

JESUS OUR PASSOVER LAMB

Exodus 12:1–13:16

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Exodus 12:1–13:16 is really a crucial passage in the Book of Exodus; it is foundational for understanding of Christ's work for us as our Passover lamb. It's so important. It pertains to our salvation. It pertains to how we live as Christians. It pertains to our dedication as people of God. More time is devoted to giving the words of preparation for the Passover than are actually contained in the Passover itself. The Lord gives some rather specific instructions to Moses. Indeed it is the Lord's speech to Moses that spans 12:1–20.

I. God indicates in verses 1 and 2 that the act of Passover and the deliverance which is to follow Passover is to mark a changing of the calendar for Israel.

We know by other references in the Old Testament that the Passover occurs in what had been the seventh calendar month for the year for Israel. It would be equivalent to our April of the year. But now the Passover is to be reckoned as the beginning of the year. God is to change the calendar. Rather than the calendar being kept from the standpoint of creation, as far as Israel is concerned, the calendar is now to be kept from the standpoint of redemption. When God leads us out the calendar of life changes.

How fitting that is when overlaid against the backdrop against the two births the New Testament describes. The first birth brings us physically into this world and marks our years in the created sense. Then the new calendar, the new birth by which we begin to mark our years in the redemptive sense. The deliverance, which Passover accomplishes, allows us all to think of our calendar in a different way. Jesus Christ has begun a new work, a new thing. You can date your life for eternity as having begun at Passover. At the time you embrace the Lord Jesus Christ.

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That's the first significant thing the Lord wants to communicate to Moses. This event is so staggering and so awesome that the calendar of your life can never be the same again.

II. A second instruction which the Lord gives to Moses is that the various households are to select lambs for the Passover, verses 3–6.

In verses 3–4, the lambs are to be selected according to households. Individuals are not to eat of the Passover alone. If they are an alone person, a single person they are then to find their next-door neighbor and they are to eat with them. The grouping is to be such that there is sufficient within every household to eat the lamb that is there. Neither an insufficient number nor an amount too much. But just enough. This keeping of the Passover according to households prevented the Passover from simply being an individual celebration. Also it kept it from being a celebration which consisted of the arbitrary grouping of friends. Instead it was to be household joined to household in terms of their physical proximity.

How good it is to think when we look at the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we do in Exodus, because Exodus, like all of Scripture, speaks of Him, that when we come to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ our faith and community is not simply to be an individual celebration. We are brought into close and vital relationship with others. We share and break bread together. We break communion together. We break the Word together. We break prayers together. We study together. We live together. Christ has designed that our life as people is not simply to be lived in isolation from one another. I feel deeply sorry for persons who come to faith in Christ and then feel that somehow the Church is immaterial, they can simply stay at home from whatever teaching they may get from books, tapes, or the TV or radio. Thank God for the ministry those mediums have but there is beyond that a community which the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to have with others of His people. Thus the intention is that we should come. Not simply

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worshipping as individuals or simply gathering together as an arbitrary collection of friends. But coming together to take the Lamb and the Word of God.

In verse 5 Moses gives specific qualifications, which are to be held regarding selection of the lamb. One qualification specifically noted is the lamb should be without blemish. This is condition for sacrifices to God. This keeps us from giving to God our worst. Or taking the straggling element of the flock which we wouldn't have any good economic profit from anyway and giving the sickly thing to the Lord. Thus “without blemish” is certainly that God is to have the best. Indeed, when speaking of Christ, who is our Passover lamb according to 1 Corinthians 5:7, God has selected in Christ a lamb for us without blemish. Hebrews puts it so beautifully in 4:15 that in every respect He has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. That qualification for the Lamb—without blemish—is the qualification attached to the moral and spiritual purity of our Lord.

It was required also in terms of the qualifications of the lamb that it be a male. While no particular rationale is offered for this requirement here in this text, we may link it to the fact that all of human history, according to Romans 5, is divided into the identity of two men. Either Adam or the Second Adam, Christ. We all belong under the headship of one or the other. The Lamb represents to us the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was noted as well that the lamb should be a year old, indicating that the Lamb had reached a certain point of maturity before it was slain.

In verse 6, we find that there was a requirement given regarding identification with the lamb. In fact, you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the month—from the tenth to the fourteenth day—when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. Various commentators have speculated on what the significance of the four days of the keeping

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of the lamb meant. Did it symbolize four centuries of slavery in Egypt, for example? We're never told.

