

EXODUS: DESIGN FOR DELIVERANCE

by Ray C. Stedman

The Old Testament is particularly designed of God to make the great truths of the New Testament come alive for us. We need this to happen in our Christian experience. So many of these truths are simply academic knowledge as far as we are concerned until they come alive when we see them interpreted in the dramatic presentations of the Old Testament. This is especially true of the first five or six books of the Old Testament, for here God lays out the foundational pattern of his workings. In a panoramic view of Scripture, the first six books, Genesis through Joshua, trace out God's pattern of working in human life. His pattern will be exactly the same in your life as it was in the lives of Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and all the others. It will follow the pattern that is developed for us in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua. In these books we will see how God moves in our lives.

It is necessary therefore when we are studying in these books to relate each one briefly to the others. Genesis is the book that reveals the need of mankind. Genesis is all about man -- man's creation, man's sin, the new world that followed the flood, and man's slow journey through time, groping after God. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph -- four men who followed God -- set forth the need of men for justification, sonship, sanctification, and glorification. Most significantly, Genesis ends with the words "a coffin in Egypt." All you can say about man when you have said everything there is to say, is that he lives in the realm of death.

But Exodus is all about God. Exodus is God's answer to man's need and God's supply for man's sin. It begins immediately with God's activity and throughout the whole course of the book you see God mightily at work. The book is the picture, therefore, of redemption, of God's activity to redeem man in his need, in his sin, in his degradation and misery. As such, it is a beautiful picture and contains tremendously instructive lessons to us of what redemption is; that is, what God has done, is doing in our lives, and what he intends to do with us -- the steps that he will be taking.

Now redemption isn't complete in this book. You will never get the full story of redemption in Exodus. You must move on into Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Then the full picture develops as you come into the book of Joshua, where you find Israel brought into the land and into the place of triumph and victory over their enemies -- a picture of the triumphant, victorious Christian experience. Israel, then, is a picture of the people of God, of the church of God, and of you as a child of God. These books are marvelously designed of the Holy Spirit for they describe actual historical events which occurred in such a way under the overruling government of God that they act out for us great redemptive truths. This is why Paul says in writing to the Corinthians, "These things happened to them as a warning [literally, types] but they were written down for our instruction." (I Cor. 10:11) Therefore, it is well to give heed to them.

The book of Exodus opens with the birth of a baby. God's finger is in evidence at the very beginning of this book for this is the story of a baby born under the sentence of death, but whose life was marvelously preserved by the intervening hand of God. With a delicate twist of irony that is wonderful to observe -- I hope none of you miss it -- God the Holy Spirit moves in such a way that, despite the law of Pharaoh to put all the Hebrew male babies in Egypt to death, Moses is not only saved, but Pharaoh hires Moses' own mother to take care of the baby! Such a design is surely one of those delightful expressions of the humor of God. If you haven't yet discovered that God has a sense of humor, there is a great discovery in store for you. Humorous glimpses appear throughout the Old and New Testaments. I can't read my Bible without occasionally breaking into gales of laughter over some of the clever ways in which God, through these ironic twists, adroitly turns the tables on someone. Such is the case in the story of Moses.

The interesting pattern is that when God wants to do something, he almost invariably starts with a baby. We don't. We think babies aren't very important. Back in 1809 the whole world was anxiously awaiting the news of the battles of Napoleon who was threatening to be the world dictator. He was the Hitler of his day. Napoleon held the whole world in fear of his tyrannical desires and egomaniacal impulses. But that same year there were babies being born in houses and families around the world -- and what babies! In England there

was Tennyson, Charles Darwin, and Gladstone, who was later to become prime minister of Great Britain. Over in this country in a Kentucky log cabin Abraham Lincoln was born. Also Oliver Wendell Holmes and still other men who, upon coming to manhood, were giants who shook and changed the world. All this is to say that when God wants to change history, he doesn't start with a battle, he starts with a baby.

So God began with this baby. As Moses grew up he was raised in the court of Pharaoh and had access to all the learning of the Egyptians; he was trained in the best university of the greatest empire of the world of that day. He was the foster son of the king himself and every privilege, every advantage was his. But when he came of age, God spoke to him and he realized that he was intended to be the deliverer of Israel. So he went out, trying to do his job, he thought, and ended up murdering a man and having to flee into the wilderness. As you trace the story through you find that Moses left the land of Egypt and herded sheep for forty years in the wilderness. Here it was that God found him and dealt with him in the remarkable confrontation of the burning bush. God called him back to his original task, for which he was completely unprepared until he learned that God himself is all it takes to do anything in his name.

