



## Exposition

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# The Exodus

## A commentary on Exodus 1–15

### G. The final plague and the Passover (Exodus 11–13)

#### Part 2: Passover legislation—Exodus 12:1-28 (i)

Mark Vincent

#### The format of the commentary

*The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.*

*Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.*

**T**HE ANNOUNCEMENT of the death of the firstborn in Exodus 11 is now followed by an explanation of the ritual the Israelites must observe in order to protect themselves from the same fate. This makes the tenth plague unique in the sequence. Previously the Israelites had been automatically protected as God 'divided' between the Israelites and the Egyptians. Now, being an Israelite by birth is no longer sufficient; there is no automatic immunity from the impending judgements of God. The stakes are raised now that human life has become the direct target of God's outstretched arm; Israel must act decisively. And not only must they act once, they must subsequently commemorate that action and the action of God for all time through

ritual observance and through explanation to the generations to come.

#### The calendar

- 12:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,  
12:2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

#### Comment

A calendar represents the way in which humans organise their lives and structure time. It is a framework, a grid-reference in accordance with which men and women plot their temporal location.

The punch line to this is that, on the basis of what God has done in delivering from Egypt, all such systems must be rewritten. All conception of time, of what comes first and of how affairs will be organised, has to be replotted because of God's decisive act of deliverance. *This* is where things now begin; *this* is what comes first. All activities, and the very structuring of life, should now revolve around appreciation of the salvation God has wrought and the new beginning that He has made.

This, then, is the significance of God's instigation of a new Jewish calendar system. It is a significance which must be read across into individual and family life. One's very construction of life and activity must find its root in God's once-for-all intervention to judge and deliver. The course of one's life every day should trace its origins to that one great day of salvation.

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## Instructions for Passover

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- 12:3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month<sup>1</sup> they shall take to them every man a lamb,<sup>2</sup> according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:
- 12:4 And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.
- 12:5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:
- 12:6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation<sup>3</sup> of Israel shall kill it in the evening.<sup>4</sup>
- 12:7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike<sup>5</sup> it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.
- 12:8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire,<sup>6</sup> and unleavened bread;<sup>7</sup> and with bitter herbs<sup>8</sup> they shall eat it.
- 12:9 Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance<sup>9</sup> thereof.
- 12:10 And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.
- 12:11 And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover.
- 12:12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt<sup>10</sup> I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.
- 12:13 And the blood shall be to you for a token<sup>11</sup> upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.
- 12:14 And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

## Comment

The Passover celebration itself is all about fellowship, a fellowship which is based around a meal shared by the family, yet which is replicated simultaneously by family after family throughout the nation. It is to be a service of communion, or sharing, one which it is appropriate to consider in the light of both the sacrifice of Christ and the breaking of bread service.

Let us start with the idea of the family. The Passover is to be kept, not by an individual (even though salvation is initially an individual matter), nor by a group of friends who happen to get on with one another and would prefer to have a meal amongst themselves rather than with some other group, but with the family, a group one cannot choose but must accept. This is an important principle of fellowship; we do not choose brothers and sisters or the group to which we belong, we are partakers together in common need. The meal itself, shared by the family, compels the unification of the disparate members. And it is replicated by family after family after a common pattern throughout the larger Brotherhood.

On several occasions the point is made that there is to be no excess or wastage, and that the whole lamb is to be consumed:

- smaller families should club together so as to provide the right number of people for *one* lamb (vv. 3,4)
- *all* the lamb is to be cooked in the fire, including head, legs and innards (v. 9)
- *nothing* is to be left until the morning; *anything* that remains is to be burned until it is consumed (v. 10).

Perhaps this speaks of the all-sufficiency of the Passover offering, and, through it, of the sacrifice of Christ. His offering was and is powerful; it is enough, and all who seek to be filled will be fed at that table. But there is also no excess. Though there is certainly an excess of love, both from Christ and from his Father, the sacrifice itself was not excessive or over-the-top in the sense that it was not more than was required in any melodramatic or histrionic way; it was, instead, precisely and absolutely what was required, a perfect match to man's gaping need. Christ himself gave his everything, his very being. This ultimate and supreme giving was no less and no more than God pleased, and no less than man required. Likewise the Passover lamb was totally devoted to the cause for which it had been appointed. It was not to be a 'here a little,

there a little' sort of lamb; it was to be in its entirety wholly dedicated for the Passover.

Once the lamb or kid had been selected it had to be kept for three days before Passover night itself. Some have suggested this was to allow time for any germs or imperfections to make themselves manifest (this view sees the three days as a potential incubation period for disease). But suppose the lamb did turn out to be diseased, would the family then select another? And how would they know this second lamb was perfect?—for there was no opportunity now to wait another three days. Nevertheless, the concept of a three-day demonstration of the animal's unblemished nature may be fitting and might find a parallel with the ministry of our Lord.

The notion of the lamb being 'on display', as it were, for the three days could also be interpreted as a reminder to the family, as they went in and out, of the momentous events that were about to unfold. The very presence of the specially selected animal would serve as valuable 'thinking-opportunity' concerning what lay in store, helping them prepare their minds for the feast and the deliverance of which it spoke.

There are several aspects of verses 3-14 that seem particularly pertinent in the light of the work of Christ. I shall single these out rather than proceeding through the passage verse by verse.

