



Exodus - Chapter Twelve

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Summary of Chapter Twelve

God instructed Moses and Aaron that the new lunar cycle was to mark the start of the New Year. The chapter then describes how lambs are to be apportioned within families, how they are to be kept, cooked, eaten and any remains disposed of. The blood from these unblemished animals is to be daubed on the lintels and door frames so that the final plague will not strike their houses.

God goes on to ordain this Passover meal to mark the start as a even day celebration to the Lord that will be kept every year by all future generations as well. Only unleavened bread was to be eaten as part of these celebrations. Those who fail to observe this statute would be cut off from their people. Moses then instructed the elders as to what the people were to do and all the people obeyed the word of the Lord.

At midnight on the 14th day of that first month the Lord struck down all the first born humans and livestock throughout all of Egypt. The firstborn of Pharaoh died as did the firstborn of the lowest citizen. Pharaoh was so struck with grief and shock that he summoned Moses and told him to take all the Israelites and their possessions, and to go out from the land.

Urged on by the Egyptians, who gave away great amounts of gold and jewellery to their former slaves, the Israelites left in haste, taking only basic foodstuffs to make unleavened bread as ordained for the festival. It was four hundred and thirty years since Jacob had settled his family in Egypt when they finally left on

the night that the Lord had ordained, with six hundred thousand men plus women and children making the initial journey from Rameses to Succoth, a journey that is remembered by all generations since.

Final instructions for eating the Passover were given to Moses and Aaron stating that all the people of Israel must participate, and their slaves and any aliens living among them may eat of the Passover but all male participants must be either circumcised or excluded.

I.d.xi.2 Exodus 12:1-28 - The First Passover Instituted

Where the Lord had made a distinction in earlier plagues by protecting Israel's land, livestock, and people from the effects he brought upon Egypt, the people of Israel are now called to act faithfully in order to appropriate the means by which the Lord will 'pass over' them during the tenth, most devastating plague. The Lord's instructions to Moses and Aaron look beyond simply the events of the tenth plague and describe how the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread will be celebrated by Israel in the Promised Land.

¹ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.

Exodus 12:1-2

The events of the plagues and exodus are so significant for Israel's identity as an emerging nation that the month they come out of Egypt will become for them the first month of the year.

Up until the time of the Babylonian exile the first month was called Abib: <<Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out>> (Exodus 13:4), and: <<Observe the month of Abib by keeping the passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night>> (Deuteronomy 16:1); following their return from Babylon the month became Nisan: <<On the fourteenth day of the first month the returned exiles kept the passover>> (Ezra 6:19), and: <<In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur – which means 'the lot' – before Haman for the day and for the month, and the lot fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar>> (Esther 3:7).

³ Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴ If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest

neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.

Exodus 12:3-4

Tell the whole congregation of Israel. This is the first occurrence in the Pentateuch of what was to become a technical term, describing Israel in its religious sense and which underlies the NT use of *ekklesia*, the Greek word for church or a collective group of believers.

On the tenth of this month each family or household was to take a lamb, and the lamb was to live with the family for the four days until Passover, i.e. <<***the fourteenth day of this month***>> (v.6). In this way, the lamb became part of the family. By the time it was sacrificed on the fourteenth day it was both cherished and mourned. God wanted the sacrifice of something precious.

They are to take a lamb for each family. Just as the plague will result in the death of a firstborn in every house in Egypt (v.30), Israel is given instructions for a lamb to be sacrificed on behalf of every household. This animal is known as the Paschal lamb. For Jesus, his disciples were his family and he chose to share a Passover meal with them: <<***On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?'***>> (Mark 14:12).

If a household is too small for a whole lamb. The rabbis later determined that there should be at least ten people for each Passover lamb, and no more than twenty. Passover was a domestic and family festival, and thus shows its early origin. It has here no temple, no meeting-tent, no altar and no priest: but representation, if not substitution, is clearly implied.

⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight.

Exodus 12:5-6

The lamb was also to be without blemish. This sacrifice unto the Lord had to be as perfect as a lamb could be. The Lord Jesus was the ultimate and final Paschal lamb because he was the only one in human form to be truly perfect: <<***For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever***>> (Hebrews 7:28). He became the only acceptable sacrificial offering for all the sins of mankind.

