

December 11th, 2022

Who Is the Real King of Egypt?

Exodus 3:16-22

True Wisdom

John Calvin (1509-1564) wrote this in the opening sentence to his famous Institutes of the Christian Religion: “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: *the knowledge of God and of ourselves.*” Those two parts, knowledge of self and knowledge of God is what Moses has been drinking up on Mt. Horeb. He asked in v.11 “Who am I?” And He asked who God was in v.13 “What is his name?” God has revealed Himself in the Burning Bush. This Angel of the LORD is the pre-incarnate Christ. He is the tender bush—representing the nature of man, and He is the burning fire—representing the nature of God. He is Yahweh—the self-existent One, who is never becoming but is Eternally and Unchangeably the Great I AM. It is He who entered into a covenant with Abraham and all His offspring—which includes all of you who are in Jesus Christ. He didn’t establish this covenant because Abraham, or Israel or you had any lovely thing that attracted Him, otherwise He is not “I AM.” This covenant is based entirely on His free grace. Thus far to v.15 in our text.

“I...I...I”

But Yahweh is not done revealing Himself. In v.16-22 a new emphasis comes into focus. Seven times the LORD declares His absolute sovereignty over all things. Look with me. Halfway through v.16 “...I have observed...”; v.17 “I promise”; “...I will bring”; v.19 “...I know”; v.20 “I will stretch out...”; v.21 “I will give.” Before Moses ever enters into Egypt. What does Yahweh want him to know? That “He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Daniel 4:35). In other words, He wants Moses to know who the real king of Egypt is. It is not Pharaoh. It is Yahweh, Jehovah,

the Triune God. Dear congregation, this is your God. You do not serve a God who is “trying his best”¹ in the world today. You serve *the King* who conquered Egypt.²

★King Over All Redemption (v.16-17)

★King Over All Rule (v.18)

★King Over All Resolve (v.19-21a)

★King Over All Restitution (v.21b-22)

I. King Over All Redemption (v.16-17)

Slaves of Yahweh

Please look at v.16. Yahweh, from the Burning Bush, now tells Moses specifically what Moses must do, and more importantly what God is going to do. v.16 “Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt.” Notice, the LORD’s authority: ‘go, gather, and say this...’ He commands Moses to go back to Egypt, to gather the leadership—the elders of Israel, and to tell precisely the words He tells Him. God is not Moses’ co-pilot. God is Moses’ Master. Moses was His subject. That’s how the NT authors speak of their relationship to God. **Romans 1:1** “Paul, *a slave* of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, having been set apart for the gospel of God.”³ The greatest men this world has ever seen—Moses, Paul—were slaves of God. Can you say that you are a slave of God? That He is Your Master?

¹ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God 4th Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Books, 20th printing 2002), pg. 20

² You serve *the King* who stopped the mouth of lions, who put foreign armies to flight, who raised Christ from the dead.

³ LSB

Infinitely sweet condescension

Now of course that is not *the only way* we are to relate to God, but it is the foundation. Before we confess anything else, we must confess He is the King of kings.⁴ That is what makes His care for His people so infinitely sweet. Note in v.16 that this King has seen the affliction of Israel. Why would the King of all worlds pay attention to them? “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (**Psalm 8:4**). As Puritan Stephen Charnock says here “The condescension of royalty magnifies the gift.”⁵

A two-fold promise of redemption

And what is this gift that the King promises Israel? Look at v.17, the LORD continues “...and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.” Now this is a two-fold promise.

1. The promise for Israel

The **first promise** is for Israel. God had told Abraham 430 years earlier in **Genesis 15:14** that He was going to bring Israel out of their slavery to Egypt and bring them into the promised land. That time had now finally come. Israel was going to be redeemed, she was going to be made into her own nation, given her own land that would be so prosperous that God says it’s flowing with rivers of milk and honey.

