

Exodus I – Notes

XI. Remember the Feast

13-Aug-06 Exodus 12:1-28; 12:43-13:16

Theme: Through the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread and the redemption of the firstborn, Israel was called to remember God's great salvation and their call to live holy lives; in the same way, Christians remember the great salvation of Christ through the Lord's Supper.

Key Verses: Exodus 12:12-13 ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. ¹³Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

Review

Last week we studied plagues seven through ten. These plagues teach us that God is: 1) omnipotent; 2) glorious; 3) sovereign; 4) eternal; and 5) just. This knowledge, concerning God's holy character and righteous actions, is not to be confined to one place or one time. It is not only for the Egyptians or Israelites of Moses' day. God uses the ten plagues to extend true knowledge of the LORD throughout space and time to encompass all of creation and all of eternity.

The seventh plague is the massive hailstorm. In His grace, God gives the Egyptians a warning to protect their servants and livestock from the deadly hail. Although a few Egyptians "feared the word of the LORD" most had no regard for it and suffered great loss. Pharaoh makes an incomplete confession, but all he is really looking for is to avoid the consequences of his sin, not forsake his rebellion against God. Of course, after the plague is gone, he refuses to let Israel go.

The eighth plague is a terrible locust swarm. Before the plague occurs, Pharaoh offers another concession to Moses – he will permit the men to go worship God, but the women and children must stay. Moses refuses to deal with Pharaoh, so the locust swarm comes and completely covers the land of Egypt. The locusts eat all the remaining vegetation that the hail had not already destroyed. Pharaoh once again expresses incomplete repentance, and once again hardens his heart in rebellion once the immediate unpleasantness of the locust swarm has passed.

The ninth plague is three days of terrifying, palpable darkness. The sun god of Egypt is defeated as the Egyptians sit in physical darkness that symbolized the spiritual darkness in the land. Meanwhile, it is light and life in the land of Goshen where the people of God dwelt. Pharaoh offers one last compromise – all the people may go, but they may not take their herds and flocks with them. Again, Moses refuses to compromise – it is all or nothing.

Pharaoh in a fit of anger throws Moses out of his court and threatens death if he ever shows his face again. Before he leaves, Moses announces the last blow – the death of the first-born. This will be the final straw, the plague that breaks the will of Pharaoh and Egypt and causes the king to drive the Israelites out of Egypt. Pharaoh is being "plagued to death."

Introduction

Today is our "legislation lesson." We temporarily interrupt the narrative to bring you three major pieces of Old Testament legislation: 1) the Passover; 2) the Feast of Unleavened Bread;

Exodus I – Notes

and 3) the Firstborn. We will deal with these laws topically rather than strictly verse by verse. Next week we will pick back up with the exodus and Red Sea crossing.

Due to the richness of the material in today's lesson, I won't have time to conclude with theological, Christological, and practical applications. However, I will be making many of these points during the exposition of the text. To keep the big picture in front of us, as we go through these instructions, always remember that this passage points directly to "Christ, our Passover, [who] was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

A. Passover (12:1-13, 21-28, 43-51)

First, let us consider the instructions Moses receives from God concerning the Passover. There are three sets of instructions for the Passover in chapter 12: verses 1-13, 21-28, and 43-51.

1. Passover Sacrifice (12:1-7, 21-22a)

The first thing we read about the Passover is that it inaugurates a new beginning. The Hebrew calendar is reoriented around the Passover. From this point on, Passover will be celebrated in the first month of the year (12:2). We've seen throughout our studies of the plagues how God has been de-creating Egypt. At the same time, this new beginning points to a new creation of Israel as the redeemed people of God.

A key element of the Passover is the *sacrifice* of a substitute. God is about to bring death and judgment upon each household of Egypt for their sins. But Israel is also sinful and unworthy. They also deserve death and judgment. However, in the grace and mercy of God, He provides a substitute for each household of Israel – a Passover lamb, to be selected on the tenth day of the month (12:3-4).

