

Ministry of Grace Church

Exodus 12 (1st half) – Speaker Notes

This chapter is a long one, so we're going to split it in two. We'll cover the first half this time and look at the second half next time. As you know, I frequently end my messages with a series of questions. But this time I want to start off with a question: "Were the firstborn of Israel saved by works, or by faith?" As we are about to learn, the Israelites had to perform specific actions in order for the firstborn to be saved from death. They had to sacrifice a lamb and put some of its blood on the two side posts and top beam of the doorway in order to have the death angel pass-over them. That sounds like the firstborn were saved by works, doesn't it? Hold on to that thought, we'll come back to it later.

Today, we're going to be looking into what happened after the three days of darkness that affected the Egyptians but not the Israelites. After this penultimate plague ended and light returned to Egypt, Moses was summoned to the presence of Pharaoh. He informed Moses that the Israelites could leave, but they were not allowed to take their flocks or herds. When Moses refused Pharaoh's offer, insisting that all the Israelites and all their flocks and herds must go, Pharaoh once again reneged on his offer and told Moses to get out of his sight, saying that Moses would never see Pharaoh's face again.

Before he left, however, Moses warned Pharaoh that there would be yet one more plague. He informed Pharaoh that *Yahweh* would go out at about midnight and kill all the firstborn throughout Egypt, both man and animal. Some people interpret this as Moses saying that *Yahweh* would kill the firstborn of Egypt that very night, but Moses was not that specific.

So Moses said, "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. (Exodus 11:4-5)

There are two possible interpretations of this. The first is that Moses did, indeed, mean that *Yahweh* was going to go through Egypt that very night and kill all the firstborn in Egypt. But this is not likely, as we will demonstrate in a minute. The other interpretation is that Moses was intentionally not specific about which night because it was to be a night yet in the future. After all, the Israelites had not yet selected their sacrificial lamb and the plague would not occur until 5 days after that.

And – why only the firstborn? Why didn't *Yahweh* just say, "I will take one child from each family?" You will recall from our previous discussions that the firstborn was the favored child who would receive a double portion of the inheritance from his father. *Yahweh* was telling Pharaoh that if he did not release *Yahweh's* favored people, He would take the favored child from each and every household in Egypt.

Okay, let's look closely at this chapter of Exodus and see what God has in store for us. As we go through this, keep in mind the parallel between these events and the events of the crucifixion of Jesus, which happened on the day before the Passover observance. Also keep in mind the similarity between the salvation of the firstborn of Israel through the blood of the lamb and our salvation through the blood of the Lamb of God.

Exodus 12:1, 2

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, there are two schools of thought about the opening words of this chapter. Some interpret the verb as a pluperfect, in which case it would be translated, “The LORD had said,” Others, however, claim there is not enough evidence to make this assertion. They translate it as, “The LORD said.” In either case, it is a reference to something that happened in the past. This is made all the more uncertain because this entire episode in the escape from Egypt is presented to us in the past tense. So, let’s look at what we do know.

Yahweh’s message to Moses was, “This month will be the first month for you.” Previous to this event, the Jewish calendar coincided with the Egyptian calendar, which was the same as the observances of most countries of that day. The Egyptian calendar began in their month *Thot*, which coincides with the Jewish month *Tisri*. These were both based on (and began on) the Autumnal Equinox (approximately September 22 in our calendar). The new beginning month for Israel was originally called *Abib*. It was changed to *Nisan* during the Babylonian captivity and begins at the vernal equinox (approximately March 22 in our calendar). In reality, the Jewish civil calendar continued to begin at the autumnal equinox (*Tisri*) whereas the ecclesiastical calendar began with the vernal equinox (*Nisan*). The Jewish historian Josephus described it this way,

“the month of Nisan was the beginning with respect to things divine, but in buying and selling, and such like things, the ancient order was observed”

It is very likely that *Yahweh* gave this message to Moses on the first day of the month, but we can’t be certain. And - it couldn’t have been given to him any later than the 8th or 9th day of the month. Why? Because, once *Yahweh* told Moses what to do, he had to contact the elders of Israel and have them relay the information on to all the people. It’s possible that this could have occurred within a single day or two, though it probably took longer. Either way they had to select the lamb on the 10th of the month and observe it for three days.

There are some who believe that the three days in which the Israelites had to observe the lambs was the same three days that Egypt was in total darkness, though there is absolutely no scriptural evidence of this. If this were the case then Moses would have met with Pharaoh on the 14th and the killing of the firstborn of Egypt occurred that night, the night of the 15th (remember, for the Israelites, the day began at 6:00 in the evening). However, I believe that it is more reasonable that Moses met with Pharaoh on the day before the 1st of Abib and God talked to Moses on the day after his meeting with Pharaoh. That’s why *Yahweh* told Moses:

This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. (Exodus 12:2)

If this is true, then the arrival of the death angel occurred two weeks later. Tradition has it that the Egyptians offered sacrifices to their gods for protection from *Yahweh*, and it would have taken some time for the information to spread throughout Egypt regarding the coming plague.

