

Exodus 11:1-12:36 Part II – The Cover-over Meal

Introduction

We saw last week that in the 10th and final plague, Yahweh Himself will enter “personally” into the land of Egypt. He enters Egypt to exercise His sovereign and irrevocable rights over all of His creation. He will kill every firstborn in Egypt. The only “problem” is that God has no less of an irrevocable right to the death of the Israelites than He does to the death of the Egyptians. And so now we learn that if Israel is to be saved from the hand of the Egyptians, then they must first be saved from the hand of Yahweh Himself.

The Lord told the Israelites to take lambs and kill them, and apply the blood to the doorposts of their houses. The blood applied to the doorposts proclaimed that a life had been taken. Someone, or something had died. And this death was intended as a substitute for all who sheltered behind the bloodstained door. But there was no real power in the blood of a lamb or a goat to keep out the death of Yahweh! The blood, in itself, was powerless. And so what I understand the text to say is that when Yahweh saw the blood on the doorposts, **He – He Himself** – would hover protectively over the people inside – guarding, and delivering, and covering them from the deadliness of **His own** righteous and irrevocable claim upon their lives. Why would He do this just because He saw the blood on the doorposts? This was a picture of how one day He Himself would come into this world to be the unblemished Lamb whose blood would be shed and applied not to the doorposts of houses, but to each and every one of His people. It was a picture of how one day Yahweh would not simply hover over His people **when He saw** the blood of the lamb – instead, He would hover over His people by Himself becoming that Lamb in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lamb in the Feast of Cover-over! And He is also Yahweh Himself – who, through the shedding of His own blood, hovers now over His people, shielding and protecting **us** from the deadliness of His own righteous and irrevocable claim upon our lives!!!

Well, now that we’ve begun to explore the significance of the blood of the lamb smeared on the lintel and the doorposts of the Israelite’s houses, it’s time to reflect on *another* wonderful reality that’s connected with the lamb. The Lord said to Moses:

I. Exodus 12:3–4 — Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; ***according to what each can eat*** you shall make your count for the lamb.

Maybe we take this for granted. The lamb that was sacrificially slain so that it’s blood might be applied to the doorposts of the house – **this same lamb was to be eaten** by all those within the house. This **same lamb** that had been slain as a substitute for the firstborn, **this same lamb** was now also to provide **a meal** for those who had been saved because of the blood. We go on to read in verses 5-7:

II. Exodus 12:5–7 — Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month,

when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses *in which they eat it*.

Can you see how the blood of the lamb that was applied to the doorposts of the house is very much connected with the meat of the lamb that was to be eaten by all those within the house? “They shall take... *the blood [of the lamb]* and put it *on* the two doorposts... of the houses *in which they eat [the lamb]*.” Once again, I wonder how much we simply take this for granted. How much do we take for granted this reality that the same lamb that provides the blood by means of its death is also the lamb that provides a meal. What does that mean? Why should this be? In verses 8-10, Yahweh gives some very specific instructions regarding this meal.

III. Exodus 12:8–10 — They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.

Anyone can see very easily that this meal isn’t just any meal. First of all, the meat could *only* be eaten “*that night*” – on the fourteenth day of the first month of the year. Any of the meat that was not eaten, and remained until the morning was to be burned. In other words, this was a meal set *apart* from all other meals, and so it was not in any way to be mingled or confused with anything “common” or “everyday.” There were also special instructions for the preparation of the lamb (not raw or boiled in water, but roasted), and for what other things the lamb was to be eaten *with* (unleavened bread and bitter herbs).

So why all the “ceremony”? We’re coming to understand the meaning of the *blood* – but what, exactly, is the meaning of this *meal*? We go on to read, now, in verses 11-13:

IV. Exodus 12:11 — In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Cover-over.

What is Yahweh’s “Cover-over”? *This meal* that the Israelites are to *eat* is Yahweh’s Cover-over! But wait a minute! Isn’t it the *blood* of the lamb smeared on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses – isn’t it this blood that will be the sign for Yahweh to hover protectively over the people in the house. Why don’t we read that the blood is the Lord’s Cover-over rather than the meal? Wouldn’t that be more accurate? What is the answer to this “riddle”?

