

THOUGHTS ON PASSOVER

1. While we often refer to the “10 plagues” that came against Egypt we must not forget that within the text of Exodus they are also called “judgments”. The G-d of Israel had judged the nation of Egypt and gave them multiple opportunities to release His firstborn. While a Hebrew word for plagues is found in the Exodus narratives, the word for “judgments” is more frequent. The word “plague” could lead one to believe that what happened to Egypt was just random acts of nature or the normal difficulties that come with living life. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every one of the “ten judgments” came directly from the hand of G-d.
2. The Judgments against the nation of Egypt were designed to demonstrate the inferiority of Egypt’s “gods”. Every one of the “judgments” meted out reflected another attack on an Egyptian “deity” within the religious pantheon. Judgment by judgment the G-d of Israel was demonstrating that He and He alone had the ability to exercise His sovereignty. The “gods” of Egypt proved powerless to stop the judgments against them. Within the nation, the Pharaoh was believed to be a demi-god who possessed divine attributes. But even Pharaoh proved powerless to stem the tide of judgments levied against him and his people. One message coming from the Exodus is—there is no G-d that can stand against the G-d of Israel.
3. Within the judgments against Egypt, her “gods”, and Pharaoh the power of G-d was manifested to the nation of Israel. The selective nature of the plagues/judgments demonstrated the ability and power of G-d to protect His people from harm. Plagues 4-9 did not occur in areas where the Israelites lived but only occurred in the areas where Egyptians lived.
4. Closely attached to the Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days no bread with leaven is to be eaten and every dwelling is to be rid of its presence. What is the purpose of eating Unleavened Bread? Unleavened Bread reminds us of the time when we were not our own. It reminds us of the constraints of slavery where our time belonged to the Egyptians and we moved at their bidding. So hurried was the exodus from Egypt that the bread had to be cooked before it could rise. As freemen we remind ourselves once a week in the cycle of the moedim that once we were not free and had to leave Egypt in haste.
5. According to the Talmud, each individual in every generation should understand that they too were redeemed from Egypt. If the retelling of the story becomes just about “them” and what “they” did then we have lost touch with our heritage. The Exodus from Egypt not only affected them but had reverberations for us as well. We must all see our wives, our children, our community, and ourselves as having come out of Egypt. We must all see ourselves as connected with those who came before us and on whose shoulders we have stood.

6. It is the responsibility of every parent to retell the story of the Exodus so that every generation knows it thoroughly. Somewhere along the line the retelling of the story got lost (at least orally) and for many generations the Passover was abandoned. Every adult member of this community has the obligation to tell and retell the story of the Exodus so that future generations will not forget the Torah commands to celebrate the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is not enough to just celebrate the Passover and eat unleavened bread for you. Each parent here has the Torah commanded obligation to make sure that every child knows the story of Passover.
7. We must not forget that a “mixed multitude” left Egypt the night the nation of Israel escaped. The word for “mixed” in Exodus 12:38 reflects those of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. While the Exodus did primarily effect the nation of Israel there were more than just Israeli’s that left Egypt that eventful night. Our G-d was not only dealing with Israeli’s and making a way out for them but also those of every ethnic race, Jew and Gentile alike. Once again the power of G-d was demonstrated in the release not only of His own people but also to everyone who identified with them.
8. The purpose of our redemption was not so we could all go around and claim our freedom. He did not free us for freedoms sake. Our freedom has a purpose, a goal. The reason He redeemed us was so that we could worship Him in the manner that He desired. As slaves our time, energy, and efforts were exhausted in building monuments to Pharaoh—but that was not the purpose for which we were created. We were created to praise G-d and bring glory to His name. The freedom we have in the Messiah allows us to give our energy and time to serving Him through obedience to His Torah.
9. Redemption precedes Sanctification. Said another way, Exodus precedes Sinai. Before we were given the Torah we were redeemed. The Torah is the inheritance of the redeemed. Exodus 20:1 says “I am the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d.” Before He ever gave us a command He redeemed us unto Himself. Torah obedience comes from the heart of those who have been freed from the bondage of slavery (to sin) and now in gratitude for that deliverance are willing to do whatever the liberator of their life asks them to do. Keeping Torah is the response of the heart set free. As the One who liberated us from the bondage of Egypt, He has every right to ask for our allegiance and obedience and we have every obligation to worship Him with all our being for we owe our very existence to Him.
10. Passover was designed for the community of faith. Passover was designed for those who had placed their faith in the G-d of Israel and were willing to be obedient to His commands. Exodus 12 tells us that for future generations only those males who are circumcised could eat of the Passover lamb. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant that G-d had established with Abraham and thus the

Passover was a demonstration of G-d's covenant faithfulness to provide and protect His children.

11. The Exodus from Egypt becomes in the Torah the basis for the ethical treatment of all peoples. Israel of all the nations knew firsthand what it was like to be treated as less than human. The way we were treated in Egypt must govern the way we treat others. We must never give in to the natural instinct of thinking that one race is better than another. The inhumane treatment that Israel received at the hands of Egypt must be seared into the social consciousness of everyone that professes Messiah. Every person, no matter their race, skin color, or gender must be treated with respect and dignity and cared for as one created in the image of our G-d. We must resist the inclination of dehumanizing those who differ from us for inevitably it will lead to violence and oppression.
12. Exodus reminds us that our G-d is doing a work in us that we can't see. As Israel left Egypt G-d made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward His people and they were given articles of gold, silver and clothing. Perhaps many Israelites thought that they had won the lottery or that they had finally got what was due them. However as one reads the book of Exodus at large, G-d was giving them these "things" so that they could eventually build a tabernacle where His presence could be in their midst. I am convinced that the purposes and intentions of G-d are often hidden from us and our human eyes often do not see His overall plan. On the last night in Egypt the Israelites "plundered" their captors and gained the needed material that would build a tabernacle for the dwelling of G-d. Our G-d is moving in directions that we often don't comprehend but His ways are righteous and always for the betterment of His children.
13. Passover is for the nation of Israel a re-creation of sorts. In observing the judgments of G-d against Egypt, Israel had seen every aspect of Creation affected. Passover is the reemerging of the nation and thus Passover would become the first month of her religious calendar. Every year the nation would be reminded by her calendar that her re-Creation as a nation was the sovereign work of G-d on her behalf. Those willing to place their faith and trust in the only One who could deliver them could restore what had been destroyed by the plagues/judgment of G-d. To put in another way—the nation once dead could be resurrected. And that brings us to our Messiah. Impaled on Passover and buried He would once again secure the freedom of His people by bringing life out of death.