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Christ and the Passover

12: 1-20

Christ and the Passover DIG: Why was the blood a good symbol of death in this passage? God surely could have accomplished the exodus without the death of all the firstborn of Egypt. So why do you think He chose to do it that way? In what sense was this a judgment on all the gods of Egypt? What influence was the Passover to have on Pharaoh? On the Hebrews? On the Egyptians? On future Israelites? On us today? Do you think it succeeded?

REFLECT: What are the gods of your culture? Do you believe that the God of Isra'el is more powerful than they are? How does He show you His amazing power today? How does this passage help you to see the purpose for Christ's shed blood and death?

Previously, **ADONAI** told **Moses and Aaron** that **every firstborn son in Egypt would die (11:5a)**. Notice **He** did not say every **firstborn of Egypt**, but every **firstborn in Egypt**. The Divine sentence of judgment would fall upon both **Egyptians and Israelites** because both were sinners in nature and practice. Justice had to be satisfied. Yet we are told several verses later that **God made a distinction between Egypt and Isra'el (11:7)**. *And that distinction was His grace*. All **the firstborn in Egypt died**, and yet **the firstborn of Isra'el** were delivered from the destroyer by means of *a substitute*. The sentence of death was satisfied, but it fell upon an innocent **lamb**.

Thus, the distinction between **the Egyptians** and **the Israelites** was not a moral one, but was made solely by **the blood of the lamb**. It was in **the blood** that **love and faithfulness meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other (Psalm 85:10)**. **The whole value of the blood of the Passover lamb lay in its being a type of Christ**, because **Messiah, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us (First Corinthians 5:6)**.¹⁹⁴

God spoke to **Moses and Aaron in Egypt (12:1)**. Not every commandment

governing the religious activities of **the Israelites** would be given at Mount Sinai. **They** were not a lawless **people** before then because the instructions concerning **the Passover** were given **in Egypt**. It is interesting that the commandments given at Mount Sinai rarely deal with any of the details of **the Passover** (except for **Deuteronomy 16**) because those instructions had already been established beforehand **in Egypt**.

Since the exodus from **Egypt** would trigger the start of a whole new way of life for **the people of Isra'el**, **God** gave **them** a brand new monthly calendar to symbolize their new beginning. **He** commanded: **This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year (12:2)**, and would be in the spring, roughly equivalent to the thirty days from mid-March to mid-April. Before the Babylonian captivity this month was called Abib (**Exodus 13:4, 23:15, 34:18; Deuteronomy 16:1**), which means *young head of grain*, and reflects the fresh, life-giving nature of springtime. But after **Isra'el** was taken into captivity, four of the twelve **Hebrew** months were given Babylonian names, and Abib was changed to Nisan (**Nehemiah 2:1; Esther 3:7**). Nevertheless, the start of **Isra'el's** religious calendar with the institution of **the Passover** did not eliminate her civil or agricultural calendar that began in the fall at the end of the harvest season (**23:16**). Both calendars existed side by side until after the Babylonian captivity (or 586 BC), but today Judaism only uses the civil calendar because, for the most part, it is not a religious nation anymore.

God, however, chose the spring for the time of the exodus because it symbolized new life and budding growth. It therefore became the time for **Isra'el's** national redemption from **Egyptian** slavery. The spring, or the month of Nisan, was an equally suitable time for the resurrection of the **Christ**. **His** birth also started a new religious calendar (this time a weekly calendar) by moving the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week (**Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:2**), also called **the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10)**.¹⁹⁵



This is the first reference in the Scriptures to **the whole community**, or congregation of **Isra'el**. The word '*dh*' means *a gathering and suggests a new beginning*. **God** commanded: **Tell the whole community of Isra'el that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household (12:3)**. It is estimated that there were about 275,000 lambs sacrificed for **the Passover** just before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. From historical records we learn that there was to be one **lamb** for no less than ten people and no more than twenty people. So that meant that there were about two and a half million Jews celebrating **the Passover** at that time. **The tenth day of the first month** would become an important **day**. *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement, is celebrated on that **day (Leviticus 23:27)**, and the nation of **Isra'el** crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land on **the tenth day of the first month (Joshua 4:19)**. **Christ rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey on Monday, the tenth of Nissan. For four days, from Monday through Thursday, He was tested by the Pharisees and Sadducees and found to be without defect or blemish.**

