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C0615 – April 12, 2006 – Ex 12:1-14 – The Passover

I. The Passover Instituted (12:1-13)

In verses 1-13 the Passover (Heb. *pesach*) is instituted by YHWH who gives Moses simple instructions regarding how the Passover should be celebrated in Egypt. Further Passover instructions are given in verses 43-51 which apply to Passover celebrations outside the land of Egypt.ⁱ

Exodus 12:1 Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,

² "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you.

³ "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household.

⁴ 'Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons *in them*; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb.

⁵ 'Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

⁶ 'You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.

⁷ 'Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

⁸ 'They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

⁹ 'Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, *both* its head and its legs along with its entrails.

¹⁰ 'And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire.

¹¹ 'Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste-- it is the LORD'S **Passover**.

¹² 'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments-- I am the LORD.

¹³ 'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.

12:1, 2. *A New Calendar, a New Nation, and a New Celebration.* Verse 1 places the institution of the Passover **in the land of Egypt**. The very **month** that God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt would now **be the beginning of months** for them. At the time, the Israelites first month was *Tishri* (Sept/Oct) but now it would be *Abib* (Mar/Apr...the ear month because the corn was in the ear; Exod 13:4). It was spring and as new vegetation began to blossom so a new nation began to bud and would ultimately produce the Messiah.ⁱⁱ After the Babylonian Captivity this month was called Nisan (Neh 2:1). The significance of a new calendar was that it marked the birth of a nation. Israel's calendar would later be filled with other celebrations and feasts that set them apart from the other nations.

12:3, 4. For the first time in the Bible Israel is referred to as **the congregation of Israel** (v 3). The first celebration of the New Year will be called Passover (14th of Nisan) and coupled with it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread (15th-21st of Nisan).ⁱⁱⁱ In later Jewish history they were both known as Passover (cf Luke 22:1).

The Passover is described very simply in verses 3-13. On the 10th of Abib a **lamb** was to be taken. One **lamb for each household**. However, if the household was small in number then they were to join a neighbor. In time it was decided that a lamb could serve at the least ten and at the most twenty. But the number/lamb is to be calculated on the basis of what each person should eat so that as little as possible is wasted yet each person has enough to eat.

12:5. The lamb taken must be a male yearling (or goat^{iv}) without blemish. That is, he was to be the best not less than eight days old and not more than a year old. It had to be a male because it was a substitute for the firstborn son. It was kept apart from the others for four days.^v

12:6, 7. On the 14th day **at twilight** the **assembly of the congregation of Israel** was to slay it. They were to do this at approximately the same time each in their own household so they would be united and simultaneous in worship which would help weld them together as a nation. The phrase **at twilight** literally means “between the two evenings”, a phrase much debated. “According to the Samaritans, the Karaite Jews, and many modern interpreters, this means between actual sunset and complete darkness (or, say, between six and seven pm)” (Edersheim, *The Temple*, chapter 11). The more widely held Jewish view was that the first evening began right after noon and the second began when the sun set. In Josephus' day, which was also Jesus' day, the Jews slew the Passover lamb in mid-afternoon. The Lord Jesus Christ died during this time i.e., about 3:00 pm, Matt. 27:45-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46; 1 Cor 5:7). This is the better interpretation because eventually all sacrifices were done by Levitical priests in the Tabernacle and later the Temple and this would allow sufficient time for the numerous lambs to be slain and prepared. So, the lamb would be slain between 3 and 5pm. Some of its blood was to be placed on the doorposts and the lintel but no blood was placed on the threshold so that blood might not be trodden under foot.^{vi} Since there was no Jewish Tabernacle or Temple in Egypt there was no altar, and thus each home became an altar when blood was smeared upon the doorposts and lintel providing expiation and consecration of everything within.^{vii}