You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. The Hebrew word for lamb can refer to either a young sheep or a young goat.

The Hebrew *seh* is quite a neutral word and should be translated ‘head of (small) stock’, applying equally to sheep and goats of any age. The Hebrews, like the Chinese, seem to have regarded any distinction between sheep and goats as a minor subdivision. Probably because of this, to ‘separate the sheep from the goats’ is proverbial of God’s discernment in NT times (Matthew 25:32).

Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. Christ came in the evening of the world; in the ‘last hour’ (1 John 2:18). He was taken down from the Cross and laid in his tomb at this very hour: <<*When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb*>> (Mark 15:42-46).

⁷ 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.

Exodus 12:7

They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts. The practice would indicate that the members of the household had followed the Lord’s instructions and were consecrated to him; but the Israelites, in light of the developed sacrificial system, would find the blood of the slain lamb to be a vivid reminder that a life had to be sacrificed in place of those in the home.

⁸ They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

Exodus 12:8

The Passover lamb is to be eaten with unleavened bread. This reflects the coming events in which Israel is sent out of Egypt so quickly that they have to pack up their dough before it is leavened (v.34 and v.39).

Unleavened bread is that made without a rising agent like yeast: <<*You must not eat with it anything leavened. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it – the bread of affliction – because you came out of the land of*

Egypt in great haste, so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days; and none of the meat of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall remain until morning>> (Deuteronomy 16:3-4). Yeast cells produce substances called enzymes. So when the yeast is added to bread dough, one enzyme goes to work on the flour, changing the starch in it into sugar. Another enzyme then takes over and changes the sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide, so that the CO₂ spreads through the dough in the form of bubbles. The dough is then placed in a dark, warm place for the fermentation to take place before going into an oven. As the dough bakes into bread, the heat causes the alcohol to evaporate and the bubbles to break. This leaves the tiny air pockets in the final bread or cake, making it light and fluffy.

Since yeast was not available in manufactured form in OT times but existed only as single cells floating in the air, then women used to produce the same effect with what they called leaven by taking a piece of old dough, leaving it in the sun to go mouldy, attracting yeast from the air. This was called leaven and was then mixed with a new larger batch of dough.

The original mixture can be created by mixing flour, salt, sugar and a source of starch such as potato water, and letting yeast cells in the air supply the enzymes!

Although this was very familiar to people in Jesus' day, the actual process was quite mystical and the exponential growth it produced seemed to be a miracle from God, providing an abundance of food from a limited resource.

That yeast is alien to flour and is introduced artificially, and originally without people knowing what was being added, also represents the Kingdom and what happens to a believer when they first accept Jesus as their saviour and the Holy Spirit enters to do his work, for like the yeast to the flour, the Holy Spirit is not native to man but permeates the entire being once he has been allowed to enter the heart, just as the yeast has to be kneaded into the dough. Much of the work occurs during the secretive fermentation process. Due to a small amount of faith, the Spirit is allowed into a person and grows into an abundance of goodness.

Yeast or leaven often has a negative connotation in the NT: <<*Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered in thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy'*>> (Luke 12:1), and: <<*Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?*>> (1 Corinthians 5:6). However, this does not mean that it is wrong to use leaven bread in Communion, because Passover was a statute in the law and Jesus has

surpassed the Law of Moses: <<We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law>> (Galatians 2:15-16).

⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰ You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.

Exodus 12:9-10

Israel is to prepare their Passover lambs by roasting them over the fire, and they are to burn anything that remains of the meal in the morning. Although the reasons for these instructions are not stated explicitly, the reference to the meal as being 'of the Lord' (v.11) indicates that it is to be treated as holy.

You shall let none of it remain until the morning. The Passover lamb had to be eaten completely; a family had to try to totally consume the sacrifice: <<*It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall not leave any of it until morning: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 22:30). The principle of faith remains the same, accept it all now rather than storing up something for later in life.

¹¹ This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord.

