

# EXODUS—WEEK 7

## THE PASSOVER



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The Tenth Plague of Egypt by J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851)  
On display in Tate Britain, London*

The plagues are getting more painful, and Pharaoh is being increasingly obdurate.

The LORD announces that He will strike Egypt, and Egypt's gods, with the ultimate plague. He makes it clear that this is personal and that this should be remembered forever. This institutes the first holiday.

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Thank you.

Exodus 10:21–12:20 — The Passover  
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1 Exodus 10:21–29 (ESV)

*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived. Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, “Go, serve the LORD; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.” But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the LORD our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there.” But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.” Moses said, “As you say! I will not see your face again.”*

At last we get to the best known Egyptian god—the sun god Ra.

<https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/ra/>

Will Durant's *The Story of Civilization* notes, “Always Ra, or the sun, was the Creator: at his first rising, seeing the earth desert and bare, he had flooded it with his energizing rays, and all living things—vegetable, animal and human—had sprung pell-mell from his eyes, and been scattered over the world.”

This plague doesn't do much damage, but to the Egyptians, it must feel like Ra has been kidnapped. The point of this plague is its blatantly supernatural nature and its power over Ra.

The take-down of the Egyptian gods is now complete. The plagues have done to the Egyptian religion what Augustine's *City of God* did to the Roman religion—turned it into a joke. Meanwhile, Pharaoh has burned all his bridges with Moses. There's no going back after a good-bye like that. The stage is set for the final plague—the Passover.

But Moses doesn't know that. At this moment everything looks like a failure. Not only has he gotten nowhere with Pharaoh, their relationship is now trashed. This is the perfect trial for Moses.

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Moses will have many more trials, but the lessons he learns in the early ones will help get him through the later ones. That's one of the central themes of Exodus—showing how God fits the pieces together.

This is encouraging. In Exodus, we get to see the reason behind all the disasters. That rarely happens in our own lives. Even when it does, we normally don't get to see the reason until much later.

So we're left with examples such as the events in Exodus to give us hope that things are actually under control, even when they look like anything but. That's why studying Exodus is so important.

But there's something else just as important—to know the “local” examples of God's workings. Any time you see God fit the pieces together, don't keep it to yourself. People need to hear about what He did.

2 Exodus 11:1–8

*And the LORD said to Moses, “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether. Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold.” And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.*

*Then Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals. Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it before, nor shall be like it again. But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.’ And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will go out.” Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger.*

Notice how God sets up this plague to get the job done. First off, *the LORD gave the people [of Israel] favor in the sight of the Egyptians*. Also, Moses is now *very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people*.

So, when Moses speaks, they listen. To this attentive audience, he precisely predicts an epic supernatural disaster. If this comes true, Moses’s credibility will be a lot more than just *very great in the land of Egypt*.

Also, this plague will be much more painful than the others. With their crops virtually destroyed, the Egyptian people may be worried about famine, but they aren’t starving yet. Worrying isn’t the same as grieving.

Moses is saying, “This one will make you cry.”

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These plagues display God’s wrath in an especially brutal fashion. That’s troubling. It makes people wonder, “What about God’s love?” That’s a good question. The answer is blunt.

If God’s love was all about pain avoidance, Jesus would never have gone to the cross. Something bigger and more glorious must be involved. We may not understand it—I sure don’t—but it’s obviously a lot more interesting than just making folks comfortable. Every book of the Bible testifies to this attitude. The action is fast, the drama intense, and the pain great.

Every character is put through the wringer, including us. God has big plans for His servants. Frankly, most of us don’t want that. We want comfort, not action. “Let someone else make a difference; I’m too tired.”

Sometimes God gets us off the couch by setting the cushions on fire.

3 Exodus 11:9–12:6

*But the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.” So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land.*

*Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘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. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.’ ”*

Christians, who are used to hearing about the Passover lamb, may be surprised to read that it can actually be either a sheep or a goat. The Hebrew word translated as “lamb” (שֶׁה, seh) literally just means “one of the flock,” so the LORD takes time to make it clear. Either a kid or a lamb is okay, less than one year old and male only.

