

JANUARY 25

Exodus 12, 13:16

The pinnacle of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh happens in the tenth plague. Finally, God sends a plague that will strike at the heart of every Egyptian family. Every Father and Mother in the nation will be grief stricken when the angel of death takes every firstborn.

Well, he doesn't take every firstborn. The Israelites were waved by the blood of the Lamb. The angel 'passed over' every house that had blood on its doorposts, thus the festival of 'passover' is aptly named. This enraged Pharaoh so completely that he commanded the Israelites to leave.

The description of Passover in chapter 12 is filled with meaning for both Israel and the church. Every Israelite household must select a lamb on the tenth day of the month of Nissan. That month, from that time on, would be the first of their religious year. The lamb was to be tethered between the dooryard of the home until the fourteenth day, when it was slaughtered between the evenings, or sometime between the going down of the sun and absolute darkness. The blood of the victim was to be applied to the two sides and to the lintel of each house with a sprig of hyssop. The entire roasted flesh of the lamb was then to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. During this hurried meal, the family must be in a state of preparation, dressed for a journey.

The lamb, of course, typifies the Lamb of God, and we must believe that when John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world,*" that he understood the connection he was making to the Passover. The blood on the doorposts spoke of the atonement, which in Hebrew literally means 'covering'. Later, we understand that this 'atoning blood of the Lamb' will be fully realized in Jesus' own blood on the cross that saves us from death.

The application of the blood indicates that the person who applied it believes in its power, and the ability of the blood to protect him from the wrath of God, or as later theology would express it, to "save him from his sin." Roasting by fire conveys the idea of judgment, which Christ vicariously suffered for us. .

And through the passover, the Israelites were not only allowed to leave, but they were asked to do so.

With the clothing and valuables that they had borrowed from the Egyptians, they left in haste from Rameses and Goshen, and they fled to Succoth, near the edge of the Sinai wilderness. The magnitude of that migration staggers the imagination because over 600,000 adults, plus children and animals, entered the journey. Following the Passover feast, apparently while in Succoth, Moses was further instructed concerning its significance. For seven days following the feast itself, there was going to be a secondary, related observance, known as the "Feast of

Unleavened Bread." Leaven is generally a symbol of sin in Scripture - although it is first mentioned here in this passage - and was to be removed from the home as a sign of separation between its inhabitants and the former sinful elements of their past lives. Moreover, because God had graciously spared the firstborn of Israel at the Passover, all firstborn sons were to be dedicated to His service.

The passage that we read today, of course, underscores the whole theme of the book of Exodus, which is the theme of redemption - God redeems His people from slavery. It doesn't take much thought to realize that this theme is, of course, the theme of the Christian experience as well - God redeeming His people from slavery, by the provision of a Passover Lamb, who is our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the sacrifice of that Passover lamb on that first night of Passover saved the lives of the firstborn, who otherwise would have been under sentence of death, so the sacrifice of our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, saves us from the sentence of death, which is rightfully ours because of our sin.

Joining the Israelites in their exodus out of Egypt was what the scripture calls "a mixed multitude." This mixed multitude probably included other Semites who had settled in the Delta region, and perhaps were also subjected to enslavement like the Israelites, but it is also possible that many native Egyptians, who were impressed by the power of the God of the Hebrews, also joined with them, and perhaps in some cases even accepted the covenant faith of Israel. It is also possible that some of these people were genuinely attracted to the faith, but the majority probably left Egypt for other reason. It will be remembered that it was they who created serious problems for Moses during the years of wandering. Israelites left not only with jewels and clothing, but also with flocks and herds and a great number of cattle, all of this being the literal fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham back in Genesis 15. It is like the Egyptian slave owners said "Here... take my gold, some cattle, some food and get out of here!"

It is interesting to me that the account of the exodus begins with God's careful instruction to Moses regarding the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Now, whether these instructions came to Moses on the actual night of the Passover or at some time before or after that event, they are placed here at the head of the account, precisely because of the importance God and Moses attached to them. We will soon enough have the opportunity (when we study Leviticus) to think more about the importance of ritual and ceremony to the people of Israel, but for now mark this down in your memory. God places a very high premium upon helping His people remember His mighty acts of deliverance and His continuing faithfulness to them. They are to remember the night of deliverance from death by a Feast of Passover, and they are to remember the days of departure into freedom by a Feast of Unleavened Bread. (From this point onward in the Bible, yeast, or leaven, becomes a symbol of sin - and the omission of leaven from the bread-baking process, which on the night of the first Passover had simply been a concession to the time restraints upon them and the speed with which they needed to move, has now become a symbol of separation from sin.)

God's words that this annual celebration will be "like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead" are the origins of the remarkable custom still preserved by Orthodox Jews of using "phylacteries" or "tephillin" - small leather pouches tied around the forehead and around the inside of the left arms of adult males, so it will be closest to the heart. These pouches contain four passages of the Law written on strips of parchment.