Coming back to the structure of Exodus, you can understand the story of the book if you remember four things. The whole book centers around four great events. The first one is the Passover. Chapters one through fourteen lead up to it and climax in that great event. The second event is the crossing of the Red Sea, which is described for us in chapter fourteen. The third great event is the giving of the law at Sinai and the fourth is the construction of the tabernacle in the midst of the camp of Israel. These four events sum up the book of Exodus.

The first two events relate closely to each other, as do the last two. The Passover and Red Sea are but two aspects of one great truth -- the deliverance of God's people from the bondage of Egypt. They portray in the Christian experience one great thing, that which we call conversion or regeneration, the deliverance of an individual from the bondage of the world; and if you want to know what God did with you when you became a Christian, study the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. We'll explore these in a moment.

The other two events also tie together. The giving of the law and the construction of the tabernacle are absolutely inseparable. Remember that the pattern of the tabernacle was given to Moses when he was on the mountain with God, at the same time that the law was given. We must understand why these two are inextricably linked together -- the law and the tabernacle. We shall see why shortly.

First, let's come back to the Passover. You know the story -- how God called Moses, challenged him, and sent him back to Egypt. At first he was reluctant to go. There are wonderful lessons in all of these stories. Here, for example, when God said to Moses, "Moses, I want you to go down and deliver my people." Moses said to God, "Oh, Lord, I can't do that; I can't speak; I am not eloquent; I am not able to talk. I can't stand before Pharaoh." God didn't rebuke Moses for saying that. He wasn't angry because that was merely Moses' human inadequacy displaying itself. There is nothing wrong with that. We were made to be that way. God never holds us guilty for feeling inadequate when he asks us to do something.

But then God said to Moses, "I know you can't talk but here's what I will do. I'll be a tongue for you. I will speak through you. You go down to Egypt and I will be your tongue and I will speak through you." And Moses said, "Well, Lord, I think you had better get somebody else." Then it says, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses." (Ex. 4:14) The first time Moses was saying, "I can't do this. I am just a man." And God says, "Yes, I know, I made you that way. But I will do it through you." When Moses, the second time, said, "Well, Lord, you had better get someone else," what he was really saying was, "Lord, I can't do this and I don't think you can do it either." When Moses challenged God like that, the anger of God was kindled against him. Now that is a good point to remember whenever God challenges you to do something.

He is never concerned when your initial reaction is to draw back. But after he has reminded you that he is with you to do this thing in you and through you and then you draw back, you have insulted God because you have said, "I don't think you can do it either."

Now Moses went on. He went down to Egypt, taking the rod of God with him, and immediately came into conflict with Pharaoh. Nothing is more dramatic in all the Old Testament than this tremendous conflict of wills

between Pharaoh and Moses, the representatives of Satan and God. God had to move in mighty power against Pharaoh and it is almost incredible to read the story of how God would send some dreadful plague throughout the land of Egypt. And then we read, "Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the people go." Again and again this took place.

There were nine plagues in all, and Dr. Graham Scroggie points out that each one of those plagues was directed against one of the gods of Egypt. God was ruling in judgment against the gods of Egypt by these terrible catastrophes that gripped the land. If you are interested in the scientific aspects of this, I recommend that you read a most fascinating book, *Worlds in Collision*, by the Russian scientist Emmanuel Velikovsky. He has some very interesting theories as to why these plagues and other stirring events of Moses' day occurred. I am not saying that everything in his book is true, but it is a fascinating approach to the story.

As we move on. God has all the people together. He has sent Moses to them and at last Pharaoh's heart is overcome. His will is overwhelmed by the display of the power of God. He consents, after the death of his first-born, to let Israel go. It is very important to notice that when Moses went down to Egypt, the people of Israel were not a nation. They became a nation when they passed through the Red Sea. That is the meaning of those words from First Corinthians, "All were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." (I Cor. 10:2) They were made a body in the sea. They were a disorganized mob before. They came out a unit, a unit in Christ, when they passed through the Red Sea.