- The blood of the Passover lamb was to be daubed on the two doorposts and the upper lintel. In other words, the blood of the sacrifice was made to mark out a doorway. This is a very powerful way of saying that through the blood of the covenant there *is* a way of salvation through which men and women may walk so as to enter the family of God and enjoy fellowship. The shedding of Christ's blood likewise marks out a doorway. He is the door, as he said, and we enter in by that way through the blood of the covenant that he has made. Those who are 'in', and fellowship in the meal he provides, are safe, and may rest with great assurance. For those who are still outside, the picture looks very different.
- The meal was to be eaten fully clothed, with loins girded, shoes on and staff in hand. This would be no ordinary meal, therefore; it would be as odd as the English eating their Sunday roast dressed in raincoats and wearing Wellington boots. It was a meal to be

eaten in haste, with the clear knowledge that there was a journey to be made. Those who partook of the Passover were going somewhere, and going soon, they were not casually reclining for a leisurely meal. We likewise do not partake of the sacrifice of Christ in order to stand still. We are on a journey, we are heading for the Promised Land and the Kingdom of God, and, taking our cue from the Passover feast, we had better be prepared for action. There must be hurry and haste, and there must be fortification for the journey that lies ahead.

- Verse 11 states very emphatically that "it is the LORD'S passover" (compare vv. 12,14, which also mention "the LORD"). It is not 'our' service, then, it is His. He provided it, and since we are there at His invitation it is not ours to enjoy as we please. If we go to be guests for a meal at someone else's house we behave ourselves as guests. How much more so if we are in the Lord's house, celebrating the sacrifice of His Son?
- The blood is said to be "a token" (v. 13), a sign or symbolic mark which the destroying angel will see and so pass over. What is it a token of? Of life given and life spared, a token of Israel's acknowledgement of the principle that all life belongs to God and is His by right, and that only through Him and the provision that He makes can salvation be won.

This service, so simple in its basic elements, was to be an ordinance for ever for the children of Israel. In an even richer and fuller sense, brothers and sisters today likewise share in a fellowship meal with one another. The ordinance for us takes a different form, but the basic principle it embodies is one which is still followed, in fulfilment of Exodus 12.

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1. **v. 3 tenth day of this month.** Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, falls on the tenth of the seventh month, exactly six months away. The two events divide the calendar. There are other respects in which the first and seventh months may be compared.
  2. **v. 3 lamb.** This term can denote a sheep or a goat, as verse 5 makes plain (it is related to the term for 'pasture').
  3. **v. 6 the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel.** This rather unwieldy phrase brings home the commonality of salvation in which Israel partook. They were all saved at the same

- time, by the same means; they all shared the same need, and in their fellowship there was no exception.
4. **v. 6 in the evening.** Literally, “between the two settings/evenings”. Debate has surrounded this phrase; ancient rabbis argued that the first setting was just after noon as the sun passed its peak, the second the sunset. Josephus claims that in the temple service the lamb was killed between 3 and 5 pm.
  5. **v. 7 take . . . strike.** This verse involves, quite literally, ‘give’ and ‘take’ (the term translated ‘strike’ is the verb *nathan*, literally ‘give’, here perhaps best rendered ‘put’, ‘apply’). The Israelites had to *take* the blood of the animal to themselves, and *do* something with it, setting it up as a sign to be seen; there was no automatic salvation just through killing and later eating what had been cooked. A similar principle is found in Isaiah 53:10: “when *Thou shalt make* his soul an offering for sin”.
  6. **v. 8 roast with fire.** Roasting would be the quickest and simplest way to cook the meat (although boiling can be fast, the meat has to be prepared and a large pottery vessel has to be reared up and heated). Roasting thus fits well with the concept of a hasty meal and departure. Sarna comments that roasting is also the most effective way of extracting the blood.
  7. **v. 8 unleavened bread.** The significance of unleavened bread will be explored [next month](#).
  8. **v. 8 bitter herbs.** The bitter taste would presumably speak of the bitter bondage of Egypt (compare 1:14, which uses the same root *marar*, ‘be bitter’). The herbs are said to have included endive, chicory and lettuce; the Mishnah lists five plants which were subsumed under the designation ‘bitter herbs’.
  9. **v. 9 head . . . legs . . . purtenance.** These terms emphasise that the entire animal is to be consumed in the fire, from top to tail, along with everything inside as well. The totality of the lamb or goat is to be devoted in sacrifice (see comment). The term ‘purtenance’ simply means ‘innards’.
  10. **v. 12 all the gods of Egypt.** This verse is often taken as evidence that the ten plagues are targeted at specific Egyptian deities.\* It must be noted, however, that the context of the verse seems to be more specifically related to the tenth plague rather than functioning as a commentary on the sequence. The act of smiting all the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast, is such an audacious and outrageous attack on God’s part (as Egypt would conceive it) that it could be interpreted in no other way than an unparalleled condemnation of, and a display of utter contempt for, all of Egypt’s vast religious tradition.
  11. **v. 13 token.** This term has been used nine times already in the narrative to describe the *signs* of Moses and God before both Israel and Egypt. The other occurrences in Exodus 1–15, at 3:12 and 13:9,16, are instructive. It often refers to something visible and potent, behind which there stands a great truth or reality of which it speaks.

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\* See the second introductory article to the plagues ([Jul. 2002, p. 251](#)).

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