

THE PASSOVER AND THE PASSION

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St. Patrick Catholic Church

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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. A “Fateful” 2013 Lecture

0.2. The Centrality of the Passover

- a. The centrality of the Passover in Scripture
- b. The centrality of the Passover in Jewish tradition
- c. The centrality of the Passover in Christian tradition

1. THE PASSOVER STORY IN EXODUS 12: A SUMMARY EXPOSITION

1.1. The Story (ESVCE)

¹The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵Your 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. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹In 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. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³The 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 no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. ¹⁵Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. ¹⁷And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. ¹⁸In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. ²⁰You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

²¹Then 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. ²²Take 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. ²³For 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. ²⁴You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. ²⁵And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. ²⁶And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ ²⁷you 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.’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

²⁸Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

²⁹At 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. ³⁰And 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. ³¹Then 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. ³²Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!”

³³The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” ³⁴So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. ³⁵The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. ³⁶And 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.

³⁷And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. ³⁹And 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.

⁴³ And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. ⁴⁶ It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸ If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. ⁴⁹ There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.”

⁵⁰ All the people of Israel did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ And on that very day the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

1.2. The Setting of the Story

The book of Exodus unfolds in three parts, recounting three great moments in Israel’s story:

- I. *The Exodus*: God’s Redemption of His People from Egypt and Their Removal to Sinai (so that they may worship him there), chs. 1–18
- II. *The Covenant*: God’s Revelation to His People and Their Reception of Torah (the Decalogue and its expansion), chs. 19–24
- III. *The Tabernacle*: God’s Residence with His People and Their Readiness for Worship, chs. 25–40

Within this broad framework, the Passover narrative of ch. 12 falls, obviously, in the first part—the story of God’s delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt, after which great event the book receives its title *Exodus* (=departure). Passover, in other words, is part of the Redemption story in Scripture.

1.3. The Structure of the Story

- A. YHWH’s Speech to Moses and Aaron: Instructions on Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, vv. 1-20
 1. Introduction: Calibrating the calendar, vv. 1-2
 2. Preparations for the exodus deliverance, vv. 3-11
 3. Explanation, vv. 12-13
 4. Permanent institution of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, vv. 14-20
- B. Moses’ Speech to the People: Instructions on Passover and Israel’s Response of Worship and Obedience, vv. 21-28
 1. Moses instructs the elders of Israel, vv. 21-27a
 2. The people’s response of worship and obedience, vv. 27b-28
- C. Narrative Report: Death of the Firstborn and Preparations for the Journey, with a Summary of the Departure from Egypt, vv. 29-42
 1. The tenth plague: The death of Egypt’s firstborn and Pharaoh’s response, vv. 29-32
 2. Preparations for the journey, vv. 33-39
 3. Summary of the exodus, vv. 40-42
- D. YHWH’s Speech to Moses and Aaron: The Passover Ordinance and the Obedient Response, vv. 43-51

