

Passover

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Passover, and the Plague of the Firstborn

Exodus 10 to 30

The Structure of the Passage

In the final verses of Exodus 10, Pharaoh angrily demands that Moses and Aaron leave his presence, threatening that to do so again will mean their death (v. 28). Moses tells Pharaoh that he is right, that he will never see his face again (v. 29). And then, in the 4th verse of chapter 11 Moses seems to appear again before Pharaoh, in contradiction to Pharaoh's order and to Moses' retort. The solution to this apparent discrepancy is to observe the way this text (as well as others in Exodus) is structured.

Several times the narrative of events is interrupted by explanatory statements, which serve to explain the "turn of events" which is described in the narrative. In chapter 11, verses 1-3 and 9-10 are parenthetical explanations. The statements which are quoted have been made previous to the event, but are interspersed to explain why things are happening as described. Thus, Moses has not left Pharaoh's presence at the end of chapter 10 and returned again to make his statement in verses 4-8 of chapter 11. Instead, verses 4-8 are Moses' final retort to Pharaoh, made immediately after his demand that Moses leave. Verses 1-3 are cited before the announcement of Moses to Pharaoh that the firstborn of Egypt will be slain. This explains how Moses knew that this was the final plague, and why Pharaoh will nonetheless reject the warning. It

also informs us that Moses had nothing to say to Pharaoh, but that which God had commanded him to speak. Verses 9 and 10 are also a parenthetical explanation of why Pharaoh stubbornly refused to heed the warning of the plagues.

In chapters 12 and 13 there is constant alternation between (first) the instructions God gave Moses, and these same instructions as Moses conveyed them to the people. There is not a great concern for a smooth flow chronologically as there is for laying, as it were, a historical and theological foundation for the ordinance of the Passover. Great effort is taken here to establish the fact that the Passover is based upon Israel's experience in time and space, and upon the direct revelation of God, made to and through Moses. The purpose of this revelation thus dictates its form. Since the purpose is not merely a chronological review of history, chronological smoothness is set aside in deference to theological explanation.

Let us remember that when we come to the Passover celebration and the plague of the firstborn, we are now dealing with the tenth and concluding plague which God has brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Thus, this plague is the capstone, as it were, of the plagues. It is the final blow of the ten plagues (there is yet to be the drowning of the Egyptian army) which will compel Pharaoh to release the Israelites.

The Plague of the Firstborn and the First Passover (Exodus 11:4-8; 12:1-13, 21-23, 29-30)

The tenth and final plague is described in several phases. The first is the pronouncement to Pharaoh by Moses that this plague is about to come upon all of Egypt. The second is the instructions given to the Israelites regarding the Passover, which is God's means of protecting His people from the plague. Finally, there is a brief account given of the plague itself, just as God had said through Moses.

Moses' pronouncement to Pharaoh: the coming of the final plague (Exodus 11:4-8). As I understand the sequence of events in chapters 10 and 11, Pharaoh had just demanded that Moses leave his presence, and warned that to return would mean death (10:28). Verses 1-3 of chapter 11 inform us of a revelation God had given Moses sometime before, in which the details of the final plague had been outlined. In verses 4-8, Moses declared the essence of this revelation to Pharaoh, as it related to him. At midnight, God would go throughout Egypt, slaying the firstborn, from Pharaoh's own son, to the firstborn son of the lowest slave. No grief will have ever been greater for the Egyptians, and yet not the least evil would fall upon the Israelites. After this blow, Pharaoh's own officials (who must have been standing there in Pharaoh's court during this confrontation) would come to Moses, begging him to leave, with the Israelites. Hot with anger, Moses then left the presence of Pharaoh.

Moses' pronouncement to Israel: instructions regarding the Passover (Exodus 12:1-13, 21-23). Chapter 12 can be divided into four major sections. (1) Verses 1-20 contain the revelation which God had given to Moses and Aaron. (2) Verses 21-30, the revelation which Moses conveyed to the Israelites. (3) Verses 31-42 give a historical overview of the exodus, from the command to leave issued by Pharaoh to an account of the departure, showing that God's promises had been carried out in accord with His schedule—to the very day. (4) Verses 43-51 conclude with further instructions for the Israelites regarding the celebration of the Passover in the future, especially focusing on the participation of foreigners.

