

## The Lord's Passover

Exodus 12:1-13

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If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 12. For the next two weeks, our attention will move away from the plagues, and even the final plague which was introduced last week, and we will focus instead on the institution of the Passover, which is described throughout Exodus 12. The bulk of this great chapter is devoted to this important Old Testament sacrament. Tonight we will be focusing on the first verses of Exodus 12. Let us hear God's holy word.

Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, in the land of Egypt, this month, shall be the beginning of months for you. It is to be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all of the congregation of Israel, saying on the tenth of this month, they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers households. A lamb for each household. Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the persons in them, according to what each man should eat. You are to divide the lamb. Your lamb shall be an unblemished male, a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel, is to kill it at twilight. Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. And they shall eat the flesh that same night. Roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw, or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire. Both its head and its legs, along with its entrails, and you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. Now, you shall eat it in this manner. With your loins girded, you sandals on your feet, and your staff, in your hand and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first born in the land of Egypt both man and beast and against all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgments. I am the Lord. And the blood shall be a sign for you. On the houses, where you live, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. And no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, an inherent word. May he

add his blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we sense the significance of the institution of this feast, and as we seek to understand somewhat of its meaning, of its implications, we pray that by the Spirit, we would be illumined, that we would see what you aim to teach in Your word and that we would praise You for it. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

This introductory section of Exodus 12 has three parts itself. The first two verses are an introduction. Then beginning in verse 3 running down to verse 11, we see instructions, and then in verses 12 and 13, we see an explanation of the name of this feast, and that which it commemorates. So I would like to look at these three parts of this passage with you. The introduction, verses 1 and 2. The instructions, verses 3-11, and then the explanation, in verses 12 and 13.

### **I. The beginning of the Law.**

In verses 1 and 2, we see the giving of the law actually begins in Egypt. This is the one exception of the rule in the giving of the law. The laws which Moses was, or were to promulgate, for Israel, primarily came at Sinai, at the announcement of redemption, but this is the one exception to the rule. And we also see in these first two verses that time itself is to be wrapped around this historical event of God's redemption of Egypt. And in the course of seeing this, we learn something very important. Moses teaches us here the priority of God. And the priority of His redemption. And he teaches us that the priority of God, and His redemption is to be reflected in the very order of Israel's calendar. God in His redeeming work is to be reflected in the very cycle of the year in Israel, so they can never ever forget this glorious deliverance which He has accomplished for them.

If you look at the opening verse, you will see this indication of the importance of the festival. It is instituted by God, and even the calendar is to reflect it. The rest of Israel's law is given at Sinai, but this memorial, this memorial of redemption, we are told, look at verse 1, was established in the land of Egypt. Moses goes out of the way to say that 'the Lord said this to me, not at Sinai, but he said it to me in the land of Egypt.'

Now, by the way, Passover is not the only aspect of Israel's worship, which preceded the announcements of Sinai. Circumcision had been established back in Genesis chapter 17, verse 10. The Lord's day, the Sabbath had been established in Genesis 2, verse 3, and in Exodus chapter 16, verses 22-30 would be reiterated before it was actually announced in the context of the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20. And so it is not all that surprising is it that the Passover itself would predate the giving of the law at Sinai.

At any rate, the month here is specified as the month which will now be

considered as the beginning of months of the children of Israel. Perhaps they have been on a more agricultural cycle, that reflected their nomadic existence and the agricultural peoples around them. Or perhaps the agricultural cycles of Egypt. But whatever the calendar they were on, Moses is now saying to them, that by God's divine direction, this was to be the first of their months. The month is referred to here as Abib. The Israelites generally stayed away from naming the months. They usually used the numbers of the months in order to avoid the pagan associations with the Canaanites and the other peoples around them who had given them these various names. But Abib is the Canaanite name for this month which roughly corresponds to our March and April. And later of course, when Israel was in exile in Babylon, they took the names, the Babylonian names of the months, and the name of this month came known as Nisan.

At any rate, God is weaving into the very fabric of Israel's calendar, their time, their schedule, their routine, a remembrance of Him, and a remembrance of what He is going to do in this great redemptive work of the Exodus, and I want to suggest to you that that has a direct relevance to us today. Not simply to Israel, in how He impressed upon their minds and hearts the priority that He was to have in their experience and the priority of His redemption of their lives, but it also directly relates to us today, in our understanding of the Lord's day, the Christian Sabbath. Because our Lord Jesus was raised again on the first day and accomplished a new Exodus in His death, and by the way, Luke tells us that is exactly what he did in Luke chapter 9, verse 31. So also there is a day of celebration of worship linked with that great redemptive event. And the day is called the Lord's day. And as Christians, we cheerfully set aside the first day of each week as a day of worship because of the deliverance of the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished on that day. And so, Christ's redemption of us, and His lordship of us are reflected even in our weekly calendar. And so the stupendous spiritual realities of that great event even permeate the mundane schedule of our week, and prevent our lives from being secularized. The Lord's day is a permanent calendar component designed to keep us from becoming secularly minded people, because it intrudes God, His lordship, His redemption into the cycle of our experience once every seven days. And that is exactly what God is doing in the Exodus experience and in the institution of the Passover for Israel. But it is done for us in the cycle of each week and the first day of the week and the Lord's day. And so we see the priority of God and of His redemption reflected even in the calendar of Israel.

