



# JESUS THE PASSEOVER LAMB



When we approach holy days in the Christian year, there is always a sense of familiarity. Some of us have celebrated these holidays ever since we can remember. When something is so familiar to us, we could easily pass it by without giving it much thought. This is especially true as we approach Holy Week and the remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for us. In order to never take His sacrifice for granted, we should always dive a little deeper into some of the events of Holy Week to make it come alive for us again. There are always new meanings and understandings to be discovered through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

When we look at the Bible in its entirety, it's amazing how the Old Testament connects to the New Testament and how often it alludes to Jesus' life and sacrifice. One instance of this is the Passover Feast and the Last Supper. We may already know that when Jesus and His disciples gathered at the Last Supper, they were together to celebrate Passover. However, it is more than just a coincidence that the Last Supper happened to be during Passover. We can look all the way back to Exodus 12, when the Passover Feast was instituted, to see how that moment was a foreshadowing for what Jesus would do for all humanity.

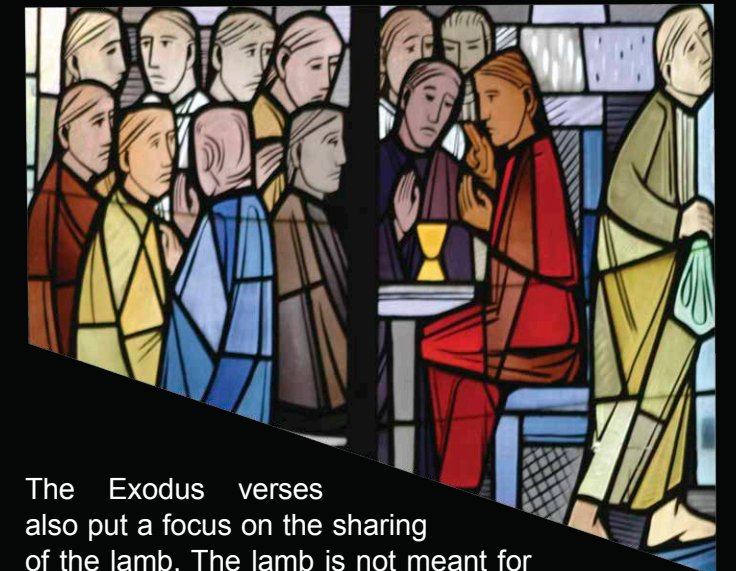
Passover was first established right before the Israelites fled Egypt to escape slavery, as we can read in Exodus 12:11 where the Lord states the Passover meal should be eaten in haste and with all of their things ready so they could leave Egypt quickly. After this initial Passover Feast when the Israelites left Egypt, Passover was then celebrated every year as a remembrance of their freedom and is still celebrated by Jewish people today.

## WHY IS THE IMAGE OF A LAMB APPLIED TO JESUS?

The first and last portions of Exodus 12 are God's instructions to Moses and Aaron on how to celebrate the Passover meal. His specific directions are what reveal the connections to His Son, who would come to earth many years later to give His life for our sins.

In Exodus 12:3 and 4, the Lord instructs Moses and Aaron to tell the Israelites, "On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb." From

these verses, we can see that the lamb is given great significance; it is to be shared as the main part of the Passover Feast among many people. We can draw a parallel between the Passover lamb and Jesus as the new Passover Lamb. Jesus is often referred to as the Lamb of God, as seen in John 1:29, and also as "our Passover" by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7. Why is the image of a lamb applied to Jesus? Not only does the animal represent the meekness and gentleness of Christ, but just as the Jewish people would bring a lamb to the priest as an atonement for their sin, Jesus was brought before God as a sacrifice on behalf of man's sin. One difference between the two, however, is that the Jews' sacrifice was repeated, but Jesus' sacrifice was once and lasts for all time. We are reminded of this every Sunday when we hear the words during the consecration of Holy Communion, "the *once brought, eternally valid sacrifice* of Jesus Christ."



The Exodus verses also put a focus on the sharing of the lamb. The lamb is not meant for just a few people, it is meant to be divided by many, even sharing it with a neighbor's family. This is true of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb. He did not die for the sins of one person, but for the sins of *all people in all times*. His love and sacrifice should not be hoarded by a small group, but should be shared with as many people as possible.