Three characteristics of the Passover lamb are given in verse 5. First, it was to be "without blemish." A perfect, healthy animal had to be chosen. God does not settle for second best. Physical defects would disqualify the animal (*cp.* Lev. 20:20-22). As Bentley points out, "the lamb which was selected had to be wholesome in every way. This lamb was to be quite different from the Israelites themselves. They had many defects; they were sinful but the lamb which they chose to sacrifice had to be pure in every way." Second, it was "a male of the first year." Thus, the chosen animal was in the prime of life. Finally, it had to be taken "from the sheep or from the goats." It was not a stray animal – it was an animal from the flock. In other words, it had value and significance to the owner.

Once selected, the lamb is segregated until the fourteenth day when it is sacrificed at twilight (12:6). Then we have very specific and unusual instructions. Every household is to take hyssop (12:22) and dip it into the blood of the lamb. Hyssop is a common, aromatic herb which is often associated with purification (Num. 19:18; Ps. 51:7). In this case, the hyssop is used to apply the blood to the door posts and lintels of their house (12:7, 22). Symbolically, this is similar to the blood of circumcision smeared on the legs (or "doorposts") of Moses' son back in 4:24-26.

Why blood? Why did the lamb have to die? Couldn't God have identified the households of the faithful without the sign of blood on the door? Of course He could. But He is teaching us a foundational principle about the consequences of sin. Sin brings death. Sin brought death to Adam and the entire human race. And redemption can only be obtained through death as well. Hebrews 9:22 tells us that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" of sin. The only way for forgiveness, the only manner of redemption, the only path of salvation is through the

Exodus I – Notes

shedding of blood. In theological terms, the shed blood of the lamb was *expiation* for sin – that is, it satisfied God’s holy and righteous demands.

Throughout the land of Egypt, there would be death visited upon each household that night. In the case of the Egyptians, the death would be the firstborn son in each household. In the Israelite families, it was the death of a substitute – the Passover lamb. Thus, the sacrifice of the Passover lamb presents us a strong picture of substitutionary atonement – one death in place of another. This is the essence of the sacrificial system and the basis for our redemption in Jesus Christ, our substitute.

2. *Passover Meal (12:8-11, 43-49)*

The first major element of the Passover observance was the sacrifice of a substitute. The death of the Passover lamb and the application of the lamb’s blood by faith to the doors of the home, served as a *propitiation* for sin. That is, the blood served as a covering to turn away the wrath of God from the household.

Because God’s wrath is turned away and His righteous demands are satisfied, those covered by the blood of the Passover lamb are in fellowship with Him. This fellowship is symbolized by the Passover *meal*. Moses spends a significant amount of time telling us: 1) how to eat the meal; and 2) who can eat the meal. Both subjects are instructive for us.

Moses gives five instructions on how to eat the Passover Meal. First, the lamb must be roasted, not boiled or eaten raw (12:9). Secondly, as the lamb was roasted, care had to be taken to ensure that none of its bones were broken (12:46). Third, it was to be seasoned with “bitter herbs” (12:8) such as endive and chicory. Most commentators state that these bitter herbs were intended to remind the Israelites of the bitterness of their bondage and affliction in Egypt (*cp.* 1:14).

Next, unleavened bread was to be eaten along with the Passover lamb (12:8). Ostensibly, the reason for the unleavened bread is the haste in which the meal was to be prepared and eaten, just before their midnight exodus out of Egypt (12:11). However, this meaning is largely symbolic, since they had four days to prepare for the meal, from the tenth day of the month when the lamb was chosen until the Passover itself on the fourteenth day. (We’ll discuss this more fully under the subject of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.)

Finally, Moses commanded the children of Israel to consume the lamb completely (12:10, 46). There were to be no leftovers from this meal. Any meat that was not consumed by the participants was burned up in the fire. The total consumption of the Passover lamb points to the sufficiency and completeness of God’s redemption of His people.

In the passage at the end of chapter 12 (vv. 43-49), Moses deals with the subject of who can eat this Passover meal. Although Moses takes the better part of seven verses to deal with this topic, the essence can be boiled down (or roasted down) into this statement: the Passover meal was only for Israelites and circumcised converts.

The Passover meal was for all of Israel: “All the congregation of Israel shall keep it” (12:47). The Old Testament Church was called to keep God’s feast. But just as God made a distinction between Israel and Egypt in the plagues, He also makes a distinction between Israelites and non-Israelites in the keeping of the Passover: “no outsider shall eat it” (12:43). This is not a racist policy, designed to exclude other nationalities from this fellowship meal. Rather, “the meal was restricted to those who were identified with the people of God” (Bentley). As Ryken puts it,

Exodus I – Notes

“This was not a matter of race but of grace. These outsiders had not yet put their faith in the God of Israel, and thus they had no right to receive the atonement that He provided through the Passover lamb.”

