

EXODUS

Lesson 10 - Chapter 12

This chapter of Exodus is almost a book unto itself. Here, the festival, or ordinance, of the Passover, Pesach, is established. In fact, another God-ordained feast, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, is also laid out. The important details and timing and who may participate and who may not are described. And, these details are rich and full of spiritual meaning, which we will discuss.

But, this chapter also includes the carrying out of God's decree that He shall kill, by His own hand, all the firstborn of Egypt.....people and livestock. And, it ends with the people of Israel packing up and quickly leaving Egypt, once again giving us some important information about who went, how many, and WHERE they went.

Now, just for the sake of organizing our thoughts to take on the important facts and meaning contained in this 12th Chapter of Exodus, it helps if we can see it arranged in 5 parts:

Verses 1-14 are God directing Moses on the details of establishing the first Passover.

Verses 15-20 look to the future, as these details are meant for FUTURE Passover celebrations.

Verses 21-27 have Moses communicating to the people, actually the elders of Israel, all that God has instructed him.

Verse 28 records the people of Israel being obedient to Moses and God.

Verses 29 to the end of the chapter describe the horror of that dreadful night that thousands upon thousands of Egyptian firstborns, human and animal, were killed by Yehoveh for the sake of Israel, and then goes on to describe the first stages of the Hebrews' exodus from captivity in Egypt.

So, let's begin.

READ CHAPTER 12 all

Verse 1 leaves us no doubt **where** and **when** this feast of Pesach, Passover, began. But, verse 2 can cause us some confusion if we're not careful, for it seems that God is establishing the Jewish calendar year. Those of you who know a little about the Jewish calendar and the 7 yearly feasts know that Passover is a spring festival. Passover occurs in the Jewish month of Abib, as it was first called, but now is referred to as Nisan. The names of the 12 months of the year were originally Hebrew...but, during their exile to Babylon, some 800 years after the exodus, the Jews changed the names of the months from Hebrew to the Babylonian names. Some sects of Jews have stubbornly clung to the more ancient original Hebrew names for each month, but most accept the more common Babylonian names.

However the Hebrew vs.. the Babylonian isn't the point of confusion I'm concerned with. Clearly God tells Israel in Verse 2 that this Passover month, Nisan, is to be the first month of the year. So, one would think that the first day, of the first month of the year would be considered New Years Day. In other words, just as we follow the Julian calendar today whereby January is the first month of the year, on the 1st of January we celebrate New Years Day....the day a new year begins. However Rosh Hashanah the Jewish New Year, which literally means "head of the year", does NOT occur on the 1st day of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar, and the month referred to here in verse 2. In fact, Rosh Hashanah doesn't even occur until the Fall, several months after the Passover, in the month of Tishri. So, what gives?

Well, the Jews actually have several kinds of "new years". Just as we have a cycle that begins with Jan 1 and ends on Dec 31st for marking a calendar year, if you have a business, you also have what is called a fiscal year, which can start in any month you choose; and this has primarily to do with taxation and accounting purposes. If you go to school you know that the school year can vary from institution to institution, that it is somewhat arbitrary (and is sometimes changed), and certainly is connected to neither a business fiscal year, nor the New Year of the 12-month calendar. If you're a farmer, your "year" is based more on the cycles of agriculture, and since all of the Hebrew festivals are based around agriculture, they are not necessarily in tune with the solar year OR the calendar year, but rather its more about the cycle of seasons.....and there are even more kinds of yearly measurements I could use as examples.

So, in the Jewish Calendar Nisan (as proscribed here in verse 2) is considered the month for counting the years of reigns of kings and queens, and is the first month of the Jewish religious Calendar. The Jewish month of Elul (August) begins the yearly tithing cycle when it comes to tithing animals; the month of Shevat (February) begins the yearly cycle for determining which fruits of the tree harvest can be eaten and tithed. The 1st day of Tishri, which is also called Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is used to determine when the number of the year changes. That is, when on 12:01 am, on the 1st day of January, we go from 2002 to 2003, and then the next year from 2003 to 2004, and so on.....so every 12 months, on the 1st day of the New Year, the number of the year increases by one. Easy enough. Well, the Jews have a specific month that they change calendar years, but it is NOT the month of Nisan which even though it is the first month of the Jewish calendar. Rather, it is somewhat mid-calendar year that the Jews advance the number of the year by one, and it is also the month they add days or weeks to their calendars (from time to time) because they use a LUNAR calendar as the basis, so adjustments must be made every few years to keep their calendars accurate and in line with the more modern SOLAR calendar year.