Exodus 12:11

Your loins girded, your sandals on your feet. Similar to the instruction about unleavened bread (v.8), Israel is to eat the Passover dressed in a manner that symbolises their being sent out of Egypt in the middle of the night (vv.31-34).

It is the passover of the Lord. The Passover was the Lord's in the sense that he provided it:

- As a rescue, to deliver Israel from the plague of the firstborn.
- As an institution, to remember God's rescue and deliverance from slavery for Israel through every generation.
- As a powerful drama, acting out the perfect sacrifice and rescue Jesus would later provide.

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul made it perfectly clear: <<*For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed*>> (1 Corinthians 5:7b). John the

Baptist drew on a similar image when he said of Jesus: <<*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*>> (John 1:29b). Jesus was actually crucified on Passover (John 19:14). Therefore, Jesus is seen in the Passover:

- Jesus lived with and became bonded to the human family before he was sacrificed for them: <<*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14).
- The sacrifice of Jesus has to be appropriate to each home, not simply on a national or community basis.
- Jesus the Passover Lamb was spotless - perfectly so, not stained by any sin, any moral or spiritual imperfection.
- It was only the blood of Jesus, his actual poured-out life that atoned for sin.
- In his death Jesus was touched with fire, the fire of God's judgement and wrath.
- In his death Jesus received the bitter cup of God's judgement.
- The work of Jesus has to be received fully, with none left in reserve.
- The Passover work of Jesus for his people is the dawn and prelude to their freedom: <<*For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another*>> (Galatians 5:13), and: <<*As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil*>> (1 Peter 2:16).

¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord.

Exodus 12:12

The seventh plague had been a forewarning that the Lord has authority over both human beings and animals (9:25), but where the hail had affected only those who remained in the field, the tenth plague would strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt wherever they may have been when the plague struck. The only shelter was in the homes marked with the sacrificial blood.

The Lord has stated repeatedly that the central purpose of the plagues is that both Egypt and Israel would know who he is: I am the Lord; refer to 3:13-15, 6:2-8, 7:5, and 7:17. What is being displayed in judgement on Egypt's land, animals, people, king, and gods is also revealing to Israel that Yahweh is the only true God of heaven and earth, and that he is acting on their behalf. The events of the Passover are the ultimate demonstration of God's holy judgement of Egypt in its stubborn

rejection of Yahweh, of God's great love for his people Israel, and of his power that is infinitely greater than all the power of Pharaoh and his kingdom. This can be seen in the words of Paul: <<*For the scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth'*>> (Romans 9:17), and: <<*What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory – including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*>> (Romans 9:22-24).

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

Exodus 12:13

The blood shall be a sign for you. Since the Lord had shown clearly in previous plagues that he could distinguish between the people of Egypt and Israel, e.g. 8:22 and 9:4, the blood placed on the doorway of the houses of Israel was to function both as the sign that they were a part of the Lord's people and also as the seal or means to appropriate the Lord's protection from the plague (vv.21-23).

When I see the blood, I will pass over you. For Israel to be spared the judgement on the firstborn, they had to apply to blood just as God said they should. The blood of the lamb was essential to what God required:

- If an Israelite home did not believe in the power of the blood of the lamb, they could sacrifice the lamb and eat it, but they would still be visited by judgement.
- If an Egyptian home did believe in the power of the blood of the lamb, and made a proper Passover sacrifice, they would be spared the judgement.
- Additionally, an intellectual agreement with what God said about the blood was not enough; they actually had to do what God said must be done with the blood.

The full power of the blood of the lamb would later be truly revealed through the sacrificial death and resurrection of the Lamb of God, Jesus of Nazareth: <<*You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake*>> (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Introduction to 12:14-20

The instructions in this section relate particularly to the way that Israel will celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread in the Promised Land.

¹⁴ This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel.

Exodus 12:14-15

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. Preparation for the Passover began on the 10th; on the 14th they ate the Passover, and this was the first day of eating unleavened bread. Then for the next seven days they ate only unleavened bread. This would later become known as the Festival of Unleavened Bread (v.17). Thus Passover and the festival lasted for eight days in total.

