

The Kept Lamb of Passover

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The original sacrifice of Passover in the land of Egypt served as a dramatic portrayal of God's eternal design for the deliverance of lost humanity from the slavery of sin. It was the intention of God from the very beginning to draw out in great detail the scheme for human redemption, illustrating through extensive pattern and type the very means by which ultimate salvation would be achieved. The sacrifice of Passover became one of the most poignant and striking symbols observed by the Jews of antiquity. Never was there a type as full of meaning and significance as the Passover at its original institution. The redemption and liberation afforded by the paschal lamb resulted in the birth of a new nation before God (Deuteronomy 32:1-18), and the marvelous story of deliverance was reiterated by fathers to their children upon every occasion of the continual observance of the Passover meal (Exodus 12:24-27).

The twelfth chapter of Exodus records the intricate detail pertaining to the selection, sacrifice, and eating of the Passover lamb. It should be evident that these instructions constitute a divine pattern bestowed by God, and that the specifications involving the paschal lamb were anticipatory of the true Lamb of God who would be slain in flawless fulfillment of the ancient design. The proof of this appears in the singular use of the term *lamb* as used by Jehovah while relaying the instructions of Passover to Moses and Aaron. Despite the great number of lambs to be slain—literally thousands—God speaks of the singular, stating, “Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill **it** at twilight” (Exodus 12:6, emp. added). This was not by accident, but was most certainly God's way of indicating that there is only one true Passover Lamb who would save from death, and that Lamb is Christ! The apostle Paul confirmed this truth, declaring, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Although occurring at the commencement of the Jewish civil calendar's seventh month, God designated their deliverance from Egypt as “the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you” (Exodus 12:2). On the tenth day of the month, the Passover lamb was to be selected (12:3). One of the stringent requirements belonging to every sacrifice offered to God was absolute purity, and the Passover lamb was not exempt, God specifying an

unblemished male (12:5). The paschal sacrifice did not occur immediately, but the lamb was kept until the fourteenth day of the month when it was slain at twilight, or as the margin reads, “literally between the two evenings.” This designation of time was observed by most sects of the Jews as the ninth to the eleventh hours of the afternoon (see Josephus, 6:9:3), or as we would say, three to five o’clock.

A careful reading of Exodus 12 hauntingly brings to the mind of anyone familiar with the four Gospels the remarkable events of Christ’s final days, culminating in His crucifixion. Every facet of the Passover instituted by God served as a beacon pointing the Jewish nation forward to the true Passover Lamb of Christ. His distinct and positive fulfillment of every condition pertaining to the sacrificial lamb forms a tightly woven matrix of evidence proving that Christ was the Holy Lamb of Passover, the true Deliverer of the people of God. The Passover lamb kept by the Jews throughout their generations was merely figurative. Its value as a sacrificial offering lay only in its grand significance, and it was God’s purpose in the design of Passover to direct the Jewish worshipper toward the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

An intriguing question emanates from the instructions regarding the selection of the lamb on the tenth day of Nisan, yet kept until the fourteenth day before being sacrificed. Why was the lamb separated from the flock and kept for the intervening days between the tenth and the fourteenth? No answer is immediately forthcoming from the text itself, and scarcely can a commentator be found who broaches the subject. That immense importance is associated with the tenth thru the fourteenth is further demonstrated when Joshua led the people across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land on “the tenth of the first month” (Joshua 4:19). Exactly forty years to the day had elapsed since they chose the first Passover lamb, and on this day, Israel is finally separated from the wilderness of unbelief. Joshua immediately pitched camp at Gilgal where the Israelites remained until after Passover (4:19-5:11).

Concerning the significance of the tenth thru the fourteenth, James Coffman explained:

We have not found even an attempted explanation of why the lamb was taken on the tenth day, four days before its slaughter; but here also we may be able to understand it from the antitype. Christ entered Jerusalem on Sunday, four days before his crucifixion, and patiently waited Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday until His crucifixion on

Thursday. There really is no other explanation of this phenomenal verse available (1985, pp. 145, 146).

Agreement is expressed that in this incidence the type must be understood through the antitype; however, another explanation is available beyond the mere numbering of days. Following His arrival in Jerusalem, Luke says, “And He was teaching daily in the temple” (19:47). Further in Luke’s narrative, he reiterates, “Now during the day He was teaching in the temple, but at evening He would go out and spend the night on the mount that is called Olivet. And all the people would get up early in the morning to come to Him in the temple to listen to Him” (21:37, 38, NASB). Our Lord also confirmed His presence daily in the temple as the kept Lamb of Passover. When the arresting party arrived in Gethsemane, Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as against a robber? Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has happened that the Scriptures might be fulfilled” (Mark 14:48, 49, NASB).

It would have been contrary to the Law of God for an inferior lamb to be offered at Passover. Although the lamb may have appeared healthy and without blemish when selected on the tenth day, the additional days provided ample opportunity to validate the unblemished nature of the chosen lamb. The Gospel accounts of Christ’s final four days disclose the relentless examination to which He was subjected as the Jews scrutinized the selected Lamb for signs of weakness or inferiority. Mark records how “the chief priests, and scribes, and elders” came questioning Him (11:27). The Pharisees and Herodians came next to evaluate Him (Matthew 22:15, 16); “And they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement” (Luke 20:20, NASB). Following these came the Sadducees, questioning Him about the resurrection (Mark 12:18-27). “But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him” (Matthew 22:34, 35, NASB).

Notice the diversity of examiners mentioned: the chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and a Pharisaic lawyer. These encompassed the whole of ecclesiastical authority in Israel. The interrogation conducted by the religious leaders was their attempt to find some fault with Jesus; however, instead of uncovering some concealed imperfection, “they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they

became silent” (Luke 29:26). As Jesus taught daily in the temple, all the people had access to Him, and although many were seeking a reason to accuse Him, “they did not find anything that they could do, for all the people were hanging on His words” (Luke 19:48, ESV).

Even during His six trials the morning of the fourteenth, those involved openly confessed His innocence: Judas first, then Pilate, even Pilate’s wife, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him” (Matthew 27:19, NASB). Herod found no fault with Him (Luke 23:13-15). One of the thieves exclaimed “this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41). Even the Roman centurion, when he “saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent’” (Luke 23:47, NASB).

The selection of the Passover Lamb occurred when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the tenth of Nisan amidst a swelling crowd shouting “Hosanna!” i.e. “save us” or “set us free.” The interval of four additional days allowed full review of the Lamb to verify that He met the criterion of an absolutely untainted sacrifice, fully capable of saving the people from their sins. The Holy Lamb of Passover was intensely examined, and being found perfect, He was sacrificed on the afternoon of the fourteenth commensurate with the ordained pattern. As God’s people today, may we think on these things, teaching them diligently to our children, that all may appreciate more fully the eternal design of salvation brought to fruition in the cross of Jesus Christ.

References:

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