

Sermons
Old Testament: The Pentateuch (Part 2)
Selected Scriptures
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Well, as part of our Anchored series, we are taking an overview of the Scriptures. In fact, tonight, something's going to happen that you rarely see in this church. I am not going to cover one verse, two verses, four verses, but 50 chapters. So, buckle up! Here we go!

Last time together, we did begin an aerial tour of the Old Testament. Just to remind you, we are intentionally flying over its peaks and its valleys at 30,000 feet. We're not focusing on the details. We're trying, instead, to get our arms around the overarching purpose and message, the history as it unfolds, of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Now, as we discovered last time, the theme of the Bible and really the message of the Old Testament, is that God is redeeming a people by His Son, for His Son, to His own glory. Every one of those words is vitally important. God is redeeming a people by His Son, for His Son, to His own glory. That's the message of the Bible as a whole. The Old Testament basically says, "He's coming. He's coming", and it projects the need for His coming. And then in the gospels - He came and the record of what He accomplished while He was here. The epistles - this is why He came, and this is what He's doing now, but I would include Acts in that as well. And Revelation - He's coming again. This is the theme of the Bible. This is the Bible encapsulated in one simple expression. So, the focus, then, of God's eternal plan, centered in Christ, is the redemption from fallen humanity of a people for Himself, specifically, for His Son. We are an expression of the love of the Father to the Son. You are part of the Father's love gift to His Son.

Now, just to remind you of how the Old Testament unfolds, it unfolds in nine movements. There is, first of all, the period of universal dealings in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, followed by the patriarchal period, the rest of Genesis from Genesis 12 through chapter 50. Then you have slavery in Egypt, a period of almost 360 years described in one chapter - Exodus 1. Then you have the exodus and the wilderness wanderings from Exodus 2 all the way through the end of Deuteronomy. And the fifth division or the fifth movement in Old Testament history, is the

conquest and division of Canaan, a period of about 60 years of Israel's history during the time of Joshua. The sixth movement in Old Testament history is the period of the Judges, about 300 years that are the darkest in Old Testament history. This is the low point in the history of the nation, when there was no central authority, no king in Israel. Instead, every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Every time I think of that, I want to write the anarchists in our country a letter and say, "Read Judges. That's what you would have." The monarchy is what follows, the seventh movement in Old Testament history, followed by the Babylonian exile, and then the return from exile under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. So, that is the Old Testament history in a nutshell. Those are the various movements that we're looking at together.

Now, when we look at the Pentateuch, that is the first five books of the Old Testament, the five books of Moses, we're looking, first of all, at that first movement. Genesis 1 to 11 is general, universal dealings. This is primeval history from creation, whenever creation was, if the genealogical records of Genesis 5 and chapter 10 are without gap, then that means that we're looking at about 4000 BC. If there are gaps, as most of the genealogies have, somewhere between 4 and 10,000 years, probably, before Christ. We can't be positive of that.

Four events mark this period of universal dealings. Creation in chapters 1 and 2, the fall and dissent and its results in chapters 3-5. We saw this last time. The flood in chapters 6-9, and then the nations in 10 and 11 - includes the judgment at Babel, the spreading of Noah's descendants over the surface of the earth. And, as a result, the earth is repopulated after the flood.

Now, this period of universal dealings ends with our meeting a man named Abraham, which introduces us to the second movement in Old Testament history, the patriarchal period. It begins in Genesis 12 - at end of chapter 11. That's why I've included it here; he's mentioned. But really chapter 12 through chapter 50. This period consists of four generations of one small clan. And each of those four generations is governed by the ruling patriarch, the oldest member of the clan at that time. And the patriarchal period really consists of the stories of four people. As the first 11 chapters of Genesis were marked by four events, the rest of Genesis is marked by the stories of four people. You have Abraham in chapters 12 through 24, Isaac in chapters 25 and 26, Jacob in chapter 27 through 36, and Joseph in chapter 37 through 50. Those four people.

Genesis 1 through 11 dealt with God's dealings with the human race as a unit. And if you want to see the result, the moral conclusion about man, go to chapter 6 of Genesis. Here is what we learn in the period of God's universal dealings with mankind. Chapter 6:5: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That is what we learn in the period of universal dealings.