Since we will not attempt to cover all the material contained in chapter 12 in this message, I want to point out that the structure of the chapter links the instructions given by God to Moses (verses 1-20) and the instructions from God spoken by Moses (verses 21-30). God would have Israelites (and the reader of New Testament times as well) know that the institution of the Passover was done in accordance with direct divine revelation. This was not

a feast which Israel devised on her own, but one which God designed and very carefully prescribed.

The instructions for the celebrations of the first Passover were specific, and dealt with several aspects of the feast. We will briefly review these:

(1) The time of the Passover meal. A new religious calendar was given to the nation at this time. Since the Passover was the commencement of a new life, the month (of Abib, cf. 13:4) was to be viewed, from this time forward, as the first month of the year (Exod. 12:1-2). The Passover lamb was to be purchased or selected on the 10th day of the month, and slaughtered at twilight on the evening of the 14th.

(2) The Passover lamb (Exodus 12:3-8, 21-23). The Passover animal was to be a male yearling, either a goat or a sheep (12:5). There was to be one sacrificial animal per household, unless the family was too small to consume one. Under such circumstances, two families could share one (12:4). There was to be provision of enough meat for each person to be adequately supplied. The blood of the animal was to be put on the sides and tops of the door frames where the animal was to be eaten (12:7). This blood was to serve as a sign, which would protect the Israelites from the death angel (12:13, 23).

(3) The Passover meal. The Passover meal was largely provided by the Passover sacrifice. The animal was to be roasted whole over the fire, not boiled or eaten raw. Each household was to eat the meal inside the door on which the animal's blood had been placed. The meat was eaten along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (12:8). Surplus food was not to be kept overnight, but was to be burned (12:10). There would be no "leftovers" for dinner because they would be long gone before another meal could be eaten. This is why the meal was to be eaten with an atmosphere of readiness and anticipation. They were to eat the meal in the same way we would eat in an airport restaurant, knowing that the departure of our flight was about to be announced. In our day, we would have our coats on and our briefcase in hand. In that day, they were to have their cloak tucked in (so they could hurry without tripping over it), their sandals on their feet, and their staff in hand (12:11).

(4) The participants of the Passover. The Passover was a corporate celebration in that all Israel observed the meal, just as Moses had instructed them (12:28, 50). On the other hand, the meal was a family matter. Each family was respon-

sible for its own sacrificial animal, its own act of placing the blood on the door frame, and its own celebration of the meal. There is no specific mention of any Egyptians celebrating the first Passover, although this is possible, even likely. This possibility is enhanced by the report that some Egyptians had taken heed of previous warnings (9:18-21). Also, in the instructions God gave concerning the future observance of Passover, foreigners who placed themselves under the Abrahamic Covenant (as signified by circumcision) were allowed to participate, with no distinctions made between them and (other) Israelites (12:43-49). Those who did not refrain from eating leavened bread were to be banned from the congregation of Israel, whether or not he was a native Israelite (cf. 12:19).

The account of the Passover plague (Exodus 12:29-30). There is absolutely no sensationalism here, but only the most cursory account of the fulfillment of the Word of the Lord, spoken through Moses. At midnight, the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain, from the king of Egypt to its cattle, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh to that of the prisoner. The weeping and wailing that night was not like anything ever heard in the land before. At the same time, none of Israel's firstborn, whether man or beast, was smitten. God's promises, for pleasure or pain, of prosperity or peril, are certain. There is no need to elaborate further.

The Passover and Related Ceremonial Observances

The initial Passover meal was the first of endless annual celebrations (12:14, 17, 24; 13:10). The instructions concerning the Passover celebration alternate between the present and the future. What Israel did on that first Passover night was a prototype for all future Passover observances. We shall therefore now consider the future implications of the first Passover celebration, as outlined in our text.

