

The Passover of the Lord
Exodus 11:1-10, 12:1-13, 21-28
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Introduction: About five years ago, when we lived outside of Washington DC and my parents were in town over Christmas break, a few of us went to the Holocaust Museum. It's interesting to be immersed in the whole story and history of the Holocaust, because books and movies about it usually depict one person or group's story; at the Museum you are forced to think about everything. I was reminded of some of the first devastating actions in the Holocaust that occurred on April 1, 1933: Nazi Storm Troopers put up signs that said "Don't buy from the Jews" (in German) and painted the Star of David in yellow and black on any Jewish businesses. Germans boycotted all Jewish businesses for a day, which might not have been a big deal, but led to greater restrictions and confiscations, and eventually the full-blown arrest, imprisonment and execution of millions of Jews throughout Europe.¹ Many were reminded of those events several years ago when ISIS began marking Christian's doors with the Arabic letter for N, which meant that a Nazarene, a Christian, lived there. The N was a threat that they would be the targets of violence.

Today's passage is also about markings on buildings; specifically on Jewish homes. Violence was coming and there needed to be a signal to separate out the Jewish families from the non-Jewish families. However, unlike in Nazi Germany, this time those marking were to save the Jews, not to condemn them. They were markings of protection that re-directed the violence elsewhere - to be taken upon those who had earned judgment and God's wrath. This passage is an immensely important one in the book of Exodus, but also in the whole of Jewish history, laying down the explanation of one of their most important holy days. And it is one of the most significant foreshadowings of the great work of the coming Messiah. If you don't understand the Passover, you miss so much depth and richness of how God planned out redemptive history, and you won't fully understand the Lord's Supper that we will celebrate later this morning.

So we start with all of chapter 11, which is a short chapter giving us a preview of what is coming.

I. Instructions for the Final Plague (11:1-10)

¹ The Lord said to Moses, "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. ² Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry." ³ And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people. ⁴ So Moses said, "Thus says the Lord: 'About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, ⁵ and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. ⁶ There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. ⁷ But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.' ⁸ And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Get out, you and all the people who follow you.' And after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." ¹⁰ Moses and

¹ <http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007693>.

Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

This is finally the last plague that God will be sending. God said that not only will Pharaoh let you go, but he'll drive you out! What could possibly force Pharaoh's hand this way? After he had stayed stubborn through what was most likely months of insect attacks, disease, weather disasters, all the pain and problems caused by the first 9 plagues? God is planning to take the lives of the firstborn of all of the people and animals of Egypt, and then they'll be so mournful and angry that they'll just tell you to get out. God had actually told Moses back when He first called him from the burning bush (Exodus 4:22-23) that He would be threatening to kill Pharaoh's firstborn son if he refused to listen and obey. God lays out the details that Moses then communicates to Pharaoh in verses 4-8: at midnight I will come to Egypt and every firstborn will die. And the text doesn't have a response from Pharaoh, just that Moses leaves his presence in "hot anger."

It's ironic because verse 3 says that Moses has achieved great esteem in the land of Egypt, it says "Moses was very great" in their sight. For Pharaoh's servants and the common people. But still not by Pharaoh himself, since the chapter ends with Pharaoh still not listening. We'll deal with most of the ideas in this chapter, including the Israelites getting their neighbors' jewelry, in later sermons.

Before God came to kill the firstborns of Egypt, though, the Israelites had some work to do:

II. Instructions for the Passover Meal (12:1-11)

1 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. 3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. 4 If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. 5 The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. 6 Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. 7 Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. 8 That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. 9 Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. 10 Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. 11 This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

Did you catch the very first command in this passage? "*This month is to be for you the first month of your year.*" The Jewish calendar is to be oriented around what is to come, the Passover celebration and the Exodus from Egypt. As I understand it, the month roughly corresponds with April. The Jews kept two calendars – one for sacred and another for civil purposes.² But the point is that these events are so important that it requires a whole new way of marking time. It's a lot like the fact that we end "BC" around Jesus' birth, and start "AD" time (even though that whole system is probably a few years off). Not only does the Passover get remembered by the changing of the calendar, but in vv. 24-27, instructions are given so that the Passover would be celebrated annually. God did not want them or their descendants to forget this, beginning each year by remembering His great work.