And that is why things change beginning in chapter 12. In Genesis 12 through chapter 50, God takes a gracious step to provide men, individually and corporately, with a powerful testimony of His saving character and His saving purposes. God is going to raise up one family and through that one family He will, in a unique way, put Himself on display. And it is true, this one man's descendants, that the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 will come. So, Abraham, then, and his descendants after him become God's great object lesson, His witness nation to the world. That was the purpose that Israel served. They were, remember in Exodus 19, to be a kingdom of priests. They were to be the representatives of God to the rest of humanity.

Now, just to show you how important the patriarchal period is to God, chapters 1 through 11 of Genesis cover a period of somewhere between 2000 and 8000 years - in that neighborhood. Chapters 12 through 50 cover 360 years. God chooses one man, one family to whom He will bear a special relationship, and that man is Abraham.

Now, when you think about Abraham, understand this: we know nothing about Abraham's first 75 years of life on this planet. And we know very little about his final 75 years on this planet. The greatest detail we have about Abraham's life is from the 25 or 26 years from his 75th to his 100th birthday, from his conversion in Ur until Isaac, the son of the promise, was born. So, we pick up his story when he's 75 years old, living in Ur of the Chaldees.

Look at Genesis 12, Genesis 12:1: "Now the LORD [Yahweh] said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you [watch how often God initiates in this paragraph]; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless

those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. [And here's the gospel in a nutshell] And in you [or through you, through your seed] all the families of the earth will be blessed." "There will come spiritual blessing through your descendants, and not through your descendants as a whole, but through, as we ultimately discover, one descendant - the seed that was promised.

Now, in this Abrahamic covenant, we find Christ. It's not surprising. I won't take you to Galatians 3 because we've just been doing this in Romans 4, but I just want to remind you of what we've discovered in our morning study of Romans 4. Galatians 3 makes it clear that the Abrahamic covenant we just read in Genesis 12, that's reiterated several times through Genesis, the Abrahamic covenant included the gospel. It included the gospel message. It included the promise of Christ. How? In that line, "in you all the families [nations] of the earth will be blessed".

Okay, I said I wasn't going to have you turn there, but I got to show you. Turn to Galatians 3. I just want you to see it again. Galatians 3:8. This is absolutely key. The Scripture - and it's interesting how the writers of Scripture personify the Scripture. When it says, "The Scripture, foreseeing [preached the gospel]..." We could say God foresaw that He would justify the Gentiles and God preached the gospel beforehand. But he says it here personified: "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham..."

You say, "How did Abraham hear the gospel?" Here it is: "All the nations will be blessed in you." You say, "How's that the gospel?" Man is a sinner. He deserves God's wrath. God cannot spiritually bless those who are His enemies, who are rebels against Him. And so, for God to pronounce blessing means that man has become reconciled to Him. This is a promise of reconciliation with God. This is a promise that there will be those who will come to know God as Abraham did. And it will happen through, notice verse 16, his "seed" (singular), that is, the Messiah. So, the Abrahamic covenant included the gospel message, the promise of Christ.

The law, he goes on to develop there in chapter 3, was just a temporary provision until the seed, the Messiah, had come. And its purpose, according to verses 23 and 24 of Galatians 3, was to serve as a tutor to lead us to Christ. To belong to Christ is to inherit the spiritual promise of the Abrahamic covenant, the reconciliation with God, the spiritual blessing God promised. As you sit here tonight as a believer, understand this: you are spiritually blessed through the promise God made to Abraham 2000 years before Christ.

Now, what about Abraham's faith in response to all of this? Well, understand that, as we noted again in our study of Romans 4 (I'm not going to go through this in detail), God chose Abraham and called him while he was still an idolater living in Ur of the Chaldees. God entered into a covenant with him and called him friend. Abraham, in turn, believed. He believed that God justifies the ungodly. That's Paul's point in Romans 4:5. And the gospel, as we just noted, was preached to him the same in substance that is preached to us, that through his seed, the Messiah, came spiritual blessing, to him and to people in all the families of the earth. Abraham was justified before God solely by his faith in the God who justifies the ungodly through his seed (singular), that is, Christ. So, that's what Abraham believed.

