

Prayer of praise

We will sing to you, Almighty God,
for you are our strong Defender.
You are our forbears' God
and we will praise your greatness.
Holy and Mighty One,
who among the gods is like you?
Who is like you in holiness?
Who is like you in glory?
You rule in glory for ever.¹

Prayer of confession

For the ways we have marred your image in us, forgive us.
For resentment, rush, or lack of trust, forgive us.
Now we open ourselves in love and faith
to your healing presence.²

[Exodus 12:1-14](#)

Before we get into this passage specifically, it may be worth making a few brief points in response to the aggressive atheists who online object morally to the account of the plagues that God sends on Egypt, the last – and worst, the killing of the firstborn – is mentioned here.

Firstly, they fail to see that this is a response to the genocide that Pharaoh has been inflicting on the Israelites, seeking to have all male Israelite babies killed. Killing the firstborn is proportional, if not lesser than what Egypt was doing.

Secondly, for Pharaoh to impose such a policy required the co-operation of the Egyptian nation. All of Egypt was guilty of co-operating with, or acquiescing to, the slaughter.

Thirdly, they say it is immoral for God to judge Pharaoh when God hardened Pharaoh's heart. However, they fail to note that Pharaoh hardened his own heart first. God hardening Pharaoh's heart is God confirming Pharaoh's pre-existing freewill decision. We would do well to ponder the solemn thought that God may confirm us in the choices we make either for him or against him. Some of our sentimental ideas of God need correction.

I'm sure these brief points don't completely deal with the moral complexity of the story, but I hope they act as pointers towards our understanding.

Leaving them to one side now, I want to concentrate on what the institution of the Passover in our passage. What does it teach us about God and salvation?

Firstly, it points us to *God's new creation*.

Verse 2:

This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.

Passover is a New Year festival, because it is a time when God starts all over again with us. Everything becomes new and fresh.

It's hard not to think of the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

When God saves people, he makes those people new and it is a sign that he is making all things new, just as he promises new heavens and a new earth in Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21.

So when we are 'passed over' for judgment, it is not simply that we are let off the hook for our sins, we are given a new start as new people who are on the way to God's new creation. God will not leave us in our sins and our mess, and he will not leave his world in a mess, either.

How many people could do with a new start in life? How many would be relieved if they could put the past behind them, with all their regrets, and start all over again? Could not our world do with a clean slate and a fresh start, too?

Think of how on New Year's Eve people have hopes and aspirations for life to be better in the coming year. It doesn't always happen, and we know that this year more dramatically than for many years.

But the aspiration is deeply human, and in one sense I think, God-given. New year, new hope, new beginnings. As a human race, we mess that up individually and institutionally, but with God it's different. He wipes clean our past and starts making us new. Is that not something worth sharing?

And perhaps too we need to hear it again for ourselves.

Secondly, Passover gives us a *sense of urgency*:

¹⁰ Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

¹² 'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

Passover is not a casual social event. Even though in future it was to become a festival that would last seven days, at this point the lamb needed to be eaten hastily, because God was about to act against 'all the gods of Egypt' (verse 12).

The blood of the lamb on the doorposts marked out the Israelites as separate from those who worshipped the gods of Egypt, and this was important, because God was about to act against those idols.

The urgency for us comes not in the hasty eating of our Passover, the Lord's Supper, but in not knowing when in history God might act against the gods of our society. You might even argue that the coronavirus pandemic has at the very least highlighted many of the follies our society deems valuable. How does keeping up with the latest designer names and desirable consumer items look right now, when it's enough to survive and so many jobs are insecure or disappearing? How do our sports and entertainment idols look when games are played behind locked doors and theatres are still closed?

When our children were in the infants at primary school in Chelmsford before we moved here, there was a day when they were invited to go in dressed as superheroes. We didn't have anything suitable for Rebekah, but we did have a child's version of a nurse's uniform, so she wore that and went in saying that people like nurses were the real-life superheroes.

She was the only child in the class not to be given a chocolate by the teacher. I doubt that would happen in 2020.

Passover reminds us that it's urgent to evaluate who and what we are following and worshipping. The gods of Egypt are judged, but we who stand under the sign of the blood of the Lamb of God do not do so as some superstition but as a declaration that this is who we worship and follow.

Thirdly and finally, Passover *stretches across time*.

In verse 14, God says,

This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord – a lasting ordinance.

To hear that, you might think that Passover was simply another tradition to be practised in succeeding generations. But it's more than that.

Why? It connects the Passover generation with the present. Later, in Deuteronomy 26, when Israel is given a liturgy for taking first-fruits and tithes to the priest, the worshippers are to speak as if they personally suffered in Egypt and were liberated by God, and that this is the basis for them bringing an offering to him.

There is something similar in the Christian Passover, the Lord's Supper, when Jesus tells us to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of him. The word used for 'remembrance' is a special one, and it binds the past and the present (and, by implication, the future too) together. We are taken right back to the Upper Room and the Cross. And also the benefits of the Cross are brought two thousand years forward and applied to us now.

We are Passover people and we are Easter people. As God passed over the homes marked with the blood of the lamb, so he still passes over those marked with the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. It is like we are watching at Calvary. And the power of the Cross is effective still for us today.

Some people object, and say how can a past event do this today? However, there are plenty of other historical events whose consequences are with us to this day. The Roman invasion of Britain and World War Two are just a couple that spring to mind. How much more the event that changed the world on a hill outside Jerusalem?

And that event which stretches across time does more than something individual and personal between us and God. Yes, it does bring us the power of sins forgiven, but it is not something isolated.

We are connected not only with God but with each other, with all the generations of saints down the ages and in the generations to come. As Passover and its ultimate fulfilment at the Cross of Christ do their work across the centuries, we find ourselves part of the communion of saints.

And though we are separated by death from meaningful fellowship with so many at present, that embrace from the past to the present points us to the future when the communion of saints will be fully one in the kingdom of God, when we and all creation shall be made new.

Are there any practical applications of this truth? Yes! It fills us with wonder and worship at the marvel of a God who can connect us to his past acts and also to the present and the future.

It also fills us with hope, for we shall surely be united in the new creation with those who have gone from the Church Militant on earth to the Church Triumphant in heaven.

Indeed, put all that with the hope of the new creation and the removal of false gods so that the one true God is all in all and everything about the Passover and its fulfilment in the Lord's Supper should lead us to praise and adoration.

Prayer of consecration

With these hands we bless the lonely,
the forgotten and the lost;
with these hands we shield your messengers
from attacks within, without;
with these hands we dispel darkness
and rebuke the evil forces;
with these hands we pray your victory
for those who fight for right.³

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing

God bless the path on which you go.
God bless the earth beneath your feet.
God bless your destination.⁴

¹ Ray Simpson, *His Complete Celtic Prayers*, #265. (Echoes Moses' song at the Red Sea in Exodus 15.)

² *Ibid.*, #245.

³ *Ibid.*, #274.

⁴ *Ibid.*, #1255.