



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 12:1-28

Topic

Moses explains that any household that does not sacrifice a lamb will suffer the death of their firstborn

Title

"Night of the Lamb-less Dead"

Do you still play *Pictionary*? It was created by a Seattle waiter, at a party in the 1980's. Its first year on the market 3million copies were sold.

How about *Draw Something*? In 2012 it became the world's top-selling app in just seven weeks. The creators sold it for \$180million.

You should watch Jimmy Fallon play *Pictionary* with his celebrity guests on *The Tonight Show*. If you Google it later, watch the one with Martin Short, Jerry Seinfeld, and Miranda Sings.

Playing *Pictionary* or *Draw Something* will give you a real appreciation for the people who come up with signs. It's no easy task to draw a symbol that will be universally, immediately understood by people of all languages.

(I'm still having trouble in the Costco roundabout, but I don't think it's the fault of the sign makers).

While we're on the subject of communicating with pictures, there was an episode of *Star Trek - The Next Generation* in which Captain Picard needed to establish meaningful communication with the captain of an alien race. The alien, Dathon, uttered the phrase "Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra." The universal translator couldn't process what he was saying.

Picard comes to realize that the alien language consisted of metaphor and allegory - that it was a kind of verbal *Pictionary*.

In the Bible, God gives us metaphors and allegories and similes. I don't know the differences between those terms, so let's agree to call them pictures - or we could simply say illustrations - that convey spiritual truth.

The Passover lamb is an especially meaningful picture to illustrate spiritual truth. The Angel of the Lord was coming to kill all the firstborn, of both man and beast. Moses instructed each household of Israelites to kill a lamb, then apply its blood to their doors. The Angel of the Lord would see the blood, *pass-over* the house, sparing the firstborn.

Do you recall how John the Baptist introduced Jesus at His baptism? He said, "Behold the **Lamb** of God Who takes away the sin of the world."

The apostle Paul says Jesus “our **passover** was sacrificed for us” (First Corinthians 5:7).

Those *exclamations* are rendered more meaningful by the Passover lamb as their *explanation*.

As we work our way through these verses, I'll organize my comments around two questions: #1 Why Does The Lamb Of God's Sacrifice Save You?, and #2 When Did The Lamb Of God's Sacrifice Save You?

#1 Why Does The Lamb Of God's Sacrifice Save You?

(v1-20)

Let's share a doctrinal moment. The Passover lamb illustrates what theologians call *vicarious atonement*.

(It's also called *substitutionary atonement*).

Atonement is a term meaning “reconciliation.” *Vicarious* means “done in place of, or instead of, someone else.” So, in literal terms, the doctrine of “vicarious atonement” is that Jesus was substituted for humanity in order to pay for the sins we had committed and thereby reconcile us to God.

Mankind needs an atonement because of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. Their descendants inherit a sin nature; and we commit individual acts of sin. The penalty for sin is death on three levels:

1. We are born spiritually dead.
2. We will one day physically die.

3. Without intervention, we deserve what the Bible calls the “second death.” It is to be separated from God for eternity in conscious torment in the Lake of Fire.

It should be clear that a man cannot give his own life as a sacrifice because it is riddled with sin. It would be like bringing to a great king an offering of a diseased or dead animal. Such an offering would be unacceptable.

Only a sinless human being could give His life as a sacrifice. But how can there be a sinless human being if we all descend from Adam and Eve?

The only way to achieve a sinless human being is for God to add humanity to His deity; for God to be born a man.

Jesus is that God-man, and He voluntarily gave Himself as your Substitute and Sacrifice on the Cross at Calvary.

I think that was a pretty clear explanation; but it’s made crystal by the picture we get in the Passover.

Exo 12:1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,

Exo 12:2 "This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you.

The first nine wonders were reported in rapid succession. The tenth - the death of the firstborn - occupies a lot more narrative. It isn’t just because the destruction of it was so severe. It isn’t just because it marks the birth of Israel as a nation.

It's because it lays the foundation for the entire program of sacrifice in the Old Testament that gives way to Jesus in the New Testament.

It was so important that the month in which it occurred, called Nisan, would become "the beginning of months."

Wait a minute. I thought Rosh Hashanah, in the month of Tishrei, was the first day of the year in Israel?

We need to quit thinking like Americans who celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. When we read that Nisan became "the beginning of months," it means that we are to understand that the calendar feasts of Israel begin with Passover. Passover is their starting point; it is ground zero.

There are seven feasts on the calendar God gave Israel - four in the spring, and three in the fall:

- The four spring feasts are Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost.
- The three fall feasts are Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Tabernacles.

If you wanted to study the feasts, to understand what God was trying to convey through them, you start with Passover, God's "beginning" feast.

That's because the feasts are in a perfect prophetic order that itself is a picture of God's plan for the redemption of human beings and the restoration of creation.

