

Session 3: The First Passover

Exodus 12:1-14, 21-28, 43-49

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Reading Exodus 12 inductively, the group discovers the requirement almost everyone forgets: the lamb was not only offered. By command, the lamb had to be eaten.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7); the Passover's own law commands that the lamb be eaten (Exodus 12:8-11); on Christ the Lamb and the biblical memorial, see CCC 608 and 1363-1364.

What You Need to Know

Tonight the study arrives at its foundation. The Synoptic Gospels present everything Jesus did in the upper room as done inside a Passover meal (John's account raises chronological questions of its own, noted at Session 10), and everything the Passover means is set down in Exodus 12. Most Christians know the outline: a lamb, blood on the doorposts, the angel of death passing over. Almost nobody notices the command in verse 8, and it changes everything: they shall eat the flesh that night.

Walk the group slowly through the requirements: a lamb without blemish, a male, selected on the tenth day and kept until the fourteenth, in the midst of the family; killed at twilight by the whole assembly; its blood applied with hyssop; its flesh roasted and eaten, with nothing left over; its bones unbroken; and the whole rite commanded as a memorial forever. Each detail is load bearing, and several are planted tonight for harvest weeks from now. Say nothing about where they lead. Two details in particular, the hyssop and the unbroken bones, must be observed tonight and left completely alone.

The theological center is the discovery aim. In Egypt, a family that sacrificed its lamb but refused to eat it would not have kept the Passover as commanded. The eating was not a snack after the ritual; it was an integral, commanded part of the rite. When Paul writes that Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed, and immediately continues, let us therefore celebrate the feast, he is thinking like an Israelite: sacrificed lambs are for eating. Do not preach this connection tonight. Plant the Exodus data and trust the study.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 12:3-6. The lamb is chosen on the tenth day and lives with the family until the fourteenth. Israel's deliverance begins with a lamb brought into the house, known before it is offered.

Exodus 12:7-11. Blood on doorposts and lintel, and the command: they shall eat the flesh that night, roasted, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, in haste, dressed for a journey.

Exodus 12:13-14. The blood is a sign; the Lord passes over; and the day is to be a memorial forever, a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. The Passover is commanded to be repeated, not merely remembered.

Exodus 12:22, 46. The blood is applied with a bunch of hyssop, and no bone of the lamb may be broken. Two small details. The Gospel of John saw both at the cross (John 19:29, 19:36). Tonight the group only observes them; the harvest comes in Sessions 10 and 12.

Fulfillment. John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29); Paul names him our paschal lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7); and the Passover's own law says what is done with such a lamb. The rite that saved Israel is the pattern that interprets both the Cross and the Supper, though the group must be allowed to assemble that themselves in the coming weeks.

Voices of the Church

St. Melito of Sardis (d. c. 180)

In his ancient Paschal homily (*Peri Pascha*), Melito preached, in summary, that the mystery of the Passover is new and old: old according to the law, new according to the Word; the sheep was the model, and the Lord the reality; what was slain in Egypt was the figure of the Lord who was to come. For the second century Church, Exodus 12 was already a Gospel text.

St. John Chrysostom (d. 407)

A summary of his preaching: Chrysostom told his people that the old Passover was the type and the new its truth, and he pressed the comparison of the two lambs: that one delivered from Egypt for a time; this one delivers the whole world from death forever. His constant pastoral point was that those who now eat the true Lamb should live like a people who have left Egypt behind.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

In the *Summa Theologiae* (III, q. 73, a. 6): among all the figures of the Eucharist, Aquinas gave the Passover lamb a certain pride of place, because it prefigured this sacrament on every side: eaten with unleavened bread, immolated by the whole assembly, its blood preserving the people from the destroyer. His *Corpus Christi* hymn *Lauda Sion* names the figures: Isaac offered, the paschal lamb appointed, the manna given to the fathers.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 608: John the Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, recalling both the suffering Servant and the paschal lamb, symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover.
- CCC 1363-1364: in the biblical sense, memorial is not merely recalling the past; when Israel celebrates Passover, the exodus events are made present. This verse of Exodus 12:14 will carry Session 4.
- CCC 1150: the signs of the Old Covenant, Passover above all, prefigure the sacraments of the New.