1. The Passover ordinance, vv. 43-49
2. The obedient response and the consequent deliverance, vv. 50-51

1.4. A Summary of the Story: Selected Key Points

- a. (vv. 1-2) At least in terms of faith and self-understanding, the Jewish year is calibrated from the Passover. It is Passover that sets the exodus in motion, and so marks the new beginning of life for Israel—from the enslavement of Pharaoh to the service of YHWH (cf. Exod 3:7-12). In the exodus and the Passover liturgy which commemorates it, Israel is “reborn.” Similarly, the Church calibrates her calendar theologically and liturgically from Christ’s Advent and Passion, with all of life orientated to this.
- b. (vv. 3-11) Among the details in preparation for the eventful night, emphasis falls on “all the [assembly of the] congregation of Israel” (vv. 3, 6); stipulations concerning the lamb (vv. 3-6, a male “without blemish,” etc.); and specific prescriptions on the smearing of its blood, how it is to be cooked and eaten, the disposal of any leftovers, and the necessity of eating in haste (vv. 7-11). Significantly, the Passover sacrifice would not consist in the mere *death* of the lamb, but in the actual *eating* of its flesh (‘eat’ 7x in vv. 3-11, 19x in ch. 12 alone!).
- c. (vv. 12-13) ‘Passover’ (*pesah*), from the verb ‘to pass over’ (*pāsaḥ*), identifies YHWH’s intention to traverse the land of Egypt, striking all the Egyptian firstborn (the 10th plague) and executing judgment on their gods (cf. Num 33:4), while “passing over” Israel in their blood-signed homes. Passover, then, is “a solemn ritual to be performed in order to protect Israel from the last plague on Egypt—the visitation by the angel of death who claimed the lives of every Egyptian firstborn” (*CBD*). YHWH’s “seeing” the blood (v. 13) does not imply that he doesn’t know in which houses his people dwell; rather, participation on Israel’s part depends on their obedient identification, on their identifying themselves as Israelites and not Egyptians.
- d. (vv. 14-20) The once-for-all redemptive event of Israel’s exodus from Egypt is to be memorialized perpetually in a liturgical celebration “*throughout your generations . . . as an ordinance for ever*” (vv. 14, 17). To disregard the liturgical requirements, including getting rid of the old leaven (=good riddance to Egypt!), is to forfeit participation in the covenant blessings; it is to be “cut off from Israel” (vv. 15, 19). In other words, *the liturgical celebration of Passover is as important as the actual event of the departure from Egypt itself*. To be noted: We are reminded repeatedly (10x in chs. 12–13!) that it is a Passover *to/for YHWH*, i.e., it is *his* Passover (12:11, 14, 27, 42 [2x], 48; 13:6, 12 [2x], 15). *YHWH’s* purposes are at stake here; Israel’s deliverance is not merely for Israel’s own sake. As the historical Passover was *to/for YHWH* (v. 11), in the interest of redeeming a people for himself, so its liturgical commemoration in perpetuity is *to/for YHWH* (v. 14), with the same interest in view.
- e. (vv. 21-28) As earlier (vv. 12-13), YHWH’s plan is to pass through the land of Egypt for destruction and to “pass over” Israel for protection from “the destroyer,” presumably an angel or aide who works on YHWH’s behalf. Since the Passover rite is a perpetual “*sacrifice* [!] of YHWH’s Passover” (v. 27), not a mere symbolic reminder of the original sacrificial lamb that set the historic exodus event in motion (cf. Deut 16:5-6), a child’s query about the meaning and significance of it all is answered not in terms of a simple report for the sake of transmitting historical information (“the lamb died in our place, just believe it”), but as a confession of Israel’s ongoing *participation* in the decisive act of redemption from Egypt. By means of the Passover ritual, all successive generations are able to *participate* in the once-for-all historic redemption from Egypt.

- f. (vv. 29-42) The enclosing of a narrative report of the escape from Egypt within Passover speeches (vv. 1-28 [29-42] 43-51) effectively accents the liturgical character of the event. *The exodus deliverance of Israel does not consist merely in a one-and-done historical event, on which future generations will look back with grateful memory on what God did at a particular moment in the distant past, but in the re-enactment of or renewed participation in that event in the ongoing experience of Israel's religious life. By means of the Passover liturgy each new generation in some mysterious way participates in the exodus*, or as Jewish tradition expressed it: "In every generation a person is duty-bound to regard himself as if he personally has gone forth from Egypt" (*Mishnah Pesahim*)—an early version of "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" "Indeed, I was!" answers the Passover-observing Israelite. In this light, the Passover is regarded as "a night of watching" (*šimmurîm*, lit., "keepings," v. 42): YHWH's *keeping* his covenant promises to his people and delivering them from Egyptian bondage is memorialized in God's people *keeping* their promises through the Passover in every generation. YHWH's vigilance in delivering his people receives from them a perpetual response of vigilance in the liturgy which *keeps* it ever alive.
- g. (vv. 43-49) The prescribed qualifications for eating the Passover place an unmistakable accent on the prerequisite of circumcision—the rite of initiation into the covenant community. It also prescribes where the Passover is to be eaten ("in one house" and not carried forth "outside the house"), how the victim is to be treated ("you shall not break a bone of it"), who is required to keep it ("all the congregation of Israel"), and the fact that "one law" applies to all ("for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you"). Clearly the Passover is an instance of "closed communion" (not an open table) in the context of an undivided covenant community—a family meal for the "congregation of Israel" alone, including those brought near by means of accepting the sign of membership in this covenant community which confesses the God of Passover (i.e., circumcision; cf. Gen 17:1-14).
- h. (vv. 50-51) The obedience of the exodus generation (v. 50) and their consequent deliverance (v. 51) function as a kind of object lesson for future generations, for whom all the regulations about keeping the Passover are actually relevant: *Look back at how the exodus generation kept that first Passover and see how God delivered them. Go and do likewise, keeping the Passover liturgy, and God will deliver you as well!* The effect of these details is to elevate the Passover ordinance to the same level of divine authority as the earlier commands leading to the original Passover event (i.e., the escape from Egypt). The transcendent effectiveness of the saving event is mediated and maintained through the commemorative liturgy of the Passover, by which that saving event *becomes exodus* for every believing participant for all time.
- i. Conclusion: It is noteworthy that the Passover story of Exodus 12 does not unfold in terms of historical event and ongoing *explanation* of that event, but in terms of historical event and *ongoing participation in that event*. In other words, the means by which salvation is experienced and faith is preserved in each generation of God's people is through *reenacted ritual* or *perpetual liturgy* (Passover ceremony), not through mere *explanation* or *exposition*. This is how the original saving event is kept alive in the present.
- There is no hint in Exodus that salvation is a done deal and its ongoing celebration optional, nor is there any possibility that the relationship between event and liturgy can be summed up in something like grateful memory. This is not to imply, of course, that the Passover should not be celebrated with gratitude, but to underscore that Passover involved more than thankful recollection of the past—more than ongoing faith in a one-time saving event in history. *The rituals are in fact the vehicles or the means in and through which God effects salvation for successive generations*. This is how the redemptive experience becomes a lived reality for each Israelite in every age.