One thing we may be sure of, that by a family's isolating in advance the Passover lamb that was to be slain and perhaps bringing it closer to their physical proximity of their quarters, it would mean that when that lamb was slain it's loss would be more personal to them. It would not simply have been a member of the flock on the same status and par and distance with others in the sheepfold. But rather, it was that lamb that had been specially selected. Those four days of closeness and proximity of the lamb to the family meant that something tender and dear was being offered in their place. As we come close to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ we recognize this same thing. That it is the disciple whom Jesus loved, John, who appreciates perhaps more than any of the others, the cross of the Lord. He is there seeing the one who has been close to him giving His life. The Lord wants us to have an identification with a lamb, which is offered for sin.

Another striking thing about the lamb is that it lived in order that it might die. It's real end, the reason why it came into being, was not simply that it might eat but that it might spill its blood. That its blood might become an instrument of salvation. The blood of the lamb must be released if salvation was to come for Israel. There was no salvation for Israel except the lamb gives its blood. Thus it is striking when we come to the New Testament to recognize that John the Baptist, prophetically, when he sees Jesus, cries out in his first recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The purpose of the lamb is more than to minister, more than to teach, more than to give acts of healing. His purpose is to show in the shedding of His blood at Calvary that salvation comes not simply through the teaching and the moral example of Jesus but by the substitution which He offers—giving His life instead of ours. Behold the Lamb of God

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who takes away the sin of the world, whose full and complete purpose on earth is to be realized by His death and by His sacrifice for us.

III. When the lamb is set aside then in verses 6–11, we find the instructions which God gives to Moses pertaining to the slaying of the lamb.

The lamb was to be slain at the evening time. As that sun went down then the lamb's life was taken and the meal had. The Passover time was finally apexed at the midnight hour.

It's striking to realize that the lamb of God was slain at a time when darkness was upon the face of the earth. It was as if God himself would not look at the earth when His son was dying. Thus in Matthew 27:45 "From the sixth hour [noon] there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour [three o'clock]." The Passover lamb slain in the evening. For the lamb of God, God creates the darkness in the middle of the day. A striking comparison.

In verse 7, Moses is told by God that the blood of the lamb is to be applied to the doorposts and the lintel of the house. The lintel is the board over the doorposts of the house, which supports the wall that comes on top of the board. The blood is to be applied to the top of the door and the posts of the door. The blood is to be seen by God. God will pass over. It is immaterial once the blood is applied whether Israel in its household sees the blood. It is not important whether it goes out and continue to check whether the blood is there. For the blood is there.

Sometimes we get so curious. Has God really saved me? Did He take me at my word when I confessed my sins? Was the salvation really real? Should I go out and check and see if the blood is still there? Yes it's still there! The blood was here. There for God to see and He passed by. I wonder what the Egyptians must have thought when the next day they came and beheld all the empty slave shacks in the land of Egypt and saw this sign of blood upon the door. What they wondered. Those who look at the meaning and sacrifice of Christ, having missed the

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opportunity, can never understand the wealth of protection and meaning that blood has purchased and accorded to us.

Following the slaying of the lamb there was to be the eating of the lamb. Again that comparison may be made to Christ who gives His life in our stead; we're also to feed upon the sustaining life He gives us. So the very lamb which provides salvation from death also gives sustenance and strength for the journey which is ahead.

God indicates to Moses that the lamb should be totally roasted. Not left raw or boiled with water. It was in its totality to be affected by death. If it was to be a total salvation, then there was to be a total substitution made. The lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread. The unleavened bread symbolized haste with which the meal was to be eaten. Bitter herbs symbolizing the slavery which characterized Israel's experience. In the eating of the Passover there was both the sweet and the bitter. The sweet of deliverance but the remembrance of where one was prior to the Passover meal. The same in Christ when we take the Passover together, the emblems which represent His Passover. We remember where we are because of Christ. But at the same time we remember what we were without God—having no hope in the world.

The lamb was to be totally consumed. If anything was left it was to be burned. Thus when the Egyptians came the next day in their search of the homes, in their looking, they would find nothing left of the meal. Also certainly indicating in a biblical sense of comparison that Christ when He gives Himself for us is totally consumed in His task.

The lamb is eaten in urgency by persons fully prepared to travel. They are dressed. They are ready for the journey, staff in hand. It is not a leisurely meal, which was to be eaten in those slave shacks. Much remains to be done. Following the passing over of the death angel there are

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herds and flocks to gather. There is the jewelry of the Egyptians to take. But they eat. And they eat in haste. Because that night they are going out.

It is striking to realize that the people of God may have a meal while God pours out His judgment upon Egypt. The same theme is carried through in the New Testament where we are specifically told that God has not appointed us to wrath but to salvation. That we can set and have our bread and fellowship in peace while God's judgments are poured out on the world.

