

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY
WEEK 20: EXODUS 12 – THE PASSOVER

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 12

I. The Passover Instituted – Exodus 12:1-28

- A. The Reform of the Calendar (Exodus 12:1-2)
- B. The Paschal Offering (Exodus 12:3-11)
- C. Pain for Egypt; Safety for Israel (Exodus 12:12-13)
- D. The Institution of the Passover Festival – Seven Days of Matsot (Exodus 12:14-20)
- E. Instructions for the Pesah are Relayed (Exodus 12:21-28)

II. The Passover Happens – Exodus 12:29-51

- F. Passover Strikes Pharaoh – Sends Israel Away (Exodus 12:29-32)
- G. Egyptians Respond – Egyptians Plundered (Exodus 12:33-36)
- H. The Quick Departure – (Exodus 12:37-39)
- I. Remembering How Long They Had Been in Egypt (Exodus 12:40-42)
- J. Who Can Celebrate and Eat – Only the Circumcised (Exodus 12:43-49)
- K. Israel Obeys and the Lord Leads them Out (Exodus 12:50-51)

CHAPTER 11 SUMMARY

Chapter 11 announces the last plague, a plague that was first mentioned in Exodus 4:21-23, which says:

²¹ And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. ²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. ²³ I said to you, “Let my son go that he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.’ ”

It talks about how the Israelites plundered the Egyptians and the Egyptians looked favorably upon them (see verse 2-3). In verse 4, Moses resumes his conversation with Pharaoh (even though each had told the other that they never wanted to see each other again). Of course, Moses leaves “in hot anger” (verse 8). And in the end of chapter 11, we are told that even though Moses and Aaron had performed all the wonders before Pharaoh, the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and Pharaoh did not let the people go.

CHAPTER 12

Chapter 12 opens with some very important instructions regarding the institution of one of the most important ritual observances in the life of the Jewish people—the Passover festival—which includes the Passover meal and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This will become the defining ritual in Jewish self-identity and is to be celebrated both as a family and as a community as a perpetual, lasting, eternal ordinance.

After the Babylonian exile, as the people were returning to their homeland and they were putting their stories together in their final form (the Torah), think about what the Passover story would have meant to them and how it would have spoken to them. They have this story from the past that speaks volumes to their own experience.

Exodus 12:1-11 (NRSV)

¹ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell 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. ⁴ If 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. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷ They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰ You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ This 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.

EXODUS 12:1-2 – A NEW CALENDAR

Again, it's the two elderly brothers (who are in their 80s), Moses and Aaron, the sons of Amram and Jochebad (Levites; Exodus 2:1; 6:20) who have been called by God to lead the people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (Exodus 3:1-12; 4:14-30). And here God is speaking to them in the land of Egypt. Aaron and his sons (Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar) will become the first priests (Exodus 28:1) and it will be their mission to lead Israel in the observance of the law.

One of the first things we notice in the opening verses of chapter 12 is that Israel is going to be introducing/setting its entire calendar by this upcoming Passover event. This is a new beginning for Israel. The Israelites will mark all of time and all of history based on this event; their transition from slaves to a new nation. It is like how our calendar in the west is centered around the birth of Christ (which used to be designated as BC "Before Christ" and AD "Anno Domini" or Latin for "in the year of the Lord").