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. This verse does not say anything about **the lamb** being too little for **the household**. That would never happen because **the lamb** was sufficient. It was possible, however, for **the household** to be too little for **the lamb**. **You are to determine that amount of lamb needed accordance with what each person will eat (12:4)**. I believe what we see here is **God** revealing **His** method of salvation. *It was personal*. Take, for example, the account of the Philippian jailer and the salvation of his **household** as told in **the Book of Acts**. His **family** was not saved because the jailer believed, but because each member of his **family** made a personal decision to partake of **the Lamb**. That was true on **the Egyptian Passover**. Each member had to exhibit faith in that way . . . **Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved - you and your household (Acts 16:31)**. Now that didn't mean that if he believed, his whole **family** would be saved. No! Each person had to participate, partake and obey in order to come in under the protection and redemption of **the blood of the lamb** that was out on **the doorframe**.¹⁹⁶

The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect (also see Leviticus 22:18-25), and you may take them from the sheep or the goats (12:5). Nothing but a perfect sacrifice could satisfy the requirements of **God**, who

Himself is perfect. One who was sinful could not make atonement for sinners. And where was such a sacrifice to be found? Certainly not among the sons of men. None but **the Son of God** would do.¹⁹⁷ **Isaiah** used the imagery of **the sacrificial lamb** to picture the work of the coming **Messiah**. **He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7). Later, the Apostle Peter would also remind us that Christ, the lamb without spot or blemish, was sacrificed for us (First Peter 1:19).**

The Passover **lamb** was to be slaughtered **at dusk**. Death would be executed upon the guilty sinner or upon the innocent substitute. Each family was to **carefully test the lamb by searching for any defect during the four days before the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Isra'el must slaughter them simultaneously at dusk (12:6)**. *The sacrifice was, and continues to be, a unified act of worship.* The Jewish **day** does not start at midnight, but at **dusk** or sundown. *We must remember that the Jewish way of reckoning time is different than ours. The Jewish **day** starts at sunset. In other words, the evening precedes the **day**.* The Hebrew word **dusk** literally means, *between the two evenings*. But by the time of **Messiah**, because of the sheer number of Lambs, the **Jews** changed the time of this practice (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Ke](#) - Go and Make Preparations for the Passover**).

Then **ADONAI** described how to observe the **Passover**. Then, after slaughtering the **lamb** at their doorways, they were **to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and top of the doorframes of their houses (12:7)**. Literally, there was **blood** everywhere outside the door. **How marvelously this pictured Messiah on the cross; blood above, where the thorns pierced His brow, blood on the sides, from His nail-pierced hands, and blood below, from His nail-pierced feet.**¹⁹⁸ **God** would then pass over **the houses** marked with **the blood**, and those of faith would be saved. They **kept the Passover by the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Isra'el (Hebrews 11:28)**. Redemption, including the forgiveness of sin, takes place only when **the blood** of an innocent offering is shed (**Hebrews 9:22; First John 1:7**).

That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, because fire spoke of judgment. Sin must be judged. They were **to eat the meat along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast (12:8)**. Although the main course

in the **Passover** meal was **lamb** (roasted according to the method used by wandering shepherds), other items were to be included also. **Unleavened bread**, or matsah, was also to be eaten at the **Passover** meal. It signified the Hebrews' quick exodus from **Egypt**. They did not have time to allow the bread to rise, so they **carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing (12:34)**.¹⁹⁹ **Bitter herbs (Numbers 9:11)** such as endive, chicory and other plants with a **bitter** taste are native to **Egypt**, and eating them would remind **the Israelites** of their **bitter** experience there (**Exodus 1:14**).²⁰⁰ They were **not to eat the meat raw** because **the fire** spoke of the judgment of sin. **When a person comes to Christ, the Messiah, he or she comes as a sinner**. They were **not to eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roasted over the fire, head, legs and inner parts**. No parts were to be withheld from **the fire**. **ADONAI** said: **Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left in the morning you must burn it (12:9-10)**. **The total consumption of the lamb points to the completeness and effectiveness of Messiah's sacrifice**.

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 in readiness for driving their beasts of burden out of Egypt. Eat it in haste. In Hebrew, the word **in haste**, does not only mean *quickly*, but it also conveys a great sense of *alarm, fear or danger*. In subsequent Passovers they would **eat it** reclining on pillows and eating on low **Passover** tables. But **the Egyptian Passover** was to be eaten **in haste** because they would have to suddenly leave the land of **Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:3)**. The Hebrew word for the **Passover** is *pesah*, and this is the first time it is used in the Bible. The **Passover** was not primarily about the deliverance **of Isra'el** out of **Egypt**, nor was it mainly about the humiliation of Pharaoh and **Egypt**. Rather, its essential purpose was the glorification and exaltation of **God**. **It is ADONAI's Passover (12:11)**, because as **He Himself** had told Abraham: **God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering (Genesis 22:8)**.

