

VICTORY OF MOSES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Following the ninth plague, Pharaoh sealed his fate and the fate of all Egypt by permanently dismissing Moses. Thus he cut off God's mercy and brought about the culmination of all the plagues: the death of the firstborn (11:1-10). Since Pharaoh would not release Israel, the LORD'S firstborn son, then the LORD would slay Pharaoh's firstborn son (cf. 4:23) and the firstborn of all Egypt. In this plague as in all but the first three, Israel was favored and protected by the LORD (11:3, 7).

In connection with this tenth plague was the institution of the Passover (12:1-51). The sacrifice of the Passover lamb was primarily a lesson in atonement. The heart of the lesson is found in the LORD'S conditional statement, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (12:13). The Passover memorialized Israel's salvation from Egypt, but it also was a sacrifice with atoning value (12:27). Furthermore, the sacrifice of the Passover lamb was typical of Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb (Jn. 1:2; 1 Cor. 5:7). This departure from Egypt was so significant that it was to be celebrated by Israel annually and no alien to the commonwealth of Israel could participate in it.

In order that Israel might never forget the important principle of the firstborn and their salvation from Egypt, the LORD established a perpetual law requiring Israel to sanctify unto Him all of their firstborn, both of man and beast (13:1-6). All the firstborn belonged to the LORD, even as Israel was the LORD'S firstborn nation and belonged to Him. He led this nation out of Egypt so they could be separated unto Him (13:17-22).

I. Culmination of the Plagues — 11:1-10

11:1 — "He will let you go" - This assurance from the LORD must have given Moses tremendous relief. Furthermore, it underscored the fact that the LORD was in control of the entire situation and not Pharaoh. Throughout this extended episode Moses had been warned that Pharaoh would not agree and that God would harden his heart (4:27; 7:4, 13; 8:15; 9:12, 35; 10:1, 27). Now the LORD announced the end with words reminiscent of His earlier promise (6:1).

11:2 — "Let every man borrow" - This is not an ethical problem since the word translated "borrow" here is better understood to mean "ask" or "buy." The success of this operation did not depend on Israel's deception, but on the fact that God gave them favor with the Egyptians (v. 3). They had a deep respect for the power of God and did not want to offend Him further.

11:4 — "About midnight" - The day is not announced, only the solemn hour of judgment! Since the death of the firstborn was promised, but when and how was not revealed, the suspense must have bred great fear. The instructions to ask for jewelry from their neighbors and the instructions concerning the Passover followed this warning leaving an interval of at least four days.

11:4 — "Will I go out in the midst of Egypt" - Until this time Moses and Aaron had been the immediate agents initiating the plagues. Now the LORD will step in and personally intervene and execute justice and judgment with His own majestic presence.

11:7 — "Shall not a dog move his tongue" - Literally, "Not a dog will point its tongue." This is a proverbial expression built on the idea that a dog points its tongue to growl or bite. This is a promise there would be no retaliation against the Israelites following the Egyptians' bitter loss and there would be a promise of deliverance to those who would follow the Passover requirements.

11:8 — "He went out from Pharaoh in a great anger" - The wrath of Moses was inflamed by Pharaoh's threat (10:28). If the patience of Moses in his other encounters was indication of God's longsuffering, this reaction should have registered with Pharaoh as a premonition of evil. As Moses vented his wrath, so God was about to pour out His fury on Pharaoh!

11:9-10 — These statements conclude negotiations with Pharaoh and show that those negotiations proceeded and ended according to the LORD'S prediction (cf. 4:21; 7:3). The veracity of these predictions was in turn a pledge of further fulfillment of divine promises (cf. 4:23; 7:4).

II. Redemption of Israel — 12:1-51

A. Redemption Symbolized in the Passover — 12:1-28

This was a time when consecration was necessary. Not only was the LORD about to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, but at the same time He was adopting them as His own chosen nation (cf. 6:6, 7). In order that the great separation might be complete, it had to go beyond geographical distinctions and involve a separation in their hearts from all that Egypt represented. The Passover therefore was foundational to Israel's birth as a nation and was to be commemorated perpetually as a reminder of their unique fellowship with God through His grace.

1. Directions for the Passover — 12:1-11

12:2 — To mark the beginning of a new era, God commanded Israel to henceforth observe this Passover month as the first of their year. The month was called Abib, or "ear month", because it was the time when corn was in the ear. Following the Babylonian captivity the name of the month was changed to Nisan (Neh. 2:1; Esther 3:7).

