

## Holy Thursday

# Meal to Meal: The Passover to the Lord's Supper

Texts: Exodus 12:1–13; Mark 14:12–26

### Textual Notes

Exodus 12:1–13

This text from Exodus describes the establishment of the Feast of Passover. Eventually, this becomes a major feast that lasts one week.

**Vv. 1–4:** Note that from the beginning, the Passover was set up for yearly observance. It is also important to note that a lamb was the required sacrifice. Typically, poor families could substitute a lamb for a pair of doves as a sacrifice, but not so for the Passover. Instead, poor families—or families too small to afford a lamb—were to join with another family. But a lamb was required.

**V. 5:** “without blemish . . . a male a year old”: This most certainly points forward to the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who was without sin.

“from the sheep or from the goats”: In early Hebrew, a young sheep or a young goat were both referred to as “a lamb.”

**V. 6:** The lamb is taken from the flock and set aside for four days. This may be to preserve it from being defiled in some manner and thus becoming unfit for sacrifice.

“the whole assembly”: All the lambs are killed at the same time: at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month of the year. All of the lambs point to the one Lamb of God, so they are killed as one.

**V. 7:** The blood of the lamb is to be put on the doorposts and lintel of the opening of each home. In verse 22, we are told that this is done with a bunch of hyssop; and once the blood is spread, the Israelites are not to leave the house until the morning.

**Vv. 8–9:** Roasting the lamb is the best way to be certain that the lamb remains whole. There is also a stipulation that none of the lamb's bones are to be broken (v. 46). This is fulfilled when Jesus on the cross does not have His legs broken to speed up His death. However, the soldiers do break the legs of each of the thieves (John 19:32–33).

**V. 11:** The Israelites are told to eat the meal fully dressed and ready to leave the land of Egypt.

**Vv. 11–13:** “the Lord's Passover”: The Lord reveals what He will do with this tenth plague. All the firstborn males, both human and animal, of every household will be killed when the angel of death visits Egypt. Only those with the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel will be spared. The blood of the lamb—the Lamb—saves God's people.

“on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments”: The previous nine plagues have centered

on various gods of the Egyptian culture. This tenth plague will kill the firstborn son of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was worshipped like a god in Egypt. Therefore, God killing the son of a 'god' in the plague has interesting connotations for when our God offers up His Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world with His precious blood.

Mark 14:12–26

**V. 12:** The Passover is also referred to as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Jews were to have no leaven in their houses for this week-long festival. The prohibition against leaven reminded them of the unleavened bread carried out of Egypt by the Israelites after the angel of death passed over.

**Vv. 13–16:** There is some question as to whether this is a miraculous occurrence, or if Jesus had set this up in advance. Either way, the main focus is to be on the celebration of the Passover meal and the institution of a new meal.

“upper room”: It is possible that the “upper” room is chosen because all worship and communion with God tends to be in elevated places throughout Scripture. High hills, mountains, and the temple all have the shared characteristic of being raised places. This fits with the Hebrew cosmology of heaven being up and hell being down.

**Vv. 17–19:** During the Passover meal, Jesus reveals to His disciples that He will be betrayed by one of the Twelve. This obviously troubles them, but it is interesting that “one after another” asks Jesus, “Is it I?” This tells us that they are not so certain. In the Matthew 26:20–25 account, Judas also asks, “Is it I?” But he does so only after the others have asked first. Perhaps he asks to provide cover for his plan. However, Jesus then identifies him.

**Vv. 22–24:** These are the Words of Institution for the Lord’s Supper according to Mark. Some texts have the word “new” before “covenant” which reminds us of Jeremiah 31:31–32. Jeremiah speaks of the Passover as a mark of the old covenant and the Lord’s Supper as a mark of the new.

The “real presence” of the Lord’s body and blood is made clear with the words “is my.”

Taken in conjunction with the other accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, it is clear that the meal of the Passover is being replaced by the Lord’s meal. All that the Passover points to is soon to be fulfilled by the Lamb of God, and the new covenant will be established.

**V. 25:** “the kingdom of God”: Jesus makes it clear that He will be returning to the throne of God in the courts of heaven.

## The Meal Motif

The “Meal” motif in Scripture intersects with several other important and related motifs. One of these motifs is “The Lord Provides”; we see how it is the Lord who is the provider of these important meals. The other motif, the “Mountain” motif, is one of location, which we touched on in the notes for Lent 2. Many of the amazing meals in the “Meal” motif are provided by God on important mountains.

In the Garden of Eden, all things needed were provided by God, and this certainly included all of the food necessary to support Adam and Eve. This came to a tragic end as they ate a meal of which they were forbidden to eat. Now, outside the garden, meals would not be so easy to come by. However, even in the midst of this new and difficult reality, the Lord God continued to provide for the needs of His people. His overall provision for the needs of both body and soul is frequently illustrated throughout the Bible in terms of gathering together to eat a meal in the presence of the Holy One, who Himself has provided the feast.

In Exodus 24, Moses, Joshua, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ascend Mount Sinai to feast on a meal in the presence of the Lord. This prepares them to move forward through the wilderness to the Promised Land of Canaan—a land described as flowing with milk and honey, a land where they will eat from vineyards they did not plant and live in houses they did not build. The Lord will provide this beautiful land of provision.

In Isaiah 25, the prophet speaks of a great eschatological feast on the mountain of the Lord. This feast is provided by God and is an amazing banquet that will be fulfilled when the people gather in the courts of heaven for the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. These are beautiful pictures of the “Meal” motif.

