

THE PASSOVER

Exodus 12

Discuss the change of state of the Israelites in Egypt and review briefly the birth and call of Moses. Do not try to go into detail about any of this or about the plagues, except for the final one, which is involved in the lesson for the day.

Doctrinal Points

We must always remember that it is the Lord who delivers us from evil.

The Passover is one of the events which, as it recurs again and again in the Word, helps us to see the whole Word as one book. Everything we have learned can be made of spiritual use to us. Our worship should always inspire us to put into immediate practice what we learn from the Word.

Notes for Parents

The word *exodus* means “a going out,” and the book of Exodus is the story of how the children of Israel, after more than two hundred years in Egypt, were led out by Moses and back through the wilderness to their true home in the land of Canaan, the Holy Land.

The Israelites came into Egypt to be nourished and protected by Joseph through the years of famine. Egypt, because of its steady climate, was the great storehouse of the ancient world, to which people went to buy food when drought and famine struck other places. It pictures the world’s store of knowledge, to which we must go when we realize that we do not know enough to take our next step in life. Sometimes it is knowledge of the natural world which we need, but there is another kind of knowledge in the storehouse: knowledge of the Bible and of the teachings of our church. Knowledge, however—all knowledge—is meant for use in

the service of the Lord and the neighbor. When we forget this and become absorbed in learning for its own sake or for the sake of self-advancement, we are like the Israelites who stayed on in Egypt after Joseph died. Joseph pictures our higher spiritual perceptions. Without these we become slaves in Egypt just as the Israelites did. Life becomes hard and burdensome.

Moses was raised up to lead the children of Israel out of slavery. Moses, through whom a little later the ten commandments were given, represents divine law. This law shows up all of the false thoughts and the evil desires of selfish and worldly living but, if obeyed, it leads to heaven all who wish to be good people.

The Israelites were commanded to celebrate a great feast on the eve of their leaving Egypt. It was called the feast of the Passover because when the blood of the lamb killed for the feast was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of their houses, it became a sign which enabled the “angel of death” to pass over them when the firstborn of the Egyptians were killed. The Israelites were commanded for the future to keep this feast regularly as a memorial of their deliverance from Egypt. They keep it to this day.

It was at the feast of the Passover in Jerusalem just before the Lord was betrayed that He instituted the feast of the Holy Supper which takes the place of the Passover in the Christian Church. The Lord is called the “Paschal Lamb,” and we celebrate the Holy Supper in remembrance of Him and in acknowledgment of the fact that He came into the world to save us and that, if we follow and obey Him, He will lead us out of bondage to sin, and on to our true home in heaven.

Primary

Be sure the children know the names of the first two books of the Bible and what the two words mean. After reading the lesson from the Word emphasize the feast of the Passover and why it was given that name. Go into the details of the Passover feast itself and stress the command to observe it always as a memorial of the deliverance from Egypt.

What is the second book in the Bible called?

Exodus means “a going out.”

The book tells about how the children of Israel finally went out of Egypt and back to their true home in Canaan.

Nearly two hundred years had passed since Joseph’s death, and the kings of Egypt had forgotten all about Joseph and how much they owed to him. So the children of Israel, although they still lived in the rich land of Goshen, were not safe and happy anymore. They had increased from the seventy who came with Jacob to six hundred thousand people, and the Egyptians were worried. So the king had made them slaves, and finally he even ordered that all the boy babies of the Hebrews should be killed.

Who was raised up by the Lord to free them?

The Lord gave Moses power to bring ten plagues, one after another, upon the Egyptians. What was the last plague?

How were the children of Israel told to save their own sons?

What feast were they to celebrate before they left?

How was the lamb to be prepared for eating?

What were they to eat with it?

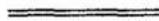
How were they to be dressed when they ate it?

Why was this feast called the *Passover*?

What command was given regarding its later observance?

What were they to remember whenever they observed it?

Try to remember this feast of the Passover and why it was so named, for you will hear of it many times in the Bible story.



Junior

In covering the review and introduction be sure the Juniors have the answers to all the questions in their notes. The historical aspects of the lesson should be stressed—length of time in Egypt, increase in numbers, continuation of the Passover to the present day, etc.—and finally the connection between the Passover and the Holy Supper should be brought out and emphasized.

