

Easter: the making of the people of God



**BIBLE
SOCIETY**
Live light

Holy week, culminating in Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, is the high point of the Christian year. What an opportunity to particularly remember and celebrate God's long term plan to establish of a people for himself, through the atoning death of his son.

Written by Amy Stopher. Amy grew up in the northern suburbs of Perth, the third of four exuberant girls, and first learned the gospel from her parents. She is a pastor of Providence Church in WA, having the particular privilege of pointing women to Jesus, spurring them on in faith and godliness. She taught high school students Politics and English before studying Theology, and still loves the Saturday papers.

Scripture taken from The Holy Bible: NIV

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	“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. 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.	Exodus 12:12-13	<p>On the night of the first Passover, death came to Egypt, affecting every family from the field to the palace. God's judgement had come. And in his judgement we see something of who he is. We see his supremacy. He is the Lord. He won't tolerate rulers who set themselves up in opposition to him, nor the worship of other gods before him. But we also see his justice and mercy, hand in hand. Mercy in the passing over of Israelite families. Justice in the lambs substituted in place of their firstborn sons. Such a God is worthy of all praise and honour!</p> <p>Take a moment to reflect on who God is; his supremacy, justice and mercy.</p>	Lord and God, I praise you as the one true God who rules over all things. I praise you for your justice and mercy, shown to your people. Amen.
2	Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”	Exodus 19:3-6	<p>After the Passover, God brought Israel out of Egypt and the slavery they had endured, leading them through the Red Sea. God brought them to himself, calling them to be his own people; his treasured possession. God began to fulfil his promises to Abraham, faithfully doing what he said he would, establishing Abraham's descendants as his people, and himself as their God. Now, in Christ, God has called us into that kind of relationship with himself.</p> <p>If you were amongst the Israelites, hearing God's promise to make you his treasured possession, how would you feel? How do you feel, having been called by God to belong to his people?</p>	Heavenly Father, I praise you for your faithfulness in fulfilling your promises. Thank you for including me in your people. Amen.

Easter: the making of the people of God (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
3	Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’	Exodus 32:7-8	<p>Despite having experienced God’s mighty hand bring them out of Egypt, the Israelites were quick to forget him. Having made for themselves an idol, in the shape of a calf, they bowed down to it; calling on it as god and crediting it with their rescue from Egypt. Their faithlessness beggars belief! And yet, we too have short memories. In the face of uncertainty, we quickly forget God’s goodness to us, and return to fear and self-sufficiency, instead of trusting him. But praise be to the God who does not treat us as our sins deserve; who is faithful to us even when we are faithless.</p> <p>When, in the last week, have you turned from the Lord to trust in other things? How might you fix your eyes on him?</p>	Dear God, I’m sorry I so quickly turn away from you in the face of uncertainty. Thank you that you are always faithful. Please grow me in faithfulness to you. Amen.
4	So that is what the Benjamites did. While the young women were dancing, each man caught one and carried her off to be his wife. Then they returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and settled in them. At that time the Israelites left that place and went home to their tribes and clans, each to his own inheritance. In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.	Judges 21:23-25	<p>Generations have passed, Israel long possessing the land of Canaan which God gave them. And yet, things remain much the same. The Israelites continue to live as they please, even fighting against each other. Not only so, but they find ways to justify their behaviour! The final phrase of the book of Judges serves as an exclamation point to their faithlessness. Without a king, everyone did as they saw fit; they didn’t even live with God as king. And so, anticipation builds for the next step in God’s good plan: a king.</p> <p>How do you justify your own sin?</p>	Dear God, I’m sorry for the times I justify my sin. Please give me a humble heart, that I might turn from my sin and submit to your good rule. Amen.

Easter: the making of the people of God (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
5	<p>“How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, LORD, have become their God.</p>	2 Samuel 7:22-24	<p>After a false start, Israel receives a king after God’s own heart: King David. God promises David that he will establish his throne forever, raising up his child to succeed him. On receiving the promise, David responds in a way that is perfectly fitting; he praises God. The one true God who is sovereign and mighty. The God who redeemed Israel as a people for himself, bringing them out of Egypt, driving out nations and gods before them. And he is the same God now! The one true God who is sovereign and mighty. The God who has redeemed a people for himself.</p> <p>Take a moment to reflect on the attributes of the LORD, the one true God.</p>	<p>Dear God, I praise you, the one true God. You alone rule all things. You alone are mighty. Thank you for redeeming a people for yourself. Thank you for including me in that redemption. Amen.</p>
6	<p>Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”</p>	Isaiah 1:2-3	<p>Despite God’s provision of a king for the people of Israel, their rebellion continued. The prophecy of Isaiah begins with the LORD’s proclamation to all creation of Israel’s failure to live under his good rule. In fact, they are so hard-hearted, they don’t know what the ox and donkey know instinctively. They don’t know the one to whom they belong. They don’t know their God; the one who called them to be his very own people. The situation is dire. Yet, God has shown himself to be faithful, prompting us to ask, how will God fulfil his promises to Israel?</p> <p>In what ways do you rebel against God?</p>	<p>Dear God, please take away my rebellious heart, that I might know you as my God and humbly walk in your ways. Amen.</p>

Easter: the making of the people of God (continued)

