

## Passover Lamb (A sermon with discussion questions) by David Foster

Having seen how the Devil-dragon is overcome by the Lamb in the book of Revelation, we turned to Genesis and began to explore a prediction Abraham made involving a special lamb that God will one day provide. Today we will continue unfolding this theme by looking at the Passover Lamb. This special sacrificial animal marked the turning point in the epic Exodus account where Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. And, of course, it was God who provided the Passover Lamb. He also declared that performing this sacrifice was to be a lasting ordinance, a yearly festival that reminded them of past provision, yet also pointed to a greater provision still to come.

Already last week we began to see the importance of honoring God by giving thanks. Now in the Exodus story which highlights a sacrificial lamb we see again how crucial it is to giving thanks to God. Moses summarized why the Israelites should slaughter a Passover lamb each year explaining; “In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and **redeem** each of my firstborn sons.’” (Exodus 13:14-15)

The fuller story is detailed throughout the book of Exodus. We will read chapter 12 which is the turning point.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. 3 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. 4 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. 5 The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. 6 Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. 7 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. 8 That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ...

14 “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.

21 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. 22 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. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. 23 When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and 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.

24 “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. 25 When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. 26 And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ 27 then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, 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 worshiped. 28 The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

29 At midnight the LORD 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. 30 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.

## The Exodus

31 During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. 32 Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.”

33 The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!” 34 So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. 35 The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. 36 The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. 38 Many other people went up with them, and also large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. 39 With the dough the Israelites had brought from Egypt, they baked loaves of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.

40 Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. 41 At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD’s divisions left Egypt. 42 Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come.

1. What does this teach us about the two key role players in this story – God and Pharaoh? This chapter shows us God's compassion and justice towards the abused Hebrew slaves but in order to understand how deeply they were being oppressed, (even their babies were slaughtered) one needs to read the first eleven chapters of Exodus. These early chapters give more details explaining how Pharaoh resisted and then hardened his heart against the command to let God's people go free. There are, however, some things we need to look at more closely if we want a fuller understanding.
2. What does this chapter teach us about people in general? Let's consider a couple of questions that we might otherwise easily overlook. We know that God was determined to free the Hebrew slaves who were being terribly oppressed by Pharaoh. We also know that after nine devastating plagues had struck Egypt, Pharaoh was still stubbornly stalling. God does not tolerate such defiance, nor does he allow anyone to usurp his supreme authority. For this reason God finally unleashed the most terrifying and painful plague of all – killing all first born son's.

Let's pause a moment to think: wasn't it possible for God to accomplish the mission of liberating the Hebrews by killing only the eldest son of Pharaoh, together with some other Egyptians who may have collaborated in his wickedness? Surely, this scenario would have resulted in the slaves being released? But the fact is: the LORD threatened **everyone** with a death blow to their eldest son, from the very lowliest slave to high officials and even Pharaoh. Make no mistake about it, the death angel was intent on entering every home regardless of whether they were Egyptian or Hebrew.

We may be inclined to view this story with broad brush strokes, thinking only in terms of Hebrew victims and Egyptian oppressors. But as a matter of fact, from God's perspective, the Hebrews and Egyptians were all wrongdoers. For this reason, the death threat didn't focus only on the Egyptians, it applied to everyone. From this we see that God's “work is perfect, for all his ways are justice.”... “For the wages of sin is death.” (Deuteronomy 32:4; Romans 6:23, ESV)

Moses and his people needed to humble themselves under God's mighty hand in order to find true freedom. As it turned out, they did believe the death threat was real. They acknowledged implicitly that they were sinners, as it is written, “Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20, NLT) Furthermore, they obeyed the LORD by slaughtering a lamb and applying the blood on their doorposts. We read in verse 27-28 that “the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.”

How does all this relate to giving thanks, praise and honor to God? Verse 42 expresses in a nutshell what should be our response; “Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come.”

One obvious way the Israelites could honor the Lord was to remember how God rescued them. The simplest way of doing this was to celebrate Passover each year as the Lord commanded them to do. Passover was clearly a family event which involved teaching their children to know and serve the Lord. (Psalm 78) But it was more than this, for example, Moses told his father-in-law Jethro how God miraculously rescued them from Pharaoh's tyrannical grip. (Exodus 18:8-11)

Moses told him, *“everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians on behalf of Israel. He also told about all the hardships they had experienced along the way and how the LORD had rescued his people from all their troubles. Jethro was delighted when he heard about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel as he rescued them from the hand of the Egyptians. “Praise be to the Lord,” Jethro said, “for he has rescued you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh ... I know now that God is greater than all other gods.”* (Exodus 18:8-11)

When seeing this response from a Midianite like Jethro, we need to bear in mind what the Lord told Pharaoh when he was about to send the plague of hail, “Let my people go so that they may worship me or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that **my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.**” (Exodus 9:13-16, bold font added)

As it turned out, the name Yahweh was in actual fact, proclaimed worldwide. This becomes evident as the story continues unfolding. Forty years after escaping from Egypt the Israelites learned that a deep fear had spread among the surrounding nations because they had heard of the great things Yahweh had done so as to liberate his people. Rahab said to the two Israelite spies whom she had protected, “I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Dead Sea for you.”