This is a beautiful reflection of the truth that every Christian discovers. Before he becomes a Christian he is simply an individual struggling to make his way through life. But when he has gone through the experience of the Passover, when he has seen the blood of the Lamb nailed to a cross for him, sprinkled on a cross for him, and has rested in the fact as the people of Israel rested in the symbol of the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses on the night of the Passover, and until he has passed through a Red Sea experience, burning his bridges behind him and moving forward onto a Christian stand, having declared himself for God -- thus symbolically passing through the waters of the Sea -- he will never fully understand that he has now become part of a body, the body of Christ, and that he is joined together in a living unit with all other Christians. This is pictured for us in the book of Exodus.

The Passover is a picture of the cross of Christ. What a beautiful story it is! How the angel of death passed through the land and all the first-born were slain -- all but those Israelites who by faith, simply by faith, took the blood of a lamb and sprinkled it on the door-posts and lintels of their houses. They were then perfectly safe within the house. This pictures for us the simple act of faith by which we rest on the fact that Jesus Christ's dying has settled our guilt before God. The angel of death passes over us. The angel of judgment will never pass our way because we are resting under the blood of the Lamb of God. A wonderful truth.

But that is not the whole story. Remember the Passover is never of value until the Red Sea experience is linked with it. The Red Sea experience immediately followed the Passover. They left the safety of their homes, went out into the wilderness and came to the shore of the Sea. They were still in Egypt when they got to the edge of the Sea, and the case looked hopeless to them. It looked as though there they would lose all they had gained. The people began to cry out to Moses and ask him why he had brought them here to die in the wilderness.

Moses' answer is wonderful. He says, "Stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. 14:13). It was a cry of faith. But God's word came immediately and said, "Go forward. Don't stand still, this is not the time for that. Go forward." "Well," they said, "where? The water is in front of us, the Egyptians are behind us. Where can we go?" And Moses said, "Never mind, God says go forward, now go forward."

The Lord had told him to stretch out his rod over the sea and when he did, the waters rolled back and they passed through safely onto the other side while the Egyptians, following them, were caught in a rush of the waves and were drowned in the sea.

What does the Red Sea typify in your life? Well, it typifies your break with the world. Egypt is now on the other side. Once they got through the Red Sea they were in the wilderness, true, but they were out of Egypt. Now there was a river of death that had rolled between them. Exactly the same river of death that has rolled between you and the world when you claimed Jesus Christ as your Lord.

Now, notice something about this. When they were going through the Passover, they rested in their houses. They didn't do a thing. They simply sat there. They were depending upon the work of another. When they came to the Red Sea, though, it was God's power and God's might that rolled the waters back and made the escape possible, but activity was demanded of them. Their wills were challenged. They were asked to move through.

Here is the reason why many professions of Christian faith never materialize into anything. There are people who are willing to sit under the Passover blood, who are willing to receive Jesus Christ as Savior, but they are not willing to walk through the waters of the Red Sea. They never take that step which burns their bridges cuts them off from the world. In their mind and thinking they are still back in Egypt. They will not move forward through the Red Sea, and until that happens they are still under the bondage and control of Egypt.

Notice, in chapter fifteen, that it was only as Israel came through the Sea that they began to sing. The first thing they did when they walked through on the other side was to break into song. There had been no songs in Egypt. That was a place of bondage, of heartache, of misery, and of unremitting toil and danger. But when they came into the wilderness and onto the far shore of the Red Sea, they broke into song. Real deliverance brings a song. Have you a song of deliverance?

I see this pattern worked out so frequently in life today. A young man came to me not long ago. He was having a struggle with drinking and evidently had come to a crisis in his life. He wanted to be set free. Somehow he realized that there was strength in Christ to set him free. He came to me and we talked together. He bowed his head at last and received the Lord. But about three weeks later, I got a telephone call from him and he was back in the same old mess. Exactly the same. I called him over and we sat down again together. I said, "What happened to you when you went home three weeks ago after you said you had received the Lord? Did you do anything about this?" He said, "No, I didn't. I just went home." I said, "What were you expecting to happen?" He said, "I don't know. I just went home and I guess I just forgot about it." I said, "If you had made a decision to enter into some business relationship, if you had decided you wanted to get into a certain job and there were certain necessary steps to take, would you then go home and forget about the whole thing?" "Oh, no," he said, "I would start moving in that direction." "Well," I said, "do you think you can convince me that you have really made a decision for Jesus Christ and that your life is going to be under his control, if, when you have made it, you go home and sit down, fold your arms and forget about it." He replied, "No, I guess not."