THREAD WATCH

The command to eat. Tonight the thread gets its anchor text: Exodus 12:8. The lamb must be eaten. Add it to the quiet list beside John 6 and the covenant meal of Exodus 24.

Where is the lamb? A new thread is planted in the Dig Deeper: Isaac's question on Mount Moriah and Abraham's unfinished answer. It resolves in Session 12. Plant it and move on.

Hands off. Hyssop (12:22) and unbroken bones (12:46) must be read aloud tonight and never explained. If anyone connects them to the crucifixion, honor it briefly and say the study will get there. Do not elaborate.

Session Goals

1. Read Exodus 12 closely enough to reconstruct the Passover requirements from the text alone.
2. Discover that eating the lamb is commanded, not optional, and that the sacrifice is completed at the table.
3. Observe, without explanation, the hyssop and the unbroken bones.
4. Register the command that Passover be kept as a memorial forever.
5. Plant the Where is the lamb thread from Genesis 22.

A note on time. If you must cut, cut the second Win question and shorten the reading of Exodus 12:43-49 to verses 43 and 46-47. Do not cut the Dig Deeper tonight; the thread it plants is structural.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, on the night you struck Egypt you sheltered your people under the blood of a lamb and gathered them at a table. Gather us now. Teach us this rite you commanded forever, and show us what you were preparing. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening the Conversation

1. What is a meal your family repeats every year in exactly the same way? What would be lost if you skipped it once?
2. When you hear the word sacrifice, what picture comes to mind? Where does that picture come from?

Build: Into the Text

Leader: Tonight is pure inductive work in one chapter. The group's job is to become experts in Exodus 12. Read each block aloud, then reconstruct its requirements before opening the answer.

3. Read Exodus 12:1-6. List everything the text requires about the lamb and the timeline. Why do you think the lamb is chosen four days early and kept with the family?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A lamb per household (small households share); without blemish; a male a year old; chosen on the tenth day; kept until the fourteenth; killed at twilight with the whole assembly participating. The text does not state why it is kept four days; let the group speculate, then note the effect: the lamb enters the home and is known. The victim is not anonymous. Israel's deliverance begins with a lamb in the house.

4. Read Exodus 12:7-11. After the blood is applied, what does verse 8 command? How is the lamb to be prepared and eaten, and what may be left over (see also verse 10)?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They shall eat the flesh that night. Roasted whole, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs; nothing raw or boiled; nothing left until morning; eaten in haste, belted, sandaled, staff in hand. The eating is commanded in the same breath as the blood.

Draw the group's attention to what verse 8 rules out: a Passover where the lamb dies and no one eats. The blood goes to the doorpost, and the flesh, by command, goes to the table; Exodus knows no Passover without both.

5. Read Exodus 12:12-14. What does the blood accomplish, and what does verse 14 command about the future? What is the difference between remembering an event and keeping a memorial feast forever?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Lord passes over the blood-marked houses; judgment falls on Egypt and its gods. Verse 14 commands a memorial day, a feast to the Lord, kept as an ordinance forever, throughout their generations. Israel is not told to think about the exodus; Israel is told to do the Passover, every year, as if the night belonged to every generation.

Do not resolve tonight what memorial means; that is the whole of next week. Simply fix the fact: Passover is commanded as a perpetual feast, not a one-time rescue.

6. Read Exodus 12:21-28, then 12:43-49. Two details for sharp eyes: how is the blood applied in verse 22, and what does verse 46 forbid? Also, from 43-49, who may eat this meal?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The blood is applied with a bunch of hyssop. Verse 46 forbids breaking any bone of the lamb, and requires the lamb be eaten in one house, the flesh not carried outside. No foreigner or uncircumcised male may eat it; the meal belongs to the covenant household, women and children included, and the sojourner may join once the males of his house are circumcised (12:43-49).