Exodus 12:3-5

Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of

persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats,

Given that Moses has just announced to Israel that this is now the first month of the year and the fact that now he is describing what to do on the tenth of the month, this message was obviously delivered well before the tenth of the month. As I've already said, I believe that it was delivered on the first of the month, allowing time for the message to be propagated from Moses, to the elders, to all the people (more than 600,000 plus women and children) in time to perform this action on the tenth of the month.

In **Exodus 12:21**, the lamb was to be “according to their fathers' houses.” So, we see that the lamb was to be eaten by family units which were to have gathered together. The number of people gathered for a Passover lamb was based on how much each would eat so that none would be left-over (**Exodus 12:10**). A later custom fixed this number as ten people.

The lamb they chose was to be “without blemish.” This is from the Hebrew *tamim*, meaning “complete.” The implication is that it was to be “without any indication of any flaw.” The Hebrew word translated “lamb” refers to a sacrificial lamb. This is a picture of the “Lamb of God,” identified by John the Baptist, who was sacrificed on the cross for our sins. There are two different words for a lamb in Greek: *aren*, meaning a young sheep or goat, and *amnos*, meaning a sacrificial lamb. In the following passage the word for lamb is *amnos*.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (**John 1:29**)

For the Israelites, the lamb was to be “a year old,” which comes from the Hebrew *ben sanah*, which literally means “a son of a year.” In other words, it was to be a male between its first and second birthdays. The implication is that it was to be a fully grown lamb in the prime of its vigor. This lamb was to be sacrificed in place of the first born of each household. Those who did not sacrifice the lamb and place its blood on the door posts and lintel would suffer the loss of the firstborn in their household.

Exodus 12:6, 7

and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.

Since this occurred before the giving of the Law, there were no priests set-apart for the offering of sacrifices. Instead, the head of each household was to perform the priestly duty of killing the sacrificial lamb. When was this sacrificial action supposed to be performed? The Hebrew literally reads, “between the evenings.” The Israelites had two evenings which they observed. Their first evening began just after twelve o'clock, and continued till sunset; their second evening began at sunset and continued till night. Hence, the paschal lamb was to be killed between Noon and six o'clock. Since the meal was to be eaten hastily before the second evening, the killing of the lamb would have had to have happened around three o'clock in order to give time to sprinkle the blood and cook the lamb. Notice that it was the ninth hour (three o'clock in the afternoon) when Christ offered up his life.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said,

“This man is calling Elijah.” And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. (Matthew 27:45-50)

The blood of the slain lamb was to be applied to the two side posts and to the lintel (upper door frame) of the entrance of the house where the lamb was to be eaten. If there were two or more families sharing a Passover meal, they were all to remain inside the house until morning (see verse 22). I’m sure that it is no accident that by applying the blood to the side posts and lintel they formed the shape of the cross, and the blood would be a representation of Jesus’ bloodied hands from the nails and bloodied head from the crown of thorns.

Exodus 12:8-9

They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts.

The probable reason for roasting the lamb is that this was the only way the animal could be cooked without dividing it up. If the Children of Israel did have ovens, they certainly were not large enough to cook an entire animal. Likewise, boiling the animal would require that it first be cut-up, then placed in a pot. And, just like with Jesus, verse 46 tells us that none of its bones were to be broken. Therefore, it would have to have been roasted.

The bread was unleavened (without yeast) because this was the quickest way to make the bread. Throughout the Bible, leaven is a symbol of sin. Unleavened bread, therefore, is a symbol of the lack of sin in the lives of the children of Israel because they had been atoned for by the blood of the paschal lamb.

The Israelites were to eat the roasted lamb with bitter herbs. This was to remind the children of Israel throughout the ages of their bitter affliction at the hands of the Egyptians. For a Christian the bitterness represents our recognition of our sin which was paid for by the Lamb of God. And there was to be no blood present, for the blood was the price already paid for sins.

According to the writings of Justin Martyr, the lamb was roasted in the form of a cross; one spit (made of wood), he says, went through from the lower parts to the head, and again another across the shoulders, to which the hands (or rather the legs) of the lamb were fastened and hung. The spit was not turned, rather it was hung above the fire with the animal’s belly and limbs exposed. The roasted lamb, therefore was a perfect picture of the Lamb of God who was hung on the cross.

Exodus 12:10-11

And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover.

The paschal lamb was to be completely consumed during the meal. If any did remain, it was to be completely burned up the following morning. Once consumed, there was no further need or use of the paschal lamb. With the Christian faith, once a person has completely received the lamb of God there is no need to repeat the action.