Goats are easier to care for than sheep and are a good source for food.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goat\\_meat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goat_meat)

The other big surprise in this passage is that God declared the Passover as the start of the year. The modern traditional Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah (literally “head of the year” in Hebrew), is celebrated in the fall. They still call the Passover the first month of the year though.

Putting something first is an ancient way to give it emphasis. That’s true in language as well as table seating. This will be the first month of the year forever. God is setting up a holiday.

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday2.htm>

He doesn’t want this forgotten.

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Forgetting the great events of the past is forgetting the great lessons of history. Holidays remind us, but serious study is better. These devotionals were created for that purpose.

But don’t limit your study to just these devotionals, or even just the Bible. Find a passion for Christian history. Some folks love reading about the early church fathers. Others find the Irish saints a rich source of wisdom and understanding. The Reformation gave us great teaching too, as did more modern saints such as William Wilberforce and Jonathan Edwards. Then there’s CS Lewis—my favorite.

A passion for Christ inspires a passion for learning.

4 Exodus 12:7–13

*“And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover.*

*‘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; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment. I am the LORD. 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.’ ”*

Two things are made especially clear in this passage. First, the Hebrew noun that’s translated as plague (נֶגֶף, *negef*) literally means blow or stroke. But this is the first time since Exodus 3:20 that God uses the Hebrew verb for “to strike” to describe His own actions—and He uses it twice.

He won’t just “bring” this plague; He will *strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt*. Also, *the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt*.

Second, he makes explicit that *against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment*. This plague won’t just strike the Egyptians and their livestock, it will strike their gods. The LORD is making His attack on the Egyptian religion explicit.

That has been the point all along—to show that YHVH is the one true God. Here’s one more reference on YHVH’s takedown of the Egyptian gods. This one’s longer and more scholarly.

[http://www.padfield.com/acrobat/history/gods\\_of\\_egypt.pdf](http://www.padfield.com/acrobat/history/gods_of_egypt.pdf)

The LORD gives great priority to His being the only object of worship. We’ll see this again, when the Ten Commandments give priority to the ones about Him by listing them first.

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People are so hungry for a relationship with God that they invent false ones. This offends the LORD, even as it makes people want to know the real thing.

That’s a curious combination, but one of the secrets to evangelism. In Acts 17:22b–23, Paul applies some judo to the Athenians’ hunger for the real thing.

*“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:”*

Never forget that we know what they’re looking for—even if they don’t.

5 Exodus 12:14–20

*“ So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.’ ”*

This is the first holiday instituted by the LORD—even the Sabbath isn’t mentioned until Exodus 16:23. God hasn’t performed this miracle yet, and already He’s instructing the Jews in how to celebrate it. The build-up is without precedent. If this were a human endeavor, it’d be oversold.

But it isn’t. Just as this miracle was built up to the Egyptians with a precise forecast, it is being built up to the Jews with a specific ceremony. Everything points to it being remembered.

*So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.*

Of course, the Egyptian dictatorship doesn’t want it to be remembered, and the evidence appears to have been suppressed.

But the Jews are required to remember it and to celebrate it in the prescribed manner only. This is so important that the rule is given, *“For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”*

As always, God’s glory is the point.

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Holiday literally means holy day; that’s the Old English root. Unfortunately, that original meaning has faded in our culture. We love our holidays, but they’re anything but holy.

Fortunately, Jews have done an impressive job of staying true to the meaning of holidays. Even Jews who could fairly be described as atheists practice Passover solemnly and with precision. They glorify God beautifully.

Oh, how I wish we would do as well with Easter.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. When have you seen puzzling or unfortunate situations turn out so that you could see how God fit the pieces together?
2. What's the biggest catastrophe you've witnessed first-hand?
3. Who's your favorite Christian author?
4. How do you tap into a non-believers hidden hunger for God? (hint: listen)
5. How can we make our holidays more serious?