12:8, 9. The proper means of preparation was roasting over the fire. This was to preserve the integrity of the sacrifice. It was not to be boiled in water because that would destroy the integrity of the animal, in part because a whole lamb could not fit into one pot without cutting it apart and breaking bones. Rashi correctly explains, “undivided or whole, so that neither head nor thighs were cut off, and not a bone was broken (v 46), and the viscera were roasted in the belly along with the entrails”. “It was to be roasted, in order that it might be placed upon the table undivided and essentially unchanged”.^{viii} It was to appear as a lamb and not just meat. This was not an ordinary meal. “Through the unity and integrity of the lamb given them to eat, the participants were to be joined into an undivided unity and fellowship with the Lord, who had provided them with the meal” (1 Cor 10:17). “None of it was to be left over; and those, who gathered around it were to form one family. All this was intended to express that it was to be a complete and unbroken sacrifice, on the ground of which there was complete and unbroken fellowship with the God who had passed by the blood-sprinkled doors, and with those who together formed but one family and one body.”^{ix} After it was properly roasted over fire in its entirety, it was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. “The Passover lamb means that God passed over the bloodsprinkled place on the houses of our fathers in Egypt; the unleavened bread means that our fathers were delivered out of Egypt (in haste); and the bitter herbs mean that the Egyptians made bitter the lives of our fathers in Egypt.”^x But this bitterness would be overpowered by the sweet flesh of the lamb. This was the time for the fathers and grandfathers to teach their sons and grandsons their history (Exod 10:1, 2). “...the head of the house was to relate the whole national history,

commencing with Terah, Abraham's father, and telling of his idolatry, and continuing, in due order, the story of Israel up to their deliverance from Egypt and the giving of the Law; and the more fully he explained it all, the better."^{xi}

12:10. Anything not eaten was to be destroyed with fire by morning to preserve the unity of the sacrifice. There were to be no leftovers.

12:11. The manner in which they were to eat the Passover lamb; **with loins girded** so that their long flowing dress would not get in the way of their feet as they walked. **with sandals on their feet** so that they would be ready to walk over rough terrain and **with staff in hand**. The meal was to be eaten in haste, even standing so they would be ready to leave at any moment. Verse 11 closes by stating **it is a Passover to the Lord**. It is appointed by the Lord and it is to be kept for Him. The reason it is called a **Passover**^{xii} is given in verses 12-13.

12:12, 13. For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, which is, the 15th of Nisan, **and will strike the firstborn of Egypt**. The judgment would be upon the firstborn of **man and beast**. The purpose of the final plague was to **judge all the gods of Egypt** which would demonstrate that there is no one like YHWH and that He is the only God. The judgment upon **man and beast** would indirectly judge **all the gods of Egypt** because Pharaoh's firstborn son and successor was considered a god. His death would show that YHWH was God and not Pharaoh. Other God such as Apis would be judged when the firstborn cattle were killed. In the end, this judgment would show that the Egyptian gods were impotent. Thus, the Egyptians would not cry only for the loss of firstborn sons but also the utter defeat of their gods around which their lives revolved.

However, God would Passover the Israelites homes when He saw the blood on the doorposts and lintel. "Note that God said that when *He* saw the blood He would pass over the Jews (v. 13). He did not say when *they* saw it. The ground of their security was propitiation. The blood satisfied God. Therefore the Israelites could rest. The reason we can have peace with God is that Jesus Christ's blood satisfied God."^{xiii} For an Israelite to place blood on the door would require faith in God's promise that this would save their firstborn. This introduces the importance of sacrificial blood and appropriation by faith. A way of deliverance was provided for any and all but deliverance would be enjoyed only by those who responded by faith in God's promises. Later writers of Scripture identified the angel of death as "a band of destroying angels" (Ps 78:49-51). So, angels carried out the work of the Lord in striking the firstborn.

12:14. The Passover was to be observed annually by the generations to come as a permanent ordinance to the Lord. It is to be observed as a **memorial**^{xiv} "For in the night

of the Passover the children of Israel, miraculously preserved and set free, for the first time became a people, and that by the direct interposition of God.” But it is not completely **memorial** it is also “typical” of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! “For when God bound up the future of all nations in the history of Abraham and his seed, (Genesis 12:3) He made that history prophetic; and each event and every rite became, as it were, a bud, destined to open in blossom and ripen into fruit on that tree under the shadow of which all nations were to be gathered.”^{xv}

This simple celebration in Egypt has been complicated in Modern Passovers (*Pesach*). Further instructions regarding future Passover celebrations are described at the end of this chapter (12:43-51) and elsewhere which omit certain elements. For example, 1) taking the lamb on the 10th day, 2) applying blood to the doorposts, and 3) eating the meal in haste. Maimonides said, “These things were only for those in the land of Egypt and are not required of later generations.”^{xvi} This explains why, Christ and his disciples did not eat the Passover in haste with staffs in hand but rather “reclined at the table” (Luke 22:14). Further, the Mosaic Law would forbid sacrifices apart from the Levitical priests at the tabernacle (and later the Temple). Thus, the Passover lamb would not be slain at the house but at the tabernacle (and later the Temple) where all Israel gathered and then would be taken home (also cf Luke 22:1-38).