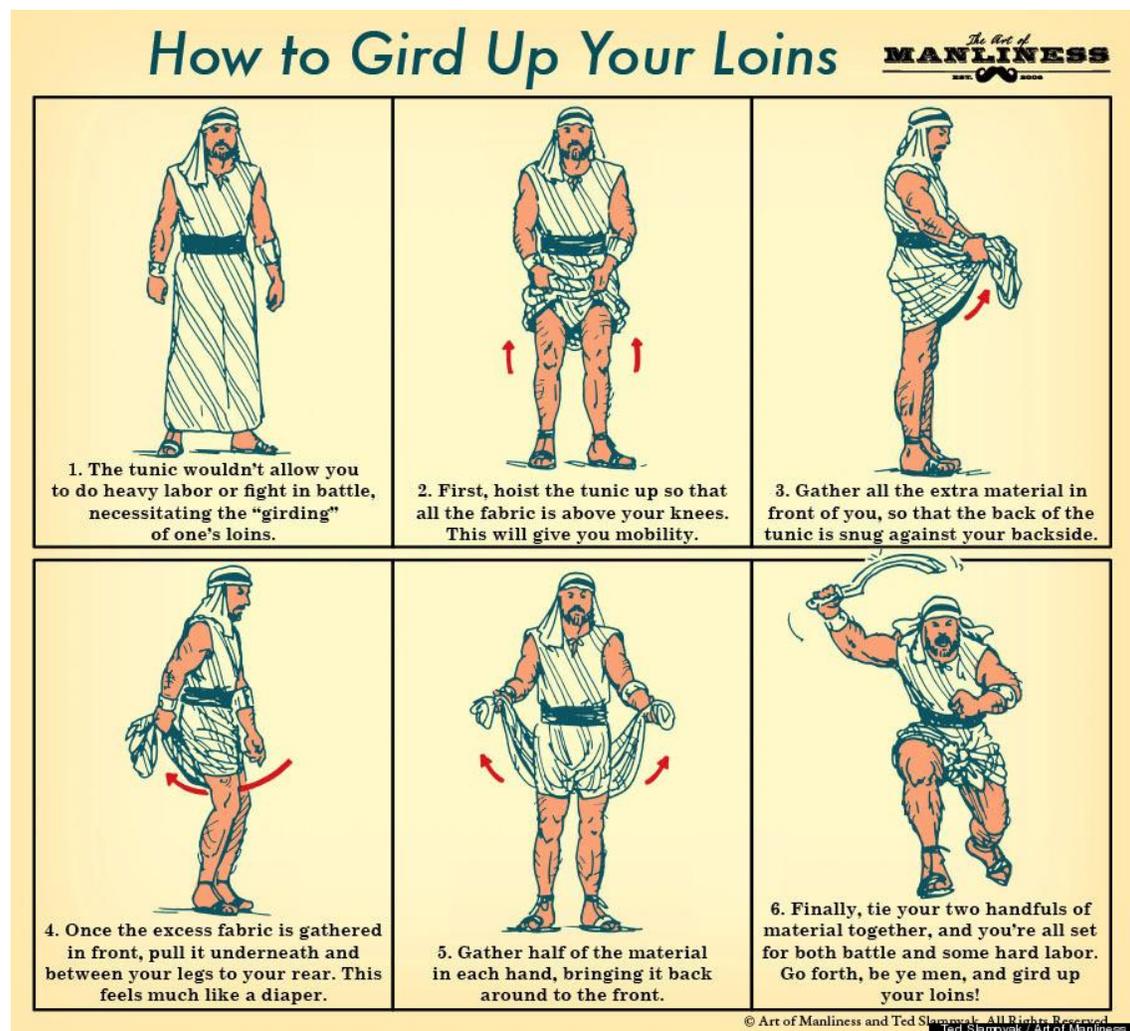
EXODUS 12:3-11 – A NEW SACRIFICE

Central to this celebration will be a year-old, unblemished male lamb (see Leviticus 1:3-10 and Numbers 28:3; 29:2) whose blood (representing its life that is used to save them from the judgment to come; see Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 17:11-14) will be used to mark the houses of the Israelites. The lamb's "roasted" meat will be used in a ritual meal that will be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the month (the night of the full moon for a lunar calendar).

The preparations will begin on the tenth day of the month. Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement; see Leviticus 23:27-28), the most sacred day in the religious calendar, falls on the tenth of the seventh month. In ancient times this same date ushered in the Jubilee year. Joshua chose the tenth of the first month to cross the Jordan river (see Joshua 4:19).

