

The People of God
Exodus 8:20 - 9:12

Throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is called the people of God. They were God's chosen people because they were the descendants of Abraham. In Genesis, chapter 12, we read of the call of Abram, as he was known before God changed his name.

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God repeats and expands on this promise to Abraham later, and confirms His covenant with Abraham's son, Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob. He would make Abraham's descendents into a great nation and He would be their God and they would be His people. Still, when Jacob's family sought refuge in Egypt from the famine, there were only 75 of them.

But now, 400 years later, there are perhaps 2 million Israelites. They may never have thought of themselves as a nation and certainly, given the harsh conditions that they suffered under the current Pharaoh, it didn't feel like they were the people belonging to any particular god. So when Moses and Aaron come to them in the name of Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, bringing the good news that they would be rescued from slavery in Egypt, they were encouraged and worshiped Yahweh. However, when Pharaoh made conditions even worse, they were quick to lose heart and lose faith; they accuse Moses of putting a sword in the hand of Pharaoh to kill them, as we saw near the end of chapter 5.

And that's the last time we hear a response from the people of Israel until chapter 12. But in the meantime, God will repeatedly demonstrate His mighty power, working on behalf of His people. Last week we saw Pharaoh hardening his heart against Yahweh resulting in three plagues on Egypt. This week, we are going to cover plagues 4-6.

The ultimate purpose of God in these three plagues remains the same. As Nathan put it, God's fame is the ultimate aim of these plagues. Jason told us last week that God is using these plagues to establish His superiority over every false god that is worshiped in Egypt, including Pharaoh himself.

But in plagues four through six, we see a distinction that was not mentioned earlier. Moses has demanded that Pharaoh let the people of Israel go three days' journey into the wilderness to make sacrifices to Yahweh. Pharaoh refused, so God sent swarms of flies to afflict the Egyptians and their animals. But now look at verses 22-23 of chapter 8.

22 But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. 23 Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.”””

We don't know how the first three plagues affected the Israelites. Moses doesn't say. But the fact that he goes out of his way here in the fourth plague to point out to Pharaoh that God is putting a division between His people and Pharaoh's people leads some to speculate that perhaps the Israelites suffered right along with the Egyptians from the first three plagues. Other commentators point out that Moses only describes the effects of those first three plagues on the Egyptians and therefore they conclude that the Israelites were spared. I tend to agree with these latter commentators, but regardless, beginning in plague number 4, we are told that God has put a division between Israel and Egypt. The original Hebrew

word translated “division” is translated “redeem” or “redemption” the other three times it is used in the OT. For example, Psalm 111:9 says:

**He sent redemption to his people;
He has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name!**

This is a covenantal word. God is not just going to treat Israel differently; He is going to set them apart, because of His covenantal love, to be the recipients of His divine deliverance.

This is, I think, the main message of this passage. God sets apart His people to be the recipients of His gracious deliverance from His just wrath. Here in Exodus 8, God has set the people of Israel apart from the Egyptians in order to lavish upon them His redeeming grace. He is protecting them from these plagues so that they will trust in His provision and protection when the time comes to leave Egypt. He intends to redeem His people from slavery for the purpose of displaying to them and to the world that He is the one true living Creator of the universe.

But God does not completely ignore those who are not His people. Rather, He graciously and patiently testifies to His existence and calls those who are not His people to repent.

Paul tells us in Romans 2:3-5,

3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

It may not seem to Pharaoh or the Egyptians or even to us as we read this passage that God is dealing with Pharaoh out of the richness of His kindness and forbearance and patience. But there is kindness and forbearance and patience in the fact they are still alive. God didn't just wipe them out when they first started mistreating His people. And, God continues to graciously give Pharaoh chances to repent. Notice in 8:22 that the purpose of the salvation of Israel from the plague of flies is so that Pharaoh and the Egyptians will know that Yahweh is Lord in the midst of the earth. And in verse 23, Moses calls this a **sign** to Pharaoh. Even though Pharaoh's heart is hardened, God still patiently gives him opportunities to repent. But if he continues to harden his heart, he is storing up wrath for himself.

And that is just what Pharaoh does. Look at his responses to the plague. First, he tries to bargain with God. Verse 25. He says they can go make sacrifices to Yahweh, but they must stay in Egypt. This is unacceptable to Moses because the animals the Israelites would sacrifice are sacred to the Egyptians. They would be stoned. So Pharaoh compromises a bit. Verse 28. I'll let you leave Egypt, but don't go far. He wants to be able to round them up if they attempt to escape completely. And then he says an interesting thing. "Plead for me." This is a far cry from the stubborn, defiant stance he has taken all along. But Pharaoh isn't sincere and Moses isn't fooled. He agrees to plead to Yahweh to remove the plague but he warns Pharaoh in verse 29. Don't change your mind again like you have in the past when the plague is removed.