What is the name of the second book in the Bible?

Exodus means “a going out.” The book tells the story of the fulfillment of Joseph’s prediction (Genesis 50:24), which did not come for almost two hundred years after he died. Read Exodus 1:8. This is the key to all that followed. Let us see how much you

remember of the story:

Why had the Egyptians become afraid of the Hebrews?

What had Pharaoh done to them?

How many plagues did Moses and Aaron bring upon the Egyptians?

What was the final plague?

The children of Israel had been saved from all the plagues. But from the tenth they were saved in a special way. They had to do something themselves.

What was it?

Why was the feast to be called the *Passover*?

What did it consist of?

How were they to eat it?

In verse 2 of our chapter we learn that this event was so important that the Lord told the Hebrews to change their calendar so that the month of the Passover should be the first month of their religious year. It was one of the spring months. Their months were governed by the phases of the moon and do not exactly coincide with any of our months. So this first Hebrew month sometimes begins in March and sometimes early in April, depending on the moon. Many years afterward the Lord was crucified during the Jewish Passover week; so our Easter still comes just after the Passover. This is why Easter does not always come on the same day of the month.

For the children of Israel the Passover marked their deliverance not only from the tenth plague but also from their bondage in Egypt, for they started on their journey that very night. The Egyptians were so glad to see them go that they willingly gave them jewels of silver and gold, and raiment. The word translated “borrow” (in KJV) really means “ask” (as it is translated in RSV). The things were presents—not merely loans. Many of them were later used in carrying out the Lord’s instructions for the building of the tabernacle.

How many children of Israel were there when they left Egypt?

Look up Genesis 46:26-27. This shows us how the children of Israel had increased in Egypt. Verse 40 of our chapter says that

they had been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years, but this is counting from the time when Abraham first went down to Egypt because of the famine. It was actually about two hundred and fifteen years from the time when Jacob and his family came into Egypt to live until the time of the Passover.

We must study this story of the Passover with special care, for we shall be reminded of it many times in the Bible, even in the New Testament. The Jews still celebrate the Passover every year, although not in exactly the original way. Do you know why we Christians do not celebrate it? It is because the Lord, when He was on earth, gave us a new feast to take its place. That feast is the Lord's Supper or the Holy Communion. The Lord instituted it when He was partaking of the Passover feast with His disciples for the last time. In the book of Revelation the Lord is called "the Lamb that was slain." The Jews celebrate the Passover to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt. We celebrate the Lord's Supper to commemorate our deliverance from the power of the hells as a result of the Lord's life on earth.

Intermediate

The lesson for this class is the general meaning of the Passover and the correspondence of the details of the feast, and this should be carried over into a discussion of the Holy Supper.

We have studied the birth of Moses, his preparation and call by the Lord, and the ten plagues which he was permitted to bring upon the Egyptians in order to induce Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go back to the land of Canaan. They should have gone back as soon as the famine was over. A time of famine, you remember, pictures a crisis in our lives when we do not know what to do and realize that we need more knowledge; the land of Egypt pictures the plane of memory-knowledge. Egypt with Joseph as its ruler pictures the whole field of external truth as to both natural and spiritual things properly related to our true purpose in life. This means knowledge of the letter of the Word and in addition,

for us in the New Church, knowledge of the writings of Swedenborg by means of which the Lord shows us the true doctrine to be drawn from the Word. We need this knowledge.

But we might spend all our lives studying the Bible and the writings and find the study very interesting and absorbing without ever trying to use what we learn to discover and correct our own evils or to help other people. This is what is pictured by the fact that the children of Israel did not go back to the Holy Land when the famine was over. They found themselves comfortable and prosperous in Egypt and forgot their true home and their duty to the Lord and finally even the name of their own God. The principle which had ruled them when they first came to Egypt had changed: “There arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.” (Exodus 1:8) The Israelites gradually became slaves, just as we, if we do not use our knowledge in the Lord’s service, become slaves to mere learning. Life becomes a burden and the Lord has to show us—sometimes by hard experiences—the way back to happiness.