If someone connects hyssop or unbroken bones to the crucifixion, acknowledge it in one sentence and promise the study will return to both. Do not develop it; those seeds are for later sessions.

The Other Side of the Table

Leader: Read the objection at full strength.

The death-only reading. What saved Israel was the death of the lamb and its blood on the door: Exodus 12:13 says so in as many words. The meal was commanded covenant worship, and no serious reader calls it optional; but it contributed nothing to the deliverance itself. In the same way, what saves Christians is Christ's death on the cross, full stop. The Lord's Supper is obedient remembrance of that finished work, and making the eating essential to salvation confuses the memorial with the thing it commemorates.

7. Strengthen it: what is the best case that only the death and the blood mattered?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Good additions: Exodus 12:13 attributes the passing over to the blood, not the meal; the meal has practical features (haste, travel dress) suggesting mere provision; and Scripture elsewhere locates atonement in blood (Leviticus 17:11).

8. Now answer it from Exodus 12 itself. Does the text treat the eating as optional practicality or as command? What happens to a lamb that is sacrificed but not consumed?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First, concede the objection's center: Exodus 12:13 credits the blood with the passing over, and no one is saved by chewing. What the stronger reading must still face is the shape of the command. The eating is commanded with the same force as the blood (12:8), regulated in detail (how cooked, with what, by whom, in which house, nothing remaining), and protected by law (12:43-49 governs who may eat). A rite whose eating is fenced by that much law is not incidental catering.

Blood and meal are two halves of one act: the blood turns away death; the meal takes the lamb's life into the family that the blood just saved. Exodus knows nothing of a Passover that stops at the doorpost.

Be precise about what this does and does not prove. It does not yet prove anything about the Eucharist. It proves the pattern: in God's own design of the paschal sacrifice, the lamb that saves is the lamb you eat. Whether the true Lamb follows his own pattern is exactly the question this study is walking toward, and the group should feel that question forming on its own.

DIG DEEPER: Where Is the Lamb? (Genesis 22:1-14)

Read Genesis 22:1-14, the binding of Isaac on Moriah. Isolate verse 7, Isaac's question: where is the lamb? And Abraham's answer in verse 8: God will provide himself the lamb.

Then look closely at what God actually provides in verse 13: a ram, and Abraham names the place The LORD will provide (verse 14). A lamb was spoken of; a ram was given; and readers ancient and modern have heard in that wording a promise held open. Carry the question as the text lets you carry it: where is the lamb? Write it on the group's list and leave it open. It will not close for nine more weeks.

Send: Taking It With You

9. The lamb lived with the family before it was offered. What does it change about the meaning of sacrifice when the offering is known and near, not anonymous?

10. God commanded Israel to keep the feast forever so that no generation would stand outside the story. Where do you stand toward the feast Christ left his Church: inside the story, or watching it?

Live It This Week

- Read Exodus 12:1-14 once more and memorize the sequence: chosen, kept, killed, blood, eaten, forever.
- At Mass this Sunday, when you hear Behold the Lamb of God, remember Isaac's question and let it be your own: where is the lamb?
- Before next session, ask one older Catholic in your life what the word memorial in the Mass means to them, and just listen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. 1 Corinthians 5:7

Closing Prayer

Together: Lamb of God, chosen before the foundation of the world, you came into the house of Israel and were known among us. Mark our doorposts, gather us at your table, and keep us until morning. Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Passage	Used For
Exodus 12:1-6	Selection and keeping of the lamb; live discovery
Exodus 12:7-11	Blood and the command to eat; discovery aim text
Exodus 12:12-14	Passing over; memorial forever (sets up Session 4)
Exodus 12:21-28	Hyssop (v. 22); instruction of children; live discovery
Exodus 12:43-49	Who may eat; one house; no bone broken (v. 46)
Leviticus 17:11 (reference)	Steelman support: atonement located in blood
Genesis 22:1-14	Dig Deeper: Where is the lamb thread planted
John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7	Leader background: Lamb of God, paschal lamb
1 Corinthians 5:7	Memory verse