What is the meaning of the Passover?

1. It was to commemorate the birth of the nation of Israel as shown by the fact that it is the first event of the new calendar.
2. It was to remind Israel of the Lord’s salvation when he “passed over” their houses and delivered the firstborn.
3. The male lamb was to replace the male firstborn.
4. The unblemished lamb was to represent the unblemished Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
5. The blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel was to represent atonement of sin.
6. The bitter herbs were to remind Israel of her bitter days of bondage in Egypt.
7. The unleavened bread was to remind Israel of God’s quick deliverance since it did not have time to rise.

The Exodus plagues and the Passover in particular picture seven crucial doctrines:

1. *grace before judgment*
2. *perfect discrimination*
3. *man and nature judged*
4. *judgment/salvation*
5. *appropriation by faith*
6. *one way of salvation*

7. substitutionary blood atonement.

GRACE BEFORE JUDGMENT

Grace before judgment was first revealed at the Flood in Noah's day when God extended grace for 120 years through Noah and his families preaching of coming judgment. This allowed an opportunity for men to repent. But God's grace only extended for 120 years. After that judgment followed swiftly. The confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh amplify our knowledge of God's way of offering grace before judgment. Pharaoh was given many opportunities to repent and let the people go. However, Pharaoh spurned each opportunity, hardened his heart and refused to let them go. In such a situation, there is nothing left but to judge. Through this we learn that God's grace is only a temporal extension and not an eternal one. As such, God's grace has a limit and once that limit is reached judgment comes. As such, every family in Egypt would lose their firstborn.

PERFECT DISCRIMINATION

Perfect discrimination was first revealed at the Flood in Noah's day when God perfectly discriminated between those inside Noah's Ark and those outside the Ark. Not one living soul outside the Ark survived the cataclysmic judgment but all those inside the Ark survived. The same truth is amplified in the Exodus plagues. After the first cycle of plagues God perfectly discriminated between His elect people Israel and the non-elect nation of Egypt so that the flies, pestilence, boils, hail, darkness and death (et. al) came only upon the Egyptians. The text even says, "that you may understand that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (Exod 11:7). The death of the firstborn of Egypt and not Israel is the most striking example of this truth.

MAN AND NATURE JUDGED

We often think of the spiritual and physical consequences for Adam and the human race when he sinned but it is equally crucial to recognize the judgments on nature. Man would toil in labor to bring forth the fruit of the earth. All nature would groan because of the terrible consequences of sin. Nature was judged because it was originally placed under man's dominion at creation. As such, when man fell under sin, nature was also permeated with sin and thus comes under the justice of God and must be judged to remove sin. This truth was clearly taught in the Flood of Noah's day when the whole earth was inundated with water and all men and animals outside the Ark were judged. We are given additional knowledge regarding this important principle of God in the Exodus plagues. Many of the

plagues affect both man and nature and this is consistent with God's attribute of justice and original design in creation.

JUDGMENT/SALVATION

However, whenever man and nature are judged we also see the truth of salvation emerge. While man and nature outside the Ark were being judged, Noah, his family, and the animals on the Ark were being saved. This truth is advanced in the Exodus plagues because as Egypt is being judged Israel is being saved. The final death blow to the firstborn of Egypt resulted in the salvation of the firstborn of Israel.

APPROPRIATION BY FAITH

God's promises have to be appropriated by faith in order to be applied. Since man is a sinner the only thing that can please God is faith. As such, appropriation by faith is crucial to Christian thought and is exemplified objectively in history, particularly in the death of Egypt's firstborn but not Israel's. This truth was also exemplified in the Flood of Noah. Even though many doubtless heard that God promised to flood the world with water only eight had faith in God's word and promise. As such, only they enjoyed salvation passing through the flood waters to safety on the other side. Such examples of deliverance could be shown time and time again in God's word but the Passover of the tenth plague provides a penultimate example of appropriation by faith. The Israelites would have to believe that blood on the doorposts and lintel was sufficient for the angel of death to Passover and not destroy the firstborn. Faith in God's word and promises is always the issue.