(1) The redemption of the firstborn (Exod. 13:1-2, 11-16). The firstborn of all the Egyptians were smitten, while those of the Israelites were spared. We must acknowledge that God had the right (as He still does) to smite the firstborn of Egypt. Indeed, He had the right to smite the firstborn of Israel as well, and this would have happened apart from the provision of the Passover lamb and the shedding of its blood. God therefore struck down the Egyptian firstborn while He spared the Israelite firstborn. Because the sparing of the Israelite firstborn was not a matter of merit, but of grace, God owned them. Since He had spared their

lives, He possessed them. The rite of redeeming the firstborn was a constant reminder to the Israelites of all subsequent generations that the firstborn belonged to God, and that this was due to the sparing of the firstborn at the Exodus. Thus, every time the first boy was born to an Israelite family, the parents were reminded of their "roots" and the reason for their blessing, and every child was retold the story of the exodus.

(2) The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 12:14-20; 13:3-10). The first Passover meal was to consist of the roasted sacrificial animal, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread (12:8). The hasty departure of the Israelites did not afford the time required to bake leavened bread (12:34, 39). The Passover celebration was to commence the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On the first day of the feast, all presence of yeast is to be removed from the house. On this first and last of the seven days, a sacred assembly is held (12:16). On these (two) days, no work was to be done, other than cooking. For the entire seven days, no leavened bread was to be eaten. The entire week of celebration was to serve as a reminder to Israel of the day on which God brought them out of Egypt.

The Purposes of Passover Celebrations (Exodus 12:21-27, 43-49)

Like the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the redemption of the firstborn, the Passover was to become a permanent part of Israel's religious liturgy (cf. 12:24-25). There were several purposes for the Passover celebration, some of which were to be understood at a later time. We will briefly survey the principle purposes of the Passover.

(1) The Passover was a memorial of the deliverance of Israel, accomplished by the mighty power of God: "This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the Law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand" (Exod. 13:9; cf. 13:14, 16; 3:20).

(2) The Passover and its related celebrations, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the redemption of the firstborn, were intended to serve as a means of instruction for the future generations of Israel (Exod. 12:26-27; 13:8, 14-16). God directed that the meaning of the celebration was to be explained to the children (13:8). Also, when a child asks the meaning of a celebration, the parent is to teach its significance (12:26-27; 13:14). God therefore designed these celebra-

tions as occasions for instruction. Thus the story of the Exodus was to be retold, and its meaning reinforced. The “bitter herbs” (12:8) would certainly help the children gain some sensory stimulation in this educational endeavor.

(3) The Passover celebrations was a means of incorporating or excluding the Gentiles in the covenant of God to Abraham (Exod. 12:38, 43-49). Those who ate anything leavened during the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to be excluded from the community of Israel, whether this person was an Israelite or a foreigner (12:19). No uncircumcised person could partake of the Passover, but by receiving circumcision—that is, by identifying oneself with the Abrahamic Covenant—even a foreigner could partake of Passover, and with no distinctions between this individual and an Israelite. Thus, circumcision enabled one to participate fully in the Passover celebration. Passover thus was a kind of dividing line between a true believer and an outsider. Since a number of foreigners accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt (12:38), this was a necessary distinction.

(4) The Passover Lamb was a model, a prototype (a type) of the Messiah, the “Lamb of God” through whom God would bring redemption to both Israel and the Gentiles (Exod. 12:5-7, 46-47). This was likely not immediately perceived, but there are several similarities between the Passover lamb and the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The sacrificial lamb was to be without defect (Exod. 12:5), just as the Lord Jesus was without blemish (1 Peter 1:19). It was the shed blood of the lamb which saved Israel’s firstborn from the plague (Exod. 12:12-13, 22-23), just as it is the shed blood of the Lamb of God which saves men from the judgment of God (1 Peter 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9). As there was to be no bone broken of the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:46), so no bone of our Lord was broken (John 19:32-36). Thus, the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, could speak of Israel’s Savior as a lamb:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isa. 53:6-7).

