



FOCUS VERSE

Exodus 13:3

And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten.

LESSON TEXT

Exodus 12:3–14

3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:

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.

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:

6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

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 thereof.

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.

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 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 I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

13 And the blood shall be to you for a token 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.

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.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Deliverance from bondage depends upon the blood of redemption being applied to the door of our heart.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Sharing Our Common Story

The Passover was about food, family, and a shared story. Anthony Daniels, in his essay “The Worldview that Makes the Underclass,” explains how many of the homes he visited in professional practice “had no means of cooking a meal, or any evidence of a meal ever having been cooked beyond the use of a microwave, and no place at which a meal could have been eaten in a family fashion. The pattern of eating in such households was a kind of foraging in the refrigerator, as and when the mood took, with the food to be consumed sitting in front of one of the giant television screens.”

He also said that many modern “children do not eat a meal more than once a week with another member of their household, and many homes do not have a dining table.

Needless to say, this pattern is concentrated in the lower reaches of society, where so elementary but fundamental a means of socialization is now unknown” (*Imprimis*, May/June 2014).

Just as Jesus gathered with His disciples to share a meal and reflect on their common story, families would be wise to do the same today. Children need to hear from their parents in something more than a drive-through lifestyle. At the Passover, families of faith reconnected with their history over a special meal. Churches gather together over food to celebrate, socialize, and be reminded of those things that connect us. Believers will be spiritually impoverished if they do not share together with one another.

OUTLINE

I. DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT

II. ANNUAL PASSOVER OBSERVANCE

III. FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

IV. JESUS, OUR PASSOVER

V. COMMUNION

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Killing a lamb disrupts the order of nature. There is no way to catch the blood in a bowl without making a mess. The death of a beautiful, innocent creature disturbs the conscience and scars the memory. God chose this picture to jolt His people out of the mundane and show them reality.

The Lord had decreed doom on every firstborn child in Egypt (Exodus 11:5). Since the nation of Israel was stationed in pagan Egypt, God provided a method of protection for those who put Him first in their lives—Himself. Yes, the Lord Himself became their

covering and protection when they obeyed His command.

Experts tell us that people retain information best through using all five senses. God chose to help Israel remember their most important story through vivid sensory stimuli. More than just flannelgraph figures or PowerPoint slides, He involved His followers in an active night of remembrance. Distinct tastes, aroma, ambience, blood, and a heartfelt discussion made this night different from any other.

This study of the Passover concerns more than just the remembering, however. Those who have found the full meaning of the Passover know it as more than just a historical event. It is His story we must also remember and apply to our lives. When we grasp the meaning and power of the Passover, we make it our own.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Our word *passover* is the biblical translation for the Hebrew *pesach*. Since this word is not original with the Hebrew language, it likely

comes from the Egyptian word *pesh*, meaning “to spread wings over” (Ceil and Moïshe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover*). Typically one thinks of the Passover as being an event where the angel of death passed over those who obeyed God by putting the lamb’s blood on the side posts and lintel (the top piece of the doorframe) of their doors. Although that is true, perhaps there is additional meaning in the term.

Isaiah 31:5 can help clarify the understanding of the word *passover*. God said He would “pass over” Jerusalem like a bird and defend her. This does not mean He would fly over her, but would become an umbrella of protection over her just as a bird is to its nest. Jesus expressed this same sentiment in Luke 13:34 saying He wanted to take doomed Jerusalem to Himself like a mother hen protecting her chicks under her wings. This theme of God overshadowing His own is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. (See Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 91:4.) Therefore, it is logical to think of the Lord taking doomed Israel under His wing to protect His people from the destroyer in Egypt.

I. DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT

God’s people had been under cruel bondage as slaves to the pharaoh of Egypt far longer than they cared to remember. Only after crying out for deliverance did God’s people see hope of being delivered out of their situation. God sent Moses to lead His people out from under Pharaoh’s heavy thumb. Using Aaron’s rod, God worked miracles that defied the gods of the Egyptians. The tenth and final plague involved the death of the firstborn.

By the Lord’s own decree, the firstborn son in each family in Egypt had to die. But the Lord provided a means of protection for His people. The Lord did not passively get pulled into Passover but promised to personally stand guard over His people, protecting them from the disaster He prepared for their enemies. He became their hiding place so the destroyer would not come into their homes to kill them (Exodus 12:13, 23). Not only was the Passover a story of deliverance from Egypt, but it was also a deliverance from the destruction of God.

A new beginning. “Let my people go,” Jehovah (Yahweh) told Pharaoh through Moses. As liberating as it felt to tell the oppressor “Hands

off!,” those who were leaving needed to leave their bondage mindset behind and develop a freedom mindset. In Exodus 12:2, God told them their liberation from bondage marked a new beginning for them. They would count this as the beginning of the year.

As Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, Jesus Christ leads us out of sin’s bondage. That is the starting point of our new life. Jesus’ death and resurrection provided for our new life in Him. We do not duplicate His death physically, but we relate to it by faith when we repent of our sins, turning from a life of sin and determining to live for Jesus Christ. (See Acts 3:19.) We apply His death to our own lives in baptism (Romans 6:3–4), and as Jesus arose from the grave, victorious over death, the infilling of His Spirit gives us new life and the power to live victoriously over sin. (See Romans 6:5; 8:1–17.)

The price of redemption. Each Israelite family was to take a lamb for themselves (Exodus 12:3). These verses move from saying “a lamb” (12:3) to “the lamb” (12:4) and finally “your lamb” (12:5). Similarly, we must move from a general understanding of our redemption, to the specific, to finally making it personal. “A Savior” must become “the (only) Savior” to finally “my Savior.”

The horror of the Passover was not just in the killing of an innocent lamb. A modern horror story contains more than just graphic events; a properly done story of horror begins in happiness so that one begins to like the victim(s). Once the reader has become attached to the fictional characters, the violence becomes more horrid and terrifying. God commanded the Hebrews to pen up a lamb for four days before the event. They took the lamb on the tenth of the month and killed it on the fourteenth (Exodus 12:3, 6). During those four days, perhaps the children patted its head and possibly even named it. When the night of tragedy came, the scene became a gut-wrenching memory and surely brought more than a few tears to the onlookers’ eyes.

The death of Christ and our identification with Him is not meant to be a quick, passing experience. Just as the lamb looked after by the Israelite family made it a purposeful, deliberate event, so we must develop an attachment to Jesus so His story is more than

a tragedy but a horror we identify with. The brutality of His death must burn into our minds as we identify our old selves with His demise so we can join Him as new creatures in His resurrection.

Escaping judgment. God decreed that the Passover lamb chosen by each family had to “be without blemish, a male of the first year” (Exodus 12:5). These requirements were of God’s choosing; it was not up to the people to decide the gender, age, or quality of the sacrifice. This was not an opportunity to cull or discard unwanted or deformed creatures from their flock. God wanted the best. Likewise, children of God today should willingly give Him their best. Christians demonstrate generous, respectful behavior because they have a love relationship with the Lord.

God also mandated that Israelites “kill it in the evening” (Exodus 12:6) “at the going down of the sun” (Deuteronomy 16:6). This likely would have been an emotional event for any family with young children. Even in a survival economy and an agrarian lifestyle where killing animals for food was a common occurrence, this event would have been different. After being penned up for a few days, the lamb would die at the front door of the family’s dwelling. According to the Lord’s instructions to protect the firstborn from death, the blood of the slain lamb was brushed on the side posts and lintel of the door of each house. Little children would not just shrug off this holiday. It would jar their attention in a memorable way. Likewise, the Lamb of God’s death was brutal and shocking to those who had grown attached to Him.

“And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle” (Exodus 12:29).

In Egyptian homes was something worse than the brutal death of a lamb: wailing and anguish for lost children. But God’s judgment passed over and guarded His chosen people who had the witness of blood over their lives. To the background noise of grieving Egyptians, the Hebrews marched out of bondage.

II. ANNUAL PASSOVER OBSERVANCE

Passover comes every year on the first new moon after the spring equinox (Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Jewish Festivals*). A yearly event is infrequent enough to be meaningful every time it is held, but frequent enough so no one forgets. The Lord called His people to remember. Other times in history, He told the people to set up markers and memorials so they would not forget key elements in their story of deliverance. In the Christian faith we must keep the gospel story alive as well.

Remembering and reviewing. The Passover came on the fourteenth of Nisan as not just a feast to be kept, but a story to be told (Numbers 9:1–5). According to Gary M. Burge, the Hebrews would clean out all forms of yeast a couple of days before Passover. This surely involved all ages in both the preparations and in the participation. The Lord knew the children would ask why the night of Passover was different from other nights (Exodus 12:26), and this question would provide a learning environment for parents to teach their children the story.

Too many parents do not tell their children their family story. They tell the children what not to do, but fail to tell them the bondage to sins the Lord delivered the family from. They do not tell them about the bitter bondage (Exodus 12:41–42) of sin. Yet they give them rules to try to prevent the same behavior. Children of believing parents are prone to repeat the same mistakes unless they know the story and understand the reasons why not to go down the same path.

Typically, Jews sang Psalms 113–118 (the “Praise ye the Lord” psalms) on this night. Jesus and His disciples probably were keeping this tradition on the eve before His death (Mark 14:26). Believers’ families should experience the joy of singing together. Songs are a way to declare communal faith and focus on the bond of love between the participants and our Lord. Modern songs trend toward worship and praise as is fitting in many ways, but our songs must also help remind us of the story, not just an experience.