Put differently, the Passover story of Exodus does not present God's action against the Egyptians and his deliverance of Israel in terms of a one-and-done historical event on which future generations simply look back in faith and heartfelt gratitude. They are to enter and reenter continually into that grand saving event through renewed participation in the Passover ceremony instituted at that time. This is "the mystery of faith" by which each new generation actually participates in the historic act of redemption—the means by which the original exodus becomes *their* exodus in the ongoing experience of their religious life. The ongoing liturgical observance is an essential part of the saving event.

This explains why in the response given to children's questions in generations to come (12:26-27; 13:8, 14-15) parents do not simply report in factual language something God did for our forefathers "way back then," which we now commemorate once in a while as a way of jogging our memories and saying "Thank You, God, for doing that." Rather, they insist that what happened *there* and *then* to our fathers is happening *here* and *now* to *us*. This is how *we* participate in *that*. This is how the benefits of that once-for-all redemptive event are actualized or made alive for us now, forming a direct link between the saving actions of God in the past and his saving deeds in the present.

In short, *the liturgical observance of Israel's salvation is as important in the ongoing life of the community as the event which it commemorates*. In other words, *just as YHWH saved Israel by means of the original event of the exodus deliverance, so YHWH will save future generations of Israelites through their faithful participation by means of the Passover instituted with that first generation who escaped Egypt*.

2. FROM YHWH'S PASSOVER TO JESUS' PASSION

2.1. From Exodus 12, Christian readers will already anticipate many points of connection that lean toward a grander fulfillment in a New Exodus, a New Passover, and a New Passover Lamb. Indeed, "Of all the sacrifices of Israel, the immolation [killing and offering] of the paschal lamb during the feast of Passover most perfectly prefigures the Eucharist. . ." (Feingold, *The Eucharist*, 55). Some of the many anticipated points of connection include:

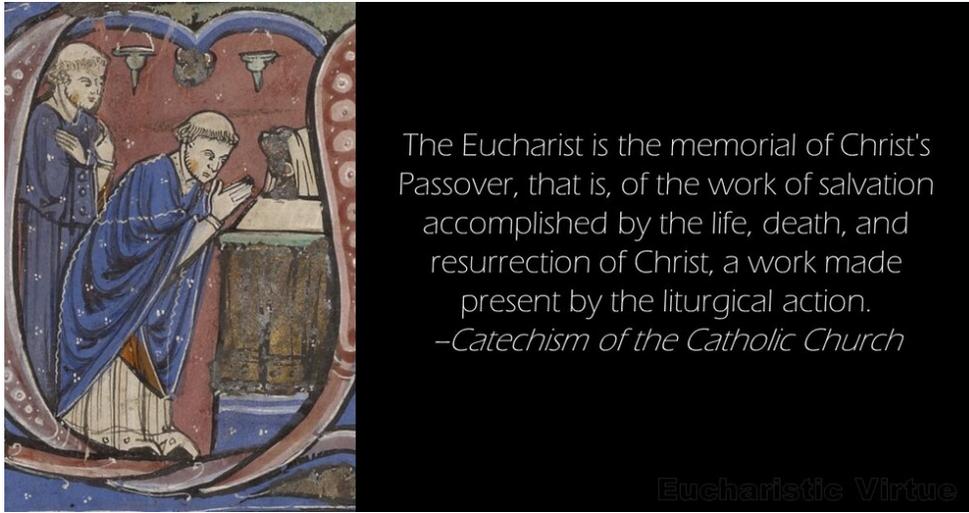
- the sacrifice of a perfect male lamb and the smearing of its blood on the wooden doorposts and lintels of the homes by means of a hyssop branch;
- the necessity of eating not merely, say, a cracker or wafer that *symbolizes* the lamb, but of eating the actual flesh of the sacrificial lamb, and not just as a *reminder*, as something that *makes us think of* the lamb, but as a memorial *participation*;
- the command to keep the Passover as a perpetual, not merely occasional, "memorial" or feast of "remembrance";
- the contingency of covenant blessing on faithful participation in the Passover;
- the fact that every Passover is a new *sacrifice*, not merely a symbolic reminder of the original sacrificial lamb that set the historic exodus event in motion;
- the restriction of Passover observance to a single (undivided) house and to those who meet the requisite conditions for the covenant family feast;
- the prohibition of breaking even a single bone of the Passover lamb; and
- the requirement of ridding lives and homes of any trace of the old "leaven" (symbolic of corruption) for the proper observance of the Passover.

2.2. Between the Original Passover and Jesus' New Passover: Some Developments

a. From homes to Temple

- b. The Passover *seder* (Heb: order/arrangement) and the four cups of wine
- c. Singing the “Great Egyptian Hallel” (Psalms 113–118)

3. SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PASSOVER, THE PASSION, AND THE EUCHARIST



CCC 1409

In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present. (CCC 1364)

- 3.1. A New Passover and a New Exodus (Matt 26:2, 17, 18, 19; Mk 14:1, 12[2x], 14, 16; Lk 2:41; Lk 22:1, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15; Jn 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55[2x]; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14; Acts 12:4; 1 Cor 5:7; Heb 11:28)
- 3.2. The Last Supper as a Passover Meal, and Jesus the Passover Lamb (Matt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22:7-23; cf. Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19)
- 3.3. The Re-presentation of Jesus’ Once-for-all Death in the Sacrifice of the Mass
- 3.4. “This do in *remembrance* of me” (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24, 25)

3.5. Marked by Jesus' Blood

3.6. The Temple of Jesus' Body

3.7. The *Real Presence* of Jesus' Body and Blood

3.8. The Bread of the Presence (*leḥem pānīm*, "Bread of the Face"; Exod 25:23-30)

- a. The Tabernacle and its furnishings as a *tabnît* ("design/building plan/replica") of God's heavenly abode (Exod 25:9, 40; 27:8)
- b. The earthly Bread of the Presence as a visible sign of the invisible face of God
- c. An amazing correspondence! (adapted from Brant Pitre, *The Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*)

Bread and Wine of the Presence Exodus 25:23-30; Lev 24:5-9	Bread and Wine of the Last Supper/Eucharist Luke 22:14-30
Consecrated by the priest Twelve cakes for twelve tribes of Israel Bread and Wine of God's Presence The sign of an "everlasting covenant" A "memorial portion" (Grk. <i>anamnēsis</i>) Offered by the high priest and eaten by priests Eaten at the golden Table in the Jerusalem Temple A perpetual rule	"Blessed" by Jesus Twelve disciples as twelve apostles of the Church Bread and Wine of Jesus' Presence The sign of a "new covenant" "This do in remembrance (<i>anamnēsis</i>) of me" Offered by Jesus and eaten by his disciples Eaten at Jesus' Table in the kingdom of the Father "Do this [until he comes again]" (1 Cor 11:26)

- d. The Table for the Bread of the Presence in the Tabernacle—a construction model made to replicate and to anticipate Jesus' *Real Presence* as the true face of God in the new Bread and the new Wine

3.9. The Passover *Seder* and the Four Cups of Wine (2.2.b. above)

3.10. Singing the "Great Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113–118) (2.2.c. above)