2. The promise for the nations

But there is a **second promise** here that’s even more wonderful, especially during Advent. The second promise is for the nations of the world. *Why* this

⁴ “I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

⁵ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God Vol. 2*, Ed. Mark Jones, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2022), pg. 1523

land? The land of the Canaanites, the Hittites etc? Listen to what Abraham Kuyper says here:

“If it had been the Lord’s design and intent to seek the isolation of Israel before all else and to keep Israel out of contact with the nations, would it even have been thinkable that the Lord, to whom the whole world belongs, would have chose the region of Palestine [the land of Canaan] for Israel...? If you want to isolate a tribe, a nation, a people, then you must let it dwell on a remote island, in an elevated mountainous region, or in a remote corner of the earth...But we find...[the LORD] doing the exact opposite. And we may say without exaggeration that God...[gave Israel] precisely that region that was least isolated and most in contact with the nations of the earth. Indeed, when you ask an authority on history the question, “Which location on this earth was at that time the point where the lifelines of most nations intersected?”—then not a single location could be pointed to that definitely fulfilled these requirements more completely than Palestine...it lay precisely in the center of the world of that time.”⁶

Why is that important to note? Because God saved Israel out of Egypt, not only for Israel’s sake, but so that she could be a blessing to every nation on earth. The promise to Abraham wasn’t merely aimed at Israel, but the whole world. **Genesis 22:18** “...in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”⁷

Our 1st Principle: the King is always about redemption

That brings us to our **first principle**: *the King is always about working redemption for the world*. The book of Exodus is *not* primarily about God saving Israel, as wonderful as that was. Rather, as Kuyper says “...the nation of Jacob was created and enriched by God in order to prepare the medicine of eternal

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Collected Works in Public Theology: Common Grace: God’s Gifts For a Fallen World Vol. 1*, (Bellingham, WA.: Lexham Press, 2016), 439-441

⁷ also cf. Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14

life...for the nations of the world.”⁸ By giving Israel the promised land, God put her at the very center of the world for when Messiah would be born. God gave Israel the center of the ancient world—the one place where Asia, Europe and Africa intersected⁹—in order to minister salvation to the nations.¹⁰

Celebratory Use

How do we apply this? We *praise* the all-wise all-generous King who appointed all this for our good. Oh think what would have happened if the King put Israel on some isolated mountain, or on some remote island, that had “...no contact with the rest of the nations.”¹¹ Think of the state of your soul had God’s desire simply been to confine and segregate Israel so she had no outside contact. The Word of God would have been written, Messiah would have been born, and you would know nothing of it. You would still be dead in your trespasses and sins. Oh but praise God that the King has always had the whole world in mind. As God said to His Son in **Isaiah 49:6** says “It is too light a thing that you should be my Servant to [only] raise up the tribes of Jacob...I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Beloved praise God this Christmas season that the Great King did not isolate Israel, but gave them a land that guaranteed the blessing of Jesus Christ would spread to every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. That’s our **first point**: When the King promised Israel the land, He was preparing the medicine of eternal life for the whole world.¹²

⁸ Kuyper, pg. 449

⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 441

¹⁰ Also read Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 566-569

¹¹ Kuyper, pg. 440

¹² God was aiming at redeeming the world by placing Israel in the promised land. Israel gaining the promised land was a redemptive move on God's part to shape world history.

II. King Over All Rule (v.18)

A new old leader

Please look with me at v.18. How will the elders of Israel respond when Moses comes to them with this revelation? v.18 “And they will listen to your voice...” Stop. This is what Moses was concerned with in v.13 when he asked ‘what should I say to them?’ Recall that 40 years earlier Israel had rejected his leadership (Acts 7:35). But now the King guaranteed they would *listen* to him, meaning, that despite their many faults along the way, “Moses would be their leader under God.”¹³

The request that couldn't be denied

What next? Continuing halfway through v.18 “...and you and the elders of Israel *shall go* to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’ Notice three things here.

1. Moses' authority

When He addressed Pharaoh, it would not be in Moses' own name, or in the name of shared human values. Moses was to approach this king in the Name of Yahweh: “The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us.”

2. Moses' approach

His initial approach to Pharaoh was to be a humble servant. He was to ask for permission from Pharaoh: “please let us go.” This is absolutely fascinating. Why didn't Yahweh just command it?¹⁴ Perhaps it reflects the the two comings of Christ. Yahweh first appears gentle to Pharaoh (as Christ did in His first

¹³ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Commentaries on the Pentateuch: Exodus*, (Vallecito, CA.: Ross House Books), pg. 38

¹⁴ The President doesn't ask permission of a general to do such and such a thing. The general is directly under the command of the President. The President commands that the general is obligated to obey.

coming¹⁵), and only when Pharaoh rejected this did Yahweh lay bare His arm and ruin Egypt (as Christ will do in His second coming¹⁶). At any rate, although this is *in the form of a request*, it is not something that Pharaoh was allowed to deny.