² John J. Davis, *Studies in Exodus: Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2011), p. 144.

So at the end of all these terrible plagues that the Lord has sent on Egypt as He is moving the Israelites towards freedom, we have here elaborate instructions for a big meal. Very specific cooking instructions on a specific day with a specific dress code, some of which we'll work through. This meal was a family meal, and if the household was small, they would share the lamb with another family. Did you notice verse 11, how the people were supposed to dress to the meal? Kinda strange – everyone had to have a belt on their waist, sandals on their feet, staff in hand. The message is: be ready to leave! You're not sitting around for another month or two making preparations to depart, it's time to get going because Pharaoh is going to send you out when his son and all the other firstborn sons of Egypt die.

Now look at the instructions about the lamb to be slaughtered:³

- 1) **The lamb was killed by God's command.** Verse 3 – *"Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household."*
- 2) **The lamb was perfect.** Verse 5 – *"The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats."*
- 3) **The lamb was roasted over the fire.** Verse 9 – *"Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs"*
- 4) **The lamb's bones were not broken.** Verse 46 we find out: *"You shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones."*
- 5) **The lamb was eaten.** V. 11 – *"This is how you are to eat... in haste; it is the Lord's Passover."*

Sometimes I save all of the parallels to the New Testament and the saving work of Christ until the end of the sermon, but it's kind of unavoidable in this passage. It's all over the place, hard to miss for those who have eyes to see. Christ is the sacrificial, Passover Lamb. God is giving His people a visual that would last for a couple thousand years before its full impact would be understood. Every one of these instructions about preparing the Lamb was reflected in the death of Christ:

- 1) **The lamb was killed by God's command.** Acts 2:23 - *"this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."* Men killed Jesus, but it was God's plan for our redemption.
- 2) **The lamb was perfect.** 1 Peter 1:18-19 – *"you were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."* Only a sinless lamb could atone for sins, only one who had never sinned could offer His death to cover other's sins.
- 3) **The lamb was roasted over the fire.** Eph. 5:2 *"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* Jesus was not burned to death, but the parallel is that He went through the fire of suffering, and was an offering on our behalf.
- 4) **The lamb's bones were not broken.** John 19:36 – *"For these things took place that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken.'" The Roman soldiers broke the bones of the two criminals who died next to Jesus to hurry along their deaths, but when they came to Jesus they saw he was already dead and they didn't need to break his legs.*
- 5) **The lamb was eaten.** John 6:53-54 – *"So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, 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. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.'" In 15 - 20 minutes we'll be eating Christ's broken body in our communion bread.*

Now that instructions for the meal have been given, we find out why it's called Passover. We'll skip about 7 verses because we're going to those with the first half of chapter 13 in two weeks.

³ Stan K. Evers, *Christ In Exodus* (London: Grace Publications, 2010), pp. 47-50.

III) Instructions for Marking the Houses (vv. 12-13, 21-28)

12 “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. 13 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.

(skip to verse 21)

21 Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. 22 Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. 23 When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down. 24 “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. 25 When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. 26 And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ 27 then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. 28 Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

Do you remember the animated Dreamworks movie about the Exodus, *Prince of Egypt*, with the voice of Val Kilmer as Moses? The makers of the film asked some Christian leaders like James Kennedy and Billy Graham to be expert advisors so that they wouldn't get it wrong or offend the Christian audience. (Something the makers of *Exodus: Gods and Kings* with Christian Bale maybe should have done). The first cut or screenplay of the film did not include the blood on the doorposts during the Exodus, because the filmmakers thought, “That's just too bloody, this is a kid's movie.” But the theologians told them, “There is no way you can leave that out, you completely destroy the whole symbolism if you don't have the blood on the doorposts.”

God had already committed to sending this last plague, the death of the firstborn. And He was going to take the lives of Egyptians because of their abuse of the Hebrews, as judgment. God didn't need markings on the doors of the houses to know who were His people and who weren't, right? So the need for the sign must point to a much deeper theological reality. Marking the door with blood indicated that death had already taken place in the household. Judgment had already taken place, even if it was on a substitute victim. The Israelites were just as deserving of death as the Egyptians, but they had a way to escape destruction. Death came to every single house in Egypt. In the morning somebody was going to be dead – either the lamb or the firstborn son!

