

Celebration and Destruction

Exodus 12:21-32

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus, chapter 12 and the 21st verse. This passage implements the Passover as well as records for us the implementation of the tenth plague, and has implications for our understanding, of course, in what's happening in the Lord's Supper in the New Covenant.

We've already said that Exodus 12 focuses much of its emphasis on the institution of both the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. And as we look through Exodus, chapter 12, the first twenty verses we highlighted a number of things. We saw that the priority of God and of His redemption was reflected even in Israel's calendar. The Exodus experience was to mark the beginning of months for Israel. We also saw that the presence of God with His people, even in redemption required them to obey meticulous details in preparation for Him drawing near. We also saw that God gave Israel this covenant sign of the Passover lamb as a sacrament, promising deliverance and setting forth His provision for them in their need. We saw that He established this sign as a memorial to connect their minds, their remembrances, with His redeeming works and also to strengthen their faith. The Israelites were required to believe that that sign would provide the protection that they needed. It's a fairly frightening thing to know that the destroyer is about to visit your land, and the only thing in between you and the destroyer is some blood-smeared lintels and doorposts. And the children of Israel had to believe that.

Finally, we have seen that worship demands our preparation, our consecration, and our full attention. This is seen in these meticulous ten details for the feast of the unleavened bread. So we've already seen something of the equipment of the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. And tonight we see Moses actually command these things to be done. God has spoken to Moses in the first 20 verses. Now Moses turns and speaks to the children of Israel, and we see God give us the first Passover night in the visiting of the tenth plague on Egypt. So let's hear God's Word in Exodus 12 beginning in verse 21.

Exodus 12:21-32

Our Lord and our God, just hearing Your Words ringing in our ears reminds us of the solemnity of Your redemption. For as You redeem Your people You destroy all that which is arrayed against them. This is so true. We see it in the work of our Lord Jesus. We ask, O God, as we consider this great first type of that great archetypal redemption, we pray that we would see Christ, that we would tremble before Your sovereignty, that we would wonder at Your compassion, and that we would learn not to trifle with the Almighty. All these things we ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Many of you know the story; some of you remember it. Quiet negotiations were going on for a number of months at the end of the war in the Pacific Theater. The Second World War, the greatest war, the most expensive war that had ever been fought in the history of the world was coming to an end. And Tokyo was talking with Washington and London and with the supreme allied commander of the Pacific Theater, and the negotiations were going something like this: "What conditions would the allies impose if we offered to surrender? And in consultation with the supreme allied commander of the Pacific forces, the answer came back repeatedly: "Here are the terms. Unconditional surrender. There will be no qualifications. And one more thing. We will require the emperor himself to issue the word of surrender." Total surrender, those were the terms. And those would be the terms when the Emperor of Egypt finally gave the word. For God had one plan from the beginning in this story, and that is to show that He and He alone was sovereign.

There are many, many messages; fruitful messages for us to learn in this passage. And we will have to restrict ourselves to a few. And so allow me to walk you through this passage as we see the unconditional of the surrender of the Egyptians to the God, the one true God, the God of Israel.

I. Elders are responsible for worship.

First of all look at verse 21. Here we see Passover commanded. The instructions for Passover have already been given from God to Moses in verses 1 through 20. Now the command to commence the Passover is given. But this time the command comes from God via Moses. Notice to the elders. The elders of Israel are instructed to oversee and encourage Israel's family worship in the Passover. The elders are to see the families placed under their care carry out the ordinances of God.

Isn't it interesting to view the Passover. It's family worship. The beginnings of corporate national worship in Israel are rooted in the family worship in which the father served as priest to instruct their children and extended families in the things of the Lord and offer up this sacrifice to God. But even in this setting, where the father's carry out the work of priests, the elders are given oversight. Perhaps in this word Moses intends for the elders themselves to set the example

for the rest of Israel. But in addition, it seems that they are to give oversight. They are to give care. And it their charge to see that the families, that the fathers of Israel carry out the ordinances of God. I am sorely tempted to digress and talk about the significance of their elderly oversight, their spiritual concerns, the focus on the worship of Israel, and the focus on family religion, but we must hasten on. I leave that for your contemplation. Jethro has yet to give his words of wise counsel to Moses in this book. But already the elders are seen to be the ones who are given a spiritual charge and oversight of the families of God in Israel. Surely, there's a world of significance in that. That's the first thing we see. The elders of Israel are instructed to oversee and encourage Israel's worship.

II. Specific instructions for Passover.

Then in verse 22, we see a second thing. Not only was the Passover commanded in general, but now we see yet another specific command given on how the Passover is to be done. There is a specific command on how the blood covering of the doors is to be done. Blood is to be applied with hyssop, and the people are to say indoors. Notice God's concern for the smallest details of this service, down to the very manner and method in which the blood is going to be applied. Detail matters in worship, among other things, because much of the meaning often resides in the detail. There are other reasons which we will explore later on, but isn't it interesting that the Israelites are to find refuge inside their homes this night of judgment in much the same way that a fugitive would find refuge and safety in the cities of refuge, provided in the law of Moses. As long as he was inside that city, he was safe. But if he stepped out, he was on his own. So also the families to Israel are to find refuge in the bloodstained houses.