“In this manner you shall eat [the meal]: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. [*This meal*] is the LORD’s Cover-over.” And then we go right on to read in verses 12-13:

V. Exodus 12:12–13 — For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. **The blood** shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see **the blood**, I will **cover over you**, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

One thing is clear. It's not the meal that Yahweh sees, so that He then covers over the Israelite's houses. It's the blood applied to the doorposts. *And yet* there *is* a connection between **the blood** on the doorposts of the house outside, and **the meal** that was being eaten by those inside – a connection so close that it could even be said of the meal itself: “*This is the Lord's Cover-over.*” So what's the connection? And what does it matter to us?

VI. The MEANING of the MEAL (the connection between the meal and the blood)

Remember what that first generation of Israelites was to eat along *with* the lamb?

- ✓ Exodus 12:8 — They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; **with** unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.

Why unleavened bread? On the night Yahweh passed through the land of Egypt, the Israelites were to eat the “Cover-over” meal with their belts fastened, their sandals on their feet, and their staffs in their hand. (cf. 12:11) They were to eat the meal in haste, so that they might be ready to leave at a moment's notice. And so as the Israelites prepared the unleavened bread for the feast of “Cover-over,” they would also have been preparing *leavened* bread for the first days of the journey they were about to take. Only we read that as things actually turned out:

- ✓ Exodus 12:33–34 — The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” So the people took their dough **before it was leavened**, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders.

In other words, the leavened bread that the Israelites had planned to bring on their journey never had a chance to rise because of the haste and urgency with which they were driven out of Egypt. We read in verse 39 that at their first stop along the way:

- ✓ Exodus 12:39 — They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for **it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait**, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

So the Lord commanded the Israelites to **purposefully prepare** unleavened bread to eat with the lamb of Cover-over **in anticipation** of the fact that soon they would be **forced** to eat unleavened bread even **in spite** of what they had planned and intended. This unleavened bread that the Israelites were **forced** to eat during the first days of their departure from Egypt was to become a symbol of all their long years of slavery and affliction in Egypt. Deuteronomy 16 calls it “the bread of affliction.” (16:3)

If the unleavened bread was a symbol of Israel's slavery and affliction in Egypt, then I believe that so also were the “bitter herbs.”¹ The last time we saw that word “bitter” was in Exodus chapter one:

¹ Motyer writes: “It could be possible that [*marar*; bitter] passed into common currency for what the Hebrews were suffering and, in this case the Passover usage would have been perfectly understandable at the time.”

- ✓ Exodus 1:13–14 — So [the Egyptians] ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives **bitter** with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

The unleavened bread and the bitter herbs symbolized Israel’s long years of bitterness and affliction in the land of Egypt. But, of course, this unleavened bread and these bitter herbs were *not* to be eaten *alone*! They were eaten *with* the flesh of the “Cover-over” lamb. If the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs symbolize Israel’s years of hard slavery and affliction, then the flesh of the lamb symbolizes how God rescued and delivered His people from Egypt – and how He did this not simply be a display of brute power and force, but rather by *redeeming* them with the *blood* of that very *same* lamb.

Can you see how the meal is telling a story? – And yet, of course, not in the usual way that stories are told. This story is told uniquely in the “**eating**.” And so the eating itself becomes part of the symbol – part of the story.² As the Israelites ate this “Cover-over” meal, they were being fed on this sign of Yahweh’s salvation. They’re bodies were being nourished on this symbol of Yahweh’s redemption. And so it was the **eating of this meal** that was meant to symbolize the miraculous creation of a brand new life and existence for the Israelites. It’s *here* in this chapter on the “Cover-over” meal that the Israelites are **first** called the “congregation” and the “assembly” of Israel.

