

Jesus in the Exodus

Exodus 12-13

We have reached one of the great high points in the book of Exodus – the deliverance of the people of Israel out of Egypt and out of slavery. This is a huge event in the history of Israel that has been commemorated by feasts and celebrations among the Jewish people ever since it happened. Today we are going to look at the events that happened as well as the rituals that God commanded the people to do to commemorate them.

Every people group has different rituals or customs they participate in to commemorate things from their history. Think about what you do on holidays or even birthday parties in your family. For Christmas you might put up a Christmas tree or hang stockings. You might sing Christmas carols and open gifts. You might eat certain kinds of foods only for Christmas. For Easter you might dye easter eggs or hide them for the kids and then get together for a feast that usually includes ham. We have customs for 4th of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and maybe more. You might have traditions you follow for birthday parties or other important days in your family. If you think about them, some of these rituals probably make sense, but some of them probably seem a little weird.

I looked up some weird rituals that happen around the world – and there are a lot of them. Here are a couple I thought were appropriate to share in church:

- **Bullet Ant gloves.** When boys of the Satere-Mawe tribe in the Amazon come of age, they must prove their manhood in a tradition that's torturous and terrifying. The young men first trap bullet ants which are then drugged by a medicine man, who places the deadly creatures in woven mitts. It is said the sting of a bullet ant can be compared to a bullet hitting the flesh. The young men then have to wear the mitts on their hands and dance for ten minutes to take their mind off the pain. Satere-Mawe men have to go through this ritual at least 20 times in their lifetime.
- **Toddler tossing.** In some parts of India, there is an age old practice where toddlers are tossed from the roof of temples 15-30 feet above the ground and are caught by a blanket held out by devotees. This traumatic ordeal is said to bring good luck to the child. (Child rights activists managed to ban it in 2011)

Some rituals are so weird that at some point the people must turn to each other and say, “Why are we doing this again?” Eventually people want to make sense of what they’re doing, especially with rituals that seem really weird. This morning we’re going to look at three rituals God commanded the Israelites to follow when he brought them out of Egypt. I think two of them would have made sense, but the third was really weird. I’m not sure that they could have understood what it meant, be we can today, and its meaning is really powerful. So that’s where I want to end up, but first I want to look at the actual events that happened.

We ended last week with Moses warning Pharaoh of a terrible plague. Nine plagues had come and gone which the previously unknown God, Yahweh, was revealing his glory to the Egyptians and the people of Israel. Now Egypt was in really bad shape. Hail, boils, and locusts had devastated their landscape, livestock, and bodies, and humiliated their gods. But Pharaoh refused to give in and let the people of Israel go. After the ninth plague he was given a terrible warning: “Let my people go, or at midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die.” But he refused to listen. What happened next was a little strange...

Read 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. ²² 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. ²³ 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.

I don’t know what the Israelites thought about this – it must have sounded pretty strange – but they didn’t ask any questions. It says they went out and did exactly what they were told. They killed the lambs, put the blood on their doorframes and went inside to wait.

Read Exodus 12:29-30.

At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was

in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.³⁰ And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

Family members in every home, neighbors and friends – everyone who was the first born was suddenly dead. That would have been a nightmare. It was a severe act of judgment against Egypt because of their wickedness, and because Pharaoh refused to obey. The plague was so devastating that Pharaoh finally relented.

Read Exodus 12:31-33.

Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, “Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said.³² Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!”

³³ The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.”

Pharaoh finally had enough, and the people did as well. As badly as they wanted to keep their slave workforce it wasn't going to happen – Yahweh had claimed them. They were all going to die if they didn't get the Israelites out of there, so they thrust them out of the land. After 400 years of slavery, they were forced out in a matter of hours.

Read Exodus 12:34-36.

So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders.³⁵ The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing.³⁶ And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

They left so abruptly that morning that they didn't have time to add yeast to their dough. They grabbed their unleavened dough and bowls, and the plunder they received from the Egyptians who gave them what they asked for out of fear of Moses and Yahweh, and they moved out. When they left, they weren't poverty stricken slaves anymore, they had the silver, gold, and clothing they received from the Egyptians.

It must have been a surreal experience as they walked out of Egypt and headed east into the wilderness. “What just happened?” They had seen the signs and wonders, heard about and witnessed some of the plagues and devastation, heard the cries of the Egyptians from the night before, and now they were walking out of Egypt, carrying a massive amount of wealth that the Egyptians had given to them... Unbelievable... Yahweh had fought for them and done everything he said he would do. And as utterly impossible as it seemed, it was actually happening. They were free from the house of slavery.

