver His people by opening the Red Sea. A yearly holiday built around these stories and symbols, kept the memory and the language and the concepts alive for each generation in turn.

THE MIRACLE OF JEWISH IDENTITY THROUGH THE AGES

The following quote is from "The Bronfman Hagadah": "This book is dedicated to the youth of the Jewish people. We who have come before you stand at the roots of the tree of life, while you rise above us in its blossoming spring. *The story of your ancestors is now in your hands. Tell it proudly.*"⁴ Mormon parents and grandparents can relate to this powerful statement because we also seek to pass our faith stories and communal identity to our children and grandchildren. Our two traditions have much in common.

The Jewish traditions of keeping Passover, as well as the other Jewish festivals, have fulfilled their purpose to successfully keep Jewish identity alive, in spite of all the forces trying to stamp it out. God certainly knew what he was doing when he instituted this particular feast of remembrance.

MULTIPLE LEVELS OF MEANING

A fascinating thing about the symbols of the Passover is their application to Christian salvation theology. In each detail there is a perfect counterpoint with New Testament teachings. Egypt is the World. Pharaoh is Satan. Slavery is bondage to sin. The spotless lamb is Christ. The death of the lamb for the Passover meal represents the Atonement and the power of Christ's blood to deliver his people. Passing through the Red Sea is baptism. The guiding light/cloud is the Holy Spirit. The correspondence is so perfect in every detail that it seems amazing anyone would miss the underlying significance. Once we see it, we can say with the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, "all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him." (2Ne. 11:4)

THE POWER OF THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

What freed the Israelites from Pharaoh's power was the blood of a spotless lamb, *applied to their doorposts*. This demonstrates the two parts of Christian faith. Christ's part is to shed his blood for us. Our part is to *apply* the blood. It wasn't enough to kill the lamb.

Putting the lamb's blood on the door required action on the part of the believer, and that action faced outward, demonstrating one's faith in Israel's god publically. Beyond putting the blood on the door, the household had to actually eat the lamb. This, like the sacrament, is reminiscent of the fact that we must take in, or internalize Christ; he must be "formed in us" as the scripture says. (Galatians 4:10) The goal is not only to have faith in Christ, but to become more like him.

We promise on Sunday to remember "the blood of thy son, which was shed for [us]." (D&C 20:79) Consider D&C 45:3-5, a picture of the courtroom scene at the last judgment with Christ before the Father as our defense attorney: "Listen to him who is [your] advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him— Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life." Christ does not say, "Behold these people," but "behold the blood of thy son." Truly did the apostle Peter remind us "...that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...; *But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*" (1 Peter 1:18-19)

TRUE IN EVERY DETAIL

Some details of the Passover were prophecies that came to have meaning only when they were fulfilled much later. That's true of the instruction not to break any bones of the lamb. (Ex. 12:46) Roughly 1440 years later, Jewish leaders asked the Roman soldiers to break Christ's legs as he hung on the cross to hasten his death, so that his body could be taken down before the Sabbath started. (John 19:31) However it was not done because when the soldiers came to him, he had already died. Thus was fulfilled a prophecy made through this minor detail of the Passover instructions. Even the smallest thing had been known from the beginning and bore testimony to Christ's divinity.

THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Most Christians don't realize that God instituted two commemorative feasts to be held by the Jewish people, not one. Along with Passover, there is a separate but attached feast called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was to be observed for seven days, during which time no risen bread was eaten. In fact, every bit or crumb of leaven in a home was to be ferreted out and burned. (Ex. 12:15) Yeast, or leaven, represents *influence* or teachings. Christ tells his apostles to "beware the leaven of the Pharisees." They don't understand until he explains that he means the "*doctrine* of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." (Matt. 16:6-12) Leaven does not always represent a bad influence or sin. For example, Jesus said the kingdom of heaven was like leaven put in three measures of meal, "til the whole was leavened." (Matt. 13:33) Leavened bread or regular, raised loaves of bread were also used in the worship of the Mosaic Law. See for example Leviticus 23:17. "Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord." Leaven can represent both good and evil influences that have an effect upon a larger whole.

Remember this feast was instituted at the beginning of the Israelites' lives as free people. As slaves in Egypt they were constantly under the influence of an idolatrous culture. God was taking them out of Egypt and making them free. Now they would be Israel, a nation that was meant to be a light to other nations. (Isaiah 49:6) And the first step of this new life and identity was to get rid of the old Egyptian influences.