IV. The Lord then in verses 12–13 of chapter 12 gives to Moses the reason for the taking of the lamb.

We've already looked at some of the reasons. Again, they're specifically noted in verses 12–13.

The killing of the lamb represents, and the Passover as an entity represents, God's judgment upon Egypt and the gods of Egypt. The taking of the firstborn of Egypt is due justice for their slaughter of Hebrew children which has already been noted in Exodus 1:22; generations of murder of the Hebrew infants is now to be met with poetic justice by God. God has a Nuremberg for every people, every nation, every ruler who walks in injustice. God will balance the scales of justice in the world. If the judgment is upon Egypt, the judgment is also upon Egypt's gods as the Lord notes to Moses—the God of procreation and reproduction, the God of fertility and who gave the power to bear offspring, the goddess of love, one of the seven deities who attended the birth of children, the God of bulls since also the firstborn of animals was affected. It was a judgment against Pharaoh himself who regarded himself and his firstborn son as divine, the embodiment of divinity. Against the gods of Egypt, against Egypt itself this plague would come. But for Israel, verse 13, the Passover represented redemption. “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” (NIV). How was Israel saved that night of the

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Passover? Was it saved by simply saying, “*I feel* like I’m saved”? Was it saved by simply the fact that they were Hebrews and not Egyptians? The salvation was not dependent upon their feelings and the salvation was not dependent upon their nationality. Indeed the salvation was available to the Egyptians if they wanted to participate in the same deeds of salvation. They were saved by keeping God’s objective promise. God made a statement based upon His covenant with Abraham that He would redeem. He gave a promise–If you will do this, then I will save. And indeed by acting in obedience to that word of God salvation was accomplished.

At times doubts return, causing you to wonder, “Am I saved?” If you have given your life to Jesus Christ, confessed your sins, and believed in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, then the blood has been shed. God will keep His promise. Your salvation is objectively real whether subjectively sometimes you feel terribly blocked. The salvation is real because the Lamb is real. And the Lamb’s blood has been shed.

Indeed, Jesus tells us in John 6:53–54, speaking in spiritual dimensions, “Truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.” Not a physical eating but a spiritual eating is spoken of.

Peter describes us as being chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit in obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood. Beautiful term for the Passover which Peter supplies to us that on the doorposts of our life the blood of Christ is sprinkled. We have been destined for the sprinkling of His blood. Paul therefore can say in Romans 5:9, “Since therefore we are now justified by his blood much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”

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V. The Lord then gives instructions in Exodus 12:14–20 regarding keeping the feast as a perpetual observance.

The Passover was not just to be a one-time event. All future generations of Israel were to be linked into this great event. All of Israel was to see itself as represented there so it is perfectly appropriate to say even though one came centuries later, “Yes, I was there on that night when God passed over. I was there.”

The perpetual keeping of the Passover links all future generation with that covenant which God has made of salvation and sacrifice.

God also in the keeping of the Feast of the Passover ordained that the Feast of Unleavened Bread be kept commensurate with the Passover beginning on the day of the Passover and continuing seven days after that. We must realize that in an age prior to communication by print and television and radio, God used sometimes events as teaching symbols. Thus Paul when he writes in 1 Corinthians 5:8 says “Let us therefore celebrate the festival not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” So with the act of being saved itself which the Passover lamb represented, the Feast of Unleavened Bread comes to represent the life of cleansing from evil that is to be lived as an outcome of salvation.

VI. Following the instructions which the Lord gives to Moses. Moses then turns around and in verses 21–27 gives instructions to the people.

In this particular passage the writer summarizes the instructions Moses is to deliver. Again we must note salvation is not to rest upon the feelings of the people, but it rested upon God’s covenant which had been received in obedience. It was not said to the people, “When you see the blood and value the blood as you ought then I will pass over you.” It is not said to us, “When you value Christ as you ought.” It is not, “When *you* see the blood.” It is the blood on the outside.

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And the Israelite on the inside. So that the Israelite cannot possibly see it but God can see it. I realize that in a physical sense you cannot see the blood of Jesus Christ applied to your life. You must simply trust the Lord that what He has said, “He sees the blood, He will pass over.” So when we come to Jesus Christ, there is the loss of His life for ours. His life is applied to us and we are saved by that very real and objective fact. When the people learned what God had provided from verse 26–27 they bowed their heads and worshipped. That same wording you recall was used in Exodus 4:31, there in a very different context. It was the context when Moses first came back from Midian and revealed to them the fact that he was to be the deliverer and God would bring them out with a strong hand. It says they bowed their heads and worshipped. But it was not very long until they were saying, “If God sent you, then why all this evil on us?” But following the completion of the plagues again that phrase is used. They bowed their heads and worshipped.