The Israelites were told to eat the paschal lamb, “with your belt fastened” The text literally says, “with your loins girded.” This referred to the process of reaching between the legs, grabbing the back hem of the long garment, pulling it through the legs, and tucking it in the belt. This was done in order to facilitate rapid travel. They were also told to eat the meal with, “your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand.” They were also told to “eat it in haste.” These were indications of complete preparedness for an imminent journey which was to be taken quickly.

Yahweh made it very clear to Moses and the children of Israel that this was not a meal or a celebration of man’s making. The Passover, which refers both to the event and to the animal sacrificed, was *Yahweh’s* doing. It was done by His design to satisfy His justice and to allow the mercy of *Yahweh* to be demonstrated dramatically. The rescuing of the children of Israel from Egypt was totally *Yahweh’s* doing, from the bringing of the plagues as judgment on the world to the offering of the Paschal Lamb for the payment of sins and salvation of His people. Again, there is a strong parallel to the Christian faith. It is all of God’s doing. It is by His design to satisfy His justice and to allow His mercy to be demonstrated to all the world (physical and spiritual). All the Israelites had to do was observe, believe, and act in obedience as proof of their faith. With the Christian faith, all we have to do is to hear, believe, and act out our belief as evidence of genuine faith.

Exodus 12:12-13

For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 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 no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

Notice carefully that *Yahweh* says that He will “pass through” the land of Egypt. That comes from the Hebrew *abar*, meaning “to traverse” or “to pass through.” It is a distinctly different word from the word translated “pass over.” The passing through was for the purpose of judgment, whereas the passing over was for the purpose of showing mercy. This is a pre-figure of the rapture of the church where *Yahweh* will come to show mercy on Christians by delivering us from the judgment which He will execute against the “earth dwellers.”

We also learn here that the judgment of *Yahweh* was not only on the people of Egypt, but also, “on all the gods of Egypt.” This is an indication that *Yahweh* rendered all the supposed gods of the people powerless to protect them, just as the gods of the “earth dwellers” will be powerless to save them during the Tribulation.

Since we believe that Moses’ appearance before Pharaoh after the three days of darkness may have been as much as 15 days before the arrival of the death angel. The Egyptian people would have had sufficient time to make sacrifices to their own gods in expectation of protection from Moses’ God. In killing all the firstborn throughout Egypt except those who had performed the sprinkling of the blood of the paschal lamb, *Yahweh* destroyed the power and reputation of all the gods of Egypt, thus executing judgment upon them as false gods and, therefore, no gods at all.

The actual blood of the sacrificial lamb had no real effect but was merely a sign or symbol. In Hebrews we are told:

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (*Hebrews 10:4*)

The blood on the doorposts was a sign indicating that faith was present. That act of obedience was exercised as a result of their faith in *Yahweh's* word. Again, this is a prefigure of our salvation which was demonstrated by our confession as a result of our faith in the sacrifice of Christ as described in God's word.

Exodus 12:14-15

“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

To this day Jews keep the celebration of the Passover in remembrance of God's divine protection (a memorial day). The significance of the Passover; God's salvation from the effects of sin, is celebrated among Christians in the communion observance. The connection between the two was highlighted by Christ Himself at the last supper with His disciples. And, just as leaven is a symbol of sin, it is appropriate that they should begin this sacred ceremony with the removal of leaven. Similarly, with Christian communion, we are to begin with a confession of our sins so that we should not eat the bread or drink the cup in an unworthy manner.

Exodus 12:16-20

On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

The week of Unleavened Bread is an observance in which the Israelites were to consecrate themselves to God in remembrance of what He had already done for them. They were to be very specific in removing any sin from their lives and focusing on *Yahweh* for the entire week. Similarly, as we Christians observe Communion, we are to consecrate ourselves continually to the Lord in recognition of the work that He has already done for us at the cross.

Exodus 12:21-23

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. 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 will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.

Moses now delivers the message to the elders of Israel. It is given here in an abbreviated form in general but with specific details as to how the blood is to be applied to the doorposts and lintels.

Exodus 12:24-28

You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

The children of Israel were instructed to observe this memorial through all generations. They were to use it to teach their children about God’s provision for them in judging Egypt and redeeming Israel.

So What?

As we have seen, the Israelites had to do something in order to be saved from the death angel. They had to sacrifice the lamb and they had to apply the blood to the doorposts and lintel. Does it mean, then, that they were saved by works? This is the question that we asked at the beginning of this study. Let’s see what the Bible teaches us.