## **II. God's instructions for the Passover.**

Secondly we see in verses 3-11, the specific instructions which God gave for this Passover. We have said all along, and we will see this especially when we get to the instructions later in the book of Exodus and then later on as we have opportunity to study other books in the first five books of the Bible. These long lists of rules and regulations which were necessary for the children of Israel to

obey. Why? Because God was in their midst. And when God is near unto you, the demand for purity and order and holiness is exaggerated as it were. And so as God dwells in the midst of Israel, as they go through the wilderness, they have to keep certain regulations, because God is in their midst. Well, isn't it interesting that we get this list of rules, this list of instruction, minute instructions of the preparation of Passover. Why? Because God is about to visit his people. The passage makes it clear that God is as it were, going to come down and visit his people in Egypt. The presence of God with his people in this visitation of judgment requires that they meticulously prepare for his arrival. This by the way, if you will look at verse 3, is the first occurrence in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, it is the first occurrence of a phrase that would become a technical description of Israel in its religious sense. Israel gathered for the purpose of worship. You will see the phrase, it is all the congregation of Israel. Speak God says to Moses, speak to all the congregation of Israel. And that same phrase will be elaborated on in verse 6. Notice again where it occurs. The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel. Now in our day and time, there are some theologians who don't want to make a distinction between the believers worship and all of life, and what we call corporate worship, when we gather together to praise God. Isn't it interesting that God developed a special phrase to talk about the children of Israel when they were gathered for the purpose of corporate praise. The assembly of the Lord. The assembly, the congregation of Israel. That is what he called them when they were gathered for the purpose of praise. And so, Cole tells us that this word, congregation, is not an abstraction. It implies the physical meeting together of Israel, usually for a religious purpose. And so it does. Now I want you to note in verses 3-11, there are at least and I have tried to count these different ways, and I would be perfectly happy to defer to others who had a different way of numbering them. But there are at least sixteen specific rules given for preparing for the Passover. And we will walk through these sixteen rules, from verse 3 to verse 11.

First in verse 3, you will see three rules, you will see one rule given in verse 4, one in verse 5, two in verse 6, one in verse 7, three in verse 8, one in verse 9, two in verse 10, and two in verse 11. Let's walk through them. First, this is to be done, this Passover feast is to be observed, when? On the tenth of the month. Now there is a significance to that. The tenth of this month, reflects the old Hebrew three-fold division of the month. You will remember that the Hebrew calendar is lunar. It basically had three parts. There was the first section, the middle section and the last section. Basically three triads. Ten, ten and ten. The first section was called entering. I don't know what the second section was called. The third section was called departing. It is sort of like waxing and waning, except a middle section stuck in. Well the tenth of the month fell on the last day of the first section of 10, or the first day of the second section of 10. And so the tenth is the last day of that first section.

Then, number 2, they are told not only to do this on the tenth of the month, but they are to take a lamb for themselves. The word lamb in this setting simply

refers to any kind of a head of a small stock. It could refer as we will see later on either to a sheep or to a goat.

Second, or thirdly, they were to do this according to their father's households. There was to be a lamb for each household and so we see the Passover was to be a domestic and a family festival. Before there was a national expression of worship in Israel, there had been family expressions of worship. And the fathers were as it were the priests of the houses. And so in the Passover, that order was to reflect itself. And it was to be done in the context of the households of Israel, which in and of itself would have strengthened the ties of kinship and friendship and communion with one another as well as communion with God. And so we see that as part of this third direction.

Fourth, and you will see this in verse 4, we are told that if the household is too small for a lamb, the one household doesn't have enough people in it to eat the lamb, the animal that is slaughtered, then what are you to do? Invite the nearest neighbors. And so if one family couldn't eat the whole lamb or goat, then other families were to be invited. And again, this stresses the communal nature of this particular meal.