3. Moses' appeal

The essential question was to be able to worship the LORD as he required: "...please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, *that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.*" Now some think to be deceptive to Pharaoh because God had already promised to bring Israel out of Egypt not just on a three day get-away. But the solution is easy if we look elsewhere. Before the Babylonian captivity the LORD promised Jerusalem would be destroyed (**2 Chronicles 34:24-25**). Yet He offered a promise to King Zedekiah that if he surrendered, his life would be spared and the city would not be burned down (**Jeremiah 38:17**). This was not deceptive. If Zedekiah would have repented, Jerusalem would have been spared. But God knew full well Zedekiah would not repent. So it is here. God had already promised to judge Egypt (**Genesis 15:14**) but here he offers this king terms of peace if he will let his people go into the wilderness and worship Him. But Yahweh knew full well Pharaoh would never let this happen.¹⁷ As one author put it "Pharaoh was unwilling to give God even three days of glory."¹⁸

¹⁵ John 3:17

¹⁶ 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

¹⁷ See Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 716 paragraph [505]. Another solution is offered by Calvin. "A pretext is suggested to them by which suspicion and anger may be turned away from themselves; for a free permission to depart altogether, by which grievous loss would have arisen to the tyrant, never would have been accorded...If any object that it is alien from the nature of God to countenance any craft or pretense, the reply is easy,-- that he was bound by no necessity to lay open his whole counsel to the tyrant...He only concealed from the the tyrant (as he had a perfect right to do) what He was about ultimately to effect." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 78-79

¹⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word: Exodus, Saved for God's Glory*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), pg. 92

Our 2nd Principle: every human authority must obey this King

And so we arrive at our **second principle**: *every human authority must obey the King of kings*. One of the most unhelpful theologies of our day is called Two Kingdom Theology or Radical Two Kingdom Theology. It teaches that the civil sphere is not to be ruled by special revelation—“Thus says the LORD”—but rather it’s to be ruled simply by natural law—those self-evident moral axioms that all human beings have access to through general revelation. Here’s the problem: Yahweh doesn’t operate by that theology. In Exodus¹⁹ the LORD requires Pharaoh to obey Him. This is the pattern all over Scripture. The LORD required King Abimelech to obey Him (**Genesis 20: 3**); He demanded King Nebuchadnezzar’s obedience (**Daniel 4:31-32**); King Belshazzar’s obedience (**Daniel 5:22**); the King of Nineveh’s obedience (**Jonah 3:6**); King Herod’s obedience (**Acts 12:23**). Every human authority regardless of what nation they belong to owe obedience to the LORD. And this has been the view of the Reformed Tradition until five minutes ago in church history.

John Calvin (1509-1564) wrote this in his letter to the King of France. “The characteristic of a true sovereign is, to acknowledge that...he is a minister of God. He who does not make his reign subservient to the divine glory, acts the part not of a king, but a robber.”²⁰

Puritan Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) asked “Did God ever [appoint] any earthly authority against his glory and give them leave to outlaw his laws, to introduce their own? No...he calls upon the kings of the earth...to observe his orders and pay him homage as their governor.”²¹

¹⁹ I would argue that Exodus is the prototype for *how* God deals with earthly rulers in Scripture

²⁰ He continues: “He, moreover, deceives himself who anticipates long prosperity to any kingdom which is not ruled by the sceptre of God, that is, by his divine word.”

²¹ Charnock, pg. 1503

Dutch theologian Petrus Van Mastricht (1630-1706) said “Magistrates...should have [God’s] law before their eyes, prescribe it for their subordinates, protect it against enemies, as nursing fathers of the church and as guardians of both tables of the law.”²²

Former president of Princeton A.A. Hodge (1823-1886) asked rhetorically “Who is responsible for the new doctrine that the State is not a creature of God, and owes him no allegiance?”²³

When Moses went to Pharaoh in the name of Yahweh, Pharaoh was expected to obey, not because it’s Moses, but because the King of the world was speaking.