Decision is one thing. Decision brings the power of God to bear on our lives and sets us free from the guilt of the past and we can rejoice in that. God's word is true. But there is also the experience of passing through the Red Sea, that call to move forward, and cut off your ties with the world, and take steps that will allow the river of God's judgment to flow between you and the ways of the world. When you take that step, you move out into that place where God dwells within you. As you see here in Exodus, chapter fifteen, God never touches his people, or comes among them, until they have passed through the Red Sea. When they have passed through, then God dwells among them.

Annie Johnson flint wrote a beautiful poem that says,

Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life?
Where in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back.
The only way out, is through.

Have you come to that place? Well that is where many need to come, because until they do, they can never really know the dwelling of God in their life,

As we read on in chapter fifteen a most interesting picture develops. We have the story of the waters of Marah, the place of bitterness. This immediately follows the crossing of the Red Sea. In order to cure these waters, Moses cut down a tree which the Lord showed him, threw it into the water and the water became sweet (Ex. 15:25). In terms of the picture of our lives that this story portrays, you will see that this comes in just the right

place. What it is telling us is that the cross, the great tree upon which the Lord Jesus hung, is God's answer to the bitterness of life. When we have been through the Passover, trusting in his blood, then through the Red Sea, cutting ourselves away from the things of the world, we discover then that the cross is forever the answer to all the bitterness that sin may have brought into our life in the past. God's answer to bitterness in any person's experience is this experience of the cross -- cutting away all the unhappiness of the past and all the frustrations of the present by sweetening the waters of our life.

Immediately following this they came into the wilderness. and there the manna falls. Here is the beginning of God's fatherly care. Didn't you discover that when you became a Christian? The minute you became a Christian, and cut off your former life, and had passed through the Red Sea, didn't you immediately discover God's fatherly care? He watched over you. He fed you and bore you on eagles' wings, as he did here to these Israelites. But, even so, there was the murmuring of the people. There is so much of that in our lives, complaining against God, isn't there?

Then comes the battle in chapter seventeen, the first battle with the flesh. This is always a startling thing to new Christians. After then have gone through the glory of the Passover, the Red Sea, the mighty deliverance from sin in their lives, the sense of his fatherly love in the giving of the manna, and have found fellowship with Christ in the new life, they discover they still have a battle with the old flesh. It can be a shocking realization. But here it is. Amalek comes and fights with Israel, but God declares unending war with Amalek (Ex. 17:10) "For the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other" (Gal. 5:17). You can never make peace with Amalek.

So, as we come through the typical teaching of this book to chapter nineteen, we arrive at Sinai; that is, the law and the tabernacle, the third and fourth major sections of Exodus. Let us bring these two together. At Sinai we have, of course, the giving of the law. Now what is the law? It is simply a picture of the holiness of God, that is, the character of God. Let me put it another way. It is the unchangeability of God, the unrelenting character of God. This is why the law and the giving of the law is a time of terror. because there is nothing more terrible to human beings than to face squarely up to the fact that God is absolutely unchangeable, that nothing will change him. This gives wonderful comfort to us when we think of his love and care and grace, but it is frightening when we think of his holiness, his anger, and his wrath. This means that God can never be talked out of anything. God can never be bought off. We cannot get him to lower his standards in any degree. The law is the absolute, irrevocable standard of God's character, which is what we discover as we come into the experience of the Lordship of Christ -- he is absolutely unchangeable. He will never lower his demands in our life.

Now the law by itself, therefore, is a frightening thing. God's holy character terrorizes us. Do we really take seriously what God says to us about himself? Listen: "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Do you take that seriously? Well, most of us spend a lot of time trying to water it down somehow. Be perfect! That is frightening! How can I be perfect? God's answer to that question is the tabernacle -- the ritual and the sacrifice connected with it. That is why on the mountain, yes, the very same mountain on which he gave the law, which is the revelation of his character, he also gave the tabernacle, his provision for dwelling with man. For in the tabernacle, God dwelt among his people.

I like to visualize the camp of Israel. You remember they were divided up, all the tribes; some on the east, some on the north, some on the west, and on the south. They were arranged in orderly fashion. Right in the center was the tabernacle. Over it, and over the whole camp, was the great cloud by day and the fiery pillar by night. I have often thought the camp of Israel must have looked very much like the city of Los Angeles, lying out there in the desert, spread out in a fashion, and over it a cloud -- of smog, of course, in Los Angeles -- but in Israel it was a cloud which betokened the presence of God. Here was God dwelling among his people. He could do it only by a most intricate system of sacrifices and rituals and a very complicated procedure of bringing the people into his presence.