Closing: The Passover Points Forward to Christ's Death and Atonement⁴

Fast-forward roughly 2,000 years, to when Jesus, like a good, obedient Jewish man is celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples, as the Gospels describe the Last Supper. He acted as the father who would take the whole family through the different parts of the Passover and explain each part to his children. But in the Gospel accounts where you think Jesus should be talking about the sufferings of Israel, and the bitterness of the herbs symbolizing the bitterness of the bondage of Egypt; or the bread of affliction reflecting how the wilderness community suffered, HE ISN'T! He says a strange thing – the bread is My body. The wine is My blood. Move beyond their symbolism with the old celebration of Passover. There is a greater thing that you are about to witness, and it is the new

⁴ Charlie Baile's sermon “It Is The Lord's Passover” found at: shadygrovepca.org/sundays/sermons/

covenant with God. Passover and the Exodus were amazing, it was a historic turning point that the Jews continued to celebrate and still do. But Christ's death and sacrificial atonement is greater!

Hebrews 9:13-14 - *"For if the blood of goats and bulls... sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."*

1 Corinthians 5:7 - *"For Christ, **our Passover Lamb**, has been sacrificed."*

John 1:29 - *"Behold, **the Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Revelation 5:12 - *"Worthy is the Lamb **who was slain**, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"*

We don't celebrate Passover anymore because it's only the shadow of the real thing. Why celebrate the symbol when you can celebrate what it's symbolizing? We partake in the Lord's Supper out of obedience to the new covenant. It's the same reason that we baptize children instead of using circumcision as our ritual. The same reason we don't still slaughter animals - all those were part of the old covenant; all are remade new in Christ.

Don Carson's "Picture Two Jews The Day Before The First Passover"

To get a sense of how much salvation depends on us, here's a story that Don Carson told. It's a fictional conversation between two Hebrew men on the night of Passover. The first man says,

"Are you a little nervous about what's going to happen tonight?" The other man says, 'Well, God told us what to do through His servant, Moses. You don't have to be nervous. Haven't you slaughtered the lamb? Daubed the two doorposts with blood? Put blood on the lintel. You've done that, right? You're already ready, packed to go? You're going to eat the Passover meal with your family?' The other guy says, 'Of course I've done that, I'm not stupid. But it's still pretty scary when you think of all the things that have happened around here recently. Flies, river turning to blood, it's pretty awful. Now there's the threat of the firstborn being killed - it's not as bad for you, you've got 3 sons, I've only got 1. The angel of death is passing through tonight. I know what God says and I've put the blood there, but it's pretty scary and I'll be glad when this night is over.' The other one responds, 'Bring it on. I trust the promises of God.'

That night the angel of death swept through the land, *which one lost his son?* And the answer, of course, is neither. Because death doesn't pass over them on the ground of the intensity or the clarity of the faith exercised, but on the ground of the blood of the Lamb... The blood silences the accuser of the brothers when he accuses us before God... We overcome him by the blood of the Lamb. There is the ground of all human assurance before God... It's not the intensity of our faith but the object of our faith - we overcome him on the grounds of the blood of the Lamb."⁵

Are you saved because you are good enough? *"When I see the blood, I will pass over you."*

Are you saved because you're doing the best you can? *"When I see the blood, I will pass over you."*

Are you saved because you've done more good than bad? *"When I see the blood, I will pass over you."*⁶

Christ is our Passover Lamb, and today we eat the Lamb slain. All people have justly deserved the judgment and punishment of God for their sins. But as with the Passover meal, God has provided a way to avoid being under God's sentence of eternal death and separation from Him: Jesus Christ is the Lamb slain for you!

⁵ Don Carson's sermon "The Ground of our Assurance" found at: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-long-o-lord-steadying-our-soul-in-the-midst-of-the-storm>

⁶ J. Vernon McGee, *Exodus: Chapters 1-18* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 105.