The consequence of eating something leavened during the seven days is that a person shall be cut off from Israel. This suggests that eating leavened bread during the Passover was a serious sin. Although being cut off is stated as the consequence for a number of violations of the law, e.g. not being circumcised (Genesis 17:14), eating part of the sacrifice while unclean (Leviticus 7:20-21), committing incest (Leviticus 20:17), etc., the majority of the contexts where it is mentioned do not state explicitly whether this refers to an action that Israel is to carry out or whether it is something known and acted upon by the Lord; refer to comment on Exodus 31:14-15. In the context of the instructions for the Passover, it is possible that the addition of being cut off from the congregation of Israel indicates that Israel was to remove a person from the celebration of the Passover if and when they knew the restriction had been broken. However, even where such an action may be intended, it would have been grounded primarily in what being cut off represented about the person's state before the Lord and thus would have been a merciful warning against disregarding the covenant lest the person continue in such a state and be cut off forever. Sometimes it appears that God's judgement brings about the offender's premature death. Refer also to comments made on Genesis 17:14, Leviticus 7:11-36, Leviticus 22:1-3, Numbers 9:6-14 and Psalm 37:9.

¹⁶ On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you.

¹⁷ You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall

observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance.¹⁸ In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread.¹⁹ For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether an alien or a native of the land.²⁰ You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

Exodus 12:16-20

You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt. For the first Passover, the unleavened bread was a practical necessity for they left Egypt in such a hurry there was no time to allow for the dough to rise. After the first Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread was a testimony throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. It was to be kept by all subsequent generations to remember how God had delivered them out of slavery.

An alien or a native of the land. The aliens or sojourners were non-Israelites, living among the people of Israel; often they were converts to the Lord known as proselytes, an Anglicisation of the Koine Greek term *proselytos*. These rules are not just for the first Passover in Egypt; they prescribe how the festival is to be celebrated when Israel arrives in Canaan and has foreigners living among them.

For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses. Leaven was also a picture of sin and corruption, because of the way a little leaven influences a whole lump of dough, and also because of the way leaven ‘puffs up’ the lump, even as pride and sin can ‘puff up’ a Christian.

Significantly, God called them to walk ‘unleavened’ after their initial deliverance from Egypt. Symbolically, they were being called to a life in moral purity before the Lord. Some suggest there was also a hygienic aspect in getting rid of all the leaven. Since they used a piece of dough from the previous batch to make the bread for that day, and did so repeatedly, that harmful bacteria could take hold in the dough so it was good to remove all leaven and start all over at least once a year. Paul makes reference to the disciple needing to do the same: <<*Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed*>> (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, ‘Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb.’

Exodus 12:21

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them. The elders were expected to lead the way. Moses instructed them to observe the Passover, knowing the rest of the nation would follow their example and instruction.

After Pharaoh offers qualified obedience to the Lord's request, including attempts to restrict the place (8:25), participants (10:8-11), and provision (10:24-26) for serving him, there is tragic irony in the fact that Israel's first sacrifice, to slaughter the passover lamb, is in the land of Egypt and signifies the judgement that will come upon it.

²² Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning.

Exodus 12:22

A bunch of hyssop. Hyssop is a bushy shrub used as a brush in a variety of cleansing ceremonies; refer to Leviticus 14:4-7, Numbers 19:6 and 19:18, and Psalm 51:7. Hyssop was even connected with Jesus' great sacrifice for sin. John 19:29 points out when Jesus was offered sour wine to drink on the Cross, the sponge soaked with it was put on a branch of hyssop.

²³ For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.

Exodus 12:23

When he sees the blood, the Lord will pass over. The Lord looked for blood. This blood sacrifice was the basis for sparing people from judgement. Rescue from the angel of death did not happen by a prayer or a fasting or a good work; it was accomplished by a life given on behalf of others, a substitutionary death like that of Jesus Christ. Those who are marked with his blood will be saved: *<<I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying, 'Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads'>>* (Revelation 7:2-3).

²⁴ You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. ²⁵ When you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. ²⁶ And when your

children ask you, “What do you mean by this observance?” ^{27a} you shall say, “It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.””