It shouldn't surprise us therefore, to see how the prophet Isaiah testified many years later that the God of Israel had established for himself “everlasting fame and a glorious name” by miraculously destroying Pharaoh's army and liberating the Israelites. (Isaiah 63:11-16)

I trust you are encouraged seeing how the Lord worked in ancient times to ensure his glorious reputation was spread worldwide! But what about today? Can you think of any examples in modern times showing how the God of Moses is widely known and feared? ...

The epic Exodus story from the Bible has been portrayed as a major motion picture at least half a dozen times over the last 60 years! One of the more recent movies, The Prince of Egypt, was dubbed into 17 languages. ... But movies are not the only way people know the God of Moses proved himself greater than all other gods. The Qur'an, which is revered by 1.7 billion Muslims, records the miraculous rescue from slavery in Egypt under the godly leadership of Moses and Aaron. Though the Qur'anic account has a few strange twists it still retains many threads of the story such as the parting of the Red Sea. Tragically, however, it makes no mention at all how the Lord provides the Passover Lamb – the most vital aspect of the BIG picture as portrayed through all of the Biblical prophets.

3. What do we need to apply / obey? Is there a modern day festival we can (and should) celebrate which corresponds with Passover? ... List some parallels between communion and Passover? ... (NB: 1 Cor. 5:17, “Christ our Passover Lamb”) Note, next week is easter when Christians celebrate Christ's death and resurrection!

4. Who are you and I going to tell this Good News about the “Lamb”? As a reminder, let me quote from Psalm 107. “Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.” (v. 2) In a similar way we read in Psalm 96, “praise the name of the Lord, proclaim his salvation ... Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord.”

Write down one or two names of friends who don't know Jesus as Lord and Savior with whom you intend to share this Good News.

In closing let's sing the beautiful song, “Worthy is the Lamb” inspired by Revelation 5:12-13.

### Questions for reflection and discussion.

- 1) The Exodus story reminds us God is great, honorable and praiseworthy. Now let us consider how these qualities impact us in terms of being Christ's witnesses. How does my understanding of God's surpassing greatness affect my motivation to share my faith? Consider also the apostle Paul's encouraging words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7-8, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.”
- 2) The epic exodus story as portrayed in the movie Prince of Egypt is familiar to many millennials living in the west. The basics are also familiar to Muslims. Therefore it may afford us a relevant way to engage unbelievers in a gracious, seasoned-with-salt conversation. Let me suggest a way that you can recap the story coupled with a few questions to stimulate people's curiosity and also keep your conversation on track.

The story unfolds as the Egyptians are struck with a series of plagues. Pharaoh hardens his heart, which intensifies the conflict. The plagues become more harsh and painful until finally God unleashes the most devastating plague. Do you remember what it was?... Pharaoh's son dies (& all the first born sons across the land) This proved to be the turning point - the final straw - that broke Pharaoh's resistance, making him willing to let the slaves go free. But did you ever wonder, “Was it really necessary for Yahweh to threaten to kill **both** Jewish and Egyptian first born sons?” Couldn't he simply have imposed judgment against Pharaoh's people? Would this not achieve the desired result? ... But then, if God rescued them like this it might imply that the Israelites were innocent? Were the Jewish people without sin? ... God is not biased. As to the “game” of life, God views everyone impartially, on a level playing field. So he declared the death threat was over EVERY home. This way, the Hebrews wouldn't get the wrong impression that they were without fault. Thankfully God was merciful and he provided a way of escape. The Israelites could kill a lamb as a way of averting death. Doesn't this make sense to ransom first born sons by sacrificing a lamb – not unlike how Abraham's son was redeemed?

- 3) Here in Canada we live in a prevailing climate of political correctness that tends to stifle Christians from constructively criticizing our non-believing friends, especially Muslims! One example that is relevant to the topic at hand has to do with the fact that the Qur'an makes no mention of the lamb in the story of Moses and the Exodus or for that matter, in the story of Abraham's sacrifice. This omission is all the more startling considering the concept of the lamb figures so prominently in the Divine plan of salvation throughout Scripture, especially the atoning death of Messiah as the Lamb of God. The thought provoking questions in the previous paragraph are not intended for any particular group of people, such as Muslims. They are intended for anyone. I encourage you to use them as a conversation guide or try adapting and using them as a conversation starter.

If you found these insights interesting you may also like to read two other articles: “Pondering similarities between Eid and Passover,” and “God our **Saviour Redeemer.**” They are available online here:

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