The Passover in the New Testament (John 1:29, 36; Luke 22:1-23; 1 Cor. 5:1-8; Rev. 5:6-14)

John the Baptist could thus identify and introduce

our Lord as Israel’s Messiah by the words, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The Passover meal was very naturally transformed into the Eucharist, the Lord’s Table. Thus, in the gospel accounts, we find the death of our Savior corresponding with the sacrifice of the Passover sacrificial lambs and the Passover meal (cf. Luke 22:1-23). Paul clearly identified the Lord Jesus as the Passover lamb: “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7). One can see that the first Passover, along with each subsequent annual remembrance of Passover, was an event of great significance, one which was to be celebrated from that time on.

Conclusion

The meaning of the Passover plague for the Egyptians

The Passover and the plague of the firstborn had several purposes with regard to the Egyptians.

(1) The Passover and the plague of the firstborn was a defeat of Egypt’s gods: “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt; I am the Lord” (Exod. 12:12). As the tenth and final plague, the smiting of the firstborn of Egypt conclusively proved that the “gods” of Egypt were powerless, non-existent, while the God of Israel was all-powerful.

(2) The Passover and the plague of the firstborn served as the final blow, which compelled the Egyptians to let the Israelites go (Exod. 3:20; 6:1; 11:1; 12:31-32). After the death of the firstborn of Egypt, the Egyptians did not want to be reminded of their grief by seeing the Israelites. Thus, this final plague brought the Egyptians to the point where they virtually compelled the Israelites to leave. This plague accomplished precisely what God intended, and what Moses had been asking for all along.

(3) The plague of the firstborn was an appropriate punishment of Egyptians for their oppression of Israel (Gen. 15:14; Exod. 1 and 2; 7:14ff.). God had told Abraham that the oppressive nation (which we now know to be Egypt) which would enslave Israel would be punished (Gen. 15:14). The plague of the firstborn was exceedingly appropriate since the Egyptians were

seeking to kill all of the male babies born to the Israelites (cf. Exod. 1:22).

(4) The Passover and the plague of the first-born was an act of grace, as well as an act of judgment. I believe that there is grace to be seen in this final plague (as in the rest), not only toward the Israelites, but also toward the Egyptians. The plagues revealed the powerlessness of the gods of Egypt, and the power of the God of Israel. The plagues pointed out the sin of the Egyptians and their need to repent and believe in the God of Israel. While the account is not written to underscore the conversion of Egyptians (the thrust of the account is on the judgment of Egypt, especially her gods), I think that there is ample evidence to suggest that some of the Egyptians were converted to true faith in the God of Israel.

In the first place, most of the plagues were preceded by an announcement and a warning. Each succeeding plague was further proof of God's existence and power, and gave greater substance to the warnings which followed. All of the Egyptians came to respect Moses (11:3), and some took heed to his warnings (9:13-21). Provision was also made for non-Israelites to partake of the Passover, if they were circumcised (acknowledging their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant, cf. Exod. 12:48-49; Gen. 17:9-14). Since there were many non-Israelites who left Egypt with Israel (Exod. 12:38), it is likely that a number were converted and physically spared from death through the process of the plagues and the provision of the Passover.

(5) The Passover and the plague of the first-born was an occasion for God to manifest His great power: "But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exod. 9:16). Like it or not, God is the Creator of the universe (in general) and of man (in particular). As man's Creator, God is absolutely justified in dealing with His creation as He sees fit (cf. Romans 9). When the sinfulness of man is added to his creatureliness, God's wrath is even more clearly seen to be right.

The meaning of the Passover for the Israelites

The Passover and the final plague also had great meaning and significance for the Israelites.

(1) The Passover and the tenth plague served as a judgment on the gods of Egypt,

whom the Israelites had worshipped in Egypt (cf. Josh. 24:14). Because the Israelites had also worshipped the gods of Egypt, the judgment of these gods caused God's people to turn from their false worship, at least for the moment. Ridding them of their false worship entirely was a much more long-term operation, but this was at least a beginning.

(2) The Passover was for Israel a manifestation of God's power. One of the most commonly repeated phrases employed in conjunction with the Passover is "with a mighty hand" (Exod. 13:3, 9, 14, 16; cf. 15:6, 12; 16:3). The power of God was made manifest by the Passover and the plagues.