Providing a lamb for every family. The Lord commanded that the faithful of Israel take the lamb they had penned up from the tenth to the fourteenth of the month and then kill it.

The death of the animal took place outside the home where the blood would run into the gutter in front of the threshold, called the basin (Rosen, *Christ in the Passover*). Using a bunch of hyssop, the Hebrews would slosh this fresh blood onto the doorposts and the lintel (Exodus 12:22). The Hebrews had to walk through the bloody doorway and stay inside until the destroyer had passed. Jesus is our door to life by whom we go in and out (John 10:9).

God gave the recipe for what His people should eat on this evening: bitter herbs and grilled lamb (Exodus 12:8–9). They were not to boil it or eat the lamb raw but cook it over an open fire. Furthermore, there were to be no leftovers. God told them to “let nothing of it remain until the morning” (verse 10). The participants of this meal were to eat like there was no tomorrow. They kept their shoes on and their belts buckled (sandals and loins girded), ready for action because they were leaving that night (verse 11).

III. FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

For a whole week, the people of Israel were to eat only yeastless, or unleavened, bread (Exodus 12:17–20). Leavening is any agent that makes the bread rise. The sourdough leavening the ancients used was called *chometz*, which means “bitter or sour” (Rosen, *Christ in the Passover*). They would make a batch of bread using flour and water and then add in a lump of leavening starter they had saved out of the last batch of bread they made. Leavened bread took hours to rise before it could be baked. The unleavened bread was quick and simple and could be ready in minutes. This was a meal to be consumed quickly.

Bread leavening causes the bread dough to fluff up larger while still weighing the same. Sin inflates a person without adding any substance. The sourdough starter passed from lump to lump throughout the year, and only at the feast of unleavened bread did the cooks get rid of it all. The leaven of sin stops with Christ who makes us into a new batch.

Jesus said leavening was like sin such as false doctrine and hypocrisy (Matthew 16:11–12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1). Christ contains no “leavening”—He is sinless. We must listen to the question, “Know ye not that a little

leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (I Corinthians 5:6), which is followed by the command, “Purge out therefore the old leaven” (I Corinthians 5:7). We clean out the old leaven the way the Hebrews did—searching thoroughly and discarding all of it. Preparation for freedom is cleansing out the leaven so we “may be a new lump, as [we] are unleavened” because “even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (I Corinthians 5:7).

We should therefore “keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:8). Being in Christ, we put on His humble nature. We live in purity and holiness.

IV. JESUS, OUR PASSOVER

We know Jesus kept Passover (Mark 14:1; John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). More than a feast to be kept, however, Passover was a story to be told. We must tell the story of our Passover, not just keep it to ourselves. Rabbi Gamaliel said that “failure to recite the meaning of this meal was a failure to keep it at all” (Burge, *Jesus and the Jewish Festivals*): Our great story began with Jesus’ triumphal entry to Jerusalem and continued until His death and resurrection. Many churches recount this story yearly at the Easter season. However, the original passion came during Passover. Often the calendar events of Passover and Easter are separated in American culture, but in biblical history, they are one.

Jesus came like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) to bring back the awaited miracle of the manna (Psalm 78:24) as the Jews prophesied would come again and for which they eagerly awaited (Burge, *Jesus and the Jewish Festivals*). Jesus fulfilled this expectation but not as they had hoped. Most people did not receive His explanation during Passover in John 6 where He told them, “Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:26). While they sought an earthly fulfillment of their earthly longings, He had come as the heavenly fulfillment of their earthly needs.

Moses shepherded the people out of bondage (Psalm 77:16–20) and fed them in the wilderness; Christ shepherded the people out of bondage and fed them bread in John 6:11,

14. They assumed He was the prophet like Moses for whom they had been waiting a long time, though they would not receive the bread from Heaven as well—Christ Himself (John 6:30–31). He said, “Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” (John 6:32–33). After Jesus gave this amazing Passover revelation, the people grumbled against Jesus as they did against Moses in the wilderness (John 6:41, 43, 51). Then they walked away from Him altogether (John 6:66).

Jesus Christ is our Passover. He did not just borrow meaning about this event and use it as an illustration about Himself. The whole feast was about Him from the beginning—it was a prophetic drama repeated every year. John the baptizer said of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36). Isaiah also prophesied of Him as the lamb led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).

Moses’ law commanded that no sacrifice could have any blemish or flaw in it (Deuteronomy 15:21). Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15), so He is our unblemished Lamb. The blood of the spotless Christ cleanses us from sin (Hebrews 9:14–15). Indeed, only “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Peter 1:19) was planned from the beginning of time for our cleansing (I Peter 1:20). Thank God He made Him to be sin for us that we could be free from sin and share in His righteousness (II Corinthians 5:21).