In both his letter to the Romans and his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul said that justification is through faith, not the deeds of the law:

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Romans 3:28)

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

That seems pretty clear, but the events of Exodus chapter twelve occurred before the law was given, so their works could not be considered works of the law. Yet, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul expressed a similar idea to what he said in Romans and Galatians:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (Ephesians 2:8)

He says that salvation is through faith, and that salvation is the gift of God. This salvation is not of our own doing, it is God’s gift to us. But James appears to contradict Paul because he says:

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:17)

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (James 2:24)

So, who is right, Paul or James? Well, actually they are both right. James does not say that a person is saved by works. He says that faith without works is not saving faith. James uses Abraham as his example. In Genesis we are told that God brought Abraham outside and had him “count” the stars. Most commentators tell us that Abraham was supposed to count how many stars there were because that’s how many descendants Abraham would have. Then, we are told that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

However, there is another viewpoint on this interaction between Abraham and God. There are two key words here. The word for “count” is *soper*, which means to tally up a total. But it also means

to “recount” or “retell a story.” The other word we need to look at is the word for “offspring.” It is the word *zeh'-rah* which literally means “seed” as in a seed that is sown. It is the same word that is translated as “offspring” in the following:

and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:18)

Both here in Genesis 22:18 and in Genesis 15:5, the word translated seed (or offspring) is expressed as a singular noun and, in Galatians 3:16 Paul makes a specific point of the fact that the word in Genesis 22:18 refers to a singular “seed” which is Christ.

And to Abraham and to his Seed the promises were spoken. It does not say, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, "And to your Seed," which is Christ. (Galatians 3:16) [MKJV]

With this under our belt, let’s look at the interaction between Abraham and God again.

And He brought him outside and said, Look now toward the heavens and count (recount) the stars, if you are able to count (recount) them. And He said to him, So shall your seed be. And he believed Jehovah. And He credited it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:5-6) [MKJV]

There is a story in the stars and it recounts the fall of man and the need for a savior. The crux of the story is that there is a Messiah who will come and rescue mankind. When Abraham recounted the story about the Messiah, God told him, “So shall your seed (singular) be.” Abraham believed in the Savior, the Messiah, and his faith was credited to him for righteousness.

Either way you look at Abraham’s encounter with God and the stars, it is clear that Abraham was justified by faith. But James appears to say that Abraham was justified by works when he asks the question,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? (James 2:21)

And, he goes right on to say:

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; (James 2:22)

Do you see that? James is not claiming that a person is saved by works. He is saying that a person’s works are the evidence of his faith. That’s why he said earlier that faith without works is dead. If a person claims to believe but does not act on that faith then there is no evidence that the faith is saving faith. Instead, it is what James calls dead faith.

So, we see that Abraham’s works proved he had faith. The faith saved him, the works proved his faith. Likewise, the children of Israel were saved by faith because they believed that God was going to send the death angel. And their faith was proved by their obedient action of sacrificing the lamb and painting the doorposts and lintel with its blood.

For us now living in the church age, the faith question is, do you believe that you are a sinner deserving of death, do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross, and that his blood has paid the penalty for your sins? A person can say they believe that, they can even recite the sinner’s prayer, but are they saved? The proof of their salvation is in the life they live after they make a confession of faith. If their works do not give evidence of their faith, they never were saved. If, however, their works give evidence of their faith, then they are saved. We are saved by faith, but it is demonstrated by works.

Today there are many who call themselves Christians who believe they will get into heaven because of the works they do. Without faith (having never submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ) their works are useless. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus taught many lessons. This was one of them:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

There are also many so-called Christians who claim to believe, but their lifestyle contradicts their profession. When they stand before the Judge they may say, "Lord, open the gates of heaven to us." But He will respond as He did in the parable of the ten virgins saying,

Truly, I say to you, I do not know you. (Matthew 25:12b)

But what about those of us who are genuinely saved? I trust that you are one of these, but - are you one of these whose faith is only occasionally evidenced by your actions, while much of your life is lived for yourself instead of for God? Are the good works you do, done for your own benefit, to gain something for yourself? When you stand before the Bema Seat of Christ, will you see all of your works go up in smoke? You will enter heaven because of the blood of the Pascal Lamb of God, but will you have a crown to cast at the feet of your Savior?

Finally, there are those who are genuinely saved and who have committed their life to God. They do their good works, not to gain something for themselves, but to glorify God. The driving force in their life is to bring praise to God. Their works consistently demonstrate that they are submitted to their Lord and Savior. When they stand before the Bema Seat, they will receive a reward and when they kneel before the great throne of their God and Savior, they will cast their crowns at His feet proclaiming, "You are worthy, oh Lord!"

How about you? Are you saved through faith in the blood of Christ? Do your works prove it? Are you living now for yourself or for your Savior? Will you have a crown to cast at His feet? I want you to carefully think about how you are living out your faith because it has eternal consequences.

Let's pray