(3) The Passover and the plague of the first-born was proof of God's possession of Israel. When Moses spoke to Pharaoh about the Israelites, he said, "Let My son go, that he may serve Me" (Exod. 4:23). The fact that God claimed to possess the firstborn, so that they needed to be redeemed (13:1-2; 11-16), evidenced God's ownership. When God freed the Israelites, He did so so that they may become His servants. As we shall show later, the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai was based upon the events of the exodus (cf. Deut. 5:6ff.). The firstborn of Israel thus belonged to God as a result of the Passover, and all of Israel as a result of the exodus. Israel was God's possession. All of the commandments and requirements which God placed upon the Israelites was predicated upon the fact that they were a people who belonged to Him.

(4) The Passover was another evidence of the grace of God in the lives of His people. The firstborn of Israel were not spared because they were more worthy or more righteous than the Egyptians. Like the Egyptians, the Israelites were sinners, fully deserving of divine wrath. Had Israel been worthy, there would have been no need of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, with its blood applied to the door frame. The firstborn of Israel were spared due to the grace of God alone. God's provision of a means of escape was based upon His grace, not Israel's merits.

The meaning of the Passover for unbelieving men and women today

There is no clearer example of salvation by grace in the Old Testament than the Passover which we have just studied. Every person in Egypt, whether an Israelite or an Egyptian, was worthy of God's divine judgment. The reason why men find the

judgment of God in the smiting of the firstborn so difficult to justify is that they do not grasp the seriousness of their own sin. I happened to overhear a small portion of a television program the other day, where a young woman asked, “Do I have to suffer the rest of my life for one little indiscretion?” Whatever her “indiscretion” was, I would imagine it would better be labeled “sin.” So the answer to her question should be, “For as much as one sin, God is just in condemning you, not only for time, but for all eternity.” The reason why we have so much difficulty with the subject of judgment is that we fail to comprehend the immensity of our sin. The striking of the firstborn of Egypt should cause us to rethink the matter of sin.

Our attitude toward sin is very much shaped by our own perspectives and experiences. Drunks are people we can laugh at, until they get behind the wheel and kill one of our loved ones. Sex offenders are people who simply have a different sexual orientation or preferences, until they molest someone close to us. So, too, idolatrous worship doesn't seem very serious, until we view this evil from God's perspective. Ignoring God does not seem so serious, until we understand the importance of trusting and obeying Him.

Once we have come to grips with the seriousness of sin, we need to focus on the solution. Just as the firstborn were worthy of divine judgment, and in danger of it, God's solution must be believed and acted upon. The divinely provided protection from the death angel was the sacrifice of a lamb, with its blood applied to the door frame. All those who remained within the house which had blood applied to its door frame were spared.

Just as the firstborn in Egypt were in danger of being smitten by the death angel, so men, women, and children are in danger of living out eternity in Hell, enduring the eternal wrath of God (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). The solution to the problem is, once again, a Lamb, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, on whom our sins were laid. He died for our sins; He bore the wrath of God, so that men could escape from the coming wrath of God, and could participate in His promised blessings (Isa. 53). It is my prayer that you will, even at this moment, accept the salvation which God offers to you through the sacrifice of His Son, who has been raised from the dead and who will return to the earth to execute judgment on all those who have rejected His sacrifice (cf. 2 Thes. 1). The offer of salvation is before you.

The meaning of the Passover for Christians

The New Testament teaches a number of practical applications of the Passover for contemporary Christians. Let me outline some of them briefly.

(1) Because Christ is our Passover Lamb, we are God's possession. The firstborn of Israel had to be redeemed because God had spared them, and thus they belonged to Him. While only some of those Israelites who were in Egypt were firstborn, and thus in need of being redeemed, all of us who have trusted in Christ belong to Him. Every child of God belongs to God, and must live in the light of belonging to Him. “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor. 7:23).

Since the firstborn of the Israelites belonged to God, they had to sacrifice them (in the case of an animal, except for the donkey, 13:13), or (in the case of a son) to offer a sacrifice to redeem them. Because God has spared us from His wrath by His mercy, we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1).