V. COMMUNION

Passover is not a Christian holiday; it is intrinsically Jewish. The Passover story is not a Christian story, but a Hebrew story. This does not mean we have no celebration. We do have a celebration, but about a different story. Our story of freedom from bondage is about sin and death—the plight of both Jews and Gentiles. Our story of rescue is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our lamb is the Lamb of God. This new celebration began on the eve of the beginning of our story, just as Passover preparations began the night before the Hebrew story of deliverance. A Hebrew family’s

lamb provided blood to stand in the place of the firstborn; our spiritual family is covered by the blood of the Firstborn.

The Lord’s Last Supper. Neither our holiday nor our story is without precedent. We borrow elements from Passover that our Lord saw fit to include in our tradition of remembering. On the “first day of the feast of unleavened bread” the disciples were trying to figure out where their group was going to hold Passover (Matthew 26:17). Jesus sent them to a home with instructions of what to say, and “they made ready the passover” (Matthew 26:19).

It would have been around the third phase of the meal, the drinking of the third cup, that Jesus instituted a new way of remembering the new story coming for God’s people. After a discussion about Judas betraying Him, Jesus took the flat, unleavened bread, “blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples,” and then He said, “Take, eat; this is my body” (Matthew 26:26). The bread was not just about a meal made in a hurry, but about the tearing and death of the Lord’s body.

Then the Lord added a new feature to this ancient meal. He took the third cup of beverage from the fruit of the vine, “gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it” (Matthew 26:27). Then He said, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The drinking of the fruit of the vine was already a part of the traditional Passover celebration. Now a new meaning had been added to the tradition that already existed. In that simple, quiet moment, our Lord transformed the identity of this event and showed that the purpose of this meal had not been about the past all along but about the future—His story.

Celebration of our Lord’s death. Why would the Lord do something so shocking as ask us to eat His flesh and drink His blood? Because only by eating do humans stay alive. All living creatures eat dead things to stay alive. How much more so with the Passover Lamb who died so we could live again. In this case, however, eating of Christ is an opportunity to eat of something living. More than feasting on a living feast in Christ, we are feasting on the Life-giver. We must nourish ourselves on our Lord daily.

The Hebrews identified with the death of a lamb so they would not have to experience

death in the home. Jesus gave Himself as our substitute wherein we can say, "I have been crucified with Christ" and now "Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20, NKJV). In the destroyer's eyes, we are as good as dead; but now we have been passed over or overshadowed by the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Life in communion. By being partakers of Christian Passover, which we call communion, we become members of others who do the same. (See Romans 12:5.) This time of remembering is to include group participation. Just as the Passover was a communal event, so communion is about the body of Christ. Not only do we symbolically consume the Lord's body, but we do so together as His body. Paul warned against those who took communion in an unworthy manner "not discerning the Lord's body" and so brought sickness and death on themselves (1 Corinthians 11:29).

The story of the faith is that we join in unity as one body with one Head. To continue together, we need to make stops along the journey and remember our identity. We are in Christ. We belong to one another because we belong to Him. (See 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.)

Blood of Christ applied. Through faith we adopt the Lord's death and resurrection as our own, by which His blood is applied to our lives. We enter this covenant through repenting of sin, accepting water baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking a God-given language (Acts 2:38). We must recognize who we were, who Christ is, and who we are in Him (Romans 6:3-5). Communion reminds us of this Lamb of God who purchased our salvation with His shed blood. It also points forward to the time when we will eat with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Passover was not about a special family recipe or ornate dishes that would wow friends and family. It was about remembering. This time of year gave God's people a chance to revisit their roots and remember who they were. More than the flavor and the features of the meal, the story and significance of the ancient moment controlled everything that happened on this special evening.

Some people cringe at the thought of eating bread as a substitute for Jesus' body and drinking the fruit of the vine in place of His blood. Good. That is the point. It is to stimulate the senses and impact the memory on all levels. Communion, Christian Passover, engages us with the past, reminds us of who we are in the present, and propels us to consistency for the future.

Just as the Hebrew calendar started over at the time of Passover, so our lives started over with Christ when we experienced salvation. Everything before Him does not count. Now we have a new identity in Him. Taking on the name, blood, and Spirit of the Lord, we are in Christ along with all who receive Him in truth. We are not remembering just a story when we take communion with the family of God; we are remembering our own story, which is wrapped up in His story.

Hebrew people told their story over and over each year at Passover. Who is the last person you told about your story? What has God brought you out of or prevented you from getting into? What is your story of deliverance? Whether you came from a life of wickedness or grew up living a godly life, both are stories of God's redemption. Tell others how you found the blood of the Lamb so cleansing, so effective, and let them see Him as you live. ■

REFLECTIONS

- What elements of the Passover have meaning for Christians today?
- How is communion an opportunity to retell His story?
- When and how do you take an opportunity to share with your family where the Lord brought you from and how He got you out?