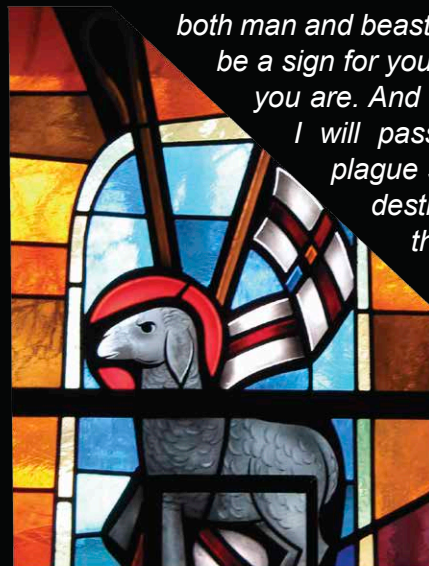
Isaiah also paints a strong picture of the Messiah's sacrifice, further reinforcing the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God: "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent" (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus is the Lamb of God because He is both the sacrifice presented to God and the sacrifice provided by God, removing the world's sin and taking it on Himself alone.

Continuing with God's instructions for the Passover Feast, Exodus 12:5 states that the "lamb shall be without blemish." The Passover lamb's connection here to Jesus is more evident. While Jesus was fully man, He was also fully God and therefore, perfect. He was without sin and faithfully submitted to His Father's will.

In verse 6, we're told that the Lord then says to Moses and Aaron, "Now you shall keep [the lamb] until the fourteenth day of the same month." The Israelites were instructed to keep their lamb in their house for four days, from the "tenth of this month" to the "fourteenth day of the same month." Their sacrificial lamb wasn't just something they picked up at the local farm when they were ready to slaughter it. They had to let the lamb stay with them for four days. Anyone who is a lover of animals may understand the implication of this. The family may have started to care for the lamb, seen it as something valuable and precious to their family, so when it was later sacrificed, it affected those who had to care for it in those four days. We also want Jesus' sacrifice to affect us. He wasn't just a stranger who decided to give His life for us; He is someone we know, who we love, and we can feel the loss of His death all the more for those reasons.

JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD BECAUSE HE IS BOTH THE SACRIFICE PRESENTED TO GOD AND THE SACRIFICE PROVIDED BY GOD

Exodus 12:7 describes that after the lamb is killed, some of its blood should be put on the two doorposts and the lintel of the house where it was eaten. God explains the importance of this in verses 12 and 13: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt; both man and beast... Now 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 the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." The



Israelites who followed this instruction could rejoice in the fact that God spared their firstborns. God knew that this plague would urge the Pharaoh to release

the Israelites from slavery because of the fear of inciting more of God's wrath. As God said of the houses that had the lamb's blood on the doorposts, "I will pass over you," slavery passed over the Israelites and they now had access to freedom. While slavery has been a reality for different groups of people over time, what has held all people captive since the time of Adam and Eve? Sin is the heaviest chain and we cannot lift it ourselves. And God knew this. So, He sent His only Son to earth to die for our sins, to release us from those chains. Because of Jesus' blood on the cross, judgement for sin can pass over us and we can have access to a relationship with God again. Just as the lamb's blood on the doorposts ultimately provided the Israelites their freedom, Jesus gives us freedom from the weight of our sins.

And so the Israelites made their exodus from Egypt and continued to celebrate the Passover every year, and Jesus and the twelve disciples at the Last Supper was just another celebration of that same Passover Feast: Until Jesus was betrayed and turned over to the Romans. Until He was hung on the cross. Until He willingly gave His life for all people. That year, Jesus breathed new life into the celebration of Passover, which would have an eternal effect on all people, not just the Israelites.

For one more example, we can look at John's account in John 19:31-37. Here, he tells of how the day after Jesus' crucifixion, the Jews asked Pilate if the dying process could be sped up so that no bodies remain on the cross on the holy Sabbath day. This is done by breaking their legs, so that they had no way to support their bodies, quickly causing death by asphyxiation. The soldiers went to the two men who had hung next to Jesus and broke their legs, so that they immediately died. When they came to Jesus, they found that He was already dead (cr. John 19:30). Therefore, Jesus' legs did not need to be broken. John, a witness of the breaking of the legs, said that this was done that "Scripture should be fulfilled" (John 19:36). What is John referring to here? We can go back to Exodus 12:46 to see one other rule from God regarding the Passover lamb: "nor shall you break one of its bones." Jesus' bones were not broken during His sacrifice. This happened so that Scripture could be fulfilled and that we could see that it was fulfilled.

Jesus' death gives a special meaning to the Passover meal. It gives further clarity to us on what Jesus's death is about and the vital role He has in our lives: the Lamb of God gave **His** life to give **us** life. - VAA/MJB/LRK

WHAT DO YOU SEE?



JOHN 1:29