

THE PASSOVER (4)

Exodus 11:1-14:31

Key Verses: 12:12,13

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn--both men and animals--and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

In this lecture we will study two major events in the Exodus: the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. The Passover is the most historical event for the people of Israel and it has spiritual meaning which corresponds to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The crossing of the Red Sea is very dramatic. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea by faith and completed the Exodus from Egypt. We want to concentrate on the meaning of the Passover. We will think about seven important events and instructions. May God help us to know the meaning of the Passover.

I. The Passover (11:1-13:16)

First, the plague on the firstborn in Egypt (11:1-10). Our God is Almighty God. He created the heavens and the earth with his power and wisdom. So everybody should worship him and honor him as God. But King Pharaoh of Egypt did not honor God. He defied God by saying, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go" (5:2). As we studied, every man has an innate knowledge of God. As a sheep knows his shepherd, a man knows God. But Pharaoh paralyzed his own conscience as though he had no conscience and said, "I do not know the LORD." Pharaoh's deliberate rejection of God led him to disobedience and his disobedience made his heart hardened like flint.

At first, God had a plan to negotiate with Pharaoh for the emancipation of his people from Egypt. Actually, God tried many times through Moses and Aaron to do this before God decided to inflict Pharaoh and his people with the ten plagues. But Pharaoh wantonly refused. In addition, he oppressed the Israelites with a hard labor policy to the degree that they would perish. To God, Pharaoh was beside himself. Finally, God decided to punish him, first with nine plagues, so Pharaoh might know that he is God Almighty. Despite the nine plagues, Pharaoh did not repent, but disobeyed all the more, regardless of his own sufferings as well as his people's sufferings. His disobedience shows the character of the devil. Now God had one way left to control Pharaoh. It was the plague of death on the firstborn of Egypt. God said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and

on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely" (11:1).

Moses understood what God said spiritually. And he immediately said to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt--worse than there has ever been or ever will be again'" (4-6). Pharaoh's disobedience caused death and unbearable sorrow to himself as well as his people. Here we learn that the leaders of all nations should not disobey God.

Pharaoh killed people as if they were flies. But he loved his first son, the heir, most dearly. Yet because of Pharaoh's disobedience his first son died by the plague of death. Pharaoh killed his first son because of his disobedience toward God. Even the innocent son of a slave girl, who ground at her hand mill all day long, also died. The first baby of a hardworking cow also died. The whole nation looked dead. This event is recorded in 12:29-30. The power of death was wielded over King Pharaoh and the Egyptian Empire. Pharaoh's story reminds us of Romans 6:23a, "The wages of sin is death." There is no one who committed sin against God and did not die. These days disobedience seems to be a kind of virtue. But we must know that disobedience is the cause of death for oneself as well as for others.

Second, a new beginning (12:1-30). Look at 12:1,2. "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.'" To God the Passover was very significant. To God, the Passover was the new start for his people Israel. "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year," means that the Israelites start new life, new history and a new mission. They are no more slaves. Now they are a chosen people and a holy nation. The old has gone and the new has come to God's people Israel.

Before the Passover event happened, God gave them many instructions about how to prepare the Passover, how to keep the Passover, and most importantly, how to remember the meaning of the Passover. It was because without the preparation of their minds and hearts God could not help them to make the glorious Exodus. What did God instruct them to do? First, as of first importance, they have to think of the meaning of the Passover (12:2). It is because the Passover was the beginning point of God's deliverance through the blood of the lamb. After the Passover event, they are no more slaves. They have to prepare to receive training to grow up to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Second, they must choose a Passover lamb which is a year-old male

without defect (5). Third, they must eat the meat of the Passover lamb. Fourth, they must not eat a chef's salad, but bitter herbs. Fifth, they must eat bread without yeast. In the past, yeast was considered as a symbol of bad influence or the cause of corruption. So God's people should eat bread baked without yeast even though it is hard to chew. Sixth, they must tuck their cloaks into their belts. They should not wear clothes unbuttoned and untucked like street bums. Seventh, they must hold their staffs in their hands as soldiers carry rifles in their hands. Eighth, they must eat it in haste. They must eat food like soldiers in three minutes.