The term **Passover** is used in three different ways throughout the Scriptures. First, it describes the entire festival because the tenth plague passed over the Jewish homes (**12:13 and 27**). A second usage describes the **Passover lamb** itself (**12:21, 27; Second Chronicles 35:1, 6 and 13; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7**). Thirdly, the term **Passover** describes a meal (**Matthew 26:17, 19; Mark 14:12, 14-16; Luke 22:8 and 13**).

The rabbis teach that almost every major event in Isra'el's history

happened on the Passover. God is considered to have revealed His future plans to Abraham on the Passover. Abraham is regarded as having entertained his heavenly guests near the great trees of Mamre on the Passover. Sodom is believed to have been destroyed following the Passover. Jericho is thought to have fallen on the Passover. And the handwriting on the wall of King Belshazzar, in the time of Dani'el, is believed to have been written on the Passover.

For **Isra'el**, the decision was clear, it was kill or be killed. **God** continued: **On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn - both men and animals - and I will bring judgment on all the false gods of Egypt (Numbers 33:4)**, many of whom had already been judged individually by the previous nine plagues. **I am ADONAI (12:12)**. After hearing what **God** had done to **the Egyptians**, Moses' father-in-law, **Reuel**, would confess his belief that **YHVH** was supreme over **all other gods (18:11)**. The spiritual contest was about to reach its climax.

Since the death of the **firstborn** involved **both men and animals**, it is quite apparent that it had far reaching religious and theological implications. The **firstborn** of Pharaoh was not only his successor to the throne, but by the act of **the gods of Egypt** was a specially born son having divine property. **Egyptian gods** associated with the birth of children would certainly have been involved in a plague of this nature. These included Min, the god of procreation and reproduction, along with Isis who symbolized the power of reproduction. Since Hathor was not only a goddess of love but also one of the seven deities who attended the birth of children, she, too, would be implicated in the disaster of this **plague**. From excavations we already have learned of the tremendous importance of the Apis bull, a firstborn animal and one revered in a very special way. The death of this animal would have tremendous theological impact on the temple priests as well as the common people who witnessed this tragic event. The death cry which was heard throughout **Egypt** was not only a wail that bemoaned the loss of a son or precious animal, but also the incapability of **the many gods of Egypt to** respond and protect them from such tragedy.²⁰¹

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. Thus, the name **Passover. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt (12:13)**. When the executioner of **God's** judgment saw **the blood** upon **the houses** of **the Israelites**, he did not enter. Why? Because death had already done its work there! The innocent had died

in the place of the guilty, and thus justice was satisfied. So **God's** eye was not upon the house, but upon **the blood**.²⁰² **The blood** was merely an outward symbol of an inward faith. They **kept the Passover by the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Isra'el (Hebrews 11:28)**. We all must remember that redemption, including the forgiveness of sin, takes place only when **the blood** of an innocent offering is shed (**Hebrews 9:22; First John 1:7**). **Just as the lamb was substituted for the first-born, thus protecting him from death, so the Lamb of God would one day die in place of all sinners, thus providing escape from the judgment of God.**²⁰³

The Isrealites were not saved because they were descendants of Abraham. If **the Egyptians** had obeyed **God's** command, **they**, too, would have been saved. **ADONAI** said: **When I see the blood, I will pass over you**. No one was saved at that time because they were doing the best they could, or because they were honest, or because they were a good person. **God** said: **When I see the blood, I will pass over you**. The Death Angel was not making a survey of the neighborhood. The Hebrews were not supposed to open the window to their house and tell the Death Angel how good they were and how much charity work they had done. Anyone sticking his or her neck out of a window that night would have died. **ADONAI** said: **When I see the blood, I will pass over you**. Nothing needed to be added. Who was saved that night? Those who believed in, trusted in, or had faith in the **blood**. Although I do not completely understand it, I believe what **God** says, and **He** tells me that the shed **blood** of **Christ, or the Messiah**, will save me. Nothing else will.²⁰⁴

*During the many years of Jewish history since the Egyptian Passover, the rabbis have added many other things to it, which unknowingly point to the Messiah. In later generations the Maggid, or the telling of the exodus story, would be added to the Passover ceremony. On this night, every adult will drink four cups of red fermented wine and every cup has its own name. The first cup is **the cup of blessing**, with which the ceremony begins. Then they drink the second cup, which is called **the cup of plagues. As each of the ten plagues are read, a drop of wine is poured out from the cup.** Then they eat their Passover meal.*

