

Here we are at week three of our ten-week journey through God’s Word. On week one we heard God’s promise to raise up a Savior from Eve’s descendants. He would crush the serpent’s head, even as the serpent was biting His heel. That was accomplished in Jesus’ death on the cross.

Last week we heard from Pastor Adelsen how God chose Abraham and Sarah to form a new nation, only then to test Abraham’s faith by commanding him to offer their firstborn son Isaac as a burnt offering. But then, at the last minute, God provided a substitute sacrifice, a ram with its horns trapped in a thicket, which would die in Isaac’s place. That ram pointed ahead to Jesus Christ, God’s Son, wearing a crown of thorns around His head and sacrificed on the cross in our place.

Today, we zip forward in time through 500 years. Abraham’s son Isaac grew up and married beautiful Rebekah. She gave birth to twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Of these twins, God chose the younger, Jacob, to carry on the promise of the nation and the Messiah.

Jacob went on to be the father of twelve sons who became the fathers of twelve extended families or tribes, which when combined made up the nation. God renamed Jacob “Israel.” And that’s the name by which his nation of descendants would be known.

Of his twelve sons, Israel favored Joseph, son number eleven, over all the rest. Joseph’s older brothers became extremely jealous and hostile toward him. No surprise there! But these siblings took things to the extreme! One day, Israel sent Joseph to check on his older brothers who were grazing the sheep far away. When he arrived, they grabbed him, threw him in a pit, and then sold him into slavery in Egypt. Afterwards they went home and falsely reported to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Under those circumstances, we might expect Joseph to abandon God, but God was with him and blessed everything he set out to do as a slave. Most importantly, God kept Joseph’s faith strong. Despite some false charges and injustices that severely tested his faith, Joseph eventually became second in command over all of Egypt. During a severe seven-year

famine, Joseph sold food to the Egyptians and the surrounding nations. When Joseph's brothers went to Egypt to buy grain, he revealed himself to them. Then wonderfully, He forgave them, and moved his father's whole family to Egypt to provide for them all during the famine. And there, the descendants of Israel would stay for over 400 years.

During that time, Israel's descendants, who were also known as Hebrews, multiplied into a great nation within Egypt. Long after Joseph and his brothers died, a new pharaoh came to power who didn't know about Joseph and how he had saved Egypt from destruction and death in the famine. He feared the growing power of the Israelites who were multiplying rapidly, so he enslaved them and made their lives bitter with hard labor.

But by God's blessing, that special nation kept growing stronger and stronger. Fearful Pharaoh gave a command to drown every Hebrew baby boy in the Nile River. When a special boy was born to one Hebrew woman, she hid him as long as she could. Then she took a basket and made it waterproof with pitch. She placed her baby in the basket, then set the basket in the reeds on the bank of the Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter saw the basket while she was bathing in the river. She rescued the baby and named him Moses.

Moses was raised in Pharaoh's house where he was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians. But he never forgot who he was- an Israelite. One day when he was forty, Moses witnessed an Egyptian whipping a Hebrew slave. Enraged, Moses killed the Egyptian and rescued the Hebrew. When his deed was discovered, Moses fled to Midian and lived there forty years. He married a Midianite woman and became a shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks.

Then one day, Moses noticed a bush that was burning on nearby Mount Sinai. But as he watched, he saw that the bush was not burned up. So, he set off to investigate. When he came near, a voice called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! ... Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:4-5)

This is an important theme throughout the Old Testament. God is holy, and sinful people cannot enter His presence unless He permits them and deals with their sins. This reminds us that one day God's Son, Jesus Christ, will stand upon the earth to judge the living and the resurrected dead. And once again, creation will be holy, and only those people who have been made holy through faith in Christ Jesus will be able to dwell with God in the new heavens and the new earth. The rest will be cast into hell.

From the burning bush, God told Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob... I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, ... Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:6, 7-8, 10)

Moses was hesitant, but God was persistent. So, finally Moses obeyed. He appeared to Pharaoh with his brother Aaron who spoke for him. Aaron commanded Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1).

Pharaoh's response was similar to that of his ancestors Adam and Eve and their son Cain. The ungodly rarely listen to the Lord and usually disobey Him if His will against their desires. Pharaoh heard God's command but refused to let Israel go. Instead, he increased the burden on them by no longer providing straw for them to make bricks.

God responded with a string of plagues. Through these, God demonstrated His power, called Pharaoh to repent and believe, and showed His superiority over all the gods the Egyptians had invented.

Each time the Lord struck Egypt with a plague, Pharaoh humbled himself and promised to set Israel free. But as soon as God lifted the plague, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let Israel go. So, God sent more plagues. Each plague hit harder and was more damaging to Egypt than the last. For the tenth and final plague, Aaron announced that

God would send an angel to strike down all the firstborn—from Pharaoh's royal heir to the firstborn of all Egyptians and their livestock.

That is a terrifying reminder of Judgment Day. Each and every one of us will stand before Jesus Christ. Even if that day does not come for another two or three thousand years, we will all be raised to life to stand before our Judge. Not a single one of us will be able to escape.

But God provided a way to save the firstborn of Israel—and us. We read in Exodus 12:

Every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household... keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; ... For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. (Ex. 12:3, 6-8, 12-13)

This lamb became known as the Passover lamb. Each year after, God's people would celebrate the Passover feast and sacrifice Passover lambs to commemorate how God freed them from slavery in Egypt.

And these Passover lambs become the third major reference to the coming Savior that we see in the Old Testament. Remember? The first was in the Garden of Eden when God told the serpent the Seed of the woman would crush his head while he was bruising the Seed's heel. That was a reference to Jesus' victory over Satan when He suffered and died on the cross.

The second was the ram caught in a thicket by its horns which was sacrificed as a substitute for Abraham's only beloved son Isaac. That ram pointed ahead to God's only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, wearing a crown of thorns around His head as He was sacrificed on the cross as a burnt offering in our place on the cross.

And this, the third, is Jesus Christ, the final Passover Lamb whose blood was shed on the cross and marks us in our Baptism. On Judgment Day, the angel of death will see the blood of Christ marking us and will pass over us, sparing us from eternal death in hell. Washed clean and pure of all our sins to live in God's presence, we will stand together on the new earth. We will be living in a perfectly restored creation, surrounded by people made pure, holy, and good. Life will be eternal and it will be a delight, standing on ground made holy by the feet of God standing with us forever. Amen.