

The God Who Delivers (Part 5 of 6)

The Promised Passover: Saved by the Blood of a Lamb

Exodus 12:1-13

Mark Vroegop

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell 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. ⁴And 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. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶and 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. ⁷“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. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹In 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 Passover. ¹²For 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. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:1–13).

The purpose of every memorial is two-fold. First, it is designed in order to mark a very important moment. There are some events in life – whether personal, national or global – that instantly change everything. And it is appropriate to mark these life-defining moments with some kind of symbol. Significant moments warrant such public recognition. But there’s another reason for memorials.

Human beings are quick to forget the past, including all the vital lessons, the sacrifices, and the “message” of the moment. So the second reason that we set up memorials is in order to help the coming generations remember the life-defining and history-changing moments. Sometimes you will even find the words “never forget” connected to these memorials. A life-defining or nationally-defining moment is so important that it would be tragic or even dangerous to neglect the lessons or to not understand how a particular event is connected to the present.

When it comes to the Bible, you could think of these moments as Historical-Redemptive Events. They are events which have a historic context; God revealed Himself to particular people through

particular moments. But they are also redemptive in that they are part of a greater story of redemption. These events reveal God's plan and shape our understanding of the gospel.

Remembering that God Delivers through the Passover (and the Lord's Supper)

Today in our study of Exodus we come to what is the most significant moment in Israel's history and what has the clearest parallel in the New Testament. Throughout our journey in this book we have observed foundational ideas that take shape in the New Testament. But chapter twelve is likely the greatest and most obvious.

God's deliverance of His people by "passing over" them due to the blood of a lamb is a defining moment for the people of God, but it is also the most obvious foreshadowing of what will happen in the New Testament with the death of Jesus Christ. What's more, the memorial meal connected with the event will be the meal that Jesus will celebrate with His disciples just before His death. And this Passover meal will become what we know today as the Lord's Supper or Communion.

Both the Lord's Supper and Passover are memorials which we are meant to **remember by reenactment**. Both celebrations are designed to take us into the life-changing moments of God's deliverance. In Exodus, the moment involved a lamb. In the New Testament, it involved the Son of God – the Lamb of God.

What I would like to do today is invite you to see in Exodus the roots of what we celebrate in the Lord's Supper. The Passover and the Lord's Supper are memorials of God's redemption. But by looking specifically at the Passover, I think we gain an even better understanding, appreciation, and love for what is celebrated in the Lord's Supper.

Redemptive Characteristics of the Passover (and the Lord's Supper)

Chapter 12 is loaded with a number of redemptive characteristics regarding the Passover, which have a direct connection to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. Let's look at ten of them:

1. It was a life-defining event

Verses 1-2 identify that the observance of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv 14-20) was the most important celebration that the people of Israel observed all year. In fact, it was so important that God instructed Israel to begin their annual calendar with this event. From this moment on, they would start each year remembering and reenacting this moment. The Exodus and Passover were a "rebirth" of God's people. From this moment on, they will be known as the people whom God delivered, and this deliverance will be foundational to their relationship with God.

The preamble to the Ten Commandments will begin with these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery . . ." (Ex. 20:2). Everything about their future will be marked by this moment when God "passed over." Therefore, it was very important that they never forget what God had done for them. Verses 24-27 state this explicitly:

²⁴You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. ²⁵And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. ²⁶And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' ²⁷you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.' " And the people bowed their heads and worshiped (Exodus 12:24–27).

Is it any wonder then that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ took place around the celebration of the Passover and that He used that sacred memorial as the basis for the Lord's Supper? The Apostle Paul captured the meaning of this moment in 1 Corinthians 11.

²³For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

And what is celebrated the Lord's Supper is equally life-defining. The death of Jesus Christ and the deliverance from the slavery of sin becomes the most important and transformative moment in a person's life. It marks him or her forever. Running to Christ changes everything. It means that a person has been brought from darkness to light, from judgment to forgiveness, from guilt to acceptance, from bondage to freedom, and from despair to hope. We celebrate, as the Israelites, the moment that changed everything!

2. It involved a sacrificial lamb

The next aspect of this event that we notice in the text is the sacrifice of a lamb. Verses 3-6 tell us that on the tenth day of the month, a lamb from each household was to be selected for sacrifice. If the household was too small for the consumption of the lamb (more on this later), then they were to share the sacrifice with a neighbor. The point was simply that every household was to be represented by a lamb.

The lamb had to be special, and it was to be killed. Verse five identifies that the lamb had to be 1) a male, 2) a year old, and 3) without blemish. The people were to give the Lord the best of what they had, not the worst. On the 14th day of the month, the lamb from every household was to be killed at twilight. As we will see in a moment, this lamb became the central feature and symbol of the Passover meal. Its sacrifice will be the means of deliverance and the protection from judgment.

