



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 12:29-42

Topic

The deaths of the firstborn of man and beast
convince Pharaoh to let God's people go

Title

*"Let Them Go, Let Them Go;
Can't Hold Them Back Anymore"*

"Hello, Pilgrim."

I won't even attempt an impression, but you savvy film buffs associate that greeting with the Duke. Ask anyone to impersonate John Wayne and they'll invariably say, "Hello, Pilgrim," or some variation of it.

It comes originally from the film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*. He called someone "pilgrim" over twenty times in conversation.

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Exodus 12:29-42

*"Let Them Go, Let Them Go;
Can't Hold Them Back Anymore"*

The word next occurred in *McClintock*, about a year later. Even though he didn't say it much afterward, it became associated with him.

Being Americans, we immediately associate the word "pilgrim" with the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony in present day Plymouth Massachusetts. They're the group that gave us Thanksgiving as a holiday.

"Pilgrim" is a word we seriously need to reintroduce into our Christian vocabulary. Instead of reminding us of the Duke, or the Pilgrims, **it needs to remind us of our daily pilgrimage as believers in Jesus Christ.**

John Bunyon wrote a book in the 1600's, *Pilgrim's Progress*. The full title is, *The Pilgrim's Progress From This World, to That Which is to Come*.

It is regarded as one of the most significant works of religious English literature, has been translated into more than 200 languages, and has never been out of print. It has also been cited as the first novel written in English.

It's an allegory whose hero is named Christian. The plot centers on Christian's journey from his hometown, the "City of Destruction," to the "Celestial City." Along the path of his pilgrimage, Christian encounters things typical of our lives as believers on earth headed to Heaven.

Pilgrim's Progress may be written in the genre of allegory, **but there's nothing allegorical about it's message.**

You and I aren't simply *like* pilgrims in certain areas of our lives. **We really are pilgrims - all the time, everyday - on our way home.**

In our verses today, the Israelites are let go from slavery by Pharaoh. They immediately become pilgrims on their way to the Promised Land, and beyond that - to Heaven.

As we work our way through these verses, we'll have an opportunity to talk about pilgrims and their pilgrimage. I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 You've Been Set Free For Your Pilgrimage, and #2 You're To Set Out On Your Pilgrimage.

#1 You've Been Set Free For Your Pilgrimage

(v28-32)

Long before the *Mayflower* sailed, God's people were pilgrims. The Bible is full of them. The eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews speaks among others of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is said of them,

Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Heb 11:14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

Our "homeland" isn't anywhere on the earth. It is after the earth; it is Heaven.

This, by itself, is life-altering in its implications. It tells me I should never look to settle in this life; that I am always pressing forward in the work of the Gospel, until I enter the Celestial City whose builder and maker is God.

Perhaps this week you read the Billy Graham quote, “Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.”

There’s a back story to his words. Evangelist and author D.L. Moody was one of Billy Graham’s heroes. Moody first uttered the quote; here it is in full:

Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all; out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal - a body that death cannot touch; that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.

Moody and Graham knew they were pilgrims, just passing through. It isn’t something reserved for renowned evangelists. It is common to all believers.

Let’s take a look at the Israelites as they became pilgrims.

Exo 12:29 And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who *was* in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock.

God had given Pharaoh over eight months to let the Israelites go. He had performed nine wonders as signs of His will and His power. Pharaoh only hardened himself against God.

One wondrous sign remained - the death of the firstborn. It's severity would overcome Pharaoh's reluctance.

If anyone thinks God was unfair or cruel, just remember these things:

- God's people were enslaved. This was a rescue mission.
- God had been incredibly longsuffering with Pharaoh.
- The death of the firstborn was avoidable.
- Everyone dies, but to know the moment of your death is a tremendous mercy on God's part, giving you real incentive to receive His offer of eternal life.

Exo 12:30 So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for *there was not a house where there was not one dead.*

Our world is beset with tragedies. In their aftermath, we catch glimpses of the overwhelming grief the survivors display.

I can't even fathom what that night in Egypt must have been like.

Exo 12:31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said.

Exo 12:32 Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also."

Pharaoh asking for a blessing indicates that he finally understood the power of God. As I've said in previous studies, God spoke to Pharaoh (and by extension, to Egypt) in the language they understood - the power of the gods. Their lower 'g' gods, including Pharaoh, were no match for the God of the Hebrews. As Yul Brenner so eloquently stated in *The Ten Commandments*, "His God **is** God."

Generations earlier, Joseph - an Israelite but second only to Pharaoh at the time - had led his starving family to Goshen, just outside Egypt. The Jews had been there about four centuries. They weren't nomadic wanderers. They had settled in Egypt.

Literally overnight they were asked to leave everything they had ever known, and their lifestyle, and embark on a pilgrimage.

I can see where that could be somewhat exciting. But I can also see how it would be somewhat terrifying.

For one thing, the territory they would be passing through was hostile. There were enemies to fight - and, having been slaves, they had no training or weaponry for fighting.

There were no mini-marts along the way. There would daily be needs for food and water for what we'll see were a lot of people and livestock.