For the Israelites, the deliverance from bondage in Egypt marked the great event which made possible the development of their nation and their religion. They were told to make the month in which they left Egypt the first month of their year, and the Passover was celebrated from the fourteenth to the twenty-first of that month. When the Lord came to Jerusalem the last week of His life on earth, it was to celebrate the Passover. So you can remember that the Passover is always celebrated by Jews during the week preceding our Easter.

The Passover was named from the fact that the houses of the Hebrews were passed over by the “angel of death” in the night when the firstborn son of everyone else in Egypt died, as well as the firstborn of all cattle. This was the tenth and last plague, and pictures the final result of a wholly worldly and selfish life, when there is no longer any possibility of the development of a living faith, which is represented by the firstborn. This is the state in which all those are who are in the hells; Swedenborg tells us that they reject any good or truth which is presented to them, just as

Pharaoh and the Egyptians finally were eager to drive out the Israelites, and even to give up with them their “jewels of silver and jewels of gold and raiment,” which picture all the good and truth which remained in their possession.

The Passover feast was to become a memorial of deliverance. You may remember that in one of the visions of the book of Revelation the Lord is seen in the form of a lamb “as it had been slain.” The lamb is the symbol of innocence. Swedenborg tells us that innocence is “to know, acknowledge, and believe, not with the mouth but with the heart, that nothing but evil is from one’s self, and that all good is from the Lord.” The word *innocence* means “harmlessness,” and if we stop to think, we shall realize that it is always pride in ourselves which makes us say and do things which hurt other people. If we try to be honest and see ourselves as we really are deep down inside, the Lord can give us this quality of innocence. But we must really want to know the truth about ourselves. This quality of innocence must be sought from love—this is the symbolism of “being roast with fire.” Unleavened bread pictures truth or goodness unmixed with any false ideas. Bitter herbs represent temptations—there will be some hardship and difficulty connected with our journey to heaven. And we are to be ready to start on this road at once, to put into immediate practice our good resolutions.

For the Jews the Passover was, and still is, celebrated as a memorial of the deliverance of their nation from bondage in Egypt. The Lord at His last Passover gave the Christian Church a new feast to celebrate in its place—the feast of the Holy Supper. For us the Lord is the paschal lamb who came on earth, took on our nature with all its temptations, and gave His life to us for our example. When we worship Him in the Holy Supper and accept Him as our example, we are “eating the paschal lamb,” for He called the bread and wine His body and blood. The celebration of the Holy Supper—like the Passover in its deeper meaning—pictures our full realization of the evils to which a worldly and selfish life leads, and our determination with the Lord’s help to

turn our backs upon such a life and travel the long hard journey to the Holy Land, under the guidance of divine law—which is represented by Moses. We take with us all that is valuable of our worldly knowledge and accomplishments, and our characters just as they are up to the point of our new resolution. Verses 34 to 39 of our chapter picture this. We are not suddenly made over into good and wise people as some churches try to believe. Conversion is not salvation. Conversion is merely the resolution to change our ways. All the trials and temptations are still to come, and we shall make many mistakes and suffer many failures before we reach even the borders of the Holy Land itself.

Basic Correspondences

the firstborn = faith

a lamb = innocence

leaven (yeast) = falsity

bitter herbs = temptations

Senior

The meaning of the change in the condition of the Israelites because they prolonged their stay in Egypt is important for the Senior age, as well as the necessity for the plagues and the meaning of the details of the Passover feast, especially as carried over into our celebration of the Holy Supper.

Today our lesson is again from the second book in the Bible. The word *exodus* means “a going out,” and the book of Exodus is the story of how the prediction made by Joseph in Genesis 50:24 was finally fulfilled some two hundred years later. Verse 40 of our chapter says the “sojourning of the children of Israel” in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years, but this is counting from the time when Abraham first came down into Egypt because of the famine.

The picture has changed. We are told in Genesis 46:26-27 that the number of souls belonging to Jacob at the time of his coming into Egypt was seventy, and verse 37 of our chapter for today says that six hundred thousand men went out on the night of the

Passover, besides children. This great increase had frightened the Egyptians into making slaves of the Hebrews so that their life in Egypt was no longer a happy one.