It's not important to remember all this in detail. But, it is important to understand that the Biblical calendar is NOTHING like our current, nice, and neat solar based 365 ¼ day calendars. So, when we come to the establishment of festival days in the Bible, or the dates of specific events, or when it talks about how long a certain king reigned, you have to think in terms of the Jewish calendar system, not our modern day system.

So, what we know is that the first Passover, marking the night before the Jews left Egypt, was

in the spring, in what we think of as around April. And, in Vs. 3, based on the Jewish lunar calendar, God instructs Israel that on the 10th day of the month of Nisan.....4 days BEFORE Passover..... they are to select.....not kill, just select.....the lamb to be used as the Passover sacrifice.

Now, before we go any further, let me dispel some myths about this lamb. First, this has to be a MALE lamb. Second, it has to be one year old. In other words, we are not talking about some cute, fuzzy little baby creature taken from its mother; this is not an animal that your kindergartner could carry around. A one-year-old male sheep is called a Ram. They have horns, they've developed a certain amount of aggression (for a sheep), and they're pretty big.....50 lbs perhaps. More, they are maturing, approaching their prime. Depending on the variety, even though a male sheep will continue growing for about 5 years, the vast majority of the growth has already occurred by the 1st year. A one-year-old male sheep is an adult, fully capable of reproducing, and likely has already been used to sire lambs. Contrast that when you buy lamb chops in a grocery store; you are not eating an adult sheep; generally the age of the sheep that you're eating is NO MORE than about 6 months. So, let's get the children's book pictures of Mary Had a Little Lamb out of our heads, or what lies underneath that clear cellophane wrapper in the meat counter when we think about the animal that God has commanded to be sacrificed.

And, this couldn't be a sickly Ram; or a runt. It had to be the best Ram of all the yearling Rams you had available. Healthy, vibrant, uninjured, unscarred.

In verses 3 and 4 it is explained that although the general rule is that one Ram per household is slaughtered, if the household is small, then another small household should SHARE a single Ram. God values the life of his creatures. These Rams were innocent....they were being killed because of mankind's sinful nature, and God didn't want any more than necessary to be slaughtered and their meat wasted.

We find out in verse 5 that a male GOAT can be legally substituted for a sheep. And, in Vs. 6, that although the Ram is to be selected 4 days before Passover, it is not to be killed until Passover evening.....which God says is to be the 14th of Nisan.

Time for another explanation: Christian Passover only occasionally coincides with Jewish Passover. For instance: a couple of years ago Christian Passover (Good Friday) was on April 9. Pesach, the true Passover that is Nisan 14, was April 6. Christians changed the Biblical Passover to a politically based Passover. Because due to decrees by early gentile Church Bishops, and then the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4th century AD, it was decided that Passover was ALWAYS to be the Friday BEFORE Easter.....and it would not be called Passover, but Good Friday. And, Easter was always to be celebrated on a Sunday. Well, since the Jewish calendar and the modern Julian calendar don't jibe, and since God gave NUMERICAL DATES that Passover was to occur on, not fixed days of the week, then its only every few years that Christian Passover actually occurs on the 14th of Nisan.....the exact date God prescribed right here in Exodus chapter 12. Do you get this? For example, the 31st of October is always celebrated as Halloween. But, one year Oct 31st falls on a Monday, another a Tuesday, another a Wednesday, and so on. Halloween is assigned a numerical date, not a

day of the week, like a Friday or a Saturday. Passover, as we see here in Exodus, is also assigned a numerical date, not a day of the week.

Here's the thing: the Passover established in Egypt, is a "type". It is also a shadow of what was to come. It most certainly represented real and actual deliverance from death.....originally in Egypt. But, 1400 years later, Christ brought the **fullest** meaning intended to Passover by He, Himself, becoming the Passover.....that is, by becoming the sacrificial Passover RAM. By our trusting God, and symbolically and spiritually applying Jesus' blood to the doorposts of our homes (our bodies), we are passed over for the death that is our due wages for our sins. That was the spiritual meaning of Passover in Exodus, but it was only revealed upon Yeshua's death. All the Bible feasts that, frankly, we have been taught by the Church to ignore as obsolete and irrelevant because they're part of the Old Testament (which it regards as abolished), were set up by God as types, as models, and as commemorations for the purpose of teaching and preparing us for their ultimate fulfillment; and although they had a real and tangible purpose and meaning to the Israelites when they were first established, there would be a fuller meaning to each of these feasts in the future.