12:3-4 — Every household was to take a lamb on the tenth day of the month; but not slaughtered until the fourteenth day (12:6). During this time the animal would be inspected to be certain that was an unblemished lamb. If a household was too small to eat a whole lamb, two households could come together for the Passover.

12:5 — "Your lamb shall be without blemish" - That which was offered to the LORD and that which became a substitute sufferer must be perfect. This was later established as the same for all sacrifices (Lev 22:19, 20). To assure the fact that the animal was uninjured and unblemished, a four-day inspection period was prescribed (compare 12:3 and 6).

12:5 — "Male of the first year" - It was to be a male since it became surrogate to the firstborn male of the household. It was to be at least one year old since it would then be in the prime of its life and at peak value.

12:6 — "Kill it in the evening" - Literally, between the evenings. Although it is impossible to determine precisely what time is meant here, Rabbinic tradition places it between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m. The important point is that the entire congregation would act individually but in concert to observe the ritual as a national unit.

12:7 — "Take of the blood and strike it..." - The application of the blood is in itself an act of faith. In every age blood is fundamental to redemption (Heb. 9:22). The shedding of blood is an exchange of life which represents the great price of redemption and in the Old Testament pointed to the death of Christ in a prophetic sense (cf. 1 Pet 1:2; Rom 5:8-9; Heb. 9:13, 14; 13:12). The door, upon which the blood was sprinkled, symbolized the place of entry and security. Applying blood, therefore, gave protection to all who were in the house.

12:8 — "Roast with fire" - This was expedient in order to preserve the integrity of the lamb. Boiling would require sectioning since they did not have large kettles. Furthermore, in boiling, some of the substance of the flesh is dissolved, which could not be allowed since the emphasis of the event was upon the whole animal. The lamb could be prepared quickly and without the use of ovens. This would accommodate their lack of time and sophisticated cooking equipment. The significance of unleavened bread will be dealt with later, but the accompaniment of bitter herbs is generally construed to be a reminder of the bitter life experienced by Israel in Egypt (cf. 1:14). This would form stark contrast with the sweet savory meat with which it was served.

12:9 — "Eat not of it raw" - This command kept them distinct from their pagan neighbors who ate raw flesh at their sacrificial feasts.

12:10 — "Let nothing of it remain" - That which had been offered to God could not be allowed to become corrupt. Neither could it be allowed to become an object of superstitious perversions.

12:11 — "With your loins girded" - The long loose robes worn by Orientals were tucked into the girdle when freedom was needed to work, run, or otherwise move about uninhibited. This showed a state of readiness to move out.

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12:11 — "Shoes on your feet" - This is another sign of preparation for taking a journey since it was and still is uncommon in the East for people to eat with their shoes on. Usually they do not even wear shoes in the house. According to many ancient drawings, the Egyptians did not ordinarily wear shoes at all. After 430 years the Israelites had certainly adopted this custom as well. Consequently, the wearing of shoes in this case was even a stronger mark of preparation to exodus!

2. Purpose of the Passover — 12:12, 13

The immediate purpose of the Passover celebration was to avert God's judgment. In the last six plagues the LORD had automatically put a distinction between Israel and Egypt sparing His people the disastrous effects. In this case, the fate of the Israelites was to be determined on an individual basis depending on their obedience or disobedience regarding the Passover observance.

3. Significance of the Passover — 12:14-28

12:14 — "This day shall be unto you for a memorial" - Israel's memory of the LORD'S personal responsibility for the birth of their nation would be crucial to their success and prosperity as a nation.

12:14 — "An ordinance forever" - Preservation from the destroyer's hand and redemption from spiritual darkness were significant lessons not to be forgotten with the passing of generations. They were eternal truths to be perpetuated by eternal ordinances.

12:15 — "Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread" - The feast of unleavened bread does not originate here as distinct from the Passover but as a continuation and emphasis of a Passover significance: separation from all impurity. Leaven was understood to represent that which was defiled or evil. Therefore, during this seven-day observance anyone partaking of leavened bread would cut himself off from the covenant community and from all the rights and privileges pertaining to it.

12:16 — "Holy convocation" - The week began and ended with a public meeting during which no work was to be done. There were times for the nation to meditate and worship God.

12:21-23 — (See notes on 12:3-13 for a more details.)

12:24-25 — The Passover was to be a perpetual yearly observance for the Israelites when they got into Canaan.

12:26-27 — The Passover was to be an occasion to instruct the children. God never intended that Israel merely observe the Passover as a religious duty, but carefully observe it as a spiritual lesson.