In the Bible narrative, any stay in Egypt represents a period of acquiring memory-knowledges. To save our spiritual lives we have to acquire memory-knowledges of the letter of the Word and of the doctrines drawn from its internal sense. But all knowledge is meant for use in the service of the Lord and the neighbor. As fast as we acquire new knowledge, we should try to put it to use. The Israelites should have gone back to their own home in Canaan as soon as the famine was over. When we continue to study and learn without applying our knowledge to its proper use, we become “slaves in Egypt.” We are no longer protected by Joseph—our spiritual perceptions—and, like the Israelites, we have forgotten the name of our God—the qualities which the Lord exemplified in His life on earth.

Then the Lord has to arouse us by showing us the terrible results of worldliness and godlessness. These are the plagues brought upon the Egyptians, culminating in the destruction of the firstborn.

The firstborn is the symbol of faith. When anyone, like Pharaoh, stubbornly persists in a worldly and evil course, in spite of repeated experiences of the bad effects of such a course, he finally comes into a state in which the very possibility of faith is destroyed. Then all the things of spiritual life—represented by the Israelites—are driven out, taking with them everything that is of value in the learning which has been acquired. This is the plague from the point of view of Pharaoh.

But we are going with the Israelites. They had been spared all the plagues, but they had seen the terrible havoc they had wrought in the lives of the Egyptians, and were ready now to follow Moses out of Egypt. Moses represents divine law. To escape the last plague they had to do something themselves, both as a sign of their willingness to obey the Lord and in recognition of their deliverance.

The lamb of the Passover represents the affection of innocence.

What this is you will see from the first quotation at the end of this lesson. The blood of the lamb symbolizes the true thoughts which spring from that affection. The doorposts of the house stand for the portals of the mind. The sprinkling of the blood there pictures the safeguarding of the mind from falsity by means of true thoughts springing from pure affection. When the lamb was eaten, it was to be “roast with fire,” not raw or “sodden with water” (boiled), because good must be loved, not merely acknowledged without interest or enjoyed as a mental concept. The unleavened bread pictures principles of goodness unmixed with the old false ideas, for leaven (yeast) in those days was a bit of sour dough from former bakings. The bitter herbs typify temptations which we must be willing to meet and overcome if we are to attain spiritual life. Finally, we are to eat the feast with our loins girded ready for the journey: we must be prepared to start out actively to carry the new principles we have accepted into our daily living—we cannot put off “turning over a new leaf” from day to day. We are also to take with us into the new life all that is of value from the Egyptian state, all our knowledges of worldly as well as of spiritual things, the jewels of silver and gold, and the raiment. Recall that Abraham also came up out of Egypt “rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.”

Just before the Lord’s crucifixion He celebrated the Passover with His disciples—the Last Supper, as it is called. At that feast He instituted a new feast to take the place of the Passover for all His disciples, and thus for the Christian Church. This is the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion. In the Lord’s Supper the bread and wine take the place of the unleavened bread and the flesh of the lamb, and the Holy Supper commemorates our deliverance by the Lord from bondage to the hells. So in this particular case, as in all others, the Lord came to “fulfill” the Law and the Prophets.

Adult

It has been thought best to center the lesson in the Adult notes on two or

three major themes. Other points may come up, however, and the teacher should be thoroughly prepared. Further very interesting discussion material may be found especially in AC 7984, 7995, and 8005.

It is important to remember that the Israelites in the first place came down into Egypt to be nourished—under Joseph’s protection—during the years of famine. They should have returned to their own country when the famine was over. But their home in Egypt seemed to promise more ease and prosperity than they had ever had. Joseph died, and his body was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt. If we should forget that the study of the letter of the Word and of the doctrines of our church is enjoined only for the purpose of enabling us to make spiritual progress, to serve the neighbor better, and so to draw closer to heaven and to the Lord, we may find that there are worldly rewards even for this study which may seem to us more real and desirable than heaven. But if we succumb to this appeal, gradually the plane of our daily life will come to be ruled by a principle which looks to self-interest rather than to the Lord’s truth for direction. As Exodus 1:8 puts it, “There arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.”

