

AT THE SIGN OF THE BLOOD

The International Sunday School Lesson For January 19 Is "The Passover"—Exodus 11:1—12:36

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS

Even a superficial consideration of the history of our own times reveals strange world-wide things which find their explanation in the Passover. There are manifest movings of human life in contemporary events which betoken to the discerning observer the presence of that Spirit whose hand first shaped the spheres and has ever since guided the currents of history. This is the deeper meaning of the day's news. It is consciousness of the sacredness of that which sobers and makes reverent many men who have been called upon to play an important part in the world's work. Every man from the trenches back to the new conviction that God is doing things in the earth to-day.

That is the present-day application of the great Old Testament story of the Passover: Jehovah is in the event. The awesome wonders of that still-celebrated night which witnessed the birth of a new nation, were merely evidences that then, as ever, "Standeth God within the shadow, Keeping watch above His own." As Bunson says, "It is admitted that the Exodus is not only historical, but that the true beginning of history for mankind." The nation which then so dramatically emerged from slavery has had the longest distinct existence of all the peoples that have ever lived upon earth; and even to this hour their persistence in undiminished identity and rejuvenated national consciousness is a witness to the providence of the God of Abraham and Moses. Remove Jehovah as a factor, and you can explain the Jew?

A Hard Apprenticeship More than four hundred years had elapsed between the day when Jacob and his train left the famine-scarred fields of Canaan for the granaries of Egypt, and the day when God spoke to Pharaoh through Moses, saying, "Let my people go." In those years the shepherd child of Joseph had become a great host. Their strength had come to be regarded as a menace by the Egyptians, who had subjected them to onerous slavery and cruel oppression. In the furnace of affliction they were welded into oneness, awaiting God's hour of deliverance. There are no meaningless blank spaces in life or history. The providence in all these years of bitter desolation is now being played out already see great blessings being wrought by the war. When He had prepared Israel, and had prepared an an for the hour, God moved for the people's deliverance. The divine clock may seem long in striking, but it always strikes. Like many mortals, groaning beneath a fortune which hardly can be borne, Israel travails and discouragement. "How long? O Lord! How long?" but the dawn was surely drawing nigh, even though the night was at its blackest. We who are at the day's end of the world, are glad to glimpse the high Providences in the war, should be reverent before the faith that held out throughout the midnight experience.

A Stubborn King's Hard Lesson Kings do not learn easily; that is why their ranks have recently been so dramatically thinned. Pharaoh would not listen to the plea of Moses, the divine ambassador, that the overworked Hebrews should be permitted to go off for a period to worship their deity; he who will not heed God's pleadings and warnings must be made to feel His judgments. There is no escaping God, who is incarnate and inevitable justice. Great aggregations of material wealth have thought themselves above the law, and immune from those obligations which society lays upon individuals; but they have been brought to book, in a manner not dissimilar from the experience of Pharaoh. The inevitableness of God should be accepted as a basal principle by whoever seeks a life of peace. No one can evade Him, for His hand is upon the world. The plagues of Egypt are but incidents in a long train of historical events, chief among them the war, which signify that God is bound to have His way in the world.

The ten plagues which God sent upon Egypt were natural events supernaturally administered. Each of them had at some time or other, in a lesser measure, been felt by the Egyptians; so they were fully aware of the dreadfulness of these visitations which came and went at the bidding of Jehovah's messengers. Many of the plagues were the first in the Scriptural history to bear a commission to others, and the first to work miracles; for miracles the plagues undoubtedly were, although each had its natural analogy. Then followed the crushing blow which broke Pharaoh's proud spirit and accomplished the deliverance of the Hebrews. This time there was no display of the rod, no tragic invocation of high heaven's aid, no instrumentality to impress the people; no awesome warning; silently and unseen by any mortal, the final blow was delivered in this audacious duel between a proud earthly monarch and the almighty King of kings. In all the mystery of unexplainedness and midnight darkness, by no visible sword, the first-born of all Egypt perished! Pharaoh had doomed all the male infants of Israel to die; now his own son, the Pharaoh of the oppression, was succeeded on the throne by his widow, according to some authorities, and the first-born of every family, down to that of the slave

heaven. Jehovah never lets pass an opportunity of emphasizing the sacredness of the family; the person who neglects his own family even for church gatherings has an altogether distorted idea of religion. The very will of God is behind the modern emphasis that is being laid upon the sanctity of the home. Every people, like every individual heart, has its anniversaries. It is not good to forget these, for they come laden with messages from the past which the present needs. And the great message of the Passover, which is perpetuated in the Lord's Supper, is that in the sign of the blood is salvation. "Christ, our Passover," who was sacrificed for us, is the only warrant we have for claiming the divine favor and protection. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." As I beheld our dear dead on a battlefield of France, more grievously shattered than I can tell, there swept over me the conviction, "These are our bodies, broken for you." In the train of Christ, our heroes have shed their blood for the salvation of mankind. In the shed blood of the whole world's sufficient Paschal Lamb there is safety, liberty and life in fulness.

The Meaning of the Miracle The underlying message of the Passover for our own ensanguined times is expressed in many ways even to-day: God has put a difference between His own people and those that know Him not. Any traveler among nations knows this to be so. He sees Christian peoples to be so. He finds a difference between the white man and the yellow or the brown or the black that is fundamentally a difference of moral character. God cares for His own, with a peculiar, personal and paternal care. The faith of the little child, that God is interested in its affairs and knows it by name and is concerned for its welfare, is the greatest truth of the highest religion revealed to man: What God said in the Passover He is still saying by revelation and providence: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." The paschal lamb was to be eaten by families; the godly household is the interger of the kingdom of heaven.

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