For the rest of Israel's history, the idea of deliverance through a lamb would be a central aspect of their understanding of God and of atonement. Eventually a lamb would be sacrificed every morning and evening as a part of tabernacle worship (Ex. 29:38-42). So it is very significant that Jesus is connected to this sacrifice. Consider the following:

- John the Baptist said that He was "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)

- Peter said that we are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot . . .” (1 Peter 1:19)
- Paul calls Christ “our Passover lamb {that} has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- John’s vision in Revelation is of Jesus as “a lamb who had been slain” (Revelation 5:6, 12; 13:8)

The parallels between Jesus and the Passover lamb are clear and compelling.

3. Its sign was blood

Probably the most important aspect of the Passover meal was what happened with the blood from the sacrificial lamb. Verse seven tells us that the people were instructed to smear some of the blood on the doorframe of their houses. Verse 22 tells us that they were to take a bunch of hyssop, a multi-branched plant that could be used as a brush, to apply the blood, and that no one was allowed to leave the house. This sign of blood would be an external mark, indicating that the household had obeyed God’s command and that a sacrificial lamb had been killed. The blood was a sign. It set the household apart from the rest of Egypt.

But who was the sign really for? Surely God knew who had obeyed his command. The sign of the blood was really for the Israelites. It was designed to make a connection for them between their own lives and the blood of another. They were marked not only by the Passover, but also by the blood.

Again, the parallels to the New Testament and the Lord’s Supper are so obvious. Luke 22:20 records these words of Jesus as He celebrated the Passover: *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”* And what we celebrate in the Lord’s Table is redemption that came through blood: *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”* (Eph. 1:7).

Blood marked the people of God both in Exodus and in the New Testament.

4. It was observed together

Verse six makes a statement that you might overlook. It says *“when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight”* (Ex. 12:6). It might seem very obvious, but it is worth noting that although this celebration was something happening in individual homes, it was a communal activity. The kind of sacrifice, the day, and even the time are clearly identified because the Passover was designed to be a corporate moment. It was a memorial that was observed together. It marked the people of God as much as saved individual households and families.

This is important to note because there are clear elements of this in the New Testament instructions regarding the Lord’s Supper. Paul gave instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 in large part because the people were not conducting themselves in a considerate manner. They were approaching the Lord’s Table with no regard for the connection between one another. Their self-focus was apparent, even in the way that they celebrated such a glorious event.

The Lord's Table, like Passover, is designed to be a corporate event. It is a memorial that unites us under the banner of the Lamb of God who was slain for us. Both events were meant to be observed together.

5. It was personal

An interesting and instructive aspect of this event is the fact that the sacrificial lamb is not only killed, but it is also eaten. Verse eight gives this instruction: *"They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it."* We do not have time today to fully unpack the significance of unleavened bread. We will cover that when we study chapter 13. What I want to highlight instead is the significance of the combination of both a sacrifice and a meal into the same event.

The lamb was used to cover the household in blood, but it became food for every person in the house. The lamb was sacrificial, but it was also personal. Every person in the home ate the sacrifice. They consumed it, and in this way the Passover was very personal. One did not watch a sacrifice from a distance or merely passively observe it. This sacrifice was intimate, close, and personal.

Understanding this will help you make sense of what might seem to be an obscure statement by Jesus: ⁵³ *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).* When you understand that Jesus is referring to the personal nature of the Passover and that He is connecting Himself to this great redemptive event, His statement makes perfect sense.

Now it is not that the elements of the Passover or the Lord's Supper created salvation. Both the Passover and the Lord's Supper were memorials for a person's faith in God's ability to deliver him or her. One's personal participation in the memorial is meant to remind us about the personal participation in the event which is pictured. In the New Testament, that is personally receiving Christ.

6. Its sacrifice was sufficient

Verses 9-10 give very specific guidelines for how the lamb was to be cooked and that there should be nothing left over. The entire lamb was to be consumed by the people or by the fire. What is this all about? There are a number of possibilities including that 1) nothing would be left-over to become putrid, and 2) they were not allowed to take "left-overs" along for the journey. But it seems that the overall point of this command is simply that the entire lamb was to be consumed. The lamb was sufficient for the blood covering and for the meal. They needed nothing more and nothing less.

In the same way, Jesus was personally consumed. He became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), and His sacrifice is entirely sufficient: *"he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).* His sacrifice was entirely sufficient. There was nothing more needed.

7. It was eaten in anticipation

One of the other hallmarks of this celebration was the way in which the people were to eat it. Very specific instructions were given regarding what people were to wear as they celebrated the Passover. *"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 Passover"* (Exodus 12:11). Everything about this instruction is meant to communicate the same thing. The people are planning on leaving Egypt. The belt, sandals, and the staff are the kind of apparel that you have on when you are traveling. Therefore, the meal was not an end to itself. It marked the beginning of a journey. As they ate, they anticipated a future deliverance.