Now friends, this again is very significant, and we can draw many lessons from it, but we've got to say this at least. This clearly gets across to the Israelites their need of the Passover Lamb's blood for protection. You see, no there's no discourse in didactic terms on what the Passover Lamb means in this passage. You learn it all indirectly through the associations of that blood with certain activities and what the blood actually ends up doing. So, there's no question in Israel's mind after this night, about whether they needed that Passover Lamb or not. There are also no questions in Israel's mind about the covering of blood providing protection from destruction. And so again we see these commands for blood covering. And we see how they get across to the Israelites their need of the Passover Lamb for their protection.

III. God Himself will execute judgment on Egypt.

There's a third thing that we learn in this passage. You'll see it in verse 23. Here it is emphasized that God Himself is the one who will carry out judgment against Egypt. God is sovereign in the grim event that is about to befall the Egyptians.

God controls and directs the destruction of Egypt. We see here God's sovereignty in His decree regarding the work of the destroyer. Death is God's universal punishment against sin, and here that judgment is particularly meted out against Egypt because of her wicked rebellion against God and because of her persecution of His people. You remember all the way back in Exodus 4, it had been made clear that because Pharaoh had said that he would be master and even destroy God's first born son, Israel, that God would touch the first-born of Israel. In the tenth plague we see this tremendous decree come to pass. And it's clear that even death and destruction are in God's Almighty Hands. The death of Egypt is not the result of demonic forces out of the control of God. No, it is the result of God's decree. In fact, throughout this whole story we have seen that there is nothing in the Exodus events that is outside the rule of God. God is sovereign in judgment. And again, it is the blood that distinguishes between Israel and Egypt and spares Israel from destruction. This again reminded Israel that they were not inherently worthy of being saved, but that they were saved through God's choice and provision. He set His love on them for His own reasons. And none of those reasons resided in them. And then He made provision of them in the Passover lamb. And so we see thirdly, God's sovereignty in all these events in Egypt.

IV. The Passover as a sacrament to be remembered.

Then in verse 24, we see a fourth thing. This sacrament, we are told, this sign, this Passover is to be a perpetual remembrance for Israel. The next generation is to be taught of the wonders of the Lord in the context of worship. God is establishing a sign here that is a memorial of redemption. Notice His words. "You shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever." Isn't it interesting how worship works in conjunction with God's deliverance in this book? We are told at the beginning of the book that God is going to save Israel in order to worship. But in Exodus 12, here's how the pattern goes: The people worship, thanking God in advance for their deliverance. He responds in deliverance, but as He gives them instruction on how to worship prior to deliverance, He tells them that after the deliverance, they are always to remember the deliverance in their worship. And so worship precedes deliverance and follows deliverance in this passage, and in the pattern that it sets forth. But whatever the case, worship and redemption are tied together.

And of course this sign is transcended for Christians by a greater event and a greater sign. Luke tells us in Luke 9:31 that what Jesus did in Jerusalem on the cross was His Exodus. And the Lord's Supper commemorates that greater Exodus by the greater Passover Lamb, the last Passover Lamb, the ultimate Passover Lamb. And so we see at the heart of the various covenant signs that God gives to His people the deeds of the Lord. The signs that God gives us are to set forth His deeds of redemption. And when we participate in the covenant signs, we are both rehearsing His promises and remembering His deliverance.

And so we see here in verse 24 this sacrament as a perpetual remembrance for Israel. And it is one that is taken over by Christians and transcended in the service of the Lord's Supper.

V. The people worship.

Then in verses 25 through 27, here in many ways we come to the culmination of the plague stories. Notice verse 27. And its very last words. "And the people bowed low and worshipped." You realize the significance of that? You remember the last time that we are told by Moses, in the book of Exodus, that the people worshipped? It was all the way back in Exodus, chapter 4, verse 31. It was before any of the plagues had begun. It was before any of the audiences with Pharaoh had been held. But God had promised to the people, through Moses, that He would deliver them. And then the rescue operation began. Initially they had bowed low, believing and worshipping. But as the hand of Pharaoh grew stronger and stronger against them, there had been a silence of their lips and hearts in worship to God. But now on the night of the destruction, they bow low and worship. God really meant that Israel was saved to worship, and that worship is carried out here for the first time since the beginning of Moses' encounters with Pharaoh.

And notice also very significantly, look at the end of verse 25; when you enter the land which the Lord will give you as He promised, you shall observe this night. Now the word that is used for night or ceremony there is the same word which is used for labor or service. Now do you remember that the great question in the conflict between God and Pharaoh in the plagues is "Whom will you serve?" Now, here is God saying to Israel, when you go into the land which I have given you by promise, you will serve Me. The next time you hear that word it will be from the lips of Pharaoh in unconditional surrender repeating what he said he would never say in accordance with the command of the God who he said he did not even know his name. God is sovereign. And His people will serve Him by His grace.