Because Christians have been redeemed by the Lamb of God, they do not belong to themselves, and they must therefore live out their lives as a living sacrifice to God. I fear that all too many presentations of the gospel do not inform people that when they come to faith in Christ, they cease to own themselves, and that they become Christ's possession. In fact, all men belong to God by virtue of creation, and all Christians belong (doubly) to God by virtue of redemption. We cannot live our lives independently, autonomously, as Christians, but we must live them out as those who have been bought with a price and as those who belong to God. Just as God's claims on the Israelites were spelled out in the Law, given a little later on in Israel's history, so God's claims on our lives as believers are given to us in the Scriptures. Let us heed His commandments well, for we belong to Him.

(2) Because Christ is our Passover lamb, we must live our lives in purity, in holy living. In the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, we read, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore

let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

In the context of this chapter in First Corinthians, Paul has been speaking of a Christian who was living with the wife of his father (5:1). The Corinthians had not done anything to remedy the situation, and even seemed to be proud of their liberality in this matter (5:2). Paul told them he had already acted (5:3-4), and that they should do likewise, by putting this man out of the assembly.

The principle on which Paul based his instruction was that of the relationship between the sacrifice of the Passover lamb and the observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb set in motion the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since Christ is our Passover lamb, and He has already been sacrificed, the Corinthians should begin the Feast of Unleavened Bread, looking for any sign of leaven (a symbol of sin) and putting it far away from them (5:7-8). Thus the fact that Christ is our Passover lamb necessitates maintaining purity in our lives, and in the church as well.

(3) The Passover teaches us the important role played by religious ceremony (liturgy, if you prefer) in the Christian’s experience. By the annual observance of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, God not only reminded His people of His mighty deeds in the past, but also taught them concerning the future. The institution of the Lord’s Table (“communion”) serves the same purposes. The observance of the Lord’s Table reminds the Christian of the salvation which our Lord accomplished by His death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Lu. 22:14-22; 1 Cor. 11:17-34). Unfortunately, Christians have come to take the remembrance of our Lord lightly, and do it infrequently, often as a kind of footnote to some other service. Let us learn to value and to practice those times of remembrance and anticipation which God has established and commanded us to do.

Just as the Passover celebrations (including the redemption of the firstborn and the Feast of Unleavened Bread) provided an opportunity to instruct the children concerning God’s work in the past and its bearing on the present, so the Lord’s table and baptism provide us with teaching opportunities which we dare not neglect.

(4) The Passover (Passion) of our Lord is a pattern for Christians regarding suffering.

While it is true that the Egyptians suffered for their sins in the plague of the firstborn (and the other plagues too), we ought not overlook the suffering of the Israelites during the 400 years of oppression, and even during the days which immediately preceded the exodus. Some Christians believe that suffering is not to be a part of the experience of one who trusts in the Lord and is obedient to Him. This is entirely untrue. Ultimately, it was not those many Passover lambs which spared the Israelite firstborn from death, it was the suffering and death of the Lamb of God, who died for all who would believe. The Passover necessitated the suffering of the Son of God. The degree to which He suffered can only be estimated in the light of the holiness of God and the dread which our Lord experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane when He anticipated the cross.

In the first epistle of Peter, the apostle informs Christians who are suffering that the passion, the suffering of the Lord Jesus, the Passover lamb, was a pattern for the suffering of all the saints (cf. 1 Pet. 2:16-24). The Lord Jesus, as the Passover lamb, is the pattern for Christian suffering, and the way it should be dealt with.

Paul also speaks of our suffering in “Passover” terms. In the 8th chapter of his epistle to the Romans, Paul writes of the victory which the Christian can have in suffering (8:31-35). He then quotes this passage from Psalm 44 to show that we, like Christ, are called to suffer as “sheep”: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom. 8:36).

In the context of Psalm 44, from which this citation was taken, we learn that those saints who suffered as described above were those who were faithful to God, not those who were disobedient. The Passover lamb is therefore a pattern for the saints, showing us that innocent suffering is often a part of God’s will for the righteous, and that through the suffering of the saints, God’s purposes may be accomplished.

Let no one seek to suffer in this way, but let no one dare to suggest that suffering in the life of the saint is inappropriate, the result of either sin or unbelief. The suffering of the Passover lamb is the pattern for the saints to follow when they suffer.