In verse 28, they did not only worship but they obeyed. It is one thing to worship and to bow one’s head. It is quite another thing to go out from the place of worship and to do all that the Lord has commanded. The act of salvation comes in both the act of worship and in the obedience to the Lord. To take that which has been offered in their stead.

VII. The results of the plague and Passover are noted in verses 29–42.

For Egypt it was the tenth plague, the last plague. There was the death of all firstborn of all men and cattle; we should probably understand domesticated animals. To all men it occurred. From the man who was in the dungeon and the firstborn to even Pharaoh himself. From the jail to the palace. A great cry went up all throughout Egypt. Not only a wail that bemoaned the loss of a son or of animals but also one that bemoaned the incompatibility and incapability of the many gods of Egypt to protect them from their tragedy. Once Egypt had made Israel cry. Thus we read

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in Exodus 2 that Israel groaned and cried. But now Egypt itself cried. Only unlike Israel, Egypt had no gods to hear its cry.

I think of this in regard to persons who go through tragedies in life who have the Lord or who do not have the Lord. One thing you can see about going through a dangerous time and critical time, a time of reverses, no matter what—even though the Christian is not immune from dangers, from sickness, from accidents, from loss, yet the Christian has Christ in the midst of his situation, a God who hears his cry. Egypt had no gods to hear their cry.

The plagues bring a release by Pharaoh. He had been insolent to Moses when Moses had first announced in his court that the Lord had sent him (5:2). He had said on that occasion that he did not know who the Lord was. Now that he knows in letting the children of Israel go, he breaks out with a cry to Moses, “Bless me also!” A short-lived prayer, as it were, but nevertheless one that recognized God had the contest won. Indeed every knee shall bow to Him.

It follows as Israel leaves the land the spoiling of the Egyptians. They take from the Egyptians with their permission. It’s not thievery. It’s a taking with the permission of the Egyptians.

Certainly Israel deserved some compensation for all the centuries of slavery. One cannot look harshly at them for doing this. They deserved to be compensated.

In Exodus the Passover meant an exit from Egypt, verses 37–42. We find described in these verses their initial setting out. There were some six hundred thousand men between twenty and sixty years of age. Plus women and children.

Also with the children of Israel there is a mixed multitude, verse 38. This consisted evidently of other Semites, relatives of the Hebrews. And perhaps there are also those Egyptians who had participated in the Passover and had been saved. They’d been impressed by God’s power and joined the group going out. This mixed multitude later in Numbers is called a rabble. It causes

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trouble. When things do not go miraculously all the way this rabble incites the children of Israel to cry out, “Take us back to Egypt. We had it better off there.” As always is the case when God is moving there will be those who will come in and become associated with the moving of God but never truly become regenerate in their heart and life, never truly become one of His. They’re simply there because at that moment it is the thing to do.

This happened with Israel. It happens with the church.

Also coming out of Egypt are many cattle, flocks and herds. They left with unleavened cakes of dough. They were thrust out except for the dough and the herds without provision. God will take care of them, as we’ll see later with manna. He who begun a good work in you will bring it to completion.

They left after four hundred thirty years in Egypt. Elsewhere it’s rounded to four hundred years and they left after a night of watching.

VIII. In chapter 12:43–13:16 the Lord gives permanent directions for the observance of Passover as it is to be kept throughout the generations of Israel.

In regard to prohibitions which the Lord makes in verses 43–49, He indicates that not everyone is to be allowed to take of the meal. Only those who have come under the covenant of circumcision and have accepted the faith of Israel. There’s to be also prohibitions in regard to the eating of the lamb. For example, no flesh is to be carried outside the house. And no bone of the lamb is to be broken. Psalm 34:20 devotionally picks up on this theme that the Passover lamb does not have a bone broken. Prophetically Psalm 34:20 speaks of Jesus as the Passover lamb. “He keeps all His bones, not one of them is broken.” And John the disciple who records the phrase “Behold the Lamb of God” specifically notes when Jesus dies in John 19:36, “Not a bone of his was broken.”

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In Exodus 13:3–16 Moses gives directions to the people further in regard to the perpetual keeping of Passover. It's to be associated with the abstinence of leavened bread, verses 3–10, and as a reminder of the Passover they were to wear the leather pouches, which were worn about the forehead, or on the left arm. Inside were fragments of the law. Thus in a physical way Israel was to continue to keep on its mind and in its heart the law of God. And in addition, Moses indicates that the Children of Israel, upon directions of God, were from this time forth to consecrate their firstborn to God, whether the firstborn son or the firstborn of animals. If they will not, then the firstborn's neck is to be broken. There was no provision like that if firstborn children were not dedicated.