B. Redemption Realized in the Exodus — 12:29-51

12:29 — "The firstborn of Pharaoh" - This plague was enacted without discrimination. Since the Pharaoh was considered a god, his firstborn son and heir to the throne would also have been deified and specially protected by the god of Egypt, yet he died in his bed.

12:29 — "Captive that was in the dungeon" - Literally, if referred to the "pit house." Every class, rich or poor, bond or free, citizen or alien, all came under this awful curse.

12:30 — "Not a house where there was not one dead" - House should be understood in the family sense.

12:31 — "Get you forth" - Pharaoh yielded, but it was too late to avoid God's judgment. The LORD simply acted upon the principle He had established at the outset. God instructed Moses to deliver His firstborn son, Israel, or He would destroy Pharaoh's firstborn son (4:22, 23).

12:32 — "Bless me also" - Pharaoh was anxious for Israel to leave but also hoped that Israel's God would be propitiated toward him.

12:33 — "We be all dead men" - The Egyptians sensed that this plague was only a portent of greater disaster about to befall them.

12:34 — In their haste to depart the Israelites took their dough and bound it along with their kneading bowls in their clothes. "Clothes" represent anything that covers which means they probably wrapped the dough in a cloth while traveling.

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12:37 — "From Ramses to Succoth" - Ramses was one of the treasure cities they were building and was probably situated near Goshen. From this rendezvous they journeyed to 'Succoth', which literally signified "tents" or "tent places." This could well have been a customary camping site between Ramses and the Suez.

12:37 — "Six hundred thousand . . . men" - Literally, they were "strong men." If we compute the aggregate population on a ratio of 4 persons to 1 strong man, the total population would have been approximately 2,400,000. This ratio is conservative considering their notable proliferation (1:7).

12:38 — "Mixed multitude" - These were possibly Egyptians impressed with Israel's God, or some other kindred Semitic groups. Israel was not necessarily advantaged by their presence since this mixed multitude seems to have initiated some of Israel's sins (Num. 11:4).

12:43 — "There shall no stranger eat thereof" - This instruction probably pertained to those of the "mixed multitude" who resisted circumcision and other covenant practices.

12:46 — The three regulations form one unit. The idea is that it was to be eaten in the house where the blood was applied and was not to be divided. The command not to break any bones corresponds interestingly with the reference to Christ's death in John 19:36.

III. Dedication of the Firstborn — 13:1-22

13:1 — "Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn" — This dedicatory act dovetails very well with the entire Passover observance. Whereas the feast of unleavened bread emphasized separation from evil, this sanctifying of the firstborn stresses the positive aspect: separation unto God. The idea behind "sanctifying" is to "consider it God's possession." It was natural that Israel's firstborn should be sanctified unto the LORD since He had delivered them from the plague of death.

13:3-10 — Moses here reviews the highlights concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread with the additional exhortation to observe it annually (See notes on 12:15-20).

13:11 — "When the LORD shall bring you into the land" - the law concerning consecration of the firstborn was to come into effect when they entered Canaan and possessed it.

13:12, 13 — "The males shall be the LORD's" - A general requirement of the law was that sacrificial animals be male. In Canaanite worship firstborn sons were offered as burnt sacrifices to Molech along with all manner of animal sacrifices. God imposed two modifications on the firstborn sacrifice principle. (1) The ass, representing all unclean animals, must be substituted with an acceptable offering. (2) Firstborn male children should be redeemed or "bought back from the herd" by means of an animal sacrifice. Male children were then given to the LORD as a living sacrifice.

13:14, 15 — The entire process of sacrifice and redemption was to be a perpetual memorial of Israel's redemption from Egypt.

13:16 — "Token" - This word does not imply an amulet or fetish of any kind, but the Passover was a symbolic memorial of the LORD's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Later, some Jews concluded from this verse and Deut. 6:8; 11:10 that they were to wear literal pouches containing portions of the law. These pouches, called Taphilliu or phylacteries (from Greek), were made from the skins of clean animals and bound to the forehead and left arm of all males when they reached the age of thirteen. They contained strips of parchment inscribed with the three principle texts (Ex 13:2-10; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21). It is more likely that the "hand" and "eyes" in this verse were meant to be symbolical.

13:18 — "Israel went up harnessed" - The Hebrew term involves the sense of "free." This may imply some sort of marching arrangement. Some interpret it in the sense of military order.

13:21-22 — "Pillar of cloud... pillar of fire" - This was a continual symbol of God's presence which would guide them by day, light their path by night, and even spread out to provide protection from the elements (Ps 105:39).