Now, where did Abraham come from? Well, he started in Ur of the Chaldees. If you remember your world history, Ur was actually located in Sumer, in Mesopotamia. Of course, Mesopotamia just means "the land between the rivers". And Sumer is the cradle of civilization. It consisted of 12 city states of which Ur was the hub. It was this culture from which Abraham came that gave the world cuneiform, the earliest known form of writing. It was a highly cultured, highly educated, cosmopolitan kind of culture, advanced in business, and in metalworking, and in all kinds of things. In fact, archaeologists have discovered some 100,000 business documents from this location, dating back to the periods just before, or just after rather, that of Abraham.

So, why leave Ur then? Why do you pick up and move from what is the center, what is the hub of the world at that point? Well, Deuteronomy tells us it was because of all the false gods that were there. God plucked him out of his idolatry, just like he plucked Ruth out of her idolatry in Moab. God reaches down to Ur and saves Abraham and brings them to Himself and then pulls him out of the influence of all those false gods.

But why Canaan? Why did God promise Abraham that little piece of land we call, in modern day terms, Israel? Well, you need to understand where it's located. It sits at the crossroads of three great continents. In the ancient world, you had Africa (northern Africa), you had Asia, and you had Europe. And little Israel sits between them. God placed Israel at the most strategic spot, on the most important international highway in the ancient world. In fact, Israel constituted a land bridge. Think of it that way. It was a land bridge between those three continents. If you wanted to go from one of those continents to another, you didn't want to pass through the Mediterranean - sea travel was treacherous. You can read about that at the end of the book of Acts. On the other side, you had the Sahara Desert. Nobody was going to travel there. And so, if you wanted to pass from one of those great ancient continents to another, there was only one reasonable path. It was through that tiny little land bridge of the land of Canaan.

Why is that important? Because rather than sending Israel to the nations, God plants His people at the very center hub of the ancient world and brings the nations to them and through them. At the same time, God arranged the land of Israel to protect His people. If you look at the tiny land of Israel, it is divided into five distinct geographical divisions. From west to east, there are the coastal plains near the Mediterranean, there's this fellah, there's this central hill country, the Jordan Rift, and the Judean wilderness. Now, even though there was much military and commercial traffic constantly marching up and down through this tiny little land bridge, Israel was remarkably secluded because most of the people lived in the central hills, in the central hill country - the blue circle there on the map. And so, most of the traffic didn't pass through the central hill country. Most of the traffic passing through Israel, passed on the coastal plain, on the coastal highway, and down through the Jordan Rift. And so, here are God's people planted at the center point of the ancient world and yet, at the same time, protected. God's wisdom is truly amazing.

So, this is where Abraham traveled. He traveled to Canaan, and he waited there for the promised son.

Now, eventually the covenant was confirmed, you remember, in Isaac, after Abraham and Sarah tried to arrange things on their own and end up with Ishmael. Isaac has then twins - Esau and Jacob. God chose Jacob and Jacob struggles with Esau, gains the birthright, but he was already the one God had chosen. But because of what happened between him and Esau, Jacob goes wandering. Jacob left Hebron, where his home was, and he went up to the north, to Haran, to flee from Esau and to get a wife. It was there that he had the vision of the stairway to heaven. And years later, he returned along the same route to come back home. Eventually, then, he is renamed Israel, which means "he strives with God". Remember, it was during this time of Jacob's life that he wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, with God Himself. "He strives with God" (Israel) - that's what the name means.

And as a response, God in His goodness gave Jacob twelve sons. These are the 12 sons to Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and Rachel. These are the sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, and Benjamin. Some of those have become familiar names. We name our children after them, others of them not quite so popular. But those were the names of his sons.

Now, notice the eleventh son, Joseph. Joseph, as you remember, was hated by his brothers. He ends up being sold to Egypt. Later, because of a drought, the family of Jacob (or Israel) travels to Egypt under Jacob and, of course, Joseph, who is now the Prime Minister of Egypt. They're well received by the Egyptians, and they end up staying in Egypt for 430 years.

But here's the remarkable thing. Many of those years were difficult years, hard years. Why did God do that? I want you to turn to what I think is one of the most significant passages in the Old Testament. Turn to Genesis 15. God told Abraham, a couple hundred years before it happened, that his descendants would go to Egypt and be there for, in round numbers, 400 years. And I want you to notice the reason God gave. Verse 13: "God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here

[back to Canaan]...” So, they’re going to be in slavery for 400 years and then they’re going to come back to Canaan. Why? Why wait? Here’s the reason (verse 16): “[because] for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete [or is not yet full].”