The author of Exodus says, "It is the LORD's Passover" (11). God decided to deliver them out of slavery, out of the land of Egypt. But if his people are not prepared for the deliverance, God cannot help them. God decided to deliver them from their bondage. But if their attitude, or preparation of heart and mind, is not right, God cannot deliver them. There are so many people who are distressed for nothing because they have no basic attitude toward the holy God or toward their elder's instructions. God helps those who help themselves. God blesses those who are willing to obey his word.

Third, remember God's grace (43-50). This part is about some everlasting ordinances which God gave to help his people remember his grace. One is circumcision. Those who are not circumcised cannot participate in the Passover festival. In this case, circumcision is literally to cut off a part of one's body. However, spiritually speaking it is to cut off the life of slavery by the grace of God and to remember God's grace of deliverance. The Passover was the time of God's deliverance of his people. It was the time of God's one-sided grace. But to remember God's grace is the most difficult thing for fallen man. Even if a fallen man received 10,000 of God's blessings, he is apt to forget God's grace after 15 minutes. One young man was upheld in Chicago UBF as a most precious person. But when he could not gratify his lustful desire, he betrayed the work of God, becoming an agent of anti-Christians. His needed circumcision of the heart.

Another is the Passover ceremony. Exodus 12:24-27 says, "Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' 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.'" God wanted the Israelites to teach their children how God delivered them. Likewise, God wants us to teach our children how God delivered us and our families. We love our children. So we want to give them the best things the world seems to offer. The best thing we can give our children is to help them trust and obey God and serve him with all their strength.

Many parents think in their hearts, "I am happy to sacrifice myself to God, but not my children." But God wants us to teach our children to serve God sacrificially. God wants us to raise our children as men and women of God when we live in the midst of God's blessing in the promised land. Most importantly, God wants us to pass on to them the heritage of faith. 2 Corinthians 6:1 says, "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."

Fourth, the blood of the Passover lamb. As we studied, when the angel struck Egypt with the plague of death, he passed over whenever he saw blood smeared on the doorframe. Here, the blood of the sinless lamb refers to the blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ saves men from their sins. Sometimes we wonder why Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood. Sometimes we wonder if there was no other option to save men from their sins. But the Bible says, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22).

We are saved only by the blood of Jesus. 1 Peter 1:18, 19 says, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." Silver or gold or parents' anxiety cannot save us from our sins. Only the blood of Jesus can change us, and give us the grace of forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life and the living hope of the kingdom of God. Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." From the beginning God decided to give his one and only Son to die on the cross shedding his blood so that he might save us from our sins. There is no salvation without the blood of Jesus.

John the Baptist, who knew Jesus well, exclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29b). What John the Baptist said summarizes Isaiah's prophecy about the suffering servant so well. "...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities..." (Isa 53:5). Our Lord Jesus Christ became a Paschal Lamb in obedience to God's world salvation plan. Our Lord Jesus Christ shed his blood to save us from our sins. Luke 23:34a tells us in a most vivid way why Jesus was hung on the cross. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." The meaning of Jesus' cross gives us new life and new spirit and new joy in our hearts.

Fifth, the Exodus (12:31-42). As God promised, the night arrived. The angel of death swept through the houses of the Egyptians. All the firstborn sons and first babies of animals, beginning from Pharaoh's first son, to the firstborn son of a slave girl, who is at her hand mill, grinding the wheat all day long, being whipped--they all died.

All their parents were overwhelmed by sorrow. Egyptian mothers' wailing reached to heaven. The Egyptian Empire was filled with the sound of mourning. There was no such tragic day in human history.

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. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me." The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "For otherwise, they said, we will all die!" Then the Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. It was reasonable for them to ask for the articles of silver and gold, for they had worked as slaves for 430 years with no pay. So they must receive compensation. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people and gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians (36).

Sixth, consecration of the firstborn (13:1-16). The LORD said to Moses, "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal" (1,2). To the Israelites the firstborn males were known as God's possession. Isaiah 43:1 says, "But now, this is what the LORD says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'" Again, 1 Corinthians 6:19,20 says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

We Bible-believing Christians must consecrate our firstborn and dedicate them to God instead of spoiling them with much human affection. It is because when we were dead, the blood of Jesus made us alive. We must remember that we passed over death by the grace of God. How can we remember this grace? We can remember when we give our firstborn sons to God. We can remember when we give first priority and our first love to God always.