Exodus 12:24-27a

You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. The deliverance of Passover was not only for that generation, but also for their children, and all generations to follow. Passover was the greatest work of redemption performed on the OT side of the Cross. In the same way Jesus gave the new Passover, saying that his work on the Cross was not only for that generation, but should be remembered and applied to all generations; refer to Luke 22:14-20.

When your children ask you, you shall say. Israel’s identity as the people whom the Lord had brought out of Egypt was to be formed not only through faithful participation in the celebration of the Passover but also by proper narration of what it signifies.

In the Passover, there was a two-fold work. First, an enemy was defeated, i.e. he struck down the Egyptians. Second, God’s people were set free and given a new identity, with new promises, a new walk, a new life altogether; that is, he spared our houses.

^{27b} And the people bowed down and worshipped. ²⁸ The Israelites went and did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron.

Exodus 12:27b-28

And the people bowed down and worshipped. Rightfully, the immediate reaction of Israel to this announcement before it actually happened was worship. They honoured the God who said he would do all this for them.

The Israelites went and did just as the Lord had commanded. In many ways these were the most important words of the whole account. As great as God’s deliverance was, the people would have never received it if they had failed to do what God had told them to do. One may wonder if any Israelites suffered under the judgement of the firstborn because they did not believe and obey. Likewise, one may wonder if any of the Egyptians were spared judgement because they did believe and obey.

I.d.xi.3 Exodus 12:29-32 - The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn

This brief passage describes the immediate impact Pharaoh’s defiance against God had on his own family and his nation, and how he reacted in his own grief.

²⁹ At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. ³⁰ Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

Exodus 12:29-30

The Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. God told Moses that Pharaoh would not let them go until he was forced to by God's mighty works (Exodus 3:19-20), and that this work would somehow touch the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 4:21-23). Now the situation unfolded just as God said it would. It is rare for God not to do what he says he will. There are occasions when God relents in his just judgement. One such example is King Hezekiah's recovery from a terminal illness as recorded in 2 Kings 20:1-11.

All the firstborn in the land of Egypt. This plague was directed against two significant Egyptian gods. First, Osiris was the Egyptian god thought to be the giver of life. Second, this was against the supposed deity of Pharaoh himself, because his own household was touched, i.e. the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne.

An inscription was found in a shrine connected with the great Sphinx that records a solemn promise from the Egyptian gods vowing that Thutmose IV would succeed his father Amenhotep II, whom many believe to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus. This unique, emphatic promise from the gods that something so natural would happen - that the eldest son would take his father's place as Pharaoh - was perhaps because Thutmose IV was not his father's firstborn son, and the firstborn was struck dead at the first Passover. Therefore, they believed that the second born son needed special protection from the gods and the inscription sought to provide that.

The firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon. Dungeon is literally the 'pit-house'. Pits were a common prison, with Jeremiah being one prophet who was placed in one: <<*Those who were my enemies without cause have hunted me like a bird; they flung me alive into a pit and hurled stones on me; water closed over my head; I said, 'I am lost'*>> (Lamentations 3:52-54). Here the opposite to Pharaoh is not the 'mill girl' (11:5), but the prisoner of war or other opponent to Pharaoh incarcerated in the dungeon. It was for such people that Jesus came: <<*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*>> (Luke 4:18-19).

Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt. In dealing with Pharaoh, God first had to inform his mind, and then break his will. Pharaoh's problem was not that there was insufficient intellectual evidence; his heart had to be broken and made soft towards God. Egypt and Pharaoh would not give God his firstborn - Israel (Exodus 4:22-23); so God took the firstborn of Egypt. Finally, Pharaoh knew that the Lord God was greater than all the Egyptian gods, and was greater than Pharaoh himself, who was thought to be a god.

A great cry in Egypt. Israel cried to God for deliverance (2:23), and they cried to Pharaoh from relief (5:15). Now the Egyptians had reason to cry. There is good reason to have pity on the loud lamentations of this people for their grief was brought upon them by the stubbornness of their king.