The Israelites are also to eat "bitter" herbs which is probably a reminder of the "bitter" service of the Israelites as mentioned in Exodus 1:13-14: ¹³ *The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites,* ¹⁴ *and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.*

We are also told of the symbolic significance of the bread made without yeast: The journey is to be made in haste, so there is not time to let the dough rise. The meal is to be called "Passover" (Hebrew: *pesah*). And it is to be eaten in a hurry. You are to have your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand; essentially as if you are ready to head out the door.



One item of note is that this passage is the first time the word “congregation” (Hebrew: *edah*; verse 3) occurs in the Hebrew scriptures. It means “gathering” or “assembly”. The New Testament equivalent is the Greek word *ekklesia* which refers to people being “called out” and gathered into some sort of assembly, which we call the “church”.

Exodus 12:12-13 (NRSV)

¹² For 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. ¹³ The 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.

EXODUS 12:12-13 – PASSING THROUGH

This passage alerts the Israelites that something momentous is about to happen and that it will happen that very night. God will implement the last plague against Egypt, striking down (killing) all the firstborn—both human and animal—throughout the land.

Is it the angel of death who is going to *pass through* the land? Or is it God? According to verse 12, it is God. If you look at verse 23, you see potentially two entities; the Lord (YHWH), who will *pass through*, and the “destroyer,” who will enter each house. ²³ For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. Notice the identity of the destroyer here in verse 13: “no plague shall destroy you.” So, is the plague the destroyer or is it the angel of death as tradition holds? If we go a little further, in verse 29 it says that Yahweh (the Lord) came and struck down the firstborn at midnight.

The significance of the firstborn among the Israelites as reflected in Jewish law and practice:

- Yahweh considers Israel to be his firstborn (Exodus 4:22; see also Jeremiah 31:9).
- Israelites are to consecrate all firstborn, both human and animals, to Yahweh (Exodus 13:2; 12-13).
- While Jewish law requires the sacrifice (the death) of the firstborn, it requires that people redeem their firstborn sons and allows for the redemption of certain animals (Exodus 13:2, 12-13; 22:29-30; 34:20; Leviticus 27:26; Numbers 18:15).
- Firstborn cattle, sheep, and goats are to be holy—used as sacrificial animals. There is no provision for redeeming them. They must be slaughtered as sacrifices to Yahweh (Numbers 18:17; Deuteronomy 15:19).
- Firstborn sons are to receive a double portion of the inheritance, and fathers are prohibited from reassigning the firstborn’s portion to another son (Deuteronomy 21:15-17).
- It is through the firstborn son that families trace their lineage.

One thing to note about verse 12 is that the Passover is not just God executing judgment against Egypt, but also Egypt’s gods (and Pharaoh was considered the son of one of their gods). What God will do that night will show the Egyptians that their gods have no power to save them. They are useless.

And God closes verse 12 by saying “I am the Lord” which is essentially saying “I AM who I AM”; a throwback to Exodus 3:14 during the call of Moses: ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’”

Isn’t it interesting for whom the blood is a sign? Is it a sign for the people? Or is it a sign for God? Does God need the sign to know which houses to Passover? Verse 13 says that the blood is a sign “for you.”

Exodus 12:14-20 (NRSV)

¹⁴ This 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. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you. ¹⁷ You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. ¹⁸ In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth

day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread. ¹⁹ *For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether an alien or a native of the land.* ²⁰ *You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.*

EXODUS 12:14-20 – THE FESTIVAL OF MATSOT (UNLEAVENED BREAD)

Again, this is meant to be a lasting, eternal ordinance. It is not just this day (Nisan fourteen) that the people will observe, but seven days (verses 15-20). They will open the seven-day observance with a solemn assembly and close it with a second solemn assembly. During the seven days, they will abstain from work, purge their homes of leaven, and eat unleavened bread. They will continue this commemoration as a “perpetual ordinance” (verse 17). This annual observance is to keep the Passover fresh in Israel’s memory—to remind Israel of its origins and of Yahweh’s providential care. Notice how in verse 17, the departure is talked about in the past tense “*on this day I brought your companies out of the land.*”

One thing we notice as we continue reading chapter 12 is that it appears to jump back and forth from telling a narrative story about the departure to giving the Israelites instructions for how to observe the festival in all generations. It appears that a lesson in liturgics is inserted within the story. Liturgics means literally “the work of the people” which is what we call our liturgy (the things we do and say in worship).