Then the Lord has to let us learn “the hard way.” The Israelites became slaves in Egypt. Life in this state is full of worldly cares and anxieties and becomes a burden. When Moses was called to lead his people out of Egypt, they had not only become slaves to Pharaoh but they were worshiping the golden calf* and had forgotten even the name of the true God. They had to be taught by bitter experience the ruin in which they had permitted themselves to become involved. The ten plagues represent the gradual uncovering by divine law—represented by Moses—of the falsities and evils to which a purely worldly life leads. Not only did the Egyptians suffer, but Pharaoh imposed harder and harder conditions on the Hebrews as the plagues progressed. Only the final plague pro-

*Or so Swedenborg implies in AC 9391⁷. There is no biblical statement to this effect. —Ed.

cured their release.

We are born natural, and the purpose of our life here is that we may become regenerate. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” In the writings, faith is called the firstborn because it is the means by which falsity and evil are overcome and we become children of the first resurrection. The firstborn of Israel were saved. But when faith is destroyed, there can be no salvation. Spiritually the firstborn of Pharaoh is the faith of obedience from fear, without any love for doing what is right. This faith does not stand in the face of severe temptation. The firstborn of Egypt dies. This is the final judgment on the evil; all memory-knowledge of good and truth finally perishes, and with it the means of amendment.

But the possessions of the Egyptians are not in themselves evil. Egypt represents the natural plane of life, not only our life in the world but the most outward state of the church—its rituals, forms, and ceremonies. As a church declines in spirituality, it tends to make its rituals more elaborate, its buildings more impressive, and to amass wealth in silver and gold. Yet these are all good and necessary things. They are a defense to spiritual life. Regular external worship, instruction, hymns and prayers, the recitation of one’s faith, teaching about religion and the letter of the Word are necessary. The more we know of the letter of the Word the better we are prepared to understand its spirit. We acquire memory-knowledge of many important and useful things, and these can serve us in our spiritual life. So the Hebrews were commanded to “borrow” of the Egyptians, and they took with them into their new life the treasures so acquired. We need to “borrow” of the Egyptians “vessels of gold and silver,” the letter of the Word and the forms of worship which contain and protect the real treasure of the church, love to the Lord and the neighbor. And we also need to borrow “raiment,” the commandments in their letter, the moral truths and principles of life kept as laws of man and of earthly success. We should appropriate from what our memories receive everything that serves and supports spiritual life.

Following the last plague the Passover was instituted. It was to become the most important of the Jewish feasts, and was to be observed annually as a memorial of their deliverance from Egypt. And this festival has been kept by the Jewish Church down the ages to the present day.

We are probably familiar with the thought that lambs represent innocence, and that eating lamb represents appropriating this quality of innocence. But just what is innocence? We associate the quality with little children, and think of their simplicity and trust and their ignorance of any real evil. This is the “innocence of ignorance” of which Swedenborg speaks. But when the Lord says, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven,” He is not asking us to return to a state of ignorance. Swedenborg speaks of another kind of innocence, which he calls the “innocence of wisdom.” The word *innocent* means “not harming,” and we need to recognize that all desires we may have to injure others—whether these desires are impulsive and fleeting or deep-seated and rankling—are from the love of self. In AC 3994, in interpreting Jacob’s choice of black lambs as his wages in Haran, Swedenborg says that black signifies what is man’s own, and continues, “An own [*proprium*] that is innocent is to know, acknowledge, and believe, not with the mouth but with the heart, that nothing but evil is from one’s self and that all good is from the Lord; and therefore that what is man’s own is nothing but blackness; that is to say, not only the own of his will, which is evil, but also the own of his understanding, which is falsity. When man is in this confession and belief from the heart, the Lord flows in with good and truth.” This is the innocence of wisdom, which the Passover lamb signifies.