This is an amazing expression of God’s grace to the Amorites, to the Canaanites. Eventually, they will be destroyed - wiped out. We read about it under the conquest of Joshua - Moses and Joshua. But not yet. You see, their worship - the iniquity of the Amorite. What’s that a description of? The Amorites were polytheists. They worshipped many gods. Their worship, if you read Deuteronomy 18:9-12, you’ll discover that they were into child sacrifice. They were into religious prostitution. Those were the high places, you remember, you read about in the Old Testament. The high places were elevated places where they built altars so that the people could engage in open sexual orgies on a high platform so the gods could watch. That’s the high places. This is the kind of people that these were. Their worship also included witchcraft, divination. Eventually, Joshua’s invasion would be an act of God’s justice. It would be like God uses Israel like a scalpel to cut these people out from the land that they had so polluted by their sin. But not yet. As Derek Kidner writes, “Until it was right to invade, God’s people must wait, even if it costs them four centuries of hardship.” Why? Because the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full. You see God’s incredible patience. He just waits.

Now, as Genesis closes, Jacob and his son, Joseph, have both died. But their clan remains in Egypt, and it is multiplying. There’s a lesson here for modern times. They went into Egypt, 70 people in Jacob’s clan. 400 years later, two million of them would leave the land of Egypt.

Now, before we leave Genesis, if the Old Testament is about the coming Redeemer and the story of redemption, what does Genesis reveal about the coming Messiah? How do these stories weave together with the story of redemption that is the story of the Bible? Well, we learn much about the coming Messiah. We learn this about Him in Genesis. He would come from a woman, but He would be a unique human being. Genesis 3:15 says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

We don't have time to delve into that text but notice there are two groups of people. There are those who are Satan's people and there are those who are God's people. But then there's this "He" who shows up, a human person, who will crush Satan's head and, in the process, have His heel deeply bruised. This is a promise that a human child would be the Redeemer who would come, who would permanently deal with sin. That was the promise as early as the Garden of Eden.

We also learned that He would come from one man and one nation - Abraham. Genesis 12:3 tells us that the seed, the descendants of one man, would come from him. Let me say that differently. The seed that's promised in Genesis 3:15 would come from this one man and the nation that comes from his loins.

We learn, thirdly, in Genesis that the Redeemer would come from Isaac, not Ishmael, that He would come from Jacob, not Esau, and that He would come from one of Jacob's sons, one tribe in Israel. Genesis 49:10. Jacob, on his deathbed, gives this blessing: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah [the scepter meaning the emblem of rule], nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes [Shiloh can also be translated as 'until he comes whose right it is'], and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." This is a promise that the seed will be a ruler, a ruling king who will come from one of Jacob's sons, Judah. Later, of course, we learn that He will come from one family in Judah, and that is the family of David. 2 Samuel 7:16, God says to David, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." So, through one family in Judah. So, understand, then, the Redeemer would come from one family in the tribe of Judah, but He would be a descendant of Abraham.

Now, that brings us to Exodus. Here's an outline of the book: the exodus; the deliverance from Egypt in chapters 1 to 18; the law; the covenant made at Sinai chapters 19 to 34; the Tabernacle constructed and inhabited in chapter 35-40.

Now, the central theme of the book of Exodus is this: God's redeeming a people for Himself and entering into a covenant relationship with them. Yahweh would specifically use this nation, that has now grown to 2 million people, that He brings out of Egypt. He would use this nation to put

Himself on display, to serve as a channel of divine revelation. It's through the descendants of this nation that we get the Scriptures and to be the people through whom the Savior would come.

You can see why they factor so prominently in God's plan. It's not that Israel was a perfect people or is a perfect people; they clearly are not. But this was God's plan, through them, to put Himself on display, to bring divine revelation, and to bring the Savior through the descendants of Abraham and this people.

So, what's the spiritual message of Exodus? First of all, it's that Yahweh is a redeeming God. Passover becomes the divinely intended type or picture of God's ability to redeem sinful men from the bondage of their sins and sin's penalty. And the second message of this book is that Yahweh keeps His covenant. He always keeps His word. He promises them the land back in chapter 15. 400 years later, He brings them to the land.