If you went into the camp of Israel, you would pass through all the tribes on whichever side you entered and find your way at last to the center of the camp, where the Levites were. As you continued through the Levites you would come to the tabernacle. At first you would pass through a great gateway into the outer court where you would find certain articles -- the brazen altar and the brazen laver -- and then there was an inner building

with a veil across the entrance into which no one dared enter unless he were a priest. The priests alone went into the holy place. Behind another veil inside the holy place was the Holy of Holies. The only piece of furniture in it was the ark of the covenant including the cherubim of mercy with their wings touching each other over the ark. Into that place, we are told, only the high priest could go, and he only once a year, under the most rigid and precise conditions.

Now what does all this teach? Simply that God is absolutely changeless and holy. He can dwell among people only under the most rigid conditions. The trouble with the tabernacle was that it only permitted the people to come before God representatively, but, actually, they were excluded from his presence. The common people could never come before him. Only the high priest could, and he in fear of his life, and only once a year, that's all. That is the restriction of these Old Testament rituals.

You see, the trouble with the Old Testament and the saints of that time was not the law. There was nothing wrong with the law. The law is absolutely good. Paul says so. Sometimes we speak of the law as though it were wrong, but it isn't. The law was absolutely good. It still is. The trouble was with the tabernacle, and the system of sacrifice. It wasn't complete enough. It wasn't real enough. It was only shadows, just pictures. It could never really do anything. That is why, when we come to the book of Hebrews, the whole book is dedicated to teaching us that the law of God is still unchanged, but the approach is completely different, for we come to the One who is the antitype, the reality, symbolized by all these shadows. We read in Hebrews, "we have confidence to enter the sanctuary" (Heb. 10:19) without any fear whatsoever, for in the blood of Jesus and by means of the cross, God has set aside all that separates, and has brought us near to himself.

The great message of the book of Exodus is that by means of the cross, God has made it possible for a holy, unchangeable God to dwell with us. The whole of the tabernacle is a picture of God's dwelling with his people. The great truth for us here is that God has now settled so totally the problem of sin in us, absolutely settled it, that as Paul says in Romans eight, "There is now no condemnation" {cf, Rom 8:1}, none whatsoever. None whatsoever! We have perfect access to the Father through the Son, and God's indwelling Spirit will never leave us or forsake us. He has taken up his tabernacle in our hearts and lives.

One of the things I am in perpetual enmity against is the practice among Sunday School teachers (for they are the ones most guilty of this) of teaching children that a building is the house of God. The reason I don't like that is primarily because it is not true. There was a building which was the house of God in the Old Testament, the tabernacle, but it was a mere shadow. The temple in Jerusalem took its place. It, too, was a shadow. But when you come into the New Testament you never find a building designated as the house of God. The house of God in the New Testament is a human body. "You are the temple of God," Paul says (I Cor. 3:16). Therefore, you are never out of church. I think we have taught our children one of the most deadly of errors when we teach that a building is the house of God. When we say that, it is very difficult for them to grasp the idea that their bodies are the temples of God.

That is what God wants us to learn -- that we are never out of church. That Jesus Christ himself is dwelling in your body which is his temple and it is built exactly like the tabernacle. It has a three-fold structure. The outer court is this body of flesh and bones which we see. The holy place is the soul -- the realm of emotions, mind and will. That area in which we have free intercourse one with another as we talk and share experiences together. But deep at the center is the Holy of Holies, your spirit. In that place the Spirit of God dwells.

So each of us is a walking tabernacle. This whole book of Exodus is to impress upon us, as we read it through, that great New Testament truth -- the glory of living with God himself in the midst of our life and the demands that truth makes upon us, the responsibilities it brings upon us and the privileges it gives us. The great need is for a walk resting upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, alone, making this all possible for us.

Still, Exodus isn't enough. We need to go on into Leviticus and see what this demanding law does to us in its effort to correct us and guide our lives. In Leviticus you will find another great truth which, if you have not yet learned, will explain why you find yourself bound, hampered, and fettered in a continual up-and-down experience.

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, how much we thank you for this mighty word of truth. When we think, Lord, how it has come to us through the instrumentality of prophets and apostles, of fishermen, of common, ordinary men like ourselves, who wrote by your inspiration, and how it has been protected and passed on to us at the cost of blood and toil and sweat and tears and death, we are amazed. Lord, help us to value this word and to believe it and to walk in its light, knowing that here is the word of liberty, the word of knowledge that can set us free. We thank you for it in Christ's name. Amen.

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