- ✓ Exodus 12:3, 6 (cf. 12:19, 47) — Tell all the **congregation** of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb... and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole **assembly** of the **congregation** of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

For the very first time, the Israelites are spoken of as a community, a people, a nation set apart. I think this helps us understand what it means when the Lord says in verse nine:

- ✓ Exodus 12:9 — Do not eat any of [the lamb] raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts.

Boiling would certainly have been a convenient way to cook the lamb, but then the flesh of the lamb would have shredded and separated in the pot. And most likely, for that first generation of Israelites, it would have been necessary to first divide the lamb into pieces in order to boil it in several, smaller pots. The point of roasting the lamb over the fire – “its head with its legs and its inner parts” – seems to be that the lamb should be served *whole* and *undivided*. We read in verse 46:

- ✓ Exodus 12:46 — [The lamb] shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, **and you shall not break any of its bones**.

² Seven times, already, Yahweh has spoken of Israel’s *eating* of the “Cover-over” meal. (12:4, 7, 8, 9, 11)

This undivided wholeness of the lamb was symbolizing the unity and the wholeness of this brand new *people* – the “*congregation*” and the “*assembly*” of Israel.³ (cf. Keil; Reformation Study Bible note on 12:46) And so now we can better understand what we read at the very beginning of this chapter:

- ✓ Exodus 12:1–2 — The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.”

It’s in this very month (March/April) that the Israelites have been given a brand new life as the “*assembly*” and the “*congregation*” of Israel. And so from now on this month is to mark the beginning of the year, because it marks the very beginning of Israel’s life as a nation and a people set apart. (cf. Enns; Durham)

So *now* we can come back full circle to where we left off. It’s *this* miraculous *creation* of Israel’s brand new *life* as the “congregation” of Yahweh that’s represented not merely in the *food* of the “Cover-over” meal, but in the *act* of *eating* the meal. Together, the people of Israel are now to be fed, and nourished, and sustained on *this* meal – which is, itself, the sign of their redemption. What a beautiful mystery! If the *blood* represents Israel’s redemption *accomplished*, then the *meal* represents Israel’s redemption *experienced*.

Well, that’s all good and wonderful for that first generation of Israelites on the night in which they came out from the land of Egypt. But Yahweh’s redemption of Israel and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt happened *only once*. So what about the children, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren all yet to be born who never *personally experienced* the *events* of Israel’s redemption and deliverance from Egypt? We read, now, in verses 14 and 17, and then verses 24–28:

VII. Exodus 12:14, 17, 24–28 — This day shall be for you a *memorial day*, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; *throughout your generations, as a statute forever*, you shall keep it as a feast... Therefore you shall observe this day, *throughout your generations, as a statute forever*... You shall *observe this rite* as a statute for you and for your sons *forever*. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall *keep this service*. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘*It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Cover-over, for he hovered over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but saved our houses.*’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

Yahweh’s redemption of Israel, and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was a *one-time event* in history. That’s true. But it was also true that all the future generations of Israel were *no less participants* in Yahweh’s redemption than that first generation that actually came out of Egypt. And so even though in future years, the “Cover-over” meal would no longer be eaten in their homes and the blood no longer applied to their doorposts (Deut. 16:5–7), God still gave the “Cover-over” sacrifice and meal to every generation of Israelites. Why? It was so that they might