This reminds me of the parable of the sower in Mark 4. Jesus says many will hear the word and some will receive it with joy. But then they will be distracted by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, or they undergo persecution because of the gospel, the word will prove unfruitful and they will fall away. Pharaoh was driven to distraction by the flies. I

know I would have been. He was desperate to get rid of them. He wanted to avoid the judgment. But he wasn't willing to repent.

Therefore, Moses went to Pharaoh again and demanded that he let the people go. This time he threatened a plague on the livestock of the Egyptians. Don't get hung up on the phrase "all of the livestock of the Egyptians died." That is typical hyperbole to let us know that a large number of their livestock died, while not one single animal belonging to Israel died. Apparently, Pharaoh conducted an investigation to verify this. And once again, Pharaoh refused to humble his heart and repent.

And then the sixth plague came right on top of the fifth plague with no mention of Moses and Aaron making demands on Pharaoh. This plague of boils attacked the health of the Egyptians themselves, as well as their animals. The magicians, who haven't appeared in the narrative since plague number 3, could not even stand before Pharaoh because of their afflictions. And once again, Pharaoh refused to repent.

We aren't specifically told that God's people avoided this plague, but in light of the fact that they were protected from the previous two and the fact that verse 11 says boils broke out on all the Egyptians, I believe it is safe to assume that Israel was excluded from this plague as well.

So in these three plagues, we see that God set apart His people to be the gracious recipients of His deliverance from His just wrath. I say that they are delivered from God's just wrath because Israel deserved to be hit with the plagues every bit as much as the Egyptians. The Egyptians were sinners. They were idolaters. They deserved nothing from God but wrath. But the same is true of the people of Israel. They were also sinners. They also were idolaters as we learn from Joshua 24:14, where Joshua tells the Israelites, after they had inhabited the land of Canaan, to put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Israel, like Egypt, deserved nothing from God but wrath. So what was

the difference between these two groups of people? Why did God choose Israel to be recipients of His mercy and Egypt to be recipients of His wrath? What was so special about Israel?

First of all, because God is a faithful covenant-keeper, a promise-keeper. I get that from Deuteronomy 7, starting in verse 6 where Moses has just given the law to Israel for the second time; this time to the descendants of the men and women who were rescued from Egypt. Moses says to them:

6 “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

God had made His covenant with Abraham and reaffirmed it with Isaac and Jacob. Because He is perfect in righteousness, steadfastness, and faithfulness, He is remaining faithful to His covenant by lavishing His mercy on Israel. There is nothing these people did to deserve God’s grace. God is free and independent and He does what He pleases. He says in Exodus 33:19b.:

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

So, the first answer to the question, “why did God choose to be merciful to Israel?” is because of His faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham. God told Abraham that He would make a great nation from his descendents and that He would place them in the land that He has shown him. God is moving in that direction by lavishing mercy on Israel during the plagues on Egypt.

But while God was faithful, the people of Israel were not. Throughout their history, they rejected Yahweh and pursued other gods. They failed to be obedient to the law. They thought their position as the people of God was secured by the fact that they were the physical descendents of Abraham. But Paul sets the record straight in Romans 2:28-29.

28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

The true descendants of Abraham are those who believe God as Abraham did. Abraham trusted God completely, trusted Him enough to uproot his family and move to a new land, trusted him enough to believe that even though he was nearly 100 and his wife nearly 90 that God would bless them with a son, trusted him enough to be obedient to the point of sacrificing his own son if that is what God wanted. Abraham believed God and God counted it as righteousness.

Now Jesus Christ has come to earth. And God commands us to believe that He is the Son of God, that He lived a life of perfect obedience to His Father, obedience even to the point of death on a cross, that His death is sufficient to pardon our sin, that He rose from the grave and ascended into heaven and that if we will place our faith in all that Jesus did for us that we can be spared from the wrath of God, that we can receive forgiveness for

our sins, that we can be reconciled to God, that we can be called the children of God, that we can be a part of the people of God.

Even as God set apart the people of Israel to receive redemption from their slavery in Egypt, in order that God might be glorified, so the people of God today--the church--has been set apart to receive redemption from our slavery to sin and to show forth the glory of the matchless grace of God.

The questions we asked about Israel are still legitimate questions today regarding the church. Why has God chosen to set apart this group of people, a group that will eventually be composed of people from every nation, every tribe, every people group, and every language in the world. Why did God choose us? Why did God choose me?