What is God trying to communicate to Israel? He's trying to say to Israel, the phrase we use "Put God first" He's saying that after redemption comes consecration. As a sign that God saved your firstborn from this time on, your firstborn is to be redeemed. Your first born is to be given. It is a way of saying to Israel continually in its products and in its children, "Have you given the first to God, have you thought of Him in priority and the primacy of all of your dealings?"

IX. How do we take this whole extensive passage of Scripture and apply it to wherever we are?

Let's look at these two chapters from the standpoint of salvation and sanctification and consecration.

A. In regard to salvation as we look at the Passover we have to recognize that as the angel of death went through Egypt that night, it was to go through and be applied to all that were in Egypt whether they were Hebrews or Egyptians. The only thing which kept the death angel from coming into the Hebrew homes was the blood of the lamb. Else wise the death angel would have entered. Israel therefore can never lay claim in future generations or even in that generation that

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there was some act of righteousness on its own which merited the firstborn being saved. None at all. In fact, later as we've seen already in the introduction, God himself was provoked with the idolatry of the Children of Israel in Egypt. Had it not been for His covenant with Israel He would not have remembered them at all. So it was not their righteousness which was the means of their salvation. It was God's covenant. It was God's initiation. It was God's mercy that granted the salvation. Therefore when we think of salvation for ourselves we don't think of salvation because we've been good enough; because we have not. We do not think of salvation because we can protect ourselves from the onslaught of spiritual death and eternal separation from God. It is all due to the fact that God has allowed a substitute, even as in the Passover, a substitute lamb which provided that the firstborn might have life. So God in Christ Jesus has allowed a substitute, so that we might not die.

The death angel eventually comes not only to the firstborn but if we think of it in a symbolic sense the angel of death, death itself comes to all. We are protected not from physical death but from spiritual death, the second death which involves separation from God. Protected because of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon the door posts and lintel of our hearts.

B. When we are saved the Lord also expects us to grow in grace. To be "sanctified," a word meaning "becoming more like God." Becoming holy. Therefore we are to clear out the old leaven in our lives. The New Testament tell us to put off the old nature (and this is the old leaven)—falsehood, anger, theft, evil talk, bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, malice, immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness. Not cleanse out that you might be saved, for indeed God through the Passover has already saved you. But cleanse because it is unbecoming a child of God to have in his life the old leaven.

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C. And also following sanctification there is consecration. The Lord asks in the Old Testament as I think He'd ask in the New, the first and the best. In the Old Testament it was the first of the family given to the Lord and the first of the assets. The Lord is pleased with the consecration which gives itself to Him as well. We give to the Lord that which is ours. That which belongs rightly to Him of our family and of our possessions and of our time, again not that we might be saved, for we are already. But as a sign of our gratitude and our desire to live for Him.

How beautiful the Old Testament thus becomes as a picture book which shows us through the relief of the Passover meal how it is that we are to be saved. How it is that we are to live a holy life. How it is that we are to be consecrated to God.

Closing Prayer

In our heart, Lord, we want to see that vision of You so that we cry out with the gospel writer, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." May we add to that, Lord Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of George Wood. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away my sin." We might have thought of another way of saving. But salvation is not dependent on how we would have done it. It is how You did it. We do not argue after the fact the method You use. We just stand in great gratitude that the method You employ is the method that worked. It is the method which really brought salvation. Help us, Lord, to stop wondering why it was necessary for a substitute to stand in our place. It was simply unnecessary because You ordained it, because that is in Your heart and mind and will. To give Your most beloved to be our most beloved. To give Your Son to be our sacrifice and substitute. We can only say as we feel the blood sprinkled to our life that You are there and see it. Because of that blood of Your Son applied to us we will never, never experience Your wrath. For we are safe in You. We thank You and praise You for Your work of redemption on our behalf. We pray, Lord Jesus, for any

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who may be here in this moment who have never had that experience of coming to You and saying, “Lord Jesus, begin the calendar of my life anew. Date my birth from this moment when I come to You and confess my sins and believe on You and receive You as my substitute.” Lord, may that experience be received today. May all our hearts rejoice because our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, and there now is safety and peace in the household of our heart. There it is that we feed upon the Lamb, which has been slain. There we will receive grace and mercy and help in time of need. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we give thanks now as always. Amen.