Fifthly and you will see this in verse 5, we are told that the sacrifice or the Passover animal is to be a lamb unblemished, a male a year old, either sheep or goat. The Hebrews, the ancient Hebrews, and I am also told that this is the same with the ancient Chinese regarded the distinction of sheep and goats as to a minor distinction. A minor subdivision of domestic animals. You see by the way, the implications for that when Jesus starts talking about separating the sheep from the goat. He is indicating, you know, the goats look a lot like the sheep. And so you have to be careful when you are separating the sheep from the goats. It is not unlike his words about the separation of the wheat and the tares. And the care that has to be given to that at the end of the harvest. But at any rate, the Hebrews, regarded that distinction as a minor subdivision and if you have ever seen the small black or brown Asian sheep, you would realize that it is very hard to tell them from the goats unless you look at the tails. At any rate, a yearling, would have been about full grown, a male a year old would have been full grown, and the unblemished sacrifice, of course, represents the perfection of the species if you are worshipping the living God, then perfection is required and so he is to be unblemished.

Sixthly, we are told and you see this in verse 6, that they are to take this sacrifice, they are to take this Passover beast on the tenth, but they are to keep it to the fourteenth of the same month. Now the fourteenth would have been exactly halfway through the month in a lunar calendar. And so presumably it would have fallen on the full moon. And so this instruction is given. And then again in verse 6, we are told at that time, the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight, which we are told by the ancient Jewish authorities fell somewhere between three in the afternoon and dark and there were

differences between various classes of the Jews as to when exactly that was to be done, but that is generally the time that would have been considered twilight.

Then in verse 7, you see, an eighth direction. Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two door posts and lintel. Now hold that in the back of your head there, because I want you to ask this question. What does this mean? Why the smearing of the blood? Because in the passage, forgiveness of sins is not directly linked with this Passover lamb. So what is going on here? I want you to hold that in the back of your mind. We are going to come to it right at the very end.

Ninth, and you will see this in verse 8. They are told that they should eat the flesh that same night. It is to be done then in connection with the memorial of the redemption and the visitation of God.

They are also told in verse 8, and this is the tenth thing they are told. They are to roast the sacrifice, or they are to roast this beast with fire. They are literally to barbecue it. They are not to eat it raw. You remember in the time of Noah and from that time on in Israel, Israel was forbidden to eat things which were strangled or still had their blood, or to take the blood itself. The blood was viewed by the Hebrews as the life force of the being. And only God had the right to that. And so they were not to take and eat things that were still in blood, or drown in their own blood, or still possessed of their own blood. Nor were they to boil this, which would have been a later form of preparation, they were to barbecue it, or roast it, which perhaps reflects Israel's nomadic origins. That is what Nomads would have done in the preparation of their meals. They would have roasted it over a pit of fire.

Then again, in verse 8, you see an eleventh thing. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. There is no time for this bread to rise and later Jews of course, said, that those bitter herbs reflected the bitterness of their bondage in Israel. And it has even been suggested that this is one reason why the Gospel author is interested in you knowing that Jesus drank wine that had been mingled with gall, or with myrrh. As it were indicating that he has the Passover lamb for his people has taken the bitter herbs for us on our behalf.

At any rate, we are told again in verse 9, and this is the twelfth thing that we are given as an instruction. They were not to eat any of it raw or boiled, but roasted with fire, and again this points back to those Noahic provisions about preparation and was probably because of various magical rituals in connection with blood and such that the Canaanites participated in.

Thirteenth and you will see this in verse 10. You shall not leave of it, any of it over until morning. This was a communion meal. And once the communion is over, the meal is over. And so as soon as the communion is done, as soon as the rite is participated in, that is it. The remains of the beast is not to be kept any

further than that. I suspect there is some significance of that in our theology of the Lord's Supper, but I won't go into that right now, either. Also, in verse 10, notice the instruction is given.

This is the fourteenth instruction, whatever is left of it, burn it with fire. And this would of course, would definitively prevent any type of superstitious use of the Passover animal. Once it was burn and consumed, nothing could be done with the animal. Again it is a communion meal once the communion is over, the meal itself is over.

And then in verse 11, we see the fifteenth and the sixteenth direction. Eat it like this. With your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and you staff in your hand. In other words, they are to prepare to eat it, they are to eat it prepared for instant departure. They are to be ready to go. The reference to loins girded, reminds us that the particular dress of the men would have been a long sort of night shirt like looking outfit and when you needed to run, or be more maneuverable, you pulled it up, you wrapped it around the waist, you tied it with a sash and that way you could sprint pretty well, and so they were to eat with their loins girded. This is unlike the exposition of the minister that my mother once heard in east Tennessee in her days as a child who said that this referred to girding your lions. And he preached the entire sermon about what it meant to gird your lions. And she went up to him afterwards and said, excuse me, but it says, your loins, not your lions. He was very upset about this when she made this notation to him after the service. That is the reference to girding your loins.