It's certainly not because we were better than anyone else. We were all dead in our trespasses and sin and were deserving of the wrath of God. It's certainly not because we are wiser than anyone else. Paul says not many of us were wise or powerful. Indeed, he says God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. So why has God chosen a group of people to receive His mercy?

Ephesians 1:3-6 gives us the answer.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Let's follow Paul's train of thought, here. Start in verse 4. He chose us--and then he tells us what we were chosen to be--holy and blameless in His sight. Verse 5. He predestined us--and then he tells us what we were predestined to be--adopted to sonship through Jesus Christ. Notice this is all in accordance with His pleasure and will--remember, God is completely independent and does whatever He pleases. And finally, in verse 6, Paul tells us the reason we were chosen. To the praise of His glorious grace.

God could have been glorified in His justice if He had decided to condemn every last person in the human race who has ever been born--except Jesus--to spend eternity in hell. Why in the world hasn't he done that? Why are we still alive today? Why have some of us had our eyes opened to the truth of the gospel and have believed? Because God has chosen to be glorified through the grace, verse 6, that He has freely given to us in Christ. Some people receive justice to the glory of God. Some people receive mercy to the glory of God. God has set apart His people to be the recipients of His gracious deliverance from His just wrath.

How should we respond to this truth? Well, first, if you are not sure if you are a part of the people of God, or if you know that you are not, I encourage you to not be like Pharaoh. Don't bargain with God. Don't say, I'll believe you if you do this or that. You can't hedge your bet with God. You are either all in or not at all. And don't give lip service to believing in God. You may fool us but you won't fool God. Men look on the outside, but God looks on the inside, He sees right down into your heart, the seat of your will and your desires. He knows whether you are being genuine or not. You will not fool Him.

Rather, you need to repent. You need to say I give up all rights to live my life the way I want to and I'm going all in with Christ. I am going to take God at His Word. I'm going to trust that by faith in Christ, I can be cleansed from my sin and I can become pure like Jesus. I'm going to trust in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone to save me by placing my faith in His life, death,

and resurrection for my salvation. To repent means not only to stop sinning, but to stop wanting to sin. It's a change in attitude as well as behavior. It's turning from living your life according to what feels good to you and what seems right to you and start yearning and longing to live the way God says you should. God commands you to believe in the Son that He sent. I plead with you to do that. Do it today.

And if you are not yet believing in Jesus today and you are worried that you may not be chosen... don't. Instead, repent and believe in Jesus! Asking whether or not you are chosen is going at this backwards. A better question is, 'Am I turning to trust in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord?' And an even bigger question is, 'Why would a perfectly righteous, holy, independent God, who is completely joyful and satisfied in and of Himself, condescend to offer reconciliation to a people who have rebelled against Him?' And the answer is: for the praise of His glorious grace!

If you have not yet put your faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation, then I encourage you not to partake of communion this morning. It is not for you, not yet. In fact, the Bible tells us it would be bad for you. Instead, I encourage you to pray and ask God to show you the truth of the gospel. And if you would like...

If the correct response for those who are not a part of the people of God is to repent, what should be the response of those who are the people of God? Well, I have three of them. The three R's. Repent. Rejoice. Rest.

Repent. We still have work to do. We still have sin that easily entangles us. We need to put it to death. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:12-13:

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

God works in you both to will and do His good pleasure. Willing to and doing God's pleasure is the very definition of repentance. Stop dabbling with sin. Put it out of your life. Turn, and run to Jesus, who died so that you could have a new heart that yearns to do the will of God and empowers you to do it. Ask to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.

Which leads me to the second R. Rejoice. Rejoice that God has chosen to display His glory by being gracious to you. Rejoice that He has called you to Himself, called you to live a life of joyful obedience, called you to be adopted as His children and that you are a part of the people of God that He has chosen to redeem from slavery. Give thanks to the Father, who had qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Just as He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and forgiveness.

And third, rest. Rest in the knowledge that God is faithful to His covenant. God the Father has made a covenant with His Son that He will save you from the wrath to come because of the salvation earned by Jesus Christ. You do not need to earn your salvation. Jesus Christ has accomplished it. And God will be faithful to complete the good work He has begun in you. He will bring it to completion. And He has promised that He will not lose one sheep that belongs to Him.

If you are trusting in Jesus Christ for your salvation and have had your faith affirmed by a local church in baptism, I invite you to join me in taking communion. As you partake of the elements, do so in humble repentance,

with glad-hearted thanksgiving, and with child-like trust that you can rest in His promises, remembering what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross.

[Communion.]

the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”