And there would be intense spiritual warfare as well. God defeated the lower 'g' gods of Egypt, but they would regroup, and seek to destroy the Jews in the desert.

I make one simple observation for us. When a person's will is freed by the operation upon it of God the Holy Spirit; and he or she is convicted of sin and of righteousness and of the coming judgment; and he or she receives the free gift of salvation by faith; that person, who we call a Christian, becomes a life-long pilgrim on their pilgrimage through this world to Heaven.

They are immediately delivered from slavery to sin and Satan and set-out on their journey home.

We're not like the Pilgrims who came over from Europe. They came here to settle - to establish something permanent. Of course, spiritually they remained strangers on their way to Heaven. But I think we need constant reminding that we aren't settlers.

We live in the greatest country on earth; maybe ever. Even with all our problems, we are still hopeful that we can be that "shining city on the hill" that Ronald Reagan described.

But guys, gals... This is not our home, and we can't ever get comfy while there is work to be done.

We are not settlers; we are strangers. We go out each day as pilgrims.

There is one game-changing advantage to embracing your pilgrim status. Heaven can so fill your thoughts that the tragedies of this world and your life are kept in proper perspective.

It's not that we are so heavenly minded that we become no earthly good. Indeed, a Christian should do the most good, in every circumstance.

But we don't lose sight of our destination, where there will be no more tears. Ultimately the answer to every argument, to every question, is to look into the eyes of the Savior.

#2 You're To Set Out On Your Pilgrimage (v33-42)

Sometimes you need a kick-start to get going.

KickStarter is one of those crowd-funding sites where you ask for funding to kick-start your product. Since it launched in 2009, 12million people have pledged \$2.8billion to fund over 116,000 projects.

The Israelites may have invented crowd-funding, and they certainly got a kick-start from the Egyptians.

Exo 12:33 And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "*We shall all be dead.*"

God, in His foreknowledge, saw that the death of the firstborn would be the final sign necessary to overcome Pharaoh's reluctance. The Egyptians didn't know that, and were thinking that if Pharaoh didn't let Israel go now, then God would start killing more Egyptians.

Exo 12:34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders.

We're going to see a lot of references to their unleavened dough. Moses was interested in establishing the symbolism of the feasts Israel will observe. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorate the deliverance of Israel; and the Feast of Firstfruits will also occur during that period of time.

As we said and saw last week; and as we will see again later in Exodus; the feasts were prophetic of God's plan of redemption not just for Israel, but for the human race.

The unleavened bread spoke of the haste in which they left Goshen. They had no time for the dough to rise.

As for the bowls, listen to this:

It was customary to travel with the kneading troughs bound in clothing to keep them handy. They were small wooden bowls used to mix flour and water or milk for bread cakes. Some were made of leather and could be closed like a pocketbook. Dough was often carried in them.

Pretty ingenious. I could see this pitched on TV's *Shark Tank* as the latest, greatest, travel product.

Exo 12:35 Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing.

Exo 12:36 And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them *what they requested*. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

See what I mean? *Crowd-funding*.

I don't like the connotation of "plundered." It make the Israelites seem like robbers. Like when you're being held-up and you say, "Take anything you want."

I guess it could be construed that way. The Israelites were asking nicely, while the Egyptians were thinking, "Take whatever you want; just don't kill anyone else."

Normally we don't solicit funding for God's projects from nonbelievers. Truth is, we don't solicit from believers, either. We trust that you'll be moved by God to give regularly, joyfully, and sacrificially.

In the case of the Israelites, commentators soften the plundering by suggesting the stuff was deserved as a kind of back wages for centuries of forced labor.

However you look at it, the Jews went out with considerable wealth. Which may not be such a good idea when you're traveling through hostile lands.

Exo 12:37 Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.

Time to put on our math hats. We're told elsewhere there were 603,550 men who qualified for military service (Numbers 1:46). Based on this, a conservative estimate for the total number that left - including women and children - is in excess of 2million.

One source suggests it was far more by separating the Israelites like this:

- Men of war - 600,000
- Wives of men of war - 600,000
- Wives of others, not engaged as men of war, and sisters - 400,000
- Children of men of war (estimating 4 per family) - 2,400,000
- Levites a month old and upward - 22,300
- Wives of Levites 30-50 years old - 8,580
- Wives of younger and older Levites, and sisters - 2,000
- Children of Levites - 34,320
- TOTAL NUMBER OF ISRAELITES: 4,067,200

That's huge, but we're not done with the count:

Exo 12:38 A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds - a great deal of livestock.

Who were the mixed multitude? One researcher said,

In this multitude were to be found heathens who were deeply impressed by the wonderful works of the LORD as seen in the history of Israel, many who were tired of the despotic rule of Pharaoh, and many more who were animated by curiosity, and who desired to see to what end this vast nation would be led; and no doubt many families who had intermarried with Israel would

follow their relatives, animated by mingled feelings of love and sorrow.

I'm not sure how they arrived at the number, but the same source suggests there were as many as 2million in the mixed multitude.

Then there was the livestock. This was quite a congregation. Here is one description of their moving column:

If they went 400 abreast there would be a line nearly 8.7 miles long, allowing 3 feet for each of the 15,252 rows.