Admonitory Use

So how do we apply this? As a *warning* against those who have not submitted to the LORD. Who is your King? Be warned by what happened to Pharaoh. He lost everything, the wealth of Egypt, his firstborn son, even his own life for not obeying the true King. Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind. Herod was eaten by worms. The King of kings will not be mocked. In this life, He has come to you gently. He comes in the manger in Bethlehem. He comes as a Shepherd King calling you, inviting you, promising you life eternal if you call on His name. But if you spurn Him, this King will meet you at the judgment seat and will inflict His vengeance upon you and you will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction. “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and let the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and

²² “In sum they should, in all these ways, kiss Christ (Psalm 2:10-12) so that their polity becomes a theocracy, that is, a Christocracy.” Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Prolegomena Vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), pg. 90

²³ A.A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprinted 1990), pg. 247

to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”²⁴ That’s our **second point**: *there is no one—not King or commoner—that is not under the dominion of the King of Heaven.*

III. King Over All Resolve (v.19-21a)

Foreknowledge or foreordaining?

By resolve here, I simply mean that the King of kings has authority over our very hearts. We already saw that God directed the hearts of the elders of Israel to accept Moses’ leadership in v.18. But this King has authority over every heart in this book. Look at Pharaoh is going to respond to Moses’ request to let Israel go. v.19 “But *I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.*” God’s knowing what Pharaoh is going to do is *not* a mere foreknowledge of events. I might say ‘I know that 12 hours from now it will be dark’ and I would be correct. But it would be wrong to suppose that Yahweh is *simply aware* of how future events are going to unfold. In other words, the LORD is not simply predicting how Pharaoh is going to respond.²⁵ He knows Pharaoh will not let Israel go *because He is in control of Pharaoh’s heart.* Look ahead to 4:21 “And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. *But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*”” Now we will get to how God does this later on, but don’t miss the point, *God is King over the resolve of Pharaoh’s heart.* When God is finished with the 10 plagues, then he will turn Pharaoh’s heart to let the people go. Look at v.20 in our text. “So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; *after that he will let you go.*”

²⁴ Isaiah 55:6-7

²⁵ WCF 3.2 “Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.”

“I will give this people favor...”

But there’s more. He is also King over the hearts of all the Egyptians. Look at v.21 “And I will give this people *favor* in the sight of the Egyptians...” Stop. This word favor means a friendly disposition or good will towards others. It’s the same word used in **Genesis 39:4** “...the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and *gave him favor* in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” Joseph received special treatment in prison because the Lord moved on the prison keeper’s heart. Why did the Egyptians give their treasures to their Hebrew slaves? Because the King of Heaven moved on their hearts.

Our 3rd Principle: This King controls the very hearts of humanity

That brings us to our **third principle**: *King Yabweb exercises His authority over every human heart.* Consider three quick proofs.

Proverbs 21:1 “*The king’s heart* is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; *he turns it wherever he will.*”

In **Psalm 105:25** the Psalmist reveals the reason *why* the Egyptians turned against Israel to begin with. “*He turned their hearts* to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.”

In **Ezra 7:27-28**, Ezra praised the LORD for moving upon the Persian King Artaxerxes’s heart to give money to rebuild the House of God. “Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, *who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king*, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem.”

This King of the Burning Bush has authority over the hearts of all men.

Consolatory Use

How do we apply this? We comfort ourselves dear ones. This doctrine has a double comfort. **First** comfort yourselves knowing that *Yabweb has power over your heart.* Isn’t that amazing? You don’t even have that power. Children,

boys and girls, one of the hardest things to learn is how little control you have over your own heart. Have you experienced this yet? The war of your heart? I remember the war in my heart starting when I was a little boy. My heart wanted to think evil thoughts. My heart lied to me about who I was. My heart lied to me about who God was. My heart told me that sinning would make me happy. It is scary when you have an enemy within yourself. But little children, *you have a King in Heaven who has power over your heart!* Oh what comfort that is! When your heart is confused or angry or frustrated or hard or scared *and* you are powerless to control it—there is a King in Heaven who can! Cry out to Him. ‘LORD as you calmed the raging sea, calm my heart. LORD as you caused light to shine in the darkness, shine in my dark heart. LORD as you opened Lydia’s heart to see the truth of Christ, so open my heart to see Him.’ That’s the **first comfort**: though you don’t have the power to control your own heart, the good King has that power and exercises it for His loved ones.