We spent eight weeks or more on Wednesday night in a series on the feasts. Let me summarize and say that the four spring feasts were fulfilled by Jesus - *to the very day* - in His first coming. The final three fall feasts will likewise be fulfilled by Him in His Second Coming.

What do I mean by fulfilled? Jesus died just as the Jews were sacrificing the Passover lambs; He was in the tomb but suffered no corruption, as pictured by the Feast of Unleavened Bread; He rose from the dead on First-fruits as the first-fruits of the future resurrection; and He sent the Holy Spirit upon the church on Pentecost following His ascension.

Exo 12:3 Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household.

Exo 12:4 And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take *it* according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb.

If your household was too small, you must join with your neighbor. We're told elsewhere that the minimum number of people was ten.

This is the first occurrence of "congregation" in the over one hundred usages in the Bible of what becomes a technical term for the people of God gathered together to worship God or to be instructed in spiritual things. Hearing it would inspire the Israelites. A new and spiritually exciting chapter in their existence was starting.

Exo 12:5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats.

The word for “lamb,” according to my Strong’s Concordance, means *a member of the flock*. It could have been a lamb or a goat. When Jesus was introduced by John the Baptist, he used the word for *lamb*.

Since we’ve already revealed that the lamb pictures Jesus, we note that He, of course, was “without blemish,” perfect in every way - thus He was the only possible sacrifice for your sin.

Exo 12:6 Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.

It’s interesting to note that according to most of the chronologies of Jesus’ last days leading up to His crucifixion, He was in Jerusalem being “examined” by the religious leaders a period of four days. They could find no fault in Him.

The Passover prep began around 3pm, allowing for the butchering. Dinner was at “twilight,” and the night continued to midnight. It was a long contemplation of what God was about to do.

The gathering in each household was to carefully observe a few things:

Exo 12:7 And they shall take *some* of the blood and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.

Exo 12:8 Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it.

Exo 12:9 Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire - its head with its legs and its entrails.

Exo 12:10 You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.

Exo 12:11 And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It *is* the LORD's Passover.

I don't know why, but whenever the Passover comes up, I feel compelled to point out that very little of what is in modern Passover celebrations was in the original. That isn't to say it is being celebrated improperly, because God gives us freedom in these areas. Just realize that a lot of stuff has been added to it that wasn't in the Bible.

"Bitter herbs" would seem to remind them of their bitter bondage as slaves in Egypt.

They were to eat it ready to move - with sandals already latched, and their robes tucked-in. They were getting out of Dodge.

One interesting observation about "sandals on [their] feet." Since they ate reclining around low tables, Jews never ate with sandals on; they always took them off, and washed their feet.

Jesus, when He celebrated Passover with His disciples, was barefoot. we know that because of the foot-washing snafu that ensued. Not one of the disciples offered to be the foot washer.

I guess what I'm saying is that there is wiggle room in how God's people celebrate His ordinances. The first Passover required sandals, but by the time of Jesus, that had been abandoned. There are main things, for sure; but there is also freedom.

Exo 12:12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD.

A few times in the Bible God says, “all that open the womb [meaning the firstborn] are Mine” (Exodus 34:19). Every firstborn thing belongs to the Lord. He has claimed them for Himself; therefore, He expects His people to honor His claim by devoting all firstborn to Him.

Why? For one thing, the firstborn is like the first-fruits of a harvest. When you acknowledge the firstborn as the Lord's, you are saying that everything else that comes is likewise the Lord's.

God said He would “execute judgment” “against all the gods of Egypt.” **There were genuine powers at work in Egypt.** The two magicians that advised Pharaoh, Jannes and Jambres, could do crazy stuff - like have their staffs turn into serpents, and change water into blood. There were in Egypt what we must call lower 'g' gods.

One commentator put it like this:

We tend to think the lower 'g' gods are make believe. That they are idols of wood and stone. While the idols they inhabit are wood, stone, and sometimes gold or silver, the lower 'g' gods that people worship are real... Just ask anyone in India.

We say that “anything can be an idol,” then point to material things or hobbies that dominate our lives. Don't overlook that there are also evil, supernatural principalities and powers at work in the world.

Exo 12:13 Now 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 the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.

Someone pointed out that “death came to every home in Egypt: either the death of the firstborn, or the death of the lamb.”

Exo 12:14 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.

God spoke to them as if they would enjoy “generations” of fellowship with Him. They would commemorate Passover every year... And more than Passover. As we'll see later in Exodus, there would be a total of seven such holidays. Like the Feast of Unleavened Bread described next.

Exo 12:15 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, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

Exo 12:16 On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but *that* which everyone must eat - that only may be prepared by you.

Exo 12:17 So you shall observe *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

“Leaven” is what we call yeast. Although we love the benefits of yeast, it is an agent of decay. Because it has a decaying affect, the Bible uses it as a metaphor for sin.