ONE WAY OF SALVATION

One way of salvation is first revealed at the Flood of Noah. There was only one Ark built precisely according to God's dimensions. No salvation would be found outside that Ark. This truth is offensive to the modern mind but one firmly attested to in Scripture. The one way of salvation in Egypt was placing blood from the sacrificial lamb on the doorposts and lintel. The introduction of "blood" into the judgment/salvation motif leads us to the seventh doctrine of great importance.

SUBSTITUTIONARY BLOOD ATONEMENT

Since sin entered the world at the fall and death because of sin, the only way to reverse death is to somehow atone for sin. Such atonement is by blood sacrifice but why? It has to do with the relationship of “blood” to “life” and “soul”. In the Bible “life” refers to the possession of a “soul” and the “life” of all flesh is the “blood” (Lev 17:11). As such, only men and animals are said to have “life” (*nephesh*). Plants do not have blood and are therefore never said to have “life”. Blood sacrifices were required because the “life” is the “blood” and only a “life” can substitute for a “life”. Since we are sinful our lives are forfeit and thus we cannot atone for our own sins because we have no life to give! If there is a substitute the sins of the guilty can be transferred to the one without guilt. If this happens then death is reversed by the impartation of eternal life (this is the deeper magic that the witch in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* did not understand but Aslan did). In any case, this is why blood sacrifices are necessary and this also explains why the blood sacrifices in the OT merely covered sin and did not take it away. The animals were not without guilt, Jesus Christ was. When we come to the Exodus the substitution of blood for life is quite apparent. The blood of the unblemished lamb would substitute for the blood of the firstborn. When God saw the blood He would be satisfied and the angel of death would Passover.

Lastly, these substitutionary blood sacrifices provided atonement. Atonement is a word used only in the OT and means “a covering”. Noah’s Ark was covered inside and out by pitch, thus sealing and protecting it from the dangerous waters outside. On the night of the Passover the blood of the unblemished lamb applied to the doors by faith provided atonement for all inside the house. Thus, the key idea of the Exodus is substitutionary blood atonement and prepares the way for God’s Son to come.

CONCLUSION

These seven truths are all teaching us about God’s attributes so we can know who He is. *Grace before judgment* demonstrates that God is good or omni-benevolent. It is true to say that God is good all the time, all the time God is good. But it also shows us that God is just. If He were not just He would not be good. The two go together. God must be good in order to be just. God is good in that He gives man every opportunity but when grace has reached its limit God’s justice demands judgment. *Perfect discrimination* reveals that God is sovereign (He is in control of His universe) and God is omniscient (God knows everything there is to know both actual and possible). Nothing happens by chance and God doesn’t make mistakes. God’s knowledge and sovereignty enable him to perfectly discriminate between those who have believed and those who refuse to believe. We have nothing to fear if we have believed because we know that we are safe in the Father’s hand

and He will never overlook or forget about us and our needs. That God judges both *man and nature* shows that God is sovereign (He has full rights over all creation). He created it, He sustains it, and He judges it. Because He judges it reminds us that God is just and demands payment for sin. We also need to be reminded that not only does God judge man and nature but God is the savior of man and nature. The archetype for the salvation of nature is the Flood of Noah when not just men were saved but two of every kind of animal as well. Thus, the cross effects of Jesus Christ extend beyond man to nature (unlimited redemption). As such, the present heavens and earth are groaning awaiting its regeneration when Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. So, both man and nature are judged but both man and nature are also saved (cf Matt 19:28). However, there is a distinction between the salvation of man and nature. For the benefits of salvation to come to man he must *appropriate God's truth by faith*. This demonstrates that man is responsible and this flows forth from the fact that man is made in God's image. While Christ made provision for all it is applied only to those who believe. Further, there is only one way of salvation for both man and nature, it is always by *substitutionary blood atonement*. It was this way in the Exodus from Egypt and it this way for spiritual salvation as well. God's attributes of holiness and justice require substitution. This is the essence of the cross of Christ. Christ died for you/for sins. God's attributes of holiness and justice also require blood sacrifice. This is because the only equivalent to a life is another life. Since our life is corrupted by sin we have no life to give. Thus, God provided the sacrifice Himself by giving His unique Son whose sinlessness qualified His life to be given for our lives and our sin to be transferred to Him. Finally, atonement reveals that God is righteous in that He must deal with sin. He cannot blink at it forever. He dealt with it during the OT by allowing animal sacrifices to cover sin temporarily. He dealt with it once for all in Jesus Christ who did not cover sin but took it away. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)! This is what the Passover typified and looked forward to so that Christ is our Passover (1 Cor 5:7). By appropriating the gospel by faith His blood is applied to our lives so that we are given His eternal life. Amen.