Exodus 12:21-28 (NRSV)

²¹ *Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb.* ²² *Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning.* ²³ *For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.* ²⁴ *You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children.* ²⁵ *When you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance.* ²⁶ *And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’* ²⁷ *you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’”* *And the people bowed down and worshiped.* ²⁸ *The Israelites went and did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron.*

EXODUS 12:21-28 –

Things appear to be getting rather repetitive. The same regulations are being repeated again and again with extra little details added in. Here they are instructed to take a bunch of hyssop and dip it into the blood. What is hyssop? It’s a small shrub about 27 inches high with small white flowers in bunches at the end of the stem. Branches are used here to apply the blood to the doorposts. And elsewhere in scripture, it is used to sprinkle a mixture of blood and water on a person healed of leprosy or on a renovated house (See Leviticus 14). According to Hebrews 9:19-20, Moses sprinkled blood on the people in the ceremony of Exodus 24:6-8 using hyssop.



Hebrews 9:19–20 (NRSV)

¹⁹ *For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people,* ²⁰ *saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.”*

Exodus 24:6–8 (NRSV)

⁶ *Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar.* ⁷ *Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”* ⁸ *Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”*

Notice also that in this reiteration of the regulations already mentioned in verses 1 through 13, there is no mention of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Notice also the phrase “the Passover lamb” which will become an important image in the gospel representation of Jesus’ death which took place on Passover.

Exodus 12:29-32 (NRSV)

²⁹ At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. ³⁰ Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. ³¹ Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, "Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. ³² Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!"

EXODUS 12:29-32 – THE TENTH PLAGUE HAPPENS

Finally, we get to the part that we've all been waiting for: the departure from Egypt. Pharaoh and all of Egypt suffer. And Pharaoh finally sends the Israelites away. Notice the sense of urgency in Pharaoh. He calls Moses and Aaron at night and says "Go away!"

But also notice that Pharaoh wants them to "bring a blessing" on him too. Does he imagine that his actions to let them go with their flocks and herds will bring a blessing on him? Or does he want Aaron and Moses to bring a blessing on him when they are worshiping the Lord?

Exodus 12:33-36 (NRSV)

³³ The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, "We shall all be dead." ³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. ³⁵ The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, ³⁶ and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

EXODUS 12:33-36 – HURRY UP & TAKE WHAT YOU WANT

The Israelites leave, but not before plundering the Egyptians. The Egyptians urge the Israelites to leave at once and give them whatever they ask. The Egyptians appear to be afraid that the tenth plague is not the last. But notice that Egyptians still look with "favor" on the Israelites. The Israelites are leaving Egypt not as rats scurrying out of a burning building, but with dignity. Again, there is the mention of bread made without yeast in verse 34 (which will be seen again in verse 39). It will be important to notice in the verses ahead how the Israelites followed the instructions regarding their departure and the rituals that accompany the festival and feast. Notice how in verse 34 "kneading bowls" are mentioned. The last time "kneading bowls" were mentioned was during the plague of frogs coming out of the river and "into your ovens and your kneading bowls" (Exodus 8:3).

Exodus 12:37-39 (NRSV)

³⁷ The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. ³⁸ A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. ³⁹ They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

EXODUS 12:37-39 – THE FIRST PART OF THE JOURNEY

Rameses is one of the supply cities that the Israelites were forced to build for Pharaoh as mentioned in chapter 1. Succoth is a town that we first encountered in Genesis chapter 33 when Jacob was returning from the east to Shechem by way of Succoth after his meeting with Esau: ¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth. In case you didn't notice, the name Succoth means "booth" in Hebrew. That town is located way up north close to the east bank of the Jordan River up near where the Jabbok River meets the Jordan. Here in this passage, Succoth (apparently Egyptian Tjeku) is supposed to be a day's journey from the royal palace at Rameses. Tjeku was the capital of the eight nome of Lower Egypt in the eastern part of the Delta. The region served as pastureland for Semitic tribes and was the usual Egyptian gateway to and from Asia. See the map on the next page.



