

# Maundy Thursday

## CHILDREN [ARE] OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER

Exodus 12:1-14

Maundy Thursday

Analysis by Marcus Felde

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. 3Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. 5Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. 12For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute

judgments: I am the Lord. 13The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

14This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Striking Parents**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Making Babies***

Having babies is a problem? At the heart of this terrifying pericope is the notion that the Lord, in his jealousy, is going to take away the world's babies. Or, at least, all of the firstborn, as iconic instances. Ruthless exegesis of this ruthless passage concludes that, somehow, babies are the problem.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Love My Baby, Love Me***

Do we love our firstborns more because, when they are born, we admire ourselves more than we did before? Is it only the Dunas of Kopiago who say you aren't a "real man" (or woman) until you have a few children?

The tenth plague is a scourge that strikes at human pride in being fully human. "We reproduce! We make ourselves! Now we can live forever!" This discovery, accompanied with so much joy as we witness the birth of our firstborns, is transmuted in the human heart from joy at God's gift into hubris. Humanity is self-made, we reckon, and we "worship our creator" (to borrow William Cowper's assessment). We don't need a god, if we can come up with babies on our own, or if we can make children with the help of a lesser god. Is one pregnancy all that stands

between childhood and apotheosis?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Gone Babies Gone*

A cruel judgment took place outside the shuttered windows of the relatively few people who were “passed over” that night. All the firstborn of Egypt, human and beast, were taken away by death. But remember. Such a judgment, as when King David and Bathsheba’s firstborn died, is a judgment not on the child but on the parents. “I am the Lord,” said the Lord. “I mean it. You do not get babies from someone else. If you will not own me as Lord, I will take away the gift.” And then they were gone.

**PROGNOSIS: Raising Children**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *Passed Over. Not Gone.*

Except, by the grace of God, not all of them. Not all humanity. No flood this time. Terrible as the waste was, it was a foil against which would appear more clearly than ever the truth that the Lord’s opus proprium (what the Lord really enjoys doing) is salvation. Not only was Egypt spared—except for its pride and joy—but God’s children were passed over. Not selectively, judged according behavior, but all who would obey the rule of faith that the Lord laid down: “Take this lamb and eat it.” Marked by their receiving of the Word as “child ren who listen,” they ate and lived.

(Of course, we preach a new Passover, not this one. We preach that another Lamb was given in our place, once for all time and for all people. We are saved not as children of Abraham so much as children of the Egyptians’ second born. But the Lamb who saves us is one who was entitled to be passed over—descended from David and Bathsheba’s secondborn. But he gave himself for us that we might make it through the night.)

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Advanced Solution) :** *Children of the Heavenly Father*

"Children" is relative. We who have been passed over do not forget but remember who we are children "of." The meal, and the hunger that makes us prepare it, remind us that we are not our own, but belong to a household, and the household belongs to God. "Children of God" is what we are—a term that has roots in the Old Covenant, and is definitive in the New. One there is by whose blood we have been given "power to become children of God."

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Receiving Babies*  
God loves for us to (among other things) have babies. Take arranging-for-baby-making passages out of the book of Genesis, for example, and you aren't left with much. The Lord wants a large family, or why the promise to Abraham? Why "be fruitful and multiply," for that matter, and not "be fruitful and add"? God is there to hear our bawling cries. We, and our children, are the children of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. "Walk on, little lambs. Next stop Sinai." ("Road trip!")

## **POSTSCRIPT**

*This could be a frightful passage to preach because it stresses God's taking of life. We want the resurrection without the cross, as Niebuhr once said. But the Crossings Matrix is useful for precisely such times.*

*We do not preach a Size S gospel of "mend your ways." We do not preach a Size M gospel of "change your hearts." We proclaim a Size XXXL Gospel of "life from death," something of God's own doing. We believe that salvation at this level transforms people, and we believe that this is the salvation the Bible lifts up. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." This is a matter of death and life.*