Now, Yeshua was NOT killed by coincidence on Passover. The Holy Father sent our Savior to be executed PRECISELY on Passover day, the 14th of Nisan, in order to bring the festival of Passover to its fullest meaning; so it seems a little odd to me that Jews who don't yet believe in Yeshua as Savior celebrate the very day of his death, unknowingly to them established for precisely that purpose, and they do it exactly in the way and on the day as God has commanded; but we, the gentile Church, don't. All due to the tradition established by a Roman politician almost 1700 years ago, as a compromise to the pagan Sun worshippers and the anti-Jewish Church Bishops, we gentile Believers have abandoned God-ordained remembrances. I don't know about you, but I'd rather follow God's divine ordinance for Passover than manmade doctrines, built around manmade political and social agendas, especially concerning this unequalled memorial feast.

From verses 8-11 God adds more details as to exactly how the Israelites are to proceed with the Passover ritual. In addition to selecting a one year old Ram, without blemish, and making sure that enough people are present to eat the Ram to ensure it is not wasted, God adds the following;

1. The sacrifice, the killing and preparing of the Ram, was to occur between the evenings (meaning twilight).
2. The blood was to be captured in a basin.
3. Some of the blood was to be smeared on the two sides (doorposts) of the door and on the lintel.....the crossbeam above the doorway.
4. A Hyssop branch was to be used to dip into the basin of blood and then painted on the doorway.
5. DURING the time that Yehoveh was going throughout Egypt, killing the Egyptian firstborn, they were to eat the Passover meal.
6. The meal was to consist first of the Ram itself. It was to be roasted over a fire, whole, with the head attached. Fully cooked, and not to be boiled in water.
7. Unleavened bread, bread made without yeast, was to be eaten.

8. Bitter herbs were to be eaten.
9. What ever was left of the Ram, uneaten, was, before sunrise, to be completely burnt-up, destroyed, by fire.
10. They are to eat it dressed, sandals on their feet, ready for action.....ready to leave Egypt.

Each of these parts of the Passover Ritual had spiritual meaning. The Passover Ram, of course, pointed to the ultimate deliverer from death, Yeshua Ha Mashiach.

The bitter herbs signified the Israelites bitter centuries of captivity and hard labor in Egypt.

The unleavened bread spoke of sincerity and truth.....leaven in the Bible is symbolic of sin and deceit.

The bitter herbs eaten together with the sweet unleavened bread signified the bittersweet event that the Passover was: death for those who were the ransom (Egypt), life to others whom the Lord has set-apart from the rest (the Israelites). In its ultimate fulfillment it meant death for our ransom, Yeshua, and life for other, Believers.

The Ram was to be served whole, complete, and as we'll see much later in Chapter 12, not a bone of the animal was to be broken. This was a precursor of Christ who did not have a bone broken in His execution (though breaking the leg bones of the victim was customary during a Roman Crucifixion, they did not do so to Yeshua).

The Hyssop branch signified purification (we'll see that in the NT with the cleansing of the leper and in Psalm 51). By the way, no one is quite sure what tree or bush the Hyssop actually was. If you go to an Israeli market today, they sell a spice called Hyssop, but they will tell you freely that it is NOT the same thing as the Hyssop mentioned here in Exodus. More and more scholars think this is a species of what we call Oregano.

The divine ordinances being laid out to Moses and Israel were interrupted momentarily in vs.. 12, when God, Yehoveh, reiterates what is going to happen on Passover night. That it will be He, Himself, who will proceed throughout the land of Egypt, killing all the firstborn of Egypt, AND, bringing low all the gods that the Egyptians bowed down to. One can only imagine the scene that night: little babies, toddlers, teenagers, adults, the elderly; suddenly, for no apparent reason, their breathing stops and their hearts fail. No means of reviving them was possible. People in the streets fell over dead, with no apparent cause. Can you mentally picture the multitudes of panicked Egyptians rushing to their pagan priests for help, praying in fear and desperation and despair to their household gods to save them. The Lord specifically targeted the Pharaoh as his own household lost its firstborn.....the heir to the throne of Egypt died. Hundreds of thousands of livestock....perhaps millions..... laying dead in the pastures, from one end of Egypt to the other meant starvation for many Egyptians. God, unstoppable, unswayable, UNAPOLOGETICALLY bringing about terrible judgment from which there was no escape.....EXCEPT.....for Israel and all those joined to Israel, who depended on the blood of the Ram.