To sprinkle the blood of this lamb on the doorposts and lintel of the house is to write this truth on every thought we permit to enter the mind and on every desire also. To eat the lamb “roast with fire” instead of raw or “sodden with water” is to receive it from love, not without love nor yet from the mere enjoyment of knowing it. Unleavened bread is truth purified from falsity and

bitter herbs signify “by means of temptations.” That all of it shall be used means that it shall be made part of us “from the inmost to the external.” And verse 11 means that we should stand prepared to think and act in every respect from this deep conviction with regard to self and the Lord.

The journey from Egypt to Canaan was to be long and difficult, although the people were not aware of this. This journey is the symbol of our spiritual journey from natural to spiritual living, and the Passover was the preparation for it. At the Passover feast immediately preceding His betrayal and crucifixion the Lord said to the twelve, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” Then He instituted the Holy Supper, which for the Christian Church takes the place of the Passover and is given to strengthen and protect us in our journey of life. In this new Christian form the Passover will be celebrated forever.

The lamb that was sacrificed in the Passover represents the Lord. So John the Baptist declared, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.” In its inmost meaning the lamb is the Lord as to His divine innocence, the offering up of every selfish and worldly impulse and the complete consecration to the divine will and guidance.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 3994: “In all good there must be innocence in order that it may be good. Charity without innocence is not charity; and still less is love to the Lord possible without innocence. For this reason innocence is the very essential of love and charity, consequently of good. An own [*proprium*] that is innocent is to know, acknowledge, and believe, not with the mouth but with the heart, that nothing but evil is from one’s self, and that all good is from the Lord; and therefore that what is man’s own is nothing but blackness; that is to say, not only the own of his will, which is evil, but also the own of his understanding, which is falsity. When man is in this confession and belief from the heart, the Lord flows in with good and truth, and insinuates into him a heavenly own, which is white and lustrous. No one can ever be in true humility unless he is in this acknowledgment and belief from the heart; for he is then in annihilation of self, and thus in absence from self;

and in this manner he is then in a state capable of receiving the Divine of the Lord. It is by this means that the Lord flows in with good into a humble and contrite heart.”

Arcana Coelestia, n. 7996: “In general, feasts, both dinners and suppers, in ancient times were made within the church in order that they might be consoiated and conjoined as to love, and that they might instruct one another in those things which are of love and faith, thus in the things of heaven . . . Such at that time were the delights attending their banquets, and such was the end for the sake of which were their dinners and suppers. Thus the mind and the body also were nourished unanimously and correspondently; and from this they had health and long life, and from it they had intelligence and wisdom; and also from this they had communication with heaven, and some had open communication with angels. But as in the course of time all internal things vanish away and pass into external ones, so also did the purposes of the feasts and banquets, which at this day are not for the sake of any spiritual conjunction, but for the sake of worldly conjunctions, namely, for the sake of gain, for the sake of the pursuit of honors, and for the sake of pleasures, from which there is nourishment of the body, but none of the mind.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What happened to the Israelites in Egypt after Joseph died? *became slaves*
- P. Who was raised up to lead them out of Egypt? *Moses*
- P. How were the Egyptians persuaded to let them go? *plagues*
- P. How many plagues were there? *ten*
- P. What was the last one? *firstborn died*
- J. How were the Israelites told to save their own firstborn? *blood of lamb on doorway*
- J. What did the Egyptians let them have to take away with them? *gold, silver, clothing*
- P. What feast did they observe just before they left Egypt? *Passover*
- J. Why was it called the *Passover*? *“I will pass over you”*
- P. How was the lamb which they ate cooked? *roasted*
- P. What did they eat with it? *unleavened bread, bitter herbs*
- P. How were they dressed for the feast? *loins girded, sandals on, staff in hand*
- J. What were they to do with any of the lamb that was left over? *burn it*
- J. How many Israelites were there when they left Egypt? *six hundred thousand plus children*

- J. What were they to remember whenever they kept the Passover?
deliverance from slavery
- J. How often were they told to observe it? *annually forever*
- I. What feast takes the place of the Passover for Christians? *Holy Supper*
- I. When and by whom was it instituted? *Jesus, on Maundy Thursday*
- S. What does the lamb represent? *innocence*
- S. What is innocence? *harmlessness, willingness to be led by the Lord*