But there is a **second** comfort: *this same King has authority over the hearts of your enemies*. Grab a hold of this truth, it will give you a comfort that no one can rob you of. Why did Joseph find peace in Potiphar’s house and in the Egyptian prison? Because God exercised His authority over the hearts of Potiphar and the jail keeper (**Genesis 39:4, 21**). Why was Jeremiah the prophet rescued from Nebuchadnezzar while on the other hand Zedekiah the king was slaughtered? Because God spoke a good word to Nebuchadnezzar’s heart regarding Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 39:11**). Don’t you see? This King has the same authority over the hearts of your enemies. They can’t do anything to you, speak anything to you, think anything about you without the King’s approval. And if you say “Yes but Pastor Josh, my enemies are attacking me and harming me, how can God be in control of their hearts if all this pain has come upon me.” Wait on the LORD loved one. Wait to see the end of the matter. Trust Him, that He will turn the heart in whatever direction will work for His glory and your eternal good. It was at the end of the matter when Esther could see that Haman’s plans to destroy the Jews was his undoing. God directed the heart of Ashasuerus to hang Haman by his own gallows (**Esther 7:7**). The end of the matter will be the

same for you—‘all things work together for good for those who love God.’²⁶ That’s our **third point**: *The King of Heaven has authority over every human heart.*

IV. King Over All Restitution (v.21b-22)

Plundering the Egyptians

Let’s consider the end of the matter here. Please look at **v.21-22** “And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, ²²but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. *So you shall plunder the Egyptians.*” Note two things here. **First** it is *the women* who receive the goods here. In the end, Egypt was so in fear of Israel, that the weakest of Israel—the women—would be able to plunder this mighty nation. **Second** this plunder is exceedingly great. God promised in **Genesis 15:14** that Israel would leave Egypt with “great possessions.” I believe that’s what **v.22** means when it says “You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters,” that is, there will be so much plunder that even the children will have to help carry it out of Egypt.²⁷

The law of restitution

So what’s going on? Well remember the Israelites were in Egypt for at least two centuries.²⁸ During that time Egypt stole their freedom, they stole generations of their labor, and they stole the lives of many male children. God is just. He required restitution. Children restitution means to restore what was stolen *and* to make up for additional losses due to that theft. In **Exodus 22:1** it says “If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.” The thief has to pay back four to

²⁶ Romans 8:28

²⁷ cf. Calvin, pg. 83

²⁸ See my sermon “The Battle For Middle Earth” (Exodus 1:1-7) on page 14

five times the amount because the owner lost additional time and resources in trying to discover what happened. That's restitution. Here the King is making the Egyptians pay restitution for two centuries of stealing, kidnapping and killing the Hebrews.

Our 4th Principle: The King guarantees justice will be served

And so we arrive at our **fourth principle**: *The King of Heaven requires that restitution will be made for all wrongs*. Now we can and ought to rejoice that God righted this wrong done by Egypt. But this cuts both ways. If the King requires that restitution be made for all wrongs, you and I have a dreadful problem. What about the wrongs we've committed?

You've stolen from God

Dear congregation, you have stolen from God. Every sin you have committed against the King is theft.

You've stolen obedience every time you ignored His law.

You've stolen love every time your heart has treasured something more.

You've stolen time whenever you have, without cause, laid aside His Sabbath.

You've stolen authority, whenever you have decided to do life your way.

You've stolen glory, whenever you boasted in yourself.

You've stolen mercy, whenever you have hardened your heart in showing pity.

The good news of Christmas

Dear friends, if the King requires restitution, we are undone. No one can escape Divine Justice. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins shall die. How can we make restitution and still live. Beloved that is the good news of Christmas. That this King of the Burning Bush came in a cradle. He came to make restitution for all your sin. Jesus came to satisfy the law of Divine Restitution for you. Oh think of it loved ones. Egypt was forced to pay restitution at the highest earthly cost—their firstborn sons were killed and their

house left in ruin. But the house of Heaven paid a much dearer cost. The Father in making restitution for us gave up His one and only Son—the Christ—the Prince of Heaven, the Holy One before whom angels worship day and night. Egypt was forced to part with all her earthly treasure when she set Israel free. But God in giving us His Son, has given us the greatest treasure in the Universe. In Christ, we have plundered the cosmos. **Romans 8:32** “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” You have so much treasure now, that you couldn’t carry it out of this world if you had a thousand children. You have the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness of Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit, peace with God, an inheritance in Heaven that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, you have eternal life, you have God as your God, you have something waiting for you that eye has not seen, ear heard, or ever entered into the heart of man. When the Father gave you King Jesus, you plundered Heaven.