

**Exegetical Notes, Exodus 12:1-35**  
**“God Passes Over Israel”**

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**Exodus 12:1-35**

**Verse 1-4**

*YHWH said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. 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. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.*

- Technically these opening verses to chapter 12 establish the beginning of certain important items in the life of Israel as an independent nation.
- First, the calendar for the nation is established. The Hebrew calendar is to begin in the spring of the year. (March to April is to be New Year for Israel.) In ancient times calendars centered in the seasons. This was to remind Israel that her life began when God delivered her from Egypt. This calendar was not followed as the daily calendar for Israel. It did not coincide with the calendars of their non-Jewish neighbors. So, this calendar became the religious calendar, and so secular and religious life became divided.
- Second, the Feast of Passover is established. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of each New Year God ordered Israel to hold a commemorative religious feast that would remind them of their deliverance from Egypt. This feast was never to be neglected as long as Israel existed as a people. The Feast of Passover is still observed by the Jews on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish year.
- This celebration would center around the eating of a sacrificial lamb.

### **Verse 5-6**

***The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.***

- These lambs are to be specifically selected. They are to be year-old males without defect.
- As the feast begins, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day, these lambs are to be set aside and cared for until the 14<sup>th</sup> day. On the 14<sup>th</sup> day the entire community of Israel, every family group, is to slaughter the lamb set aside for the celebration. This is to be done at twilight of the 14<sup>th</sup> day, at the moment when the darkness of night descended on Egypt. The slaughtering of the Passover lambs was a communal act. The whole community of Israel did it together.

### **Verse 7-11**

***Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire -- head, legs, and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. 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. Eat it in haste; it is YHWH's Passover.***

- When the lambs are slaughtered, some of the blood of the lamb is to be smeared on the doorposts and the lintel.
- This done, the families are to enter the house and eat the lamb roasted. The lamb is to be prepared as shepherds out in the field would prepare it. It is to be roasted whole because there is no time to prepare it as a butcher would.
- It is to be eaten with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. The herbs would have been readily available and bread without yeast is bread made quickly. There was no time to allow it to rise. Nothing of the lamb is to be left over until morning because in the morning things will be happening and there will be no time to worry about last night's supper.
- The Israelites are to eat the lamb fully dressed and ready for travel.

## Verse 12

***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 gods of Egypt. I am YHWH.***

- On the 14<sup>th</sup> night of the Egyptian month of Abib, the Babylonian/Jewish month of Nisan, in the year that Moses spoke these words from God to Israel, YHWH struck down all the firstborn in Egypt. YHWH did not strike down the firstborn in Egypt every year but only the first year, when Moses spoke these words. However, every year thereafter, Israel was to celebrate this feast to remember what YHWH did to set them free.

## Verse 13

***The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.***

- The blood of the sacrificed lambs will be a sign **for Israel**. The blood will remind Israel that YHWH spared them when he judged Egypt. YHWH will not visit the houses where the blood appears. So, Israel, protected by the blood of the lamb, will not be touched by death.

## Verse 14-20

***This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to YHWH -- a lasting ordinance. For seven days 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 Israel. 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. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the 14th day until the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> day. 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 Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.***

- Rules are given related to the celebration. It is to be celebrated for all future generations. It is to be a week long in duration. On the first day

and the last day of the celebration, no work may be done. No yeasted food is to be consumed during the feast. Anyone who breaks these rules is to be shunned by the community.

- The reason for this celebration is to remind all succeeding generations of how YHWH acted to deliver Israel from Egypt.

### **Verse 21-23**

*Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When YHWH goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and the sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.*

- The leaders of Israel are told by Moses to go immediately to select the lamb, slaughter it, and smear the blood on their doorframes. The issue is immediate because the event is at hand. God is about to sweep over Egypt with death. They are told not to leave their protected houses and are promised that God will spare them when he sees the blood.

### **Verse 24-28**

*“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that YHWH will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to YHWH, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshipped. The Israelites did just what YHWH commanded Moses and Aaron.*

- Again, it is repeated that this is to be a festival that is never neglected among the Jews. They are to explain it to each successive generation and its observance is never to be forgotten.
- Having received all of Moses’ instructions, the members of the community followed Moses’ instructions to the letter.

### **Verse 29-30**

*At midnight YHWH struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the*

***prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.***

- It happened just as Moses had said! Sin regards no boundaries. Often the sinful behavior of one person negatively affects the lives of innocent others.

### **Verse 31-32**

***During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship YHWH as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.”***

- This time Pharaoh is broken in his heart. His words to Moses, whom he swore never to see again, are emphatic. “UP, LEAVE, GO, TAKE,” are words of command which indicate the intensity of his desire for Moses and Israel to depart. There are no conditions this time. Israel is to leave Egypt by command of Pharaoh.
- At the end, having felt the full force of God’s humbling hand, Pharaoh asked Moses to forgive him and to bless him. He no longer wants to stumble under God’s heavy humbling hand.

### **Verse 33-35**

***The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!” So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and clothing.***

- Possibly because they feared that Pharaoh might again change his mind and certainly because they recognized the great power of YHWH, the Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave Egypt in haste. They did, taking with them gifts from their Egyptian neighbors.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *God Passes Over Israel*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)