VI. Israel obeys God.

Then look at verse 28. That's a throwaway phrase isn't it? No. It's filled with significance. Then the sons of Israel went and did. So just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. The obedience of Israel to God's command is specifically noted. Now that might be insignificant unless you knew that this precise phrase is repeated sixty-four times in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua and Chronicles. Sixty-four times this phrase is repeated in the early history of pre and post Egypt/Israel. And it is clear, thereby, that God is concerned that His people obey His commands for worship carefully and precisely as is intimated in the exaggerated redundancy of the repetition of

this phrase. God expects to be worshipped in accordance with the commands of His Bible.

One aspect of all true worship is that it is according to God's command, which in other words is to say it is according to Scripture. And we see here the roots of what those in the Reformed churches call the regulative principle of worship. And we'll spend much of our time in the second half of the book looking at the significance of that and the implications of it.

VII. Pharaoh is humbled by God.

Verses 29 and 30. We see a seventh thing in this passage. All Egypt is stricken by the plague, and Pharaoh is roused from his sleep at night. What does this indicate? God's humbling of Pharaoh. The extent of God's judgment against Egypt is emphasized in two ways in this passage. First of all notice that the plague hits everybody, from the greatest to the least, from Pharaoh's house all the way down to the dungeon. You know, the word used for *dungeon* is interesting. It's the *pit*. Now remember, anybody else that Moses has told you about that spent some time in a pit? Joseph, who once was the right-hand man of the Pharaoh of Egypt, spent his time in a pit made by his brothers, and then he spent some time in a pit made by the Egyptians. The Lord is saying that everyone, everyone from the captive in the dungeon to the first-born in the household of Pharaoh is touched by the curse against rebellion. From the greatest to the least they are all hit.

But secondly notice that it is emphasized even that the domestic animals suffer. The cattle are also touched. We see here the extent of God's judgment. No one is out with the reach of the judgment of God. Now how is it that Pharaoh is humbled by being raised from his sleep at night? Well, I think that's fairly obvious. I'm sure that the advisers to the president tremble a little bit when events come that require them to make their way into the private quarters in the White House to rouse him from sleep. Mr. President, there's something fairly pressing, and we think we need your advice and counsel on this now. It's a judgment call. But they have got to go in and wake him up. Pharaoh, being roused from his sleep, is a sign of how God is humbling him. You see, his household itself is threatened and he is humiliated. His own succession, the dynastic succession of his house has been threatened now by the judgment of God and he is rudely awakened to hear the message.

What's happening here? God is showing His superiority over the God of Egypt. He's showing His sovereignty over all of His enemies. Pharaoh had threatened to kill the children of God's Son, Israel. Now the first one of Egypt and the firstborn of Egypt are in the hands of the God of Israel. You know, in many ancient cultures, the firstborn child was considered to belong to whatever the Gods were who those people worshipped. Sometimes, in the case of those who were

Moloch worshipers, the firstborn children were literally sacrificed to the god. Here, God lays His claim to the sovereignty over Egypt by taking its first and firstborn into His Hands.

VIII. God is sovereign in judgment.

Finally, in verses 31 and 32, we see an eighth thing. God's sovereignty in judgment. Pharaoh here is beggared. He's left in abject humiliation. God's sovereignty and redemption is displayed in Pharaoh's response to the final plague. Pharaoh has to eat his words from Exodus, chapter 10, "Go from me and never return or I'll kill you." Now, having been awakened in the middle of the night, Pharaoh sends words to Moses and Aaron, "Rise up and go. You've been asking me for months if you can rise up and go. Now here's my word to you. Do it. Do it just like you said. Just as God had told Moses, He brings Egypt to its knees in freeing captive Israel. And as the plague of death struck even Pharaoh and as the plague of death struck even Pharaoh's house, he is reduced to begging Moses to take the people, and all their possessions and leave.

And those phrases must have been peculiarly difficult for Pharaoh to repeat when he said, "As you have said." In other words, Pharaoh's surrender is unconditional. The negotiation has come to an end. There's no, "O.K., you want that. Well, what about this?" It's, "As you have said." Just like God had said, just like Moses had said. That is how it will be done. And this is said through the voice, through the lips, through the mouth of God's sworn enemy, the one who said that he didn't even know His name.

But that's not all. Before Moses goes, Pharaoh says, one more thing, "As you go, bless me." Now there's a world of significance in that. But I think an even greater significance in the fact that there is no reply to that request. Because the answer, just like Pharaoh's answer had been to Moses initially, is "No." God redeems His people. And all that aligns itself against His people He destroys. So, who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the King? May God grant that you bow the knee, and that the doors of your heart are smeared with the blood of the Passover Lamb. Let us pray.

Our Lord and our God, how solemn is this Word? We see in it no boasting by Moses or Israel. For they did not delight in the death of the wicked, nor do You. But, O God, it is certain that all those who refuse to bow the knee and trust in the one true Passover Lamb will hear that final "no" which rung in the ears of Pharaoh. Grant that we would hear the words of blessings spoken to Abram of old, repeated again by Moses, and sung again by Christ who by the blood of the covenant brought us into redemption. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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