For in vs.. 13, Yehoveh says that when he sees the blood of the Ram upon the doorposts of the houses of Israel, He will pass by, pass over, that home and all those within it. They will not experience the death of the firstborn that all their non-believing Egyptian neighbors are.

What a sobering dreadful thought. And, my friends, this exact thing happens every single day. Between the time we got up this morning, and the time we'll retire tonight, hundreds of thousands of people across the face of this earth will perish for all time.....and worse, for all eternity. And the same will happen tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that..... Yet, by joining yourself to the Israel of God you can avoid this. Trust God by trusting Yeshua, and you have joined the Israel of God. Trust Christ, sprinkle His blood on your house.....your body.....and you will have life. Don't and eternal death is the certain result. There is no in between, there is no alternative, there is no neutrality, and there is no escape.

In vs. 14, God makes clear that this day, Passover, the 14th of Nisan, is to be a memorial forever. That last time I checked, forever means forever.....not until some Roman Bishop or Emperor decided otherwise.

Beginning with vs.. 15 and ending with 20, God instructs the Israelites on how all future Passovers are to be celebrated. Now, actually, it's more of an addition than a change. This event is called the Festival of Unleavened Bread, or Matza. It commands that for 7 days, in connection with Passover (Passover being itself technically a one day event), beginning on the 14th day of Nisan, that Israel is not to eat bread with yeast, leaven, in it. Even more, each household is to throw away all of its leaven or anything that contains leaven.

There is a rather severe penalty for eating anything with leaven during that 7 day period; vs. 19 says that the person that offends will be "cut-off". The Hebrew word for "cut off" is "karet". And, it means to cut off, or eliminate, a body part, or to cut something down, like cutting down a tree. It can mean permanent separation, or most often in the Bible indicate divine destruction and death. So, this being "cut-off" is not akin to a time-out for a rebellious child. Nor is it like a jail sentence with a set amount of time for punishment, or being temporarily separated from society. Likely it did NOT, in most cases, mean that the affected person was to be executed..... Yet, undoubtedly, execution was, at times, the result. But, it did mean the "cut-off" person was banished from Israel, from his own tribe, from his family, and most seriously, from the Lord. Now, let's be clear: this is Yehoveh doing the talking, here. So, this is not so much about the punishment of the flesh, or by being disowned by your tribe; rather this is about being disowned by God. The **spiritual** benefits of being part of Israel have been terminated.

Notice also that it doesn't matter whether one is (depending on how your bible version phrases it) a foreigner or a citizen of Israel. Let me put that in the sense that it is meant: it doesn't matter whether you are a native, a natural born Israelite, or if you are from a non-Israelite tribe but have joined Israel by giving up your old foreign tribe and pledging your allegiance to one of the tribes of Israel. This principle that God has no 2nd class citizens in His Kingdom is made clear, here. We'll find this same message in a number of places throughout the OT, and in the NT. What this means for you and I who, as non-Israelites, have through the covenant of the blood of Christ been grafted into Israel that we might partake of Israel's covenants, is that God makes no SPIRITUAL distinction between those who are natural born

Israelites versus “foreigners” who were born outside of Israel by now are grafted into Israel. Does the Lord continue to make a PHYSICAL distinction between Jews and gentiles? Of course, and St. Paul covers that subject quite well.

Beginning in vs.. 21, Moses starts to communicate (to repeat actually) all that God had instructed him, to the elders of Israel, in order that the elders would then get the message to every individual Israelite.

Before we go any further, let’s get a mental picture of the Israelite population at this time. There were something around 3 million Israelites in existence and living in Egypt, about a quarter of the total population of Egypt. Some scholars suggest that number was closer to 2 million, others that it was closer to 3.5 or 4 million. Some of the most liberal say that numbers the Bible gives us are grossly inaccurate and there were only a few thousand Israelites at this time, which is just goofy and frankly would defy what was normal and natural population increase for that era. We’ll get into that a little deeper in another lesson.

The Israelites were living PRIMARILY, but not entirely, in Lower Egypt, in an area east of the Nile Delta, called Goshen. But, without doubt, there were thousands upon thousands of Israelites that had left Goshen and lived scattered all throughout Egypt. 430 years earlier, the Israelites had arrived as exclusively Shepherds. But, now, many were merchants, farmers, and traders..... and most were craftsmen of every type used by Egypt to build their highways, government buildings, and military fortresses. There had been intermarrying between the Hebrews and Egyptians, though both sides discouraged it. Some Israelites lived on the frontier between Goshen and the Sinai, and a few in the Sinai itself.