³ As one person puts it: “There was no other reason for this, than that all who [ate of] this one whole animal... should look upon themselves as one whole, one community.” (Baehr; quoted in Keil)

experience and *appropriate anew and afresh for themselves* this reality of their accomplished redemption and their miraculous creation as a *congregation* and an *assembly*, set apart. This “Cover-over” meal was not just to help future generations of Israelites *remember*, like we think of *remembering*.⁴ In the Bible, the word for “remember” very often means to “observe” or “keep” *experientially*. (cf. Gen. 8:1; 9:15; Exod. 3:15; 20:8; 23:13; Num. 15:39-40; Josh. 23:7) And so what we have here in the continual *eating* of this meal is an experiential remembering – a remembering that actually appropriates and participates in the reality of a long past event even *now in the present day*. (cf. Enns; NASB Study Bible note on 12:26; see also 12:42) So Moses will be able to say to a brand *new* generation of Israelites who had never experienced the actual *events* of the Exodus (cf. Num. 26:63-65):

- ✓ Deuteronomy 16:1, 3, 6 — “Observe the month of Abib and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought **you** out of Egypt by night... You shall eat no leavened bread... for **you** came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when **you** came out of the land of Egypt... At the place that the LORD your God will choose... there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time **you** came out of Egypt.

If last week the *blood* represented Israel’s redemption *accomplished* once and for all, then this week the *meal* represents Israel’s redemption *experienced* and *appropriated* in the lives of **all** God’s people in *all* generations.

Conclusion

Paul said to the Corinthians: “Christ, *our* ‘Cover-over’ lamb, has been sacrificed.” (1 Cor. 5:7) Jesus died, and then He was buried, and then, unlike any other “Cover-over” lamb, He was raised on the third day. (cf 1 Cor. 15:3-4) But that was a long, long, *long* time ago. What can these historical events of so long ago have to do with *us, today*?

Unlike all other events in human history, these are events that we actually participate in, and share in, and experience even today – 2000 years later. Paul says that we, too, have died, and been buried, and been raised up with Christ. *We participate* spiritually—and really and truly!—in these actual historical events of long ago.

- ✓ Romans 6:6–11 — We know that our old self was *crucified with him* in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would *no longer be enslaved* to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now *if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him*. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*.

This is truly a wonderful mystery! And so in order that we might be able to fully *experience* the wonder and the joy of this mystery, Jesus has not only covered over us with His blood, but He

⁴ Of course, the significance of the very first “Cover-over” meal was obviously more than just remembering!

has given *us* a *meal* – to *eat*. It was *while* He was eating the “Cover-over” meal with His disciples that,

- ✓ Matthew 26:26–28 — Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, *eat*; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “*Drink* of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

So today, in the year 2016, it’s in our eating of this meal together that we uniquely and powerfully “experience” our actual *participation* in those events of so long ago. As the bread and the cup give life and nourishment to our physical bodies, so the body and the blood of Jesus sets us free from our slavery to sin and makes us alive to God as His “new creation.”

- ✓ Romans 6:12–13 — Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

But there’s one more thing. Just like the lamb in the Old Testament, so the Apostle John can write of Jesus at His crucifixion:

- ✓ John 19:36 — These things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “*Not one of his bones will be broken.*”

And then Paul writes:

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 10:15–17 — The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *participation* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *participation* in the body of Christ? *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

If the lamb roasted whole symbolized the unity of the newly created congregation of Israel, *how much more* must the *one bread that we all eat* be a *powerful seal* of our oneness as the body of Christ? Speaking of those who were causing strife and division in the body of Christ, Paul wrote:

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 — Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

It's this very danger connected with eating the meal in an unworthy manner that actually shows us just how wonderful and beautiful it really is. I love how one person has said it:

“The reality of the Church’s new, resurrected life in Christ is so powerful, so real, that that fact can only be fittingly branded onto our hearts through an outward act, a symbol, in which we physically participate. The Lord’s Supper is not *merely* a symbol of our

union with the resurrected Christ, something that is nice to do but is really a ‘less real’ representation of some other reality. It is a ritual *founded by Christ*, in which we as believers bear witness to ourselves and the world that we *are* one.” (Enns)

So today, as we eat of this meal, may God give us the grace to live out in true obedience and holiness our new life in Christ, *and* to live out in true love and humility, our oneness as the body of Christ.