Sixteenth, you shall eat it in haste, it is the Lord's Passover. This can only be explained by the mingled dread and anticipation of God's coming to visit his people on his first Passover night. Eat it in haste. And of course, it is said it is the Lord's Passover, it is the Lord's victim, it is the Lord's festival. Now there are many applications of this passage, but let me just remind you of a couple of things here. Isn't it interesting that though there is no temple, there is no tent of meeting, there is no alter, there is no priest, it is clear here that we have a substitute and we have a representative in the Passover lamb. No temple, no tent of meeting, no alter, no priest, but it is clear that we have a substitute and a representation in the Passover lamb. Secondly, is there not a lesson in this minute instruction for preparation regarding our preparation for worship? It is an awesome thing to be the house of God. It is an awesome thing to be in the presence of almighty God. And God is coming down to commune with his people in Egypt in judgment and in deliverance and that is an awesome thing and so the people must prepare for this. And I wonder how our preparation for the Lord's day and our preparation for worship reflects in light of that? Is not God reminding us here that it is an awesome thing to be in his presence and preparation is required?

Well, we hasten on to the final verses. Verses 12 and 13. We have seen the introduction, we have seen the instructions, let's look at the explanation. Here,

God gives an assurance that he is going to judge Egypt. The enemy of his people. And he gives us the meaning of this blood sign. God gives Israel a covenant sign, the Passover lamb as a sacrament. And it promises deliverance and it sets forth his merciful providence. God says three things in verse 12. He is coming to Egypt. He will kill the firstborn of the lamb. And he will judge the gods of Egypt. You know when God made that announcement, surely it would have made the hair on the back of the Israelites' heads stand up. I am coming to Egypt. When I come, I am going to strike down the firstborn. Man and beast I am going to strike them down. And let me tell you one more thing. I am going to judge the gods of Egypt. You know, surely, the Egyptians would have been crying out to their gods for the lives of their children. And God is going to show those false gods to be utterly impotent against the power of his judgment. Now, they will know that I am the Lord. Can you feel a little bit of the horror of Moses' first hearing Pharaoh say, I am not familiar with this God. I am not sure I have ever heard his name. I don't know who he is. Can you feel a little bit of Moses' horror knowing that God, the God of the universe, the God of the world will not be trifled with. And here God just announces at the end, I will judge the gods of Egypt, Pharaoh included who presumes himself to be a divinity. And then he will know that I am the Lord. He won't ask about my name again. He will know that I am the almighty one. And then he tells them this in verse 13. The blood is a sign of my sparing you. The blood is a sign of my passing over you in judgment. The blood is a sign that I have not visited you with judgment, but that I have spared you of judgment. And my friends, that is vitally important because there is absolutely nothing about Israel which wants or earns or deserves that sparing. That sparing is rooted in God's love which is manifested in his electing choice of Israel. And which is grounded in his provision of this Passover lamb which points forward to the ultimate provision of his love, his son. And so when he tells this lamb, this blood shall be a sign for you that when I see the blood, I will pass over you, he is reminding them of his mercy to them, his grace to them, in sparing them judgment that they are just as deserving of as the Egyptians are. And so the ultimate difference between Egypt and Israel is not the righteousness of Israel, but the grace and the mercy of God. God's grace and his protective providence are clearly set forth in the blood of the Passover lamb. Now let's come back to the question that I asked you when we were looking at verse 7. They shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two door posts and on the lintel. What does that mean? Well let's think about that for a minute. It is the blood, and we are told this explicitly in verse 13. It is the blood of the Passover lamb that signifies God's sparing of his people from the havoc of the death angel. And it reminds them of his own providential protection. In this passage, the blood of the Passover lamb is not directly linked to the sins of the Lord's people. However, it is a Mosaic principle that blood is necessary for the atonement of sin. And there are overtones of this even in the sacrament of circumcision, which we see instituted back in Genesis 17. That principle of blood as necessary for atonement is not just set down in the New Testament, in Hebrews 9:22, it is set down in the book of Moses in Leviticus 17:11. Furthermore, it is crystal clear that the blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of the Hebrews homes, was the



God ordained instrument for covering his people from the power of the destroyer. The blood of the Passover lamb, thus reminded the children of Israel, of God's gracious redemption, and his providential protection. They did not earn their rescue from Egypt, they did not merit their rescue from Egypt. They did not deserve their rescue from the destroyer, they received deliverance from the bounty of God's grace, by the blood of the slain lamb, which was the instrument of God's merciful choosing. And so in a real sense, we can say that the Passover lamb brought Israel out of Egypt. Without the blood of the lamb, there would have been no Israel to bring out of Egypt. And so John the Baptist would say of the Lord Jesus Christ fourteen hundred years later, behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we praise you for the Passover lamb. And more than that, for the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We acknowledge that we are not worthy of your mercies. But we delight in the beneficence of your bestowal of grace upon unworthy servants. And we pray, O God, that the very reception and realization of this grace would move us to tell as many as we can of the mercy of God which is Jesus Christ. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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