



The Seventh Plague of Egypt, John Martin, 1823

About the artist and painting: The English Romantic painter John Martin was no stranger to death and despair. Out of the 13 children born to his mother and father, John was one of only 6 that survived childhood. He grew up in poverty, the son of a farm laborer. In 1813, John lost his grandmother, mother, father, and youngest son all in the same year. Despite his popular appeal to English society, he was never really celebrated much less even accepted by the art community. Yet he was somewhat of a revolutionary by choosing to paint very fantastic, biblical scenes and landscapes. One can't help but think John looked to the extraordinary aspects of the bible to deal with the harsh realities of life in a broken world.

His 1823 work, *The Seventh Plague of Egypt*, helps to capture the deliverance theme so prevalent in the Book of Exodus. In the painting you have these mighty structures of Pharaoh's palace, city, and pyramids all displayed in their grandeur. In Moses' day this represented to God's people Pharaoh's power and oppression towards them as he ruthlessly made their lives harsh. Yet God is breaking into these circumstances, "showing up" to bring about His deliverance. In this painting, over and above the Egyptian structures is something more magnificent, the storm of God: thunder, hail, and fire being poured down upon the oppressor and persecutor of His people. And your eye is drawn to the man standing on the left side of the painting, Moses, with outstretched arms looking to the LORD and His deliverance.

The purpose of Exodus:

“The original purpose of Exodus was theological, to teach God’s people about himself and their relationship to him.” - Peter Enns, NIVAC, 25.

“Exodus is about a man, Moses. He is central to the narrative in a way in which no single character, not even Abraham, dominates Genesis...Exodus is about a nation, Israel, moving from slavery in Egypt into freedom...but ultimately Exodus is about God, about the God of the covenant who has instituted a new relationship between himself and those whom he has called to be his people.”
- John Mackay, Exodus, 9.

“The whole story of Exodus is a covenant narrative. The God who pledged himself to Abraham and his descendants remained the faithful God. He had made promises and intended to honor them, and when his moment came, honor them he did...in a word, Exodus cannot be described simply as the book of the holiness of the Lord, nor simply as the book of the presence of the Lord, but as the book of the holy God present in all his holiness at the heart of his people’s life, their provident savior and friend, who makes provision whereby they, in all their unworthiness, may live safely with him.” - Alec Motyer, The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Exodus, 20, 23.

The setting for Exodus 1:1-2:25 is Israel in Egypt. The opening section sets the stage for the rest of the book by describing: the connection to the narrative of Genesis (Ex. 1:1–7), the oppression that has arisen under a new pharaoh (1:8–22), the preservation of Moses at birth (2:1–10) and later in Midian (2:11–22), and the declaration of God’s intimate knowledge of Israel’s suffering and God’s faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham and his descendants (2:23–25).

Exodus is a journey in two parts.

Part One: Egypt Exodus 1-15 Aug. 7th – Oct. 30th

Part Two: Sinai Exodus 16-18 Nov. 6th – Nov. 20th

Pause for Advent: Nov. 27th – Dec. 18th

Part Two Cont. Sinai Exodus 19 - 39 Jan. 8th – June 25th

Pause for Capital Campaign Series: Jan. 22nd-Feb. 12th

Pause for DNOW: February 19th

Pause for Missions Sunday: March 26th

Resources for further study:

Exodus: A Mentors Commentary by John Mackay

Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture
(Volume 2) (The New American Commentary) by Douglas Stuart

MARCH 5, 2023

Delivered to Rest and Celebration

Exodus 23:10-19 ESV

“For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

“Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed.

”Pay attention to all that I have said to you, and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips. “Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God.

“You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning. “The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

Scriptures for further study:

Ecclesiastes 2:22

Ecclesiastes 4:6

Psalms 127:2

Psalms 4:8

James 1:17

Matthew 11:28

2 Peter 3:18

BIG IDEA: In a world that prides itself in relentless effort and striving, let the church embrace God's prescribed reality that we reflect as much of His glory in how we rest, recreate and celebrate as we do in our work, diligence and planning.

OUTLINE

1. The World's Relentless and Dangerous Striving
2. God's Prescribed Rest
3. God's Prescribed Feast
4. God's Prescribed Savior

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The text from Exodus 21:1 through 23:19 contains basic guidelines for living together as a just society while also calling the people to live as those who are set apart to the Lord. The specific laws are not intended to be exhaustive but are to result in a way of life characterized by justice and civility among the people of God, so that they are free to pursue moral excellence.(Exodus 23:19). The reason for this rule is not made explicit here or in the other places where it is repeated (see Exodus 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). Boiling a young goat in its mother's milk may have been a pagan religious ceremony practiced by the nations in Canaan to induce fertility. Also, it may be seen as a gross violation of the natural order: the young goat should drink its mother's milk and gain life from it, not be cooked in it."

ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. “Pay attention to all that I have said to you.” When have you heard that said to you? When have you said it? What is the big benefit God doesn't want His people to miss? We should pay attention to all that God says in His Word. So why does God call us to pay attention specifically in this verse?

2. What does the word “rest” mean to you? What to you is the opposite of rest? Some antonyms are advance, agitation, awakening, beginning or clamor. Read Ecclesiastes 2:22 and Ecclesiastes 4:6 to see how the Bible describes the opposite of rest. How are the words “toil” and “strive” different for the meaning of the word “work”? Is it possible for someone both rest and work?

3. Read Exodus 23:12. What state of being is associated with God's plan for the 7th day? How can this reframe your idea about rest? What is the primary means of grace given to the church for “refreshment”? What posture of the heart is necessary to rest? How is this posture achievable?

4. What things do you typically celebrate? Read 23:14-16. Describe the connection between the words “keep” and “celebrate”. Why did God schedule the feasts at the time that He did? What can you infer about the character of our God who asks that His people hold feasts or celebrations? Read James 1:17. Does this verse cause you to think differently about good things?

5. The supreme evidence of the nature of God is seen in His most excellent gift. Read Matthew 11:28. What rest does Jesus offer? How can this be cause for celebration? What God-ordained feasts do God's people celebrate today? How might the message today challenge prevailing opinions about God, rest, and celebration? What is the difference between the idea of being busy and the idea of diligence and work as a reflection of the glory of God?

“Ultimately, every problem I see in every person I know is a problem of moving too fast for too long in too many aspects of life.”

-Addicted to Busyness
Brad Boyd

“The sleep of peace is a sleep that comes to those who are able to rest by faith in the promises of God.”

-Mark Futato

“Basically the root word for ‘rest’ in Hebrew relates to both the absence activity and presence of security.”

-Leonard Coppes

“Sabbath isn't about resting perfectly; it's about resting in the One who is perfect.”

-Shelly Miller

“Israel had their annual religious festivals and they were to be conducted as God prescribed...in large measure these festivals followed the agricultural year...by celebrating them the people were acknowledging the LORD as the one who had in his goodness blessed their fields.”

-John Mackay

PRAISE TO JESUS- Today offer praise to Jesus for ultimate peace which comes through Him by being reconciled to God. Praise Jesus for soul-satisfying rest from a rat-like pursuit of ephemeral next achievements. List the good and perfect gifts in your life and offer praise to Jesus.

REPENTANCE THROUGH JESUS- Reflect on the way that you view your work/life pace, the way that you approach work/life, and the impact of your approach to your view of work/life on yourself and those with whom you work and live. Repent of the ways that your work attitude and work approach have not been shaped by security in God’s provision and purposes for work, but instead by a hyper-drive pace in the name of security rather than flowing from security that comes from Christ. Repent for ignoring God’s command to keep the Sabbath for your rest and His exaltation.

CONSECRATION FOR JESUS- In Jesus Christ we find both the catalyst for rest and celebration. He is the Father’s prescribed SAVIOR, and He saves us from false sense of rest and celebration.

From the well-spring of life in Christ, from the food of God’s word, from the invigorated strength of corporate worship, from the glory of Christ to celebrate Him, the best and most perfect gift from above, embrace with equal passion and effort God’s prescription for celebrated-recreative-rest and work which is characterized by productive diligence and purposeful planning.

“Genesis 2 does not tell us much more about the significance of the seventh day. But as we learn more about it from Scripture we realize that the ‘rest’ involved was not a lazy rest. Rather, it was intended to be a day when the working man could enjoy the Creator as well as the creation. He could devote himself more directly to fellowship with God and the worship of His Name. This ‘sabbath,’ or ‘rest-day,’ was a further special blessing which God gave to man so he would be refreshed and strengthened, encouraged and heartened by contemplating all that God had done and stimulated to worship God in response.”