Seventh, a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire (13:17-22). God is like a good shepherd. He never left them alone. He was always with them. During the daytime, he led them by a pillar of cloud. As we know, in the desert, scorching heat can burn them out. But God graciously gave them the pillar of cloud so that they can rest under the shade of a pillar of cloud. During the night, there was a danger that the enemies, possibly the Philistines or wild animals, would attack them. So God surrounded them with a pillar of fire so that nobody could see them, just as nobody can see through the headlights of an approaching car. Here we learn that God worked day shift, evening shift and night shift. In this way God shepherded his people. God is our good shepherd. He is willing to take three shifts, day shift, evening shift and night shift.

A shepherd heart is like a magnet. To those who have a shepherd heart, many sheep are willing to come.

II. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea (13:17-14:31)

First, "Israel's army" of 600,000. The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the desert (20). God called the 600,000 Israelites, "Israel's army" (14:19). But in reality, they were full of bitterness, scars and sicknesses. They were mostly people with slave mentalities. But God called them "Israel's army" in the hope of raising them as his army of world conquest. Praise God! When God called them "Israel's army" he meant it. But at that time, the Philistines were the dominant power in the land of Canaan, the promised land. If the Israelites had to fight them, they would be defeated before fighting. So to avoid a war, God did not let them pass through Philistine territory. Instead, God let them circle around the vast wilderness. When they did not take a short cut to the promised land, it might take a lifetime to enter the promised land. God called his people "Israel's army." But in reality, they were not ready to overcome all kinds of inconveniences, discomforts and hardships. They were just like third-class people in modern times. However, God's way of doing things is inscrutable. Our God is the God of wisdom. God wanted them to stay in the wilderness until they grew up to be soldiers of God. God wanted them to stay there until they were recreated from slave people into godly people. So God led them on a very difficult route.

Second, the pursuing Egyptian army (14:5-10; 23-35). Pharaoh and his army officers only knew military strategy. They did not know God's wisdom. They knew that the Israelites were hemmed in between a catastrophic wilderness and the aggressively pursuing Egyptian army, which was equipped with newest weapons of the times. The Egyptian army thought that they would capture the Israelites as if they would capture a pet dog. They pursued. The Israelites were in deep trouble. In front of them was the Red Sea. They say that it was the rainy season, so the water was overflowing. In the rear, the Egyptian army was pursuing them thunderously. Even though God called them, "Israel's army," they were paralyzed by fear. Those terrified people of Israel came to Moses preferring an easy way of dying and said, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in this desert!" "Israel's army" of 600,000 was hemmed in between the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian army.

Third, "The LORD will fight for you" (13-18). Nevertheless Moses was firm. He had no fear of the Red Sea or the Egyptian army. He was not anxious about the situation. He drew all the attention of his people to

God and he said, "the LORD will fight for you." Moses had absolute dependence on God. It is amazing that in the past, he depended on his faltering lips (6:12,30), and complained to God that he could not be a leader of God's people. But now in that desperate situation, in which they should drown or be pierced by the Egyptian swords, Moses stood firm and said to his people, "The LORD will fight for you." Moses reminds us of Romans 8:31b, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" In the sight of God, Moses was a four-star general. At this critical moment, God visited Moses and said, "Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground." God did this to show them that he is God Almighty. 14:18 says, "The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen."

Fourth, the Israelites cross the Red Sea (14:26-31). The angel who had been in front of Israel's army withdrew and went behind them and blinded the Egyptian army. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the Egyptian side so that they could not see anything. On the other hand, the cloud brought light to the Israelite side. According to God's command, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters were divided and stood like walls. Then the Israelites crossed the Red Sea as on dry land.

The Egyptians thought that they could cross the Red Sea faster because they had chariots. But as soon as all the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea so that the water might flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen. Suddenly the Egyptian army and horses began to swim in the Red Sea. But their swimming ability was not enough to save themselves. Not one of them survived. The author comments in verse 29, "But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left." Like the Israelites we must experience the power of God by faith as many times as the opportunity offers.

In this passage we learn God blessed the Israelites when they obeyed his word. On the other hand, God punished Pharaoh and the Egyptians when they disobeyed him to the end. Most importantly, we learn the meaning of the blood of the lamb. May God help us experience the blood of the lamb very personally.