Now can you begin to appreciate why Moses needed forty years of training as a desert shepherd, to lead this flock and their flocks? When he first sought to deliver them, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster - in military style. They didn't need a general; they needed a shepherd.

Exo 12:39 And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.

Moses continues to call attention to the haste with which they left. They may have waited centuries, then months, but when God delivered them, it happened quickly.

It reminds me of the prophetic progress of our world today. Scoffers point out that the world has gone on for centuries and Jesus has not returned. But when you read about the future, you see that things are going to happen rather quickly once they begin.

The phrase “out of Egypt” is repeated fifty-six more times in the Bible after this point. Since Egypt is recognized as a type of the flesh, we should always be able to be described as being “out of Egypt.”

The Passover lamb was consumed, then unleavened bread was their diet - all to be commemorated in annual feasts that would pass on the knowledge of their deliverance.

Exo 12:40 Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.

Exo 12:41 And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years - on that very same day - it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

There are discussions and debates about exactly when the four hundred thirty years began. One that makes sense is the day God revealed to Abraham that his descendants would in fact be held captive in Egypt.

It’s a real number, not a guess, or an estimate, because Moses wrote “on that very same day,” to let us know it was a precise moment.

It’s amazing how often God does something on a specific, prophesied day.

- The exact day that Jesus would enter Jerusalem and be hailed as King was predicted by Daniel in the Old Testament.
- As we saw last week, and will see again in Exodus, Jesus fulfilled the first four calendar feasts of Israel in His first coming, on the every day they were being observed.

Exo 12:42 It *is* a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This *is* that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

The narrative again leaves the immediate story to remind how important the annual observances would be to the life of the nation.

Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, would require male Jews to travel to Jerusalem three times each year. That in itself was a reminder they were pilgrims even after entering the Promised Land - pilgrims until Heaven.

The earthly Promised Land is not a type of Heaven. Nothing pertaining to this earth is home for any of God's people.

As I said earlier, the Israelites left the perils of Egypt for the perils of the pilgrimage in the wilderness. But leave they did. They set-out... And so do we, when we get saved.

Perils there be, however, along the way. Some of them are, if we're honest, terrible; they cause nearly unbearable suffering and sorrow. Their effect can be crippling.

Nevertheless we must set-out as pilgrims everyday. We must embrace the truth we are on a pilgrimage.

I referenced John Bunyon. He was no stranger to a pilgrim's peril. He once spent a dozen years in prison for refusing to stop preaching the Gospel.

Here is an overview of *Pilgrim's Progress*:

Christian flees from the City of Destruction and makes his way through many dangers and difficulties to the Celestial City. One of the first places to which Christian comes is the Slough of Despond, where he is almost swamped by doubts and fears. Almost thrown off course, the faithful Evangelist directs him to the Wicket Gate through which he must pass to find the path to the Celestial City.

Going through, he comes to the House of the Interpreter, who shows him many wondrous things, and sends him on his way.

From there Christian ascends a hill with the Cross upon it, where he loses the burden of sin from his back. He goes on up another hill called Difficulty, and passes between two chained lions to a lodge where he rests and is armed for his onward journey. His arms and armor are immediately put to the test in a long and painful battle with Apollyon, the devil, where Christian wins through in the face of much distress.

He meets a fellow-pilgrim called Faithful, and together they press on to Vanity Fair with all its carnality, where both are imprisoned and where Faithful is martyred.

Christian is delivered, and travels on with another friend, Hopeful, who has come to be a pilgrim through the testimony of Christian and Faithful. Although the two escape the snares of the Hill Lucre, they are captured by the Giant Despair through Christian's foolish going out of the way, and held for a time in Doubting Castle.

Again they escape, this time through the use of the key called Promise. On they travel to the Delectable Mountains, where four shepherds called Knowledge, Experience, Watchful and Sincere care for them, and give them a sight of the Celestial City far ahead. Pressing on, through encounters with men including Ignorance and Atheist, they come to the Enchanted Ground. To prevent themselves being made drowsy and lulled to sleep, they talk of good matter, and so pass through the Enchanted Ground to the land of Beulah, a place of true rest and delight.

One last obstacle awaits them before they can reach the heavenly city: a river, death. There is no way to the Celestial Gate but through the river, the depth of which changes depending on the faith of those passing through it. Hopeful passes through quite easily, but Christian is at first overwhelmed with fears. Hopeful strives to keep his friend's head above the water with encouragements, and soon Christian gets a view of Christ that delivers him from his fears. So the two men pass through the River to the Celestial City, and are welcomed into glory.

Put yourself in the story; after all, if you're saved, **you** are 'Christian.'

Where are you on your pilgrimage? The Slough of Despond?
Wrestling with Apollyon? Captured by the Giant Despair?
Imprisoned in Doubting Castle?

Or are you settled somewhat comfortably in Vanity Fair - in a place of carnality?

Maybe you're at, or approaching, the final River, about to pass over into the Celestial City.

The best thing I can do for you, to constantly kick-start you in your journey, is to greet you by saying, “Hello, Pilgrim.”