Read Exodus 12:37-42.

And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth (sookuth), about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.³⁹ And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

⁴⁰ The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years.⁴¹ At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.⁴² It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

Yahweh was faithful. He did exactly what he said he would do. Moses described it as a “*a night of watching by the Lord*” as Yahweh watched over his people that night. I also became a night of watching by the people in years to come as they observed several rituals Yahweh gave them to commemorate what happened. We’re going to look at them, but I want to read the last part of this story first, which is at the end of chapter 13.

Exodus 13:20-22.

And they moved on from Succoth (sookuth) and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.²¹ And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

So God went with them in a very visible manifestation of his presence. Yahweh had delivered them from Egypt and slavery and they were on their way.

The night of their deliverance was an awesome and terrible night and the Lord wanted them to remember it throughout their generations, so he gave them three rituals to observe in the years to come. The instructions for those rituals are in between the parts of the story we just read and I want to look at them and talk about what they mean.

The first ritual was the Passover. This tied into what God told them to do with the lambs on the night they were delivered. God gave instructions to Moses and Aaron in the beginning of Exodus 12 that when the people of Israel settled in the land of Canaan, in the first month of the year, on a certain day, each family was to go out to their herds and chose one lamb. Exodus 12:5-11 says *“Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats,⁶ 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.⁷ 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.⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it...¹¹ 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.”* This was the first ritual.

The second ritual started with the Passover but continued for 7 days and it was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God gave Moses these instructions in Exodus 13:6-7 *“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord.⁷ Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory.”*

The third ritual was the consecration of their firstborn. Exodus 13:1-2 says *“The Lord said to Moses,² “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.”* When a firstborn animal was born, they were to sacrifice it to the Lord and when a firstborn son was born, they were to redeem them with some kind of payment (Ex. 13:15).

So these were the three rituals to follow to commemorate that night. And as you look at them, two of them make a lot of sense. The consecration of the firstborn is explained in Ex. 13:14-15 *“And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.”* So the consecration of the firstborn commemorates the death of the firstborn in Egypt and makes a lot of sense.

The feast of unleavened bread also makes sense. God instructed them in Ex. 13:8 that when the people held the feast, *“You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’”* The unleavened bread reminded the people that they were thrust out of Egypt so suddenly they didn’t have time to add leaven to the dough. So that makes a lot of sense.

But the Passover is where things get a little strange. Why were they supposed to kill the lamb and spread its blood on their doorframes? Yes, that’s the same thing the people did that night in Egypt in order to be spared from the Destroyer, but why did they do that? What did that have to do with anything that was going on? The only explanation given is in Ex. 12:26-27 *“And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ ²⁷ 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.’”* So the blood of the lamb was to commemorate how the Lord passed over their homes and spared their lives. But why the blood?

The unleavened bread had to do with the haste in which they left Egypt. The consecration of the firstborn had to do with the death of the firstborn of Egypt. But what did the spreading of the lamb’s blood over their doorframes have to do with? It just doesn’t make sense like the other two. It doesn’t seem to be linked to anything in the story...

That’s because it’s not. It’s not linked to something in *that* part of the story, it’s linked to something that was yet to come – something that Yahweh wanted to

prepare the people for in upcoming generations. 1500 years later, after the people of Israel had spread the blood of the lamb over their doorframes and eaten the Passover meal about 1500 times, John the Baptist saw Jesus of Nazareth and declared: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29)

Jesus was the one that the blood of the lambs was linked to. Jesus gave his life and shed his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, *“You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”* Jesus paid the ransom that set sinners free by shedding his blood on the cross.

That’s what the blood of the lambs were linked to. Not something that had happened yet, but something that was yet to come. It was the center of Yahweh’s plan to reveal his glory and provide forgiveness and reconciliation for mankind. So when he began to carry out his plan by bringing the people out of bondage in Egypt, he did it through the blood of those Passover lambs. Jesus was in the Exodus. They put the blood on their doorframes and were spared from death and delivered from slavery. And that’s what Yahweh wanted them to remember every year. They were delivered from slavery and spared from death through the blood of the lamb.

God wants us to remember the same thing today – that’s why we do Communion, and that’s what we should think about often. Jesus laid down his life and shed his blood for the forgiveness of sin. For those of us who follow him, he has spared us from death and set us free from bondage. Let’s rejoice in him as we continue to worship.