At the end of the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus said *"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"* (Matthew 26:29). And when the Apostle Paul talked about celebrating the Lord's Supper he said, *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"* (1 Corinthians 11:26). Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper is an event that anticipates something more. We eat while looking for Jesus to come.

8. It celebrated protection from judgment

The blood on the doorposts saved them from the wrath of God's judgment. The blood gave them safety and deliverance. They were spared by blood. Verses 12-13 are ominous and a bit frightening:

*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.
¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:12-13).*

God was coming in judgment, and the only protection from the final plague and the death of the firstborn was the faith-applied blood on the doorposts. The sacrificial blood of a lamb became the means by which they were saved from God's judgment. Without the blood, they would not have been spared. The Passover celebrated this protection through blood.

The Lord's Supper celebrates another protection from judgment. The cup celebrates that the shedding of Christ's blood is so we can be made right with God and spared from the judgment of our sins. Romans 5:9 captures the essence of this truth beautifully: *"Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."*

As I said last week: *"Exodus invites you to see Jesus as the Firstborn Son and as the Lamb of God who can cause the judgment of God to pass over you. The invitation is to run inside the blood-covered house, which is Christ, for forgiveness."* Christ saves us from judgment.

9. It became a memorial for future generations

Remember one of reasons for having memorials? It is to be sure that people in future generations do not forget what God has done for them. Such a life-defining moment warrants protection from future neglect and forgetfulness. In verse 14 we see that the Passover was to be a “memorial day . . . throughout your generations, as a statute forever.” And in verses 24-27, it is anticipated that future generations will ask about this event:

You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. 25 And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. 26 And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ 27 you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped (Exodus 12:24–27).

Especially when they come to the Promised Land, this memorial will remind them how they came to such a land of blessing. It will remind them about what really defines them.

When Jesus celebrated the Lord’s Supper, He said six important words that are often etched into the communion table: “Do this in remembrance of me.” We celebrate the Lord’s Table because, like Israel, we can forget. It’s not that we forget totally, but we can easily develop a mindset that doesn’t place the right value on what should be the most defining moment of our lives. Therefore, it is good remember by reenactment.

10. It was filled with faith

The final characteristic of this memorial is the role of faith. Verses 28-29 tell us that when they heard Moses’ instructions, “*the people bowed their heads and worshipped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.*” This is quite a change from the behavior of Pharaoh, who continually hardened his heart. The people of Israel heard Moses’ instructions, believed that God was coming, and in faith they sacrificed the lamb and put the blood on their doorposts.

Their faith, or belief, in the word of God through Moses is what led them to apply the blood to their doorposts. And that faith, represented by the visible blood, is what caused them to be “passed over.” Applied blood was only a sign of applied faith. Doug Stuart captures the meaning here so well:

The blood on the doorposts showed acceptance of God’s plan for rescue and trust in his word. After all, the sight of dried blood by itself had no power to deter death; it was only as the dried blood painted on the top and sides of the door was a testimony to the faith of the inhabitants in Yahweh that it had its efficacy. Thus the statement, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you”—in other words, I will spare all those who show that they have placed their faith in me.¹

¹ Stuart, D. K. , Vol. 2: Exodus. The New American Commentary, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 278.

Blood was just a symbol. But it was a dynamic symbol, identifying something beyond itself.

In the same way the elements of the Lord's Supper are merely symbols. There is nothing supernatural about bread and juice. But they represent something powerful and transforming. They serve as a memorial of what it means to place one's faith in the finished work of Jesus who was offered up physically ("This is my body given for you") and redemptively ("The blood is the new covenant in my blood").

And faith is still involved in this memorial too. It is not the kind of faith that trusts in these elements as the means of salvation, but the kind of faith that trusts in the Savior who they represent. The Lord invites us to remember, reenact, and reflect, just as the Passover did for Israel.

I don't know about you, but my heart is overwhelmed once again with the redemptive parallels between Exodus and the New Testament, between the Passover and the Lord's Table. Memorials like these are designed to help us think beyond ourselves. And with that in mind, can I ask you some questions for you to consider?

- Has your life been marked forever by putting your faith in the atonement offered through Jesus Christ? Are you safe from the deserved judgment of holy God?
- If you have received Christ, are you really defined by this redemptive moment of being "in Christ"? Does the gospel affect your understanding of who you are, your past, your value, and your meaning in life? Is the gospel the mark of your life?
- Do you need to be reminded in your "promised land" whom you really are and from where you came? Do you need to take a few moments this morning and reflect on where you'd be today without the shed blood of Christ?
- If you knew that danger was coming, what would be your posture with people who didn't know? What if you knew and never shared with them how to avoid the coming storm? What do you need to say to the Lord about your passion to share this news with others?
- What kind of gratitude, joy, and worship need to flow through your heart this morning as you consider all that God has done for us?

The Passover and the Lord's Supper both have the same aims: to remind us who we are, who God is, what He did for us, and what it really means.

"Do this in remembrance of Him!"

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com