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7	Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.	Isaiah 53:4-5	<p>Despite their persistent faithlessness, God continues to be faithful to Israel. Isaiah introduces us to the Lord's servant, who suffers on behalf of the people, bearing their sufferings and being punished for their sin. By taking God's wrath on himself in death, the servant brings peace and healing to the people of God. Later, he is described as a lamb who is a substitute for the people, just like the lambs in Egypt during the Passover. Though his people have repeatedly abandoned him, the Lord does not abandon them. Quite the opposite! By his servant he makes peace with them, just as he has done for us.</p> <p>How might you take advantage of the peace you have with God?</p>	Dear God, thank you for not abandoning me, but for making peace with me, by your servant, Jesus. Amen.
8	The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'	John 1:29-30	<p>On seeing Jesus, John the Baptist exclaims, "Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." With the Old Testament ringing in our ears, we can't help but recall the suffering servant who was led like a lamb to the slaughter in the place of sinners, and the lambs who took the place of Israel's first born sons in Egypt. From the very start of his ministry, Jesus takes on this motif of substitution for another in death, of bearing another's sin. And not just for Israel, but for the whole world! What great hope!</p> <p>God offers to take your sin away—will you accept?</p>	Father God, thank you for sending Jesus, the lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Please forgive me for my sin. Amen.
9	<p>While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."</p> <p>Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.</p>	Mark 14:22-24	<p>As he ate with his disciples on the night before his death, Jesus gave new meaning to the Passover, the ancient memorial of God's salvation of Israel. He invited the disciples to participate in his body and blood in the bread and wine shared amongst them. Jesus understood the significance of what he was about to endure. In death, his blood would be 'poured out for many,' as the blood of the covenant. He would die, not for himself, but for us, to bring us to God. He would die for us, the death we deserve, in our place.</p> <p>What do you gain from Jesus 'blood of the covenant' poured out for many?</p>	Lord and God, thank you that Jesus poured out his blood for many, including me. Thank you for the forgiveness I have received because he died in my place. Amen.

Easter: the making of the people of God (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
10	When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.	Matthew 27:35-37	<p>Unlike modern retellings, the Gospel writers give very little detail regarding the nature of Jesus' death. They don't draw much attention to the physical pain he would have suffered. In fact, Jesus' crucifixion passes by as another fact in the story: 'when they had crucified him...' And yet, in his death, Jesus endured great suffering, as God's wrath was poured out on him; the innocent punished in place of the guilty. As he died on the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The great marvel of the cross is that he was forsaken for our sake!</p> <p>Do you struggle with guilt over past sin, or particularly fear God's anger? How might Jesus' suffering for you give you hope?</p>	Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus endured great suffering on the cross for my sake. Thank you that by him I can know you. Amen.
11	On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.	Luke 24:1-8	<p>What a morning! The women arrived at the tomb with spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial, having hastily placed his body in the tomb on the night he died so they could rest on the Sabbath. What bewilderment and grief they must have felt when they discovered his body was missing. And what joy (once they'd recovered from the fright) to hear Jesus was alive, having risen from the dead, his own words to them fulfilled. We can rejoice with them! For by Jesus' resurrection we cry, 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' Oh, what a morning!</p> <p>Do you fear death? How might Jesus' resurrection give you hope?</p>	Lord God, I praise you for raising Jesus from the dead! Thank you that because of his resurrection death no longer has a hold over me. Amen.

Easter: the making of the people of God (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
12	But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.	Ephesians 2:4-7	<p>Jesus' resurrection didn't just have implications for his life, but for ours too. We have been made alive with Christ, and are seated with him in heaven. We have resurrection life now, in Christ! Notice the emphasis of this passage on God's character in giving us new life. It is because of <i>his</i> great love of us, and in <i>his</i> great mercy that he made us alive with Christ. And it is so he might show the riches of <i>his</i> grace expressed in <i>his</i> kindness to us in Christ. It is because of who he is that we have been given life with him.</p> <p>How might the truth that you have been made alive with Christ empower you to stop sinning?</p>	Dear God, what a God you are! Who is like you? Loving, merciful and kind. You are worthy of praise, glory and honour. Thank you that because of your great love and mercy you have given me new life with Christ. Amen.
13	But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.	1 Peter 2:9-10	<p>In Christ, God has brought to fullness his plans to call a people for himself. The categories which previously applied just to the nation of Israel—a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession—now apply to all those who are in Christ, both Jew and Gentile. Those who were not a people, are now the people of God. Those who had not received mercy, now receiving mercy. This is not a small thing! The God who is before and beyond all things has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light as his special possession. What a great privilege!</p> <p>How might you declare the praises of God this Easter?</p>	Lord God, thank you for calling me into your chosen people. Please equip me to declare your praises. Amen.

Easter: the making of the people of God (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
14	<p>Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”</p> <p>I answered, “Sir, you know.”</p> <p>And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore,</p> <p>“they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”</p>	Revelation 7:13-17	<p>It’s a funny picture, really. A lamb sitting on a throne, being worshipped by those who have been washed white by his blood. And that same lamb being a shepherd, leading the people to springs of living water. Yet it is precisely the oddness of this picture that makes it profound! Whereas human rulers often reign because of the might of their sword, the lamb reigns because he <i>endured</i> the sword. Having suffered for his people, he makes them clean and shelters them with his presence. The suffering they once endured now finished, because of him. What a great hope we celebrate at Easter, as we worship the lamb who was slain and now sits on the throne.</p> <p>How might this picture give you hope in the face of suffering</p>	<p>Dear God, thank you for this great hope. Please strengthen me to persevere, fixing my eyes on Jesus, until the day when I stand before the throne. Amen.</p>