-Sinclair Ferguson

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. As we have done in these passages that deal with the giving of God's Law for the Israelites, make sure to remind your children that God's Law was given after He saved them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. God's Law was never meant to save His people. The Law was meant to tell us of our need for a Savior and meant to show us God's moral will for our lives after we are saved. Remind your children that we need to be freed from our slavery to sin and filled with the Holy Spirit in order to follow and obey Him.

2. Ask your children why they think God made us to rest. Talk with your children about the fact that at least a third of our lives are spent sleeping.

- a. Exodus 23:10-13 is about the Sabbath laws. These are based on the Fourth Commandment that tells us to honor and keep the Sabbath day as holy.
- b. Exodus 23:10-11 specifically talk of giving the land a Sabbath rest one year out of seven. Ask your children what is mentioned in verse 11 about the poor. Make sure to talk about how God wanted the poor to be able to gather food from the unused land in that seventh year.

3. Read Exodus 23:14-19. These verses teach us how God commanded His people to celebrate three feasts each year. Ask your children why they think God commanded these feasts to be celebrated. Make sure to talk with them about how God wanted His people to remember God's mighty acts of love and faithfulness to them. Talk with them about how easily we forget how good God is and what He has done and what He promises to do for us.

- a. Ask your children what God has done for us through Jesus Christ that we remember each Sunday when we worship as a congregation. Make sure to talk about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Scriptures for further study:

Hebrews 3:7-4:13

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Psalm 127:1-2

Psalm 104

Ephesians 5: 3, 12

Ephesians 5: 15-21

1. In the Mosaic Law, God commanded his people to keep the Sabbath. The Hebrew word for Sabbath comes from the word to “cease”. Sabbath is a time to rest--to stop—to cease. Why is it unnecessary for us to work all the time? See Psalm 127:1-2.

2. What are some practical steps we can take to learn how to rest and worship?

3. One of the reasons we can rest from our labors is because God has so abundantly provided for our needs. Psalm 104 is an extended meditation on the glory of God seen in His creation. A wise, loving, all powerful Creator has provided for humans and animals a bountiful, abundant world. Read Psalm 104. What are several things mentioned in this Psalm for which you are especially thankful?

4. How are human beings to respond to God’s creation? See verses 14-15 and 33-35 of Psalm 104.

5. In Exodus 23:13 God tells his people, “Pay attention to all that I have said to you and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips.” Read Ephesians 5:3 and 12. Why is it dangerous to “mention”, “name”, or even “speak” of certain things? What should be done instead? See Ephesians 5:15-21.

6. All three of the festivals mentioned in Exodus 23 were times of thanksgiving where God called his people to engage with Him. How can we remind ourselves and be thankful for God’s goodness to us?

*Selected questions borrowed and adapted from Exodus for you by Tim Chester

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. We may at first wonder why God commanded these sabbath laws and what relevance it may have for us today. But we should always remember that these laws are given to us for our own good. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Luke 2:27). God did not give us arbitrary rules to follow; He gave us these commands because He loves us. And taking a sabbath for worship and rest is good for our bodies, souls, and minds. It helps us regain wholeness and peace. God's laws equal God's love for us.

2. Another good thing about taking a sabbath rest is that it helps us to recognize our limits. It causes us to cease from our workaholism, and to remember that God is in charge of all things; He doesn't need me to make sure the world stays in order. Basically, observing the sabbath helps me remember that He is God, and I am not. You would think that would be obvious, but wow, do we need to be reminded of this often!

3. Notice also in verses 10-12, that God's sabbath laws are not just commanded for my own good, but the sabbath laws also show God's love for all of His creation. He loves those who are poor, He loves slaves, He loves those who are strangers and aliens, He loves both domesticated and wild animals, and He loves the very land itself. God demonstrates through these sabbath laws that He loves and cares for all that He had made.

4. Verse 14 is a command that God's people will celebrate festivals three times a year. Don't you just love the fact that God commands festivals? Think about it; it's as if God is saying, "I command you to have celebrations and have fun!" Who ever said God is a kill joy?!

5. But God did not just command people to have fun, He also had a deeper purpose in mind for these festivals. The first festival was to be a festival remembering how God had faithfully brought His people out of Egypt. The second and third festivals were related to the harvest and were all about thanking God for His blessings. The people were to come before God not empty-handed but with the very best of their firstfruits from the harvest. Here we get a wonderful picture of the posture our lives are supposed to take today as well. Recognize God's great faithfulness in saving us, and His bountiful goodness and provision in taking care of all our needs and respond with a heart of gratitude and a life that demonstrates our heartfelt thanks! Praise God from who all blessings flow!