

The Substitute

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In the famous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, we have a character by the name of Sydney Carton. He works as a helper to a lawyer that depends heavily on the knowledge and skill of Mr. Carton. The problem is this helper is an alcoholic and doesn't have a very good lifestyle. However, at the end of the story, he decides to take the place of a Charles Darnay, who has a good character, who is to be executed by the guillotine during the French Revolution. He has the substitution made while visiting Mr. Darnay in his prison cell right before he is to be taken to the holding area for the day's executions. Most people would not do such a thing. Who would give up their life for another person? Who would allow themselves to become a substitution for another person? Even if we did, it would usually be for someone we love or a good person. A bad person would require some deep thought. Israel had to make a substitution one time in the Old Testament and we're going to see if we can learn something from this substitution.

If we go back to when Israel is still in Egypt, we may remember that the Lord had Moses go to Pharaoh, who was king of Egypt, as an ambassador of Israel and a spokesperson for God. Moses would tell Pharaoh that God would send certain plagues and then Pharaoh's heart would become hardened and he wouldn't allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt because Israel were slaves to this pagan nation. There is a lot more to this story, but because of time, I've shortened the story. After all the plagues of locusts, frogs, and other unpleasant things, we read this in Exodus 11: 9, "9 But the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." 10 So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land. (NKJV – www.biblegateway.com) We must stop here for a moment because a good question pops up about the Lord hardening Pharaoh's heart. It doesn't sound right, but it is if you think about it in this way. The Lord was guiding this whole event and God had softened Pharaoh's heart to the point that Pharaoh even

allowed Moses to see him. If you read the history of Egypt, Pharaohs' saw themselves as the "god" of Egypt and they should be worshiped. Pharaoh did not want to share his title with God, but God was intervening for Israel. All God had to do to harden Pharaoh's heart was to leave his heart to his own human condition. Pharaoh was an evil person and he would go back to his own harden heart. That's my opinion on this matter. What we do know is that Pharaoh refused to let Israel to escape from their bondage to slavery in Egypt. Something had to be done. All of this was part of the Lord's plan for deliverance.

So, God gives Moses new instructions on how to get Pharaoh to let them go. We read this in Exodus 12: 1-23, "12 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ² "This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you. ³ Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take *it* according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without^[a] blemish, a male ^[b] of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. ⁷ And they shall take *some* of the blood and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. ⁸ Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. ¹⁰ You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. ¹¹ And thus you shall eat it: ^[c] *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It *is* the LORD's Passover.

¹² 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD. ¹³ Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that ^[d]person shall be ^[e]cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but *that* which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. ¹⁷ So you shall observe *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*, for on this same day I will have brought your ^[f]armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. ¹⁸ In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹ For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land. ²⁰ You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.' "

²¹ Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover *lamb*. ²² And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. ²³ For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the ^[g]lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you*. (NKJV – www.biblegateway.com)

Verse 23 states that the Lord was going to send the Destroyer to kill all the firstborn in Egypt. In other words, Egypt was going to be punished because of its sin against God and against the people of Israel. However, the Lord states in verse 12 that He will pass over all of Egypt, so Israel had to protect themselves from this judgment of sin. God gives Israel directions on how to get passover from the Destroyer sent by God. Each family was to take a year-old lamb without blemish on the 10th day of the first month and keep it for four days. Now, I looked up lambs and found that lamb meat is better when the lamb is a year old or less. When the lamb becomes a sheep and is more than a year old, some call the meat

mutton because it's tougher and has a stronger taste. So, the lamb that is one year old is not yet a full adult. So, the family has to keep it for four days. From what I read, there was two reasons for keeping the lamb for four days. One, was to make sure it was without blemish. God wanted a perfect lamb. The owners had to spend four days making sure the lamb was perfect. Second, the family had to develop a relationship with it. Just think when you were a child and you received a new cat or dog. You grew attached to it quickly. The family had to realize the importance and the cost of this sacrifice. I believe God was giving them a foretaste of the sacrifice He would have to face with His Son, Jesus at the cross. Then, after four days, the lamb was to be killed and the blood was "to be put on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it." The blood kept the destroyer and the punishment from the Israelites who followed the directions from God. What we learn here is that sin does incur the wrath of God. We can't sugar coat this. For the wrath of God to passover Israel, innocent lamb's blood had to be put on the doorposts so the wrath of God wouldn't bring death / judgment to the Israel people. Sin brings death and judgment and still does today.

Sin didn't change in the New Testament, but the method to have God passover from judgment did. Paul tells us this in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, all fall short of God's glorious standard. (NLT)" Then Paul adds this in Romans 6: 23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (NLT)". Israel would always have to sacrifice an animal without blemish every year to make a substitution for their sin. The sin problem continued till a better way was made. Sin has to be taken care of. Sin cannot be left unchecked. Paul told us all have sinned and the wages of sin is death. It didn't change from the Old Testament times. So, God through His great wisdom, had His perfect, unblemished Son to take the place of the lamb. John the Baptist stated this in John 1: 29 when he saw Jesus, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (NLT)" The Holy Spirit guided John the Baptist to make this statement about Jesus. Jesus came to take the place of the animal sacrifices. We're celebrating Palm Sunday today and God had a reason for Jesus to enter Jerusalem on a donkey during the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. Passover had been celebrated for over 1300 years since the very first Passover, but this Passover was to be different. Jesus entered the Sheep Gate at Jerusalem to take

the place of the sheep and how grateful we should be today. Why? The blood of Jesus is so much more powerful and holy compared to the blood of a lamb. It's the blood of the only Person who never sinned! Peter states this about the blood of Jesus in 1 Peter 1: 18-20, "For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him for this purpose long before the world began, but now in these final days, he was sent to the earth for all to see. And he did this for you. (NLT)" God allowed His Son to be our perfect Lamb. God had this planned before the world began. Jesus became our atonement and our substitution from the wrath of God because of our sin. I like what Bible teacher Skip Heitzig states about this, "A substitute allows God's judgment for sin – death – to pass over us so we can have life. If there's no lamb, there will be no life. Something pure must die so we can live. The whole crux of the crucifixion is the blood of Jesus Christ, the innocent Lamb, being slain for sinners. (Heitzig (Decision), 37)" Remember, Peter called Jesus' blood "precious" in verse 19 because Peter knew what it meant to have God's wrath pass over you because of the blood of Jesus. Peter sinned against Jesus, but his sin was forgiven and he was given a new life in Jesus Christ. I believe John, a Jesus' disciple, explains this very well in 1 John 1: 5-9, "⁵This is the message we heard from Jesus^[a] and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. ⁶So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. ⁷But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. (NLT – www.biblegateway.com)"

What love God has for us by allowing His Son to be our substitute. What love Jesus has for us by allowing Himself to be our Lamb. What love Jesus has for us by allowing His precious blood to go on our doorposts of our hearts. For us to have a relationship with God, we must go through the Lamb. Jesus tells us this in John 14: 6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. (NLT)" Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Have you asked forgiveness for your sins? Have you asked Jesus to be the Lord of your life? Are you enjoying the

new life you can have through Jesus today? If not, today can be the day to ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and to ask Him to come into your heart and make you into a new person through the working of His precious Spirit. There is power in the Blood of Jesus!

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NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996.