Jesus, God’s lamb, was killed and placed in the tomb. Two things to note about Him:

1. First, He had led a pure, spotless life, unblemished by sin. Examine Him for four days or four decades, there was no fault to find. We could say His life was “unleavened.”
2. Second, although in the tomb for parts of three days and three nights, His body would not see decay. It remained “unleavened.”

On the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter quoted Psalm 16:10 and applied it to Jesus, saying, “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption [decay].”

The Feast of Unleavened Bread illustrates the burial of the sinless Son of God.

Exo 12:18 In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.

Exo 12:19 For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land.

Exo 12:20 You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.' "

Passover was on the 14th of the Jewish month Nisan. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to begin on the day after the Passover, and continue for seven days. The first and last days, Nisan 15 and 21, were considered Sabbaths on which no work was to be done. Later we will learn that a third feast, Firstfruits, also occurs during these dates.

- Jesus was like a lamb without blemish or defect (First Peter 1:19).
- John the Baptist called Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- The Apostle Paul wrote: “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (First Corinthians 5:7).
- It is through Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death that our sins are forgiven and our death sentence canceled (Hebrews 9:22; First John 1:7).

The Passover lays the foundation not only for the Old Testament sacrificial system but also for our ultimate redemption through Jesus Christ, a redemption which the Old Testament sacrifices could never accomplish (Hebrews 7:27; 10:1–12).

No wonder, then, that the Passover ‘pause’ is so distinct in this narrative.

Vicarious atonement is God’s plan to save you. You must be saved in God’s way, and not by some other plan of your own devising. One commentator said:

You may reason about the peculiarity of the method of salvation; you may think that other means will be more effective to the end desired; but if you at last are found out of the Divine way of safety, you will inevitably be lost.

The blood of Christ sprinkled on the heart is the only sign the destroying angel will recognize, and regard as the token of safety.

God has made a way of salvation. There is no other.

#2 When Did The Lamb Of God's Sacrifice Save You?

(v21-28)

Last week we explained why we believe that Egyptians could have been spared by doing what God told the Israelites to do. With each wonder there came a warning, and more than once certain Egyptians heeded God's warning and lives were spared.

Please note that individual Israelites were not automatically spared. Each household must sacrifice a lamb and apply the blood to their doorposts - otherwise the slain lamb would have no effect.

Using New Testament theological language, we would say that the lamb was sufficient to save anyone and everyone - "whosoever" would believe God and respond to His gracious offer.

But the lamb was only effective for those who applied its blood. Only they were actually spared.

The apostle Paul wrote of Jesus, "[He] is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (First Timothy 4:19). As God's Lamb, He has made the way of salvation available to all mankind. But you must respond to the Cross.

One commentator said, "It is not sufficient for the safety of men that Christ died; His precious blood must be sprinkled on their hearts."

It wouldn't have done an Israelite or an Egyptian any good to butcher and cook and eat the lamb but fail to apply its blood to their door. That application - it was a passive response of faith, believing that the terrifying Angel of the Lord would see it and spare you.

God told Moses about the Passover lamb, and he now tells the Israelites, and it is up to them to respond by faith.

Exo 12:21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover *lamb*.

Exo 12:22 And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.

Exo 12:23 For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you*.

What good, really, was blood against the Lord? How could it possibly spare you? Only because God said so. You must simply apply it, and by doing so give evidence that you believed God.

Exo 12:24 And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever.

Later in Exodus we'll look again at Passover and the other calendar feasts. We will answer the question, "Do we, as Christians, need to observe the feasts?" The answer is "No." We are under no obligation to observe them, and, in fact, ought to avoid them, seeing they are inferior shadows of what we now have in substance in relationship with Jesus.

Exo 12:25 It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service.

God had a land for them, but a whole lot more. Observing the feasts - all of them - Israel would see God's plan to use them as the preeminent nation of the world in order to bring Gentiles in every other nation to faith in Him.

Exo 12:26 And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?'

Exo 12:27 that you shall say, 'It *is* the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' " So the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

The annual observance would be like a game of *Pictionary* in which the kids would 'see' salvation depicted in the Passover elements.

There was an immediate response of reverence and worship. It encourages me about the time of reflection we have at the end of our service.

Exo 12:28 Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

They heard God's Word and they went away and did what it said. Hopefully that describes each of us anytime we read or hear God's Word; or anytime that we are prompted by His Holy Spirit.

The question, "When did the Lamb of God's sacrifice save you?", is intended to elicit your testimony. You should be able to say when you realized that Jesus Christ's universal offer of salvation became personally effective in your life.

It may be that it happened when you were merely a child. Maybe you're more like me, and got saved later in life - as an adult.

He's the Savior of all men, but He's your Savior only if you respond by faith to His gracious offer to spare you from the second death and.

If you've never done that... ***You can today.***

A final quote: "Not one soul has ever been lost that reposed its confidence in the atonement of the Savior. The trustful soul shall not be hurt by the second death."