Now, the third great act in Old Testament history, after the patriarchal age, the patriarchal period, is bondage in Egypt. There's very little revealed about these 400 years, but the general conditions are revealed in Exodus 1. You can read about them there. Verse 5 of Exodus 1 says, "All the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt. Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, 'Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land.'" So, they make them slaves. Verse 12: "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them."

Now, while the Bible doesn't tell us much more about this period, there are other things that we can learn. From 1876 BC, when Jacob took his family into Egypt, until 1730, the Hebrews lived prosperous lives. They lived in the blessing of Joseph in the time of Joseph. But in 1730, we know from secular history, at around that time, a new dynasty began in Egypt, the Hyksos dynasty. And with it a life, as we have just read, of unbearable affliction and suffering for the people under a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph.

This is a modern recreation of how bricks were made in the ancient world. Immediately, you can get an idea. Mud and straw blended together, put in forms, and hardened under the sun. It was hard labor to build the ancient cities of Egypt. But this is what they did. This was the bondage in Egypt.

Now, that brings us to the fourth movement in Old Testament history. It begins in Exodus 2 and runs all the way through the end of Deuteronomy. It is deliverance under Moses. Now, to fully understand what goes on in this time period, to understand Moses, you have to understand something about the dynasty into which he was adopted and the Egyptian woman who adopted him. Her name was likely Hatshepsut. You can find her name on this flow of the 18th dynasty of Egypt. Hatshepsut - not a name that rolls off the tongue. Not likely to be a name that you name a daughter. But she lived and ruled during the 18th dynasty of Egypt. Her only child was a daughter who died before she reached 10 years of age. So, Hatshepsut adopted Moses. You can see again from the family tree I have on the screen that she was the daughter of Thutmose I. She married her half-brother, Thutmose II, and thus ascended to the throne as queen over Egypt. When her half-brother died, her 10-year-old stepson, Thutmose III, temporarily took the throne for a few months in the year 150. Then, Hatshepsut usurped the throne. She proclaimed herself Supreme Ruler over Egypt for 22 years. Only two prior queens in Egypt's history had risen to Supreme Ruler, but only Hatshepsut posed and dressed like a man. She ruled with cruelty and oppression. After 22 years, she was succeeded by her stepson at her death - Thutmose III. He was now in his early 30s. Remember, he had temporarily taken the throne before she usurped it. And he hated her, understandably, and tried to obliterate her memory from Egypt.

Now, this is the time period and the circumstance into which Moses was born. We have almost no information about Moses from the year of five years old to his 40-year-old birthday. But let's see what we do have. Go with me to Acts, Acts 7. You know the story, of course, of his mom, and the basket of bullrushes, and Hatshepsut discovering him, and his mom taking care of him and nursing him. But what happens from there? What happens from the age of about 5 to the age of 40? Well, Steven tells us in Acts 7 in his sermon. Verse 21: "And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds." So, we learn that this woman, Hatshepsut most likely, adopted her, adopted him rather, as her own son. Remember, her own daughter, her only child, had died before she reached the age of 11. He was raised in the palace, at that period in Egypt's history, at Thebes. He received the best education possible in the world at that time. He became a powerful man, we're told, in both words and deeds.

But in spite of all those opportunities, notice in verses 23 to 25, we learn that Moses made a choice to associate with his people: "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand." Understand that Moses was clinging to the promise of Genesis 15, that God would take them out of Egypt and give them the Promised Land. And he understood in some sense, according to verse 25, that he was the one that God would use, that he was the deliverer. Perhaps his mom had educated him in the stories and the revelation that been passed down orally at this point because he's the one who at first writes the Scripture.

Now, turn to Hebrews and we learn just a little more. Hebrews 11:24: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up [near the age of forty], refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter [he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter], choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin..."

You know, we read a passage like that and just sort of rolls off the tongue. It's like, "Yeah, okay." Do you understand what that says? He chose to identify himself with his people, the enslaved Hebrews, forfeiting all the advantages that he had spent 40 years gaining. I can promise you that Hatshepsut warned him of the result of his choice, but he would not be deterred. You understand what Moses really gave up? Obviously and definitely, he gave up an easy life of wealth and luxury and power in any government position he chose. He was the son of the most powerful woman in Egyptian history. And possibly, he gave up the opportunity to become the next Pharaoh of Egypt.

