



The Promise of Passover

Promises Made, Promises Broken

About the Story

We pick up this week where the daily home reading from yesterday left off—amidst the plagues of Egypt. God has hardened Pharaoh's heart to show God's wonders to the Egyptians. Now it is getting real. God creates the first Passover for the Israelites. God gives very specific instructions as to how they are to prepare and eat their food on this night. There is no time to waste carving out specific pieces of meat or waiting for bread to rise. They need to eat quickly, sandals on, ready to run for safety out of the land of Egypt.

The Point:

God gives us ways to remember and celebrate God's deliverance. God is faithful to the children of Israel. Though they have been enslaved for a generation, God frees them from Egypt and will lead them to the Promised Land. Their last meal before they escape becomes the model for the Passover Seder, an annual celebration of God's deliverance.

Moses and Aaron told the Israelites what God had instructed and they all obeyed. That night God struck down the firstborn of every Egyptian household. The children of the Israelites were spared because of the lamb's blood marking their doorposts. God "passed over" their homes so they remained safe. Once again, God has been faithful to God's promise to Abraham—to protect his descendants that they might outnumber the stars in the sky. To this day many Jews celebrate Passover by eating this meal, including unleavened bread to remind them of the haste required to escape their slavery in Egypt.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

Powerful God, we are in awe of your mighty deeds and sometimes perplexed. We give you thanks for protecting your servants throughout history and we ask you to guide our steps this day. Give us clarity in studying your Word, that we might learn your intention for justice, love, and mercy for each of your beloved creatures. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Into the Story

Are any participants in your small group from a Jewish family? How many are firstborn? Unless you are from a Jewish family, all of you firstborn children would have been struck down in this story. How does that feel? What does it mean for an entire population of people to be "punished" for the sins of their leaders?

Last Week/Next Week

Last week we learned about God's promise to Abraham being at risk in the story of Joseph and his brothers. This week we learn about the promise God makes to the Israelites in the Passover. Next week we will learn that the Israelites forget God's promises. Even when the people stray, God keeps God's promises.

Learning the Story

Moses is finally able to lead the Israelites to freedom, away from the grip of Egyptian slavery, but not without bloodshed. We see again how God brings life out of death, hope out of tragedy, and keeps God's promises.

Read Exodus 12:1-13 – Passover Rules

- ❓ It would take great faith to trust in God's promise to pass over. Do you feel you could have trusted God that much?
- ❓ To this day, many Jews celebrate the Passover with unleavened bread (matzah) to remind them of the haste their ancestors used in eating that meal. Do you participate in a Christian tradition that celebrates Holy Communion? If so, have you noticed whether you use leavened or unleavened bread?
- ❓ Why do you think God orders that the lamb must be spotless? What New Testament connection can you make with that type of sacrificial language?

Read Exodus 13:1-8 – The Festival of Unleavened Bread

- ❓ God institutes that Passover must be celebrated by every succeeding generation of the Israelites. Part of that includes consecrating (literally, making holy) all firstborns to God. Do you have a consecration ritual in your Christian tradition? What does it involve and what does it mean to you?
- ❓ The Passover meal also includes a celebration of God's liberating the Jews from slavery. Jesus' last meal with his disciples was a Passover meal. Are there any connections between the story of exodus to Jesus' impending passion?
- ❓ What does this story tell us about how God relates to humanity?

Living the Story: Worship

Bring some matzah (unleavened bread) to share with the group (beware of possible allergies). You can find it at various grocers or make your own from a recipe online. Remember that the Israelites were commanded to eat unleavened bread because there was no time to let it rise. As a group, eat the matzah with your shoes on, coats ready, and all your belongings attached as if you, too, have to leave immediately after the food is finished. What does it feel like to eat in such haste? Would you worry about your own children, friends, grandchildren, nieces or nephews?

Closing Prayer

Pray this or another prayer aloud together:

God of life, you spared the children of Israel when their very lives were threatened. We thank you for your faithful watch over us, for safe homes and spaces to worship, for rest from our work. Help us when we are in danger and to protect others who are in greater need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Bible Connections

- ✚ Psalms 113–118 are chanted or read together for Passover and on other high holy days in the Jewish tradition and are collectively called “*Hallel*.” Take time to read them continuously as our Jewish brothers and sisters do or read one Psalm each day this week.
- ✚ Jesus celebrates Passover (Matthew 26:17-35).
- ✚ Worthy is the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 5:11-14).

At Home

- ✚ At least at one meal each day, be mindful of the gift it is to eat without fear. Take the time to thank God for daily bread, shelter and the community of people who protect you. Then ask that God might use you to be shelter for someone else.
- ✚ Learn more about the Jewish celebration of Passover. If you know someone who is Jewish, take time to ask about their experience with this holy celebration. It is always good to understand the experiences of others to better respect them as individuals and maybe even clarify our own beliefs and practices.
- ✚ Pray for unity among the people of the world. Though of different religions, races, creeds, identities and traditions, may we begin to see each person uniquely created in God's image.

Bible Nuts and Bolts: The Exodus Story

The story of the salvation of God's people from Egypt is one of the central stories in the entire Bible. It is a story that God uses to describe God's self (I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt). Many Jews still celebrate Passover, when God spared the lives of their ancestors through the blood of a lamb. This imagery is important to Christians as well. Jesus takes the unleavened bread and wine, shares it with his disciples in the last supper before his death, comparing it to his body and blood. We hear throughout Scripture that Jesus is the Lamb of God and that the blood of that lamb saves us. In both faith traditions, God has proven faithful to the promises God made to humankind.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Exodus 12:1-13; 13:1-8

The first Passover is instituted. Make a list of the traditions you celebrate in your home. Are there new traditions you would like to add?

Monday—Read Exodus 13:17-22

God faithfully led the people by cloud and fire. Seek out a new way for God to lead you: through reading, finding a faith mentor or spending (more) daily time in prayer.

Tuesday—Read Exodus 14:5-25

As they Egyptians pursued them, the Israelites essentially said to Moses, “We told you so” because they felt they were better off as slaves in Egypt. Pray about a difficulty you are experiencing in your life, that God would empower you to let go and trust God.

Wednesday—Read Exodus 16:1-8

The people are still complaining. Make a list of your current complaints to God and then quietly listen and consider how God might respond to them or ask you to respond to them.

Thursday—Read Exodus 19:1-9, 20-25

God is revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, but God’s presence is too great to be witnessed by the human eye. Close your eyes and envision God as bright light surrounding you and warming you as you pray and listen for God’s voice.

Friday—Read Exodus 20:1-17

Moses is presented with the Ten Commandments. Go back and reread each commandment and ask yourself, “What is God protecting us from by giving us this commandment?”

Saturday—Read Exodus 24:9-18

God gives Moses tablets of stone containing the law. Pray that God will help you to follow the law of loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself all through the day (and every day).