

Exodus 12:3-6

<p>Speak to the community leadership of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. But if the household is too small for a lamb, let it share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight.</p>	<p>דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּעֲשֹׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׁה לְבַיִת אֵבֶת שֶׁה לְבַיִת : וְאִם־יִמְעֹט הַבַּיִת מִהַיּוֹת מִשֶּׁה וְלָקַח הוּא וּשְׁכֵנֹו הַקָּרֵב אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסֹת נַפְשׁוֹת אִישׁ לְפִי אֲכָלוּ תִכְסּוּ עַל־הַשֶּׁה : שֶׁה תַּמִּים זָכָר בְּרִשְׁנָה יְהִיָּה לָכֶם מִרְהַבְּשִׁים וּמִן־הָעִזִּים תִּקְחוּ : וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת עַד אַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וּשְׁחֹטוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל־קְהַל עֲדַת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין הָעֶרְבָּיִם :</p>
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Question: Why is this Pesach different from all other Pesachim?

Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael on Exodus 12:3

"On the tenth day of this month, they shall take": ("this") excludes the Paschal lamb of all the generations, which, unlike the Paschal lamb of Egypt, need not be taken on the tenth day, but may be taken at all times.

1. For Israel's sake, so that they merit redemption

Rashi on Exodus 12:6

AND IT SHALL BE IN YOUR KEEPING (or watching) – This expresses the idea of examining, and the text therefore implies that it requires examination against any blemish during the four days before slaughter (Pesachim 96a). And why did He order that it should be taken from the flock four days before its slaughter, something which He did not command in respect to the paschal-lamb that was offered by succeeding generations? Rabbi Mathia, the son of Cheresch, said, in answer: Behold, it (Scripture) says, (Ezekiel 16:8) "And I passed over thee (an allusion to God's passing over the Israelites in Egypt) and looked upon thee, and behold, thy time was the time of love" – there had arrived the time to fulfil the oath which I had sworn to Abraham to redeem his children. They, however, possessed no divine commands in which to engage in order that they should merit to be redeemed – as it is said (Ezekiel 16:7) "thou wast naked and bare" (i. e. bare of all merit earned through the fulfilment of God's commands). He therefore gave them two commands, relating respectively to the blood of the paschal-lamb and the blood of the circumcision – for that night they circumcised themselves, as it is said (Ezekiel 16:6) "[When I passed over thee] I saw thee wallowing in thy bloods (בְּדַמִּיָּהּ is plural)" i. e. in two kinds of blood. (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:2:1).



2. As a symbolic execution of the Egyptian god

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 46:2

Scripture tells us, according to the Version of Onkelos, that the Egyptians worshipped Aries, and therefore abstained from killing sheep, and held shepherds in contempt. Comp. "Behold we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians," etc. (Exod. 8:26); "For every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34). Some sects among the Sabeans worshipped demons, and imagined that these assumed the form of goats, and called them therefore "goats" [se'irim]. This worship was widespread. Comp. "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto demons, after whom they have gone a whoring" (Lev. 17:7). For this reason those sects abstained from eating goats' flesh. Most idolaters objected to killing cattle, holding this species of animals in great estimation. Therefore the people of Hodu [Indians] up to this day do not slaughter cattle even in those countries where other animals are slaughtered. In order to eradicate these false principles, the Law commands us to offer sacrifices only of these three kinds: "Ye shall bring your offering of the cattle [viz.], of the herd and of the flock" (Lev. 1:2). Thus the very act which is considered by the heathen as the greatest crime, is the means of approaching God, and obtaining His pardon for our sins. In this manner, evil principles, the diseases of the human soul, are cured by other principles which are diametrically opposite.

Nachmonides on Exodus 12:3

THEY SHALL TAKE TO THEM EVERY MAN A LAMB, ACCORDING TO THEIR FATHERS' HOUSES. The reason for this commandment is that the constellation of Aries (the Ram) is at the height of its power in the month of Nisan, it being the sign of the zodiac which ascends the heavens. Therefore He commanded us to slaughter the sheep and to eat it in order to inform us that it was not by the power of that constellation that we went out from Egypt, but by decree of the Supreme One. And according to the opinion of our Rabbis that the Egyptians worshipped it as a deity, He has all the more informed us through this that He subdued their gods and their powers at the height of their ascendancy. And thus the Rabbis have said: "*Take you lambs and slaughter the gods of Egypt.*"

3. As an 'Excessive celebration end-zone dance' to mock the Egyptians and their god

Hizkuni (Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (13th century France) on Exodus 12:6

Until the fourteenth day – 'in order to annoy the Egyptians who had to sit by unable to interfere while the Israelites prepared to kill their deities.' These animals were kept tied up where everyone could see them for four days. They would hear the animals bleat and were powerless to do anything about it. If we needed proof for this assumption it is found in the words: לחודש הזה "only) during this month." This means that this commandment was a commandment to be performed only once in Jewish history, [as we are a people that shuns cruelty to animals, so much so that we are commanded to unload the donkeys of even an enemy, if we see that it broke down under too heavy load. (Exodus 23,5) Ed.] What follows the words: לחודש הזה, "for this month," are rules applicable only to the Passover prior to the Exodus.



4. To break the Israelites of their own idol worshipping

Midrash Exodus Rabbah 16:2

You will find that the Israelites, when they were in Egypt, had also become idol-worshippers, and they would not forsake it... So the Holy Blessed One said to Moses: As long as the Israelites worship the Egyptian gods, they will not be redeemed. So go and say to them, forsake your evil ways, and atone for your idolatry. As it is written, "Pull back and take a lamb..." (Exod 12:21), meaning: pull your hands back from idolatry and take the lamb and slaughter the gods of Egypt to make the Passover offering.

Ha-ketav Veha-kabbalah, (Rabbi Ya'akov Zvi Mecklenberg, 1785-1865 Germany) on Exodus 12:13

The Israelites themselves were responsible in part for deferring their own redemption. First they had to be purified and show by some outstanding act of self-sacrifice that they had repented of their ways. If they were willing to place their lives in danger in order to carry out the wishes of the Almighty, that would be a true token of their love of God. Consequently, God commanded them to slay the Egyptian god under conditions of the widest publicity. First they had to procure the lamb, lead it through the streets without fear of Egyptian reaction, second, to slaughter it family by family, in groups and finally they had to sprinkle its blood on the doorposts for every Egyptian passer-by to see, braving the vengeance of their former persecutors. Their fulfilment of every detail of this rite would be a proof of their complete faith in God. In the words of the Sages, the blood would be a token 'to you' and not to others.

Nechama Leibowitz, New Studies in Exodus, page 200

We have thus clarified the significance of three aspects of the first Passover (1) the double performance of "draw-out-and-pick," (2) the choice of date for this performance – four days before the actual slaughter of the Paschal lamb, (3) the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts. They were all meant to demonstrate one principle: freedom in depth precedes a purely surface redemption.