The elders of Israel had been called to act on behalf of their households (v.21) so that every 'house' would appropriate the means for protection (v.22); Pharaoh's refusal to obey the Lord results in there being **not a house without someone dead**. In each case, the leaders acted as representatives through whom the consequences of either their faithfulness or unfaithfulness were extended to their respective houses.

³¹ Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, 'Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. ³² Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!'

Exodus 12:31-32

Rise up, go away from my people. Pharaoh did not simply allow Israel to leave; now he commanded them to go. This was just what the Lord told Moses would happen: <<*indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you away*>> (Exodus 11:1b).

And bring a blessing on me too! This shows that, at long last, Pharaoh truly knew who the Lord was, the God who was greater than Pharaoh and whom Pharaoh must seek for blessing. Pharaoh only came to this knowledge through being broken.

I.d.xi.4 Exodus 12:33-42 - The Exodus: From Rameses to Succoth

The Israelites are now required to leave Egypt in haste. They are to collect items of wealth and clothes from the Egyptian people, who gave generously and were probably glad to see them go. About two million people left, including all the Israelites, their livestock, and some other people who joined them. They started out from the land of Goshen and headed generally east towards the wilderness.

³³ The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, 'We shall all be dead.'³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading-bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders.³⁵ The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewellery of silver and gold, and for clothing,³⁶ and the Lord had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

Exodus 12:33-36

The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, they plundered the Egyptians. The Egyptian people also agreed that the Israelites must go, to the extent that they essentially paid the Israelites to leave. Therefore, the children of Israel left in a hurry, so quickly that there was no time to let the bread rise. This is why they had to eat unleavened bread as the Lord had commanded.

Israel's obedience in asking for jewellery of silver and gold, and for clothing fulfils not only what the Lord had promised to Moses at the Burning Bush (3:22), but also what he had originally promised to Abraham: <<*but I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions*>> (Genesis 15:14).

³⁷ The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.

Exodus 12:37

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. The eastward journey from Egypt toward the wilderness began with this first leg. This was the moment all the previous chapters of Exodus anticipated. Israel was now free, and Pharaoh and his armies did not hold them back as they travelled. Rameses was in the land of Goshen where Jacob had originally settled: <<*Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed*>> (Genesis 47:11), and therefore the place of their departure. Since Succoth means shelters, it may describe a temporary encampment instead of an existing Egyptian city. It is easy to imagine the celebrations and tension at Succoth that night.

Moses confirms this leg of the journey in a later account also: <<*They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the passover the Israelites went out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them. The Lord executed judgements even*>>

against their gods. So the Israelites set out from Rameses, and camped at Succoth>> (Numbers 33:3-5). There is a map showing the probable locations.



The Journey from Rameses to Succoth

While the sons of Jacob and their families arrived in Egypt with about 70 persons (1:5), the people of Israel who were going out of the land now numbered more than six hundred thousand: <<So the whole number of the Israelites, by their ancestral houses, from twenty years old and upwards, everyone able to go to war in Israel – their whole number was six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty>> (Numbers 1:45-46), besides children and not counting the women either. This would suggest a total company of about 2 million people. On the large numbers in the Pentateuch, refer to the Introduction to the Book of Numbers on the web site.

³⁸ A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. ³⁹ They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

Exodus 12:38-39

A mixed crowd also went up with them. The debate as to whether the 600,000 were all Hebrews continues. The time span of 430 years in captivity would easily allow the Hebrew nation to grow to have this number of adult males and indeed a total population approaching two million people. The additional people would include both Egyptians and other foreigners. The Hebrew term for crowd is literally 'swarm', from the same root as that used in 8:21 to describe the plague of flies. It is probably the same term that is intended by 'rabble' in: <<*The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, 'If only we had meat to eat!'*>> (Numbers 11:4), and the aliens who were with them when they arrived in the Promised Land: <<*There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the aliens who resided among them*>> (Joshua 8:35).

The celebration of Israel's exodus from Egypt will involve the seemingly unimportant but historically particular event of having to bake unleavened cakes of the dough.

It was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait. Again, God made obedience a necessity in the case of the unleavened bread.