Why? Why would he make this choice? Look at verse 26: "considering the reproach of Christ [Christos, of the Messiah. He considered the reproach that comes with the Messiah] greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward." Moses made a decision to give all of that life of power and luxury up because of his personal commitment to Israel's coming Messiah, the seed that had been promised. It fits well with what we're talking about faith this morning, doesn't it? By faith, Moses saw. He understood. He followed the Messiah instead of the power and prestige, wealth, that could have been his.

So, he fled Egypt, as you know. He ended up spending the next 40 years of his life as a shepherd in Midian. Not exactly a wonderful place to be. And of course, at the end of that 40 years of shepherding, is the burning bush incident. It happens at Mount Sinai. This is what it looks like. Not exactly a wonderful place to holiday, or to spend 40 years of your life.

But God shows up. The Angel of the Lord shows up in the burning bush. Remember now, as we've already discovered, this is a pre-incarnate appearance of the second member of the Trinity, and He calls Moses to go. "*I want you to go to Egypt, and I want you to deliver My people.*" You remember Moses' objections? "*Wait a minute, God! I don't have any authority. Who am I?*" To which Yahweh responds, "*You have my presence. I will be with you.*" He says, "*Wait, wait, wait. Okay, but I don't have a message. What shall I say?*" Yahweh responds, "*Let Me give you, My name. Tell them I AM*" - the One who self-sufficiently exists on His own, who needs nothing, depends on nothing and no one, who is the I AM, the self-existent One. "*I don't have any credibility. They won't believe me.*" You remember God's response? "*You have My*

power. What's that in your hand?" And He empowers him to work miracles to confirm his credibility as God's messenger. And then his last excuse is, *"Well, I'm just not eloquent. I am slow of speech and I'm slow of tongue."* Yahweh's provision? *"I will be with your mouth."* And when Moses wouldn't get it, He says, *"Okay, Aaron will go, and he'll be your spokesman."*

So, God calls Moses to be the deliverer. He goes back from Midian, back up to Egypt, and that introduces us to one of my favorite portions of the Old Testament - the ten plagues. It is Yahweh versus the gods of Egypt. That's really the heart of the story.

Now, the Pharaoh that Moses and Aaron encountered in this time period, in Exodus 5:1 through Exodus 14:31, is Amenhotep II. Again, you can see him on the family tree that I've displayed. He was the son of Thutmose III, Moses' nemesis. He was in his fourth year of reigning when Moses returns, and he was only 22 years old. He reigned from Memphis not Thebes (that's not Memphis, TN). That's Memphis in Egypt, not Thebes, and Memphis is close to Goshen, where God's people primarily were located.

Now, the plagues as they unfold, cover a period of about six months. When you put together the various events that are described there, likely they ran from late September, early October, through the latter part of March. So, over six months, these ten plagues unfold on the nation of Egypt.

Now, there are various views of these plagues. Some say, "Well, they're just pure myth." Others say, "Well, no, they're exaggerated accounts of unusual, natural phenomena." Basically, Moses just seized on these sort of natural phenomenon that occurred in an exaggerated way during that period of time. And, of course, the third view and the biblical view is that they are unique, historical outpourings of the wrath of a sovereign God who wished to show, not only Egypt, but His own people and the world that He is the Lord of heaven and earth. In other words, they were miracles performed by God.

What was the purpose of the plagues? Well, first of all, to provide a knowledge of the true God to Israel. Go back to Exodus 10. Exodus 10 and look at verses 1 and 2: "Then the Lord said to

Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you [that is, the Israelites] may know that I am the Lord [Yahweh].’“

God chose to do this to embrace His people with a true understanding of Himself. The same thing for Pharaoh. On several occasions, God makes an almost identical statement about what He’s doing in the life of Pharaoh. Exodus 7:17: “‘Thus says the LORD [Yahweh], ‘By this you shall know [Pharaoh] that I am the LORD [Yahweh]...” God wanted to show that He was, in fact, God - not only to His own people, but to Pharaoh as well as to all of Egypt. Look at chapter 7:5: “The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”“ And then all the world in chapter 9:16: “But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.” You see what God is doing here? God isn’t capricious. God isn’t having fun at the Egyptians’ expense. God is putting Himself as the true God on display. Think of the plagues as God’s evangelistic lesson to the peoples of the planet.