There are, however, other meals featured in this motif. In our texts, we read of the powerful Passover meal, which then brings us to the Lord’s Supper where the Lamb of God provides His own flesh and blood as the feast. In the wilderness, the Lord provided manna and quail. Then, in His ministry, Jesus fed five thousand people on a mountain slope with bread and fish—bread and fish which He multiplied so that there would be enough. There is also the feeding of the four thousand in the Gospels. The Lord is always providing these great feasts that pull the eyes heavenward in remembrance of the holy place that awaits the faithful.

## Sermon

Thousands upon thousands of lambs—buckets upon buckets of blood—this is the history of the Passover. Long ago, in the land of Egypt, in a land of exile, in a land of slavery, the Israelites suffered under the iron fist of Pharaoh. This line of pharaohs had forgotten the saving work of Joseph and how he had delivered Egypt from the devastating famine. So, they had enslaved the Hebrew people to do the pharaohs’ manual labor—to build their cities and erect their monuments. Terrible hardships, brutal labor, and despair were the lot of the Hebrew people. They groaned under the burdens placed upon them, they suffered under harsh taskmasters, and they cried out to the Lord in their misery. And the Lord God heard their cries, and He remembered His covenant. He sent His servant Moses to bring the people out. He sent Moses to be a mediator between God and Pharaoh, to free the people of Israel from the hand of slavery, to break their yoke of bondage, and to deliver them from the land of exile. Easier said than done!

Pharaoh was a stubborn man. Plague after plague only served to harden his heart further. One plague after another, and yet he stubbornly refused to submit to the will and power of God. But

God had a plan—a final plague—a plague that pointed to His grace promised in the covenant. In preparation, the Israelites were told to take a lamb from their flocks—the best lamb, a male without blemish or spot, a perfect specimen—one lamb for each family. Then, they were to sacrifice the lamb and spread its blood above and around the door to their homes. Why? There was one more plague to come, and this blood would protect and save their firstborn males the angel of death. The blood of the lamb would save them from the plague of death that God would bring upon the people of Egypt.

That very night, the angel of death visited Egypt, and the firstborn male in every family died. Even the firstborn male of every livestock died. All the firstborn males, from the house of the lowest slave to the house of Pharaoh, died. Great wailing and mourning went up from the land of Egypt as they counted their dead. There was no escaping this terrible, avenging angel of death—only the blood of a lamb could save you. Every door of every house that dripped with blood was passed over. It was the blood of the lamb that saved the Israelites from death. Pharaoh gave up, and the people of God came out of Egypt. And so, each year the people of Israel were commanded to celebrate this great rescue, to once again sacrifice a lamb and smear its blood as they remembered the Passover, as they remembered the rescue and deliverance accomplished by the blood of the lamb.

Thousands and thousands of lambs later—after buckets and buckets of blood had been smeared, Jesus gathers with His disciples in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover meal. They eat, they drink, they remember the great salvation God worked for His people as He brought them out of Egypt—delivering Israel from the land of their suffering and ending their exile in a foreign land. Then, Jesus says, “I have something new for you.” Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, takes bread, gives thanks, and gives it to His disciples. “This is My body.” Then, He takes the cup, drinks, gives thanks, and passes it to His disciples. “This is My blood.”

The Old Testament sacrament of the Passover is now fulfilled and replaced by the New Testament Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The blood of thousands upon thousands of lambs reaches its fulfillment, replaced by the blood of one Lamb who takes away the sin of the whole world, Jesus Christ. All of those lambs, the best from each flock, lambs without blemish or spot, are fulfilled and replaced by the perfect, pure, and holy Son of God. The salvation, the deliverance from the land of slavery and exile is fulfilled, replaced by salvation from the slavery to sin and death. A return from exile, out of the land of bondage into a new freedom—a new covenant.

One holy meal to another, one precious sacrament to another, one blood rescue to another; this is the story, the salvation history, of God’s people. This is the journey: the return from exile for the children of God. From the land of slavery to sin and death, through the waters of Baptism, into the Upper Room to receive the true body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ—a great journey, a new meal, a new sacrament, and a new covenant in Christ.

And we are the people of this new covenant. We are the people called out of the land of exile.

We are the people washed in the blood of the Lamb. We are the people who have received the grace of God in Word and Sacrament. We are the people for whom the blood of the Lamb was poured out upon the frame of the cross at Calvary. The blood of Jesus poured out upon the tree cleanses us from every spot and stain—all guilt and corruption, all iniquity and sin: washed away. We are rescued and redeemed, returned from exile to a beautiful relationship with God. We are the people of God who live each day in the joy of walking with Him. Once we were “no people,” but now we are “God’s people” once again.

Thousands and thousands of lambs slain—buckets and buckets of blood smeared—all of the Passover lambs, all of the blood points to the cross. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! The blood shed on the holy hill of Calvary brings us back to the Upper Room, and the words of Jesus echo in our hearts: “Take eat; this is My body, which is given for you. . . . Take, drink; this is My blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do in remembrance of Me.” The holy meal of the Passover points to the new holy meal that Jesus institutes in the Upper Room and validates upon the cross. And as we eat His body and drink of the cup of His blood, our eyes are turned back to the cross. We remember the sacrifice of the Lamb as He once again cleanses us from sin and shame.

From meal to meal, God delivers His people from the land of exile, rescuing us from sin and death. Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb. His blood poured out shields us from the avenging angel of death. His blood poured out overcomes the triple enemies of sin, death, and Satan. His blood poured out gives forgiveness, life, and salvation to the new-covenant people of God. A Lenten journey: meal to meal, Passover to the Lord’s Supper. A sacramental journey marked by the blood of the Lamb, our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. In His name. Amen.