Every element of the Passover looks forward to Christ, our Passover.

Passover	Christ
A lamb (Exod 12:5)	The Lamb of God (John 1:29)
Unblemished (Exod 12:5)	Unblemished (1 Pt 1:19)
Male in place of all firstborn (Exod 12:5)	Male in place of all (1 Pt 3:14)
A year old – in the vigor of life (Exod 12:5)	In the vigor of his life
Slaughtered (Exod 12:6)	Led to slaughter (Isa 53:7)
Innocent	Innocent (Heb 7:26)

Bloody (Exod 12:7)	Shed blood (Heb 9:14; 1 Pt 1:19)
Unleavened bread – without impurities (Exod 12:8)	Jesus said, “This is my body” – without sin (Lk 22:19)
Bitter herbs – bitterness of bondage (Exod 12:8)	Bitterness of death on a cross
Do not break any bone of it – the unity of the sacrifice (Exod 12:9, 46)	Not a bone was broken (Ps 34:20; John 19:36)
None shall be left till morning (Exod 12:10)	Joseph of Arimathea took his body off the cross (Mark 15:43ff)
Substitute for firstborn (Exod 12:5)	Substitute for all (Mk 10:45)
Guilt charged	Guilt charged (2 Cor 5:21)
Covered sin	Took sin away (John 1:29)

Christ is our Passover and yet the Passover is to continue until Israel recognizes that Jesus is her Passover Lamb (Isa 53:11-12). When they do He will return (Matt 23:39) and set up His kingdom and they will be a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6).

ⁱ “Jewish authorities rightly distinguish between “the Egyptian” and the “Permanent Passover.” (Edersheim, *The Temple*, Chapter 11.

ⁱⁱ It was the feast of spring; the springtime of nature, when, after the death of winter, the scattered seeds were born into a new harvest, and the first ripe sheaf could be presented to the Lord; the spring-time of Israel’s history, too, when each year the people celebrated anew their national birthday; and the spring-time of grace, their grand national deliverance pointing forward to the birth of the true Israel, and the Passover sacrifice to that “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

ⁱⁱⁱ The nations birthday is also the first visible form of the kingdom of God. They were to be a “kingdom of priests” to the nations (Exod 19:6). So, God is building His kingdom program which will ultimately culminate in the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

^{iv} Later custom restricted the choice to the lamb alone (Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 327).

^v Conjectures as to why it was set apart 4 days in advance are as follows: 1) to give time for observation of the animal to ensure it is unblemished. 2) to keep the animal from getting hurt by other animals during the preparatory days. 3) because the three previous days were darkness which would correspond to the 11th, 12th, and 13th days of the ninth plague. 4) because of the great haste which they would leave Egypt they would need to check the animal in advance so they would be ready to go.

^{vi} “The threshold, which belonged to the door quite as much as the lintel, was not to be smeared with blood, in order that the blood might not be trodden under foot. But the smearing of the door-posts and lintel with blood, the house was expiated and consecrated on an altar.” (K & D, 328).

^{vii} Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 328.

^{viii} Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 329.

^{ix} Edersheim, *The Temple*, Chapter 11.

^x Edersheim, *The Temple*, Chapter 11.

^{xi} Edersheim, *The Temple*, Chapter 11.

^{xii} “The name of the Passover, in Hebrew Pesach, and in Aramaean and Greek Pascha, is derived from a root which means to “step over,” or to “overleap,” and thus points back to the historical origin of the festival.” (Edersheim, *The Temple*, Chapter 11.

^{xiii} Constable, *Notes on Exodus*, www.soniclight.com.

^{xiv} The Passover commemorates God's passing over the Israelites homes and striking the firstborn of all Egypt. It commemorates more than Israel's national deliverance from bondage in Egypt; also commemorating the deliverance of Israel's firstborn from the angel of death. "In the midst of the judgment of death, God provided a way of salvation for the promised seed (Gen 3:15)." (Sailhammer,

The Pentateuch as Narrative)

^{xv} Edersheim, *The Temple*, Chapter 11.

^{xvi} Maimonides, *Qorbenot*, 10.15.

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