The seven-day period of unleavened bread presents a perfect symbolic picture of beginning a new life by first breaking with the old one. The Feast of Unleavened Bread coincided with the first seven days they were on the road leaving Egypt. Remember that ancient bread making was similar to sourdough bread making today. Yeast was wild and developing a starter, or colony of yeast, took some time and effort. This colony was fed and kept alive, so part of it could be used as a starter for the next day's bread. *To throw out all old leavening meant starting over again with no holdover from the old life in Egypt.* (Exodus 12:19) During the first seven days of "camping" on the road, the people would necessarily have eaten flat bread⁵. It would take time to develop new colonies of yeast for their everyday baking, since they had thrown all the old away.

If someone joins the church as an adult, they realize they must rid themselves of the old influences of sin in their lives. They should hunt out any old leaven, such as magazines, or music, and even friends that would continue to exert an influence for evil. We should *beware* (the word Jesus used) of the leaven of the world, meaning beware of any teachings or philosophies that have an ungodly influence on us or our families. And like the children of Israel, we should remove these things from our houses!

Another purpose of this feast is stated in Exodus 12:17. It would remind the Israelites that they left Egypt in a hurry, with no time for bread to rise. For the next 7 days they were on the run in a mad dash for their freedom, forced to eat their bread as flat unrisen cakes. Later, when they ate these same cakes at a Passover seder⁶, they would remember that God gave them their freedom.

ISRAEL IS PASSED OVER

Moses gives his double-sided directions—what to do now and what to do in years to come on the holy feast days of Passover and Unleavened Bread---and the scripture says the people "bowed the head and worshipped." (Ex. 12:27) That was important. They would have received no mighty deliverance without their obedience and worship. This put them in a right relationship to almighty God so that He could work in their behalf and deliver them. After the leaders received Moses' instructions, they relayed them to the people, who made all the necessary preparations.

Then God did what He said He would do. At midnight on the appointed day "there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead." (Ex. 12:30) The angel of death passed through the land, taking the first born from every family that did not have the blood of the lamb on the door. Faced with this crushing blow, Pharaoh finally accedes to God's request without adding any conditions of his own. He knows that the gods of Egypt have been thoroughly defeated and he now commands Moses to take everyone and everything and leave. Filled with dread, the Egyptians pile treasure on the Israelites and beg them to go, NOW!

WHY IS GOD SO MEAN?

Women of the modern world may read the Exodus story and be horrified at the death and destruction left behind in Egypt. We can not help but relate to the anonymous Egyptian mother whose oldest child dies in her arms on that awful night. As one young latter-day saint asked, "Why would God be so mean?"

We must remember some basic things about the story of the Exodus. God was showing his judgments against sin and idolatry through the plagues, not against individuals. He stated His purpose in Exodus 12:12. "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord."

No one who died that night went to hell because they lived in Egypt. Every individual is loved by God. Every individual experiences pain and sorrow in this life. Every individual will ultimately be given the chance to accept the very same redemption that we see modeled in the redemption of Israel from Egypt. These judgments in the Old Testament show God's wrath directed against evils that if left unhampered, would, in the end, defeat God's very purposes for the human race. Those purposes could only be fulfilled if God first established a nation built on His principles. "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)

The Egyptian mother and child who suffered during the plagues will have the same opportunity for redemption provided to the Israelites, that is, the blood of the lamb. Mormon theology teaches that the spirit world is the place where those who didn't have an opportunity to accept Christ's atonement in life, will be able to do so through the missionary work seen by President Joseph F. Smith in D&C Section 138. "The Son of God...appointed messengers, ...and commissioned them to... carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead." (D&C 138:30) Or, as the Book of Mormon testifies, "Thy...goodness and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth." (1 Nephi 1:14) Our perspective is lacking when we only see the harshness of God's judgment, and not the merciful purpose behind it.

Without the nation of Israel there would have been no hope for any of mankind. All the Egyptians, and Philistines "wiped out" in the Old Testament will have opportunity to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and will acknowledge that this opportunity could never have come to them if God had not first established His covenant with Israel.

Israel was chosen for three specific purposes:

- To model faith in the One True God before a world sinking ever deeper into idolatry and sexual depravity. (Those are the facts of the cultures God judged.)
- To give God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, to the world.
- To provide a birth lineage for the Redeemer whose mission was to save the whole world.

Israel's special status had to do with their God-assigned roles in the world, and never denoted God's disinterest in others. In fact, when God called Abraham, He said, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

BLOODLINES OR COVENANT

Interestingly, the Exodus account says that a "mixed multitude" (Ex.12:38) went out of Egypt with Israel. Some non-Israelites chose to go, desiring to follow Jehovah rather than the now disgraced gods of Egypt. They were welcome. However they were not to celebrate the feasts of Passover with the children of Israel unless they joined the covenant through circumcision of the males and a commitment to keep God's commandments.