So, when Moses gave instructions to the people’s representatives, the Elders, to prepare to leave Egypt some had to hustle back to wherever they were living to get the word out to the group of Israelites who lived among. It also means that as the huge throng of Israelites left Goshen, led by Moses, they were joined along the way with Israelite stragglers, and foreigners of non-Israelite tribes who had heard and witnessed what the god of Israel had done, and wanted to join Israel. In a few verses, we’ll actually see this issue mentioned.

In vs. 25 and 26, one of our key words, **service**, pops up, although likely your translation will say “observe this ceremony” or “observe this rite”, or something like that in its place. That is, literally in vs.. 25 it says, “you are to keep this service”, and in vs.. 26 “when your children say to you: what does this service mean to you?” The importance of seeing the use of the word “service” is the intent of God for us to see that Israel is moving from **servitude**, forced laborers, as serfs for Egypt, into **service**, a voluntary allegiance to Yehoveh, based on love and trust. And, of course, this is a “pattern”. For when we give our service to Yehoveh, by means of Yeshua, we move away from servitude to our evil inclinations and Satan.

In vs. 29, a very brief recounting of the horror of that night of death for the Egyptian firstborns is described. I cannot stress enough, that at the very moment Yehoveh was passing the eternal death sentence on the firstborn of Egypt, He was delivering Israel. Egypt was still in that state of “chosek”, spiritual darkness, while Israel reveled in God’s enlightenment. While Israel was feasting and worshipping and joyously celebrating, Egypt was frozen with fear and in a national

state of mourning at the avalanching number of dead..... ***“for there wasn’t a single house (meaning a single family) without someone dead in it.”***

In vs. 31, the now devastated and broken Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and ordered them to leave Egypt....along with all the Israelites.....no preconditions. Take everything you own, he says, and go; but he also begs that Moses would bless him. Undoubtedly the blessing was meant to remove this divine curse of death that had overcome his own house and all of Egypt.

The Egyptian people were in full agreement. They pressed Israel to leave “otherwise we’ll all be dead”.

It’s really kind of interesting: even though the Egyptians thoroughly acknowledged Yehoveh, and they now knew about Yehoveh and His power (maybe better than all of us in this room), they still wouldn’t believe Him. For He never threatened to kill all the Egyptians (“otherwise we’ll ALL be dead” they feared).....just the firstborn. There is a very big difference between knowing ABOUT God, and knowing God. And, there is a very big difference between HEARING God, and BELIEVING God, versus TRUSTING God. Knowing **about** God, even hearing Him and believing that He is, is simply an intellectual exercise, if it’s not accompanied by knowing God, Jesus, personally, and trusting Him.

The Israelites quickly packed up all their belongings, including the unbaked bread dough, the special batch that contained no leavening; and in their packs they stored the gold and silver that they “stripped” from Egypt at God’s command. Now, why would God order His people to take gold and silver from this crushed people, the Egyptians? Well, for one thing it was going to be needed for the building of God’s sanctuary, and for the Ark in which to place the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments, and for the Menorah and other implements of service to God. For another it was restitution for 2 centuries of servitude, forced labors, from a people who hated them.

Now, when did the Israelites leave Egypt? ON PASSOVER!! On Nisan the 14th. Remember, by the Hebrew way of reckoning, a day is sundown to sundown. They finished their Passover meal during the nighttime, and in the following morning, at sunrise, which was still the same day, they packed up and left. Do you get the significance of this? Our personal Passover, our redemption from eternal death, is the moment we accept Christ and sprinkle His blood on the doorposts of our bodies. But.....immediately upon accepting Him we are also free to leave our bondage to sin. We don’t have to wait for something else to happen in order to leave servitude and begin serving God. Isn’t that neat?!

Verse 37 tells us that they left from Raamses and stopped at Sukkot. Raamses was right next to Pithom, and they were known in the Bible as the great “stores cities”, those huge commercial and governmental warehouses that were built on the backs of the Israelites. We know exactly where Raamses and Pithom are (in the land of Goshen), and they have been archeologically excavated. Sukkot is another matter. Exactly where that is, is as much speculation as the exact route of the Exodus itself.

We’ll begin to deal with that next time.