Study Notes: Exodus 12:1-30
November 8, 2026: "Pondering Passover"
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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.

- Before the plague on the firstborn is carried out, the Scripture includes a great deal of instruction regarding the Passover and how it was to be celebrated. This divergence serves to explain for the Israelites who would later read this book, the rationale behind their celebration.
- The first statement concerns Israel's calendar. These events are to serve as the beginning of the year for Israel. This speaks to the significance of these events for the people and their birth as a nation.
    - The Faithlife Study Bible gives details about this month, "The name of the first month, "Abib," refers to the time when the ears of barley ripen—agriculturally, springtime (March or April). The month is now known as Nisan. The Israelite calendar was lunisolar and marked the lunar (monthly) reckoning for the needs of agricultural life. The Hebrew month names currently used by Jews come from the Babylonian calendar used during the Babylonian exile.
    - The New American Commentary adds, "Here we read that God has decided that history determines the calendar, and in particular, the history of God's saving act of the exodus does so. Whatever might theoretically have been their previous thinking about a calendar, God decreed to his Old Covenant people that they would henceforth have a calendar designed to remind them of how they first became a people—it happened by reason of their deliverance by his mighty hand out of the bondage of the oppressor, an act so important that it was also to be memorialized by a special annual feast, the Passover."

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

- To prepare for these events, on the tenth day of the month, a lamb is to be taken per family or per group of families. The size of the lamb is based on how many people will eat it on Passover. These lambs are meant to be one-year-old males without defects. The family is to care for the lamb until the fourteenth day of the month, at which point they will slaughter the lamb at twilight.
- When the lamb is slaughtered, some of its blood is to be smeared on the door frames of the houses. It is to be roasted and eaten in haste. All of the lamb is to be eaten, or burned up.
    - The New American Commentary explains how some of these details point to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ: "The ultimate purpose of the Old Testament Passover instruction is to point forward to Christ, to the purpose of his death, memorialized in the ritual of the Lord's Supper that now replaces the Passover, and also to the unity of those accepted by him as his people, his body."

- The idea of having a cloak tucked in, sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand represents the fact that this meal will take place right before the people are driven out of the land. They are to be ready to leave that very night.
    - The New American Commentary points to this as an act of faith: "The Israelites were required to eat the Passover in a manner that demonstrated their readiness to leave Egypt immediately. All aspects of the cooking and eating were designed to minimize time and maximize preparedness for sudden departure. This was an issue of faith: did the families of the Israelites really trust God's promises for them? If so, were they willing to show that trust by arranging themselves so as to be fully prepared for departure, and by eating what was to be their last meal in Egypt in such a manner as not to impede their ability to gather together and start moving as soon as the command reached them? The willingness to go at a moment's notice and never to return cannot have been easy for most Israelites, even though they initially believed Moses' signs (4:31), had witnessed the nine plagues thus far, and had been treated so badly for so long. After all, they had lived in Egypt for 430 years—a long time to acclimate culturally and geographically—and were now being asked to leave behind everything they had ever known: the place where they had lived all their lives, where their parents and grandparents had lived and died, and where they had prospered until the paranoia of the post-Hyksos pharaohs had taken over. They were leaving the houses they had built and raised families in."

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people 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.

- The reason for eating the Passover meal in haste is because of what will occur on that night. This is the night when YHWH will strike Egypt with the tenth and final plague, which will reveal that He is Lord.
- The blood which is to be placed on the doorframes will serve as a sign for the people of the Lord's mercy and protection. The Lord will pass over the houses where there is blood, and the plague will not come upon them.

"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat; that is all you may do.

- Along with commemorating the day of the Passover, the Israelites are to celebrate a festival to the Lord. Like the Passover, this is to be commemorated as a lasting ordinance.
- This ordinance, which is called the Festival of Unleavened Bread, begins on the day of Passover and lasts seven days. On the first day of this ordinance, yeast is to be removed from the home, and there is to be a sacred assembly where no work is done. For seven days, no one is to eat yeast, and if they do they will be cut off from Israel. Again on the seventh day, there is to be another sacred assembly, where no work is done, other than preparing food to eat.

"Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And anyone, whether foreigner or native-born, who eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread."

- The Festival of Unleavened Bread is to be celebrated because it represents the deliverance of the people. This festival is to take place in the first month from the evening of the fourteenth day to the twenty-first day. It is adjacent to, but not the same as Passover.
    - The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains, "The connection between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is close yet distinct. The OT uses both names to refer to the same feast: "Passover Feast" (Ex 34:25; Eze 45:21), "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (Dt 16:16; 2 Ch 30:13, 21; Ezr 6:22). Yet the two rites are treated separately, even if in sequence (see Lev 23:5–6; Nu 28:16–17; 2 Ch 35:1, 17; Ezr 6; Eze 45:21). Likewise, the NT uses this twofold designation for the same feast: pascha (Jn 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55) and azymos (Mt 26:17; Lk 22:1, 7; cf. Mk 14:12).
- No one is to eat yeast, or they will be cut off from the community. This festival is to be held, regardless of where the Israelites live.
    - The Faithlife Study Bible gives insight on the removal of yeast or leaven, "Since leaven was prohibited in sacrifices not connected to the Passover, leaven may have been used in pagan sacrifices. The prohibition thus distinguished Israelite worship from pagan worship. No textual evidence for this exists, though. Also, leaven facilitates fermentation, which means it may have been associated with decomposition (and perhaps death). However, wine and other beverages requiring fermentation were not prohibited in the ot; neither did these beverages make persons unclean. Leaven may have been viewed as something that had life in itself—because it caused fermentation and the rising of bread—and thus it was not to be burned on the altar (Lev 2:4, 11). The prohibition would then be similar to that regarding the consumption of blood (e.g., Lev 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14; Deut 15:23). The use of leavened bread was allowed for the thank offering (Lev 7:13) and the firstfruits offering of the wheat harvest (Lev 23:7), but these were not burned on the altar (Lev 7:14). Primarily viewed negatively in the ot and nt, leaven is referenced positively in some passages (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20–21)."

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

- After he is given the instructions for the Passover, Moses summons the elders of Israel. He recounts the instructions, telling them to select and slaughter the Passover Lamb. They are to follow the instructions that the LORD has given, smearing the blood of the lamb they have slaughtered on their door frames.
- The elders are told not to leave their homes that night, but to remain inside and protected from the destruction that is coming that night.

"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.'" Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron.

- Moses also calls the people to obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance, so they might remember what the Lord has done. When children ask, they are to be told that this ordinance and ceremony is a reminder of the Lord's judgment on Egypt and mercy on Israel.
- The people worship the Lord after being given these instructions, and obey the Lord's word that was given through Moses and Aaron.

At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

- Just as He said in Exodus 11:4-7, at midnight, YHWH strikes down the firstborn of all the Egyptians.
- The Bible spends very little time on the actual action of this plague. It is stated as a matter of fact, reality to tell readers that the Lord kept His word. Far more time is given to the preparations for the plague and the meaning behind them. It serves to remind us that understanding the reasons behind the action, and the need to remember what the Lord has done, should consume our time when thinking about this story.