*When the Temple at Jerusalem was built, the **Passover** meal centered on a **lamb** that was no longer slaughtered at home, but in the Temple Court. However, when the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 AD, **the rabbis taught that it was no longer possible to offer the lamb as a sacrifice, so they replaced sacrifice***

with prayer. Thus, sacrificing a **lamb** is forbidden today, and, as a form of mourning over the destruction of the Temple, most Jews substitute chicken or some other kind of kosher meat. After the **Passover** meal they drink **the cup of redemption**, symbolizing the physical redemption of **Isra'el** from **Egypt** achieved by the means of the shedding of the **blood** of the **Passover lamb**. Lastly, they drink **the cup of praise** and sing **Psalm 113-118**.²⁰⁵

This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to ADONAI - a lasting ordinance (12:14). The feast of **the Passover** would last one **day**, and that was followed immediately by the **seven days** of **the Feast of Unleavened Bread**. But since **unleavened bread** was eaten on **Pesach**, it was considered part of **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** and the two **feasts** together were considered one **seven-day** festival. Today in **Isra'el**, **Passover** is **the seven-day** holiday of **the Feast of Unleavened Bread**, with the first and last days celebrated as legal holidays and as holy days involving holiday meals, special prayer services, and abstention from work; the intervening days are known as Chol Ha'Moed ("Weekdays [of] the Festival"). Nothing that contained **yeast** is eaten during that **seven-day** period.

While the Passover itself was fulfilled by the death of the Messiah, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled by the sinlessness of His blood-offering (Hebrews 9:11-10:18). In the Hebrews passage, His offering of sinless blood was for three things: first, it was for the cleansing of the heavenly Tabernacle, secondly, for the removal of the sins of the righteous of the Old Covenant and thirdly, for the application of the blood to the New Covenant believers.²⁰⁶

Whenever the word **yeast** is used symbolically in the Bible, it is always a symbol of sin (**Matthew 16:5-6, 11-12; Mark 8:14-15; Luke 12:1; First Corinthians 5:6-8**). That is why **God** would not even allow this symbol of sin to be eaten by the Jewish people during this period or to have it in their **houses** or to have it anywhere in the land of **Isra'el**. **For seven days, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first, you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day, remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from the people of Isra'el (12:15).** Being **cut off** from the people meant no longer being a member of the covenant community of **Isra'el** or receiving any of the blessings associated with its membership. The person was simply denied fellowship or access to the Tabernacle or Temple in later times. This was a deadly consequence. **Jesus, however, was**

without sin. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). And when John the Baptist first saw Jesus he announced: **Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 35).**

On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat - that is all you may do (12:16). So **the first** and **seventh** days were especially **sacred**. Today, Jews do not work **the first day**, or **the seventh day** of this **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, but they do work the five days in between. But even though they work during the five days, they do not eat anything **with yeast in it** during that period of time.

Celebrate, literally *guard*, **the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt.** When the Israelites were led out of bondage in **Egypt**, **ADONAI** did not allow them to take any leavened **bread** (with **yeast** in it) with them, symbolically representing **His** intention that the people were not to take any influence of pagan **Egypt** with them into the Promised Land. **Isra'el** was to start life anew, with no contaminating influence from the wicked, ungodly land of her oppression.²⁰⁷

Although **the Passover** itself was observed in **Egypt**, the exodus occurred on **the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread**. Therefore, **God** said: **Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt.** The verb **I brought** is in the perfect tense and signifies completed or imminent action. Because **God** spoke these words, they would surely come to pass.²⁰⁸ **Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come (12:17).** These exact words occur in **verse 14**, and highlight the importance of **the Passover** for future generations.

During that entire week they were to **eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day (12:18).** The eating of unleavened bread began on the evening of **the fourteenth day** with **the Passover**. Days that are **sacred** and set apart for **God** always began and ended at sundown in **the evening**. **From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your Sabbath (Leviticus 23:32).** This probably came from the creation week where the days started in the evening: **And there was evening, and there was morning - the**

first day (Genesis 1:5).

For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Isra'el, whether he is an alien or native-born (12:19). An alien was someone who had taken up permanent residence in **Isra'el**, but was not a Jew. In **Isra'el**, the **alien** could participate in religious activities if he was circumcised. Without this physical sign, he could not participate in the festival. Then a final reminder: **Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread (12:20).**