Six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children! Umm... errr... that's a lot of people. With women and children that would be over 2 million people. From 70 to 2 million? Hmm... Surely there weren't 2 million Israelites living in Goshen. Of course, this amount does reflect the phenomenal growth referred to in chapter 1 which is the reason Pharaoh was so fearful of the Israelites. But, this number isn't very easy to reconcile with the archeological evidence and appears to be hyperbole. If you picture Moses as Forrest Gump as he runs across America, that would be a whole lot more people.

What does it mean that "a mixed crowd also went up with them"? Does this mean that they brought foreigners with them? When we get to verses 43-49, it begins to make sense because the talk will be about natural citizens and resident aliens, the circumcised and the uncircumcised.

Exodus 12:40-42 (NRSV)

⁴⁰ The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. ⁴¹ At the end of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴² That was for the Lord a night of vigil,

to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the Lord by all the Israelites throughout their generations.

EXODUS 12:40-42 – THE TIMING OF IT ALL

430 years to the day, all the Israelites left Egypt. If you recall what was said to Abram in the book of Genesis:

Genesis 15:13–14 (NRSV)

¹³ Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and **shall be slaves** there, and they **shall be oppressed for four hundred years**; ¹⁴ but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward **they shall come out with great possessions**.

This same information is represented in the New Testament in the book of Acts:

Acts 7:6 (NRSV)

⁶ And God spoke in these terms, that his descendants would be resident aliens in a country belonging to others, who **would enslave them and mistreat them during four hundred years**.

But do you notice a small difference in the number? In Exodus 12, it is 430 years, but in Genesis and Acts it is 400 years. Hmm... What are we to make of the not so subtle difference? I think this is a sign that we are not to take these numbers literally. Just like we were not to take the collapsed genealogy of chapter 6 which refers to four generations from Levi to Aaron literally.

The final night in Egypt is described as one of vigil for both God and Israel. It was one that God, so to speak, watched over, having long designated it to be the night of redemption. In turn, it was a night that Israel was enjoined to safeguard for all time.

Exodus 12:43-49 (NRSV)

⁴³ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been circumcised; ⁴⁵ no bound or hired servant may eat of it. ⁴⁶ It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it. ⁴⁸ If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the passover to the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it; ⁴⁹ there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.

EXODUS 12:43-49 – EXCLUSIONARY REGULATIONS

Once again, we get more instructions on how to observe the Passover correctly. But this time, the concern is primarily about who can partake of the meal.

Foreigner (Hebrew *ben nekhar*) is a non-Israelite who resides in the land temporarily. And so, these people wouldn't profess to be Jewish, wouldn't identify with Israel's history, wouldn't have been circumcised according to the covenant, and therefore aren't allowed to share in the meal.

Slaves, once they are circumcised in accordance with the law of Genesis 17:12-13, are treated as members of the family and are allowed participate in the Passover: ¹² Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. ¹³ Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.

Bound or hired servants are two categories of non-Israelite wage earners who do not have the status of members of a household and so they cannot eat of it either.

Resident Alien/Stranger (Hebrew *ger*) is someone who takes up permanent residence in Israel. For this person, it was not a requirement that they celebrate the Passover, but if they desired to do so, they could if they would submit to circumcision and identify themselves with the Israelites, thus becoming a citizen. And if they did this, there would be no discrimination against them. They would be treated no differently than a natural citizen.

Uncircumcised Israelites were excluded just like uncircumcised non-Israelites.

One thing we should remember here is that non-Israelites are NOT excluded from the meal simply based on their ethnicity. The rule seems to be whether or not they have put themselves under the sign of the covenant and have been circumcised.

Exodus 12:50-51 (NRSV)

⁵⁰ All the Israelites did just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ That very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.

Verse 51 repeats what is said in verse 41. It picks up the narrative following the digression concerning ritual regulations.