Israel's inability to prepare any provisions for themselves is merciful because Yahweh will continually demonstrate his provision for them in this context. As the narrative will make clear, Israel is still in need of fully believing and appropriating this truth during the journey to Sinai; refer to 15:24, 16:2 and 17:2-3.

⁴⁰ The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹ At the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴² That was for the Lord a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the Lord by all the Israelites throughout their generations.

Exodus 12:40-42

At the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day. Apparently the Exodus from Egypt began on the same calendar day as the 430th anniversary of Israel's time in Egypt. It is remarkable evidence that God often fulfils promises on anniversaries of prior or prophesied events.

The number of years is approximated to 400 elsewhere: <<*Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for*

four hundred years>> (Genesis 15:13), <<And God spoke in these terms, that his descendants would be resident aliens in a country belonging to others, who would enslave them and maltreat them for four hundred years>> (Acts 7:6), although Paul confirms it as 430: <<My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise>> (Galatians 3:17).

The reference to Israel as the companies of the Lord evokes a military image; refer also to 15:4. The Pharaoh <<*who did not know Joseph*>> (1:8) had originally enslaved Israel because he feared they would form a military alliance with one of Egypt's enemies (1:10). Although Israel probably had enough people to stage a military coup (v.37), the plagues and the exodus signified that it was the Lord who would fight on behalf of his people, as confirmed by 14:14. When Israel is equipped for battle, it is not to fight Egypt but to be ready to go into the land the Lord has promised them (13:18).

That was for the Lord a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. God intended this event to be as a memorial of his redemptive work for Israel. In this sense, the deliverance from Egypt was the cross-like event of the OT.

Out of the land of Egypt. The phrase out of Egypt is repeated 56 times in the Bible after this point. God wanted his people to remember his deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

I.d.xi.5 Exodus 12:43-13:2 - Directions for the Passover

The statutes related to the Passover were necessary in light of the 'mixed multitude' that went out of Egypt with Israel (v.38). Participation in the festivals that would be formative for Israel's life in the land required that a person be identified as a part of the Lord's people by letting all his males be circumcised (v.48). In the NT church, there is a parallel in that baptism, the sign of membership in God's people, would ordinarily precede participating in the Lord's Supper. Similarly here, circumcision is required prior to eating the Passover.

⁴³ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been circumcised; ⁴⁵ no bound or hired servant may eat of it. ⁴⁶ It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it. ⁴⁸ If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the passover to the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no

uncircumcised person shall eat of it; ⁴⁹ there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.

Exodus 12:43-49

No foreigner shall eat of it. To share in the Passover, one had to make themselves part of the people of Israel. Receiving the covenant of circumcision and taking Passover were all part of the same package: <<*Any alien residing among you who wishes to keep the passover to the Lord shall do so according to the statute of the passover and according to its regulation; you shall have one statute for both the resident alien and the native*>> (Numbers 9:14), <<*And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*>> (Isaiah 56:6-7).

It shall be eaten in one house. Passover was commemorated at a familial level. Each household celebrated it.

You shall not break any of its bones. This is probably the text John 19:36 has in mind as fulfilled in the death of Jesus on Passover: <<*These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘None of his bones shall be broken’*>>. John may have combined this text with: <<*He keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken*>> (Psalm 34:20); refer to comments made on Psalm 34:15-22 and John 19:36.

The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it. All who were part of Israel had to commemorate the Passover redemption. One could not be part of God’s people and not share in Passover.

In this sense, Passover means all this and more to Christians: <<*Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*>> (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

⁵⁰ All the Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ That very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.

Exodus 12:50-51

All the Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded. Israel kept the commandments of God that Moses delivered. Their faith and obedience saved their firstborn, plundered the Egyptians, and set them free from Egyptian slavery. This was the prelude to the true freedom: <<*Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'>>* (John 8:31-32), and: <<*For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery>>* (Galatians 5:1).

That very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company. This was the command that the Lord had given to Moses and Aaron: <<*It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, 'Bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company'>>* (Exodus 6:26). When Israel left Egypt, it was a nation born in a day. It was as if the 430 years were a time of gestation when the baby grew large. The plagues were like labour pains before birth and now the nation was born into freedom.