THE FIRSTBORN SON: EXODUS 13

In the ancient world, the role of a firstborn son was special, for it was this son that would take the place of the father and become the head of the family. For this reason he received special privileges and a double portion of inheritance. To the superstitious, it seemed that the blood flowed purest and strongest in the first son. This reflects the commonly felt human desire that there be someone to carry on the family name and enterprise.

Thus the final plague---the deaths of all the firstborn in the land, both of man and beast---was a terrible blow to every family, for it removed the one in whom all their hopes

were centered. After the night of death, Moses is told by God that now all the firstborn belong to Him. In other words, they *all* should have died. He spared only those who obeyed, and were thus under the protection of the blood of the lamb. Now those lives belonged to Him and they were to be *sanctified*, or set apart for His service.

KEEPING HIS WORD BEFORE OUR EYES

The unfolding of the Exodus story imprinted on the people the idea that certain ones among them—the firstborn—were to be given over to God entirely. To be let out of this obligation, one had to redeem a firstborn son by offering a sacrifice. Even firstborn animals were to be redeemed, that is, bought back, by the sacrifice of a less valuable animal.

Exodus 13:16 tells them to keep these principles “for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes.” Some things were so important to remember that the Israelites kept them literally before their eyes, by writing God’s words on small parchment scrolls and putting them inside tiny leather boxes worn on strips of leather around the forehead and upper left arm. These are known as phylacteries or tephillin in Hebrew. Exodus 13:1-10 is one of four Torah passages specifically designated to be so worn, and orthodox Jews to this day follow this custom during prayers.

FOLLOWING THE LIGHT

As they left Egypt God purposely took them by back roads. The “way of the land of the Philistines” ran along the Mediterranean and would have been the quickest route to the promised land. But it would have been full of battle hardened Philistines and Israel was not ready for war. God led them south, by the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. It was here in the furnace of the Sinai wilderness that He would temper and train and form His people’s character.

There were no highway signs in this desert. But Israel didn’t need any. God Himself was their guide and compass. Exodus 13:21 says He “went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.” What an incredible gift of security and guidance! They were, remember, a kind of baby, a newborn nation. God gives His precious gifts according to our need and level of growth. When someone is very new in their faith, God is very present in their lives for they have no experience yet to lean upon. The pillar of God’s glorious presence would teach Israel to discern when they were in His will or not.

¹ Of which particular day, we cannot be sure, even though it seems at first reading to have happened the same day. If that is true, then Moses had already given the people instructions about what to do to prepare the Passover sacrifice and meal. If Moses receives the instructions on the Passover *after* this interview with Pharaoh, then the king is left to wonder if and when the midnight stroke will fall. This night? The following night? The Passover lamb was to be selected on the 10th day of the month Abib, then live with the family until the 14th day, and then be killed, roasted and eaten by the family. If Moses had left Pharaoh's presence and gone to the elders of Israel straightway with all the necessary instructions, then it was at least four days *after* Moses delivered his last prophecy to Pharaoh that, at midnight, the angel of death came for the Egyptian firstborn.

² The name used in the Torah for this new "first month" of the Jewish year was Abib (as in Exodus 13:4). This word referred to the ripeness of the barley crop. The barley is said to be *abib* if it has reached readiness to harvest. After the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity, they adopted Babylonian names for the months, and Abib became Nisan (as in Esther 3:7).

³ The Haggadah is a small book used by the leader and participants to conduct the rituals of the Passover meal. The Haggadah also recounts the story of the Exodus. Many years ago, a council of rabbis put together a guide to meet the requirements of Exodus 13:8, which states: "And you shall instruct your son on that day..." The Haggadah teaches the younger generations about Passover. Haggadah literally means "telling" in Hebrew. In other words, it is the "telling" of the Passover story.

⁴ *The Bronfman Hagadah*, Edgar M. Bronfman, illustrated by Jan Aronson, 2013, Rizolli Publications. We cannot really recommend this hagadah because it holds the following concept: "This version replaces the idea of a personal, supernatural, and anthropomorphic "God" with one that better complements contemporary sensibilities. In this hagadah, "God" is understood as "energy"—an energy that is both transcendent (beyond us) and immanent (within us)." We, the authors of this study, do not think God needed updating!

⁵ Here is a link to a recipe for such unleavened bread. This might be a fun FHE project.
<http://video.about.com/indianfood/How-to-Make-Chapati.htm#vdTrn>

⁶ The *Seder* is the name for the Jewish ceremonial dinner held on the first night, sometimes first and second nights, of Passover.