You say, “How does He do that?” Well, He does it by, secondly, destroying the credibility of Egypt’s false gods. Specifically, the plagues seemed to be directed at the gods of Egypt. Look at Exodus 12:12: “For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment - I am the Lord [Yahweh].” This is God’s way to kick the crutches out from under those who rely on false gods. He intends to show them that their gods are not gods at all. Each of the plagues is specifically designed to show Yahweh’s superiority over all of Egypt’s gods. He essentially is saying to the ten plagues, “*I am the only true God. Everything you worship as god is under My control.*”

I wish I had time to develop this but let me just show you, in outline form, what it looks like. The first plague was the Nile turned to blood. And Egyptian hymn reads, “Hail to thee, oh Nile, that issues from the earth and comes to keep Egypt alive.” Osiris was one of Egypt’s greatest gods and supposedly the Nile was his bloodstream. They saw the Nile as the giver of everything

good. And God says, *“I am Yahweh, and I alone am the source of every good gift and I’ll strike the Nile to teach you that lesson.”*

Secondly, there are frogs in chapter 8:1-15. This is a direct attack on Heqet, goddess of birth, a goddess with a frog head in Egyptian lore. The previous plague didn’t dramatically affect Pharaoh; this one does. Frogs are everywhere, even in Pharaoh’s palace, according to chapter 8:3-4. Frogs were normally a sign of fruitfulness. They came after the annual flooding of the Nile with its fertilization and irrigation of the land but, here, it’s in excess and it’s a lesson. Notice chapter 8:10. Here is the lesson: “... there is no one like the Lord [Yahweh] our God.”

The third plague is gnats. This was an attack on Set, god of the desert. It describes a tiny, almost invisible, gnat with an irritating and painful sting. Those of you grew up in the south, it’s maybe something like the “no-see-ums” but worse. And what’s interesting about this plague is it’s an act of creation. The dust becomes these irritating, painful gnats. And so the Egyptians, in chapter 8:18, they can’t reproduce this. And in verse 19 of chapter 8, notice, they have to admit, “This is the finger of God” because He alone can create. From the dust He made these.

The fourth plague: it’s called the plague of flies in chapter 8:20-32. Ra or Re, the sun god; Uatchit, usually represented by the fly... But the Hebrew says “swarms”; doesn’t say “swarms of insects”. It’s says “swarms”. The Septuagint, whose translators lived in Egypt, refers to these flies as dog flies or bloodsucking gadflies. This is not pleasant.

What is the lesson? I love this. Look at chapter 8:22. Here’s the lesson: “But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the Lord [Yahweh], am in the midst of the land. I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign will occur.” Notice “I, the Lord, am in the midst of the land.” In other words, you know what God is saying? *“Pharaoh, I just want you to know Egypt is Mine. Egypt is Mine. It’s My land and the people of Egypt belong to Me and yet I have a unique relationship with (notice) My people. I’ve identified a specific people for Myself.”* And He says in verse 22, “I will set apart the land of Goshen...”

Literally, the Hebrew text says, “I will set a ransom. I will redeem and protect My people from My wrath.” That’s what He’s saying.

The fifth plague is the death of livestock. Hathor, the goddess with a cow head; Apis, the bull God, the symbol of fertility. The domesticated animals are struck with a highly infectious, deadly disease. All the domesticated livestock left in the open fields die according to chapter 9:3. This plague was especially hard on Pharaoh because he had much cattle - much of his wealth was in livestock.

What are the lessons about God from the death of the livestock? Well, God sustains, protects, and destroys the animals that He made according to His will. He can permit or thwart man’s attempts to subdue the earth. Remember, these are domesticated animals.

The sixth plague is the plague of boils. Sekhmet, goddess of power over disease; and Sunu, the pestilence god; Isis, the goddess of healing. Moses takes soot, probably from the very kilns where Pharaoh had forced the Israelites to make bricks, he throws it in the air and it becomes, on the people, boils. This word is used, this Hebrew word is used 13 times in the Old Testament. They were sores accompanied by open, running blisters. The point is, “*You think you have gods that are gods of disease and gods of healing? I alone have the power over disease and healing.*”

Hail - Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, the god of crops and fertility; Set, the god of storms. God sends the worst storm Egypt had ever seen. Several times, twice at least, it’s mentioned that this was the worst since it had ever been a nation. Why does He do this? Look at chapter 9:14: “... [I want you to] know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. [I am utterly unique. I’m not in any way to be compared to Egypt’s gods. I am the God of all the earth. And yet (notice verse 15) I am merciful. I haven’t struck you as I could have struck you and cut you off, and I am patient.]” Notice, God, in His mercy and grace.

Look at verse 29 of chapter 9: “Moses said to him, ‘As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease and there will be hail no longer, that you may know [watch this] that the earth is the Lord’s [Yahweh’s].’” The earth is Yahweh’s. So many of

their gods were tied to crops and earth and storms and seeds, and all these things were created and maintained by Yahweh. Locusts, again, the gods of crops and fertility, the god of the sky - God sends locusts. I don't think we can appreciate how devastating this was. Ancient civilizations were primarily agricultural. Their wealth was in fruit and grain and vegetable produce. Notice verse 15 of chapter 10: "... Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt." Think: stock market crash, followed by poverty and starvation, crime, growing unrest. What's the lesson God brings? That in His goodness, He provides prosperity, and He can take it away in a single day.

The ninth plague is the plague of darkness. Re or Ra, the sun god, was one of Egypt's greatest gods, and this plague strikes at the very heart of Egyptian worship. During this time, it was so dark, it was a darkness that could be felt. They couldn't see anything or each other. They couldn't see the hand in front of their face. They couldn't go worship and they certainly weren't going to worship the sun god. There was none. God's making a point.

And then the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn. Min, the god of reproduction; Isis, the goddess who protected children. Of course, Pharaoh's firstborn son was considered a god as well. God against the gods of Egypt. And it was an evangelistic purpose. By the way, the Philistines remembered what God did to the Egyptians 400 years later. And here we are on the other side of the globe, 3500 years later, remembering what God did.

Now, I want to end with one passage. Go with me to Exodus 9. Here it is in a nutshell. God says, "For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. [I love this]. For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth." In other words, God is saying, "*Look, this isn't punitive. I'm not trying to destroy you. If I wanted to destroy you, I could. That's not My purpose.*" "But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power [in other words, God is after Pharaoh and the Egyptians' hearts and] in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth."

What God did in Egypt was evangelistic. You say, how was it evangelistic? Because it points to God as the Redeemer, the only Redeemer. The lesson we learn from Egypt is that God can do spiritually, in the lives of enslaved people, what He did physically when He brought His people out. That's why Christ becomes our Passover Lamb. He is the Redeemer. That's what we see in the plagues of Egypt. God attacks all the false gods, declares Himself to be the true God. The Redeemer - "Turn to [look to] Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth", says the Lord. That's what God was doing. That's what He's still doing. He is the Redeemer.

Let me ask you, "Is that how you think of God? Do you think of God as a savior, as a rescuer, as a redeemer? The greatest event in the Old Testament God sets up, He sets the stage to make that point. All of the other gods are not gods. *"I am the only God, and I am, by nature, a Savior, a Redeemer. Look to Me."* If you're looking to Him in Christ, that's exactly what He wanted to do when He went down to Egypt.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for our time together tonight. Lord, I pray that You would use these magnificent truths, that You would set Yourself on display as a Redeemer in our lives. Father, there are people here who are in various kinds of slavery - slavery to sin, slavery to fear. Lord, I pray that they would look to You, that they would learn the lesson You intended to teach through the redemption of Your people from Egypt, that You are by nature a Savior, first and foremost, One who rescues us from the spiritual guilt and penalty of our sins before You. But, Father, also One who rescues from the slavery of sin. You set us free. You lose us from our sins through the death of Your Son. Father, remind those here who find themselves too entangled with sin that You are the Redeemer.

Father, for those who find themselves in the midst of temporal circumstances that are hard and difficult, under trial and trouble, pressure - Lord, may they look to You as the Redeemer. We worship You, oh God, as the Savior, the Redeemer, the God of all the earth. It's in the name of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that we pray. Amen!