However, there was a way for foreigners and outsiders to be admitted to the feast. This condition was circumcision (12:44, 46), the sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:10-14). If an outsider came to true faith and repentance, they could join themselves to the covenant people by taking the covenant sign upon themselves. Thus, we see the graciousness of God’s redemption. It was not exclusive to ethnic Israel, but to everyone who joined themselves to the people of God. Apparently there were non-Israelites who were circumcised and participated in the first Passover meal, since a “mixed multitude” departed with Israel in the exodus (12:38).

3. *Passover Judgment (12:12-13, 22b-23)*

Of course, the whole point of the Passover sacrifice and meal was to avoid the *judgment* of God in the tenth and final plague:

¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. ¹³Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt... ²²Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. ²³When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down (Exodus 12:12-13, 22b-23).

The name of “Passover” comes from God passing over the houses marked with the sign of the lamb’s blood. Notice how it is the LORD Himself who executes judgment: “I will pass through ... I will execute judgment ... I will pass over you.” He even calls Himself “the destroyer” in v. 23 (*cp.* 1 Cor. 10:10). That is exactly what He is to the Egyptians, who did not have the sign of blood over their doors. On the other hand, the sign of blood over the doors of Israel was a physical symbol which pointed to a spiritual reality. The Israelites who acted in faith according to the Passover instructions were spared the plague of death.

4. *Passover Memorial (12:24-27a)*

The regulations that Moses gives in Exodus 12 were intended for more than just the exodus generation. This is clear from the instructions given in verse 24-27a regarding the ongoing observance of the Passover. The observance of the original Passover was to be a *memorial* passed down from generation to generation as a lasting ordinance. We call the Passover a “memorial” feast because it was established to remember the great redemption of God. When God remembers something (*cp.* 2:24), He acts in history. In response, we are called to remember the great acts in history of our God. God saved His people from Egypt, He redeemed them from slavery, He called them to service. The Passover meal is intended to remind God’s people of their great salvation and spur them on to righteous and holy living in response.

We have a similar memorial. Jesus took the Passover meal and transformed it into the Lord’s Supper. Just as the Passover meal was only for Israelites and circumcised converts, so the Lord’s Supper is only for true believers who confess Jesus Christ as Savior. This is why the elders of

Exodus I – Notes

this church “fence the table.” We are happy to have Bible-believing Christians in good standing within our church or any other evangelical church partake in the Supper. But it is not for the unbeliever. You must first join yourself to the church of Christ in public confession before you can come to the Table.

Furthermore, similar to Passover, the Lord’s Supper is to be observed as a memorial (I Cor. 11:24) of the great salvation we have through Jesus Christ. “The Lord’s Supper is a feast to remember. It helps us make sure we never forget that we are sinners saved by the body and blood of Christ” (Ryken). Thus, when we keep the Lord’s Supper, we are continuing the tradition of observing the Passover meal, in remembrance of our great salvation.

5. Passover Obeyed (12:27b-28, 50-51)

²⁷So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. ²⁸Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did...
⁵⁰Thus all the children of Israel did; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. ⁵¹And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies (Exodus 12:27b-28, 50-51).

Isn’t it good to read that the people of God obeyed His commands? They “bowed their heads and worshipped” when they heard the commands, and then they “went away and did so.” In these verses, the Israelites exemplify the entire purpose of the exodus. God has continually told Pharaoh to “let My people go so that they may serve Me.” And here we actually see them doing that – serving God by worshipping Him. God has taken this group of oppressed slaves and converted them into a holy army of prayer warriors. How great and glorious is the redemption of God!

6. Passover Significance

Of course, the whole Passover story finds its significance and fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who is “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Although the Passover and exodus is the great act of atonement and redemption in the Old Testament, it still looked forward to something more complete and permanent. The book of Hebrews tells us that it is not possible for the blood of bulls or goats or lambs or any other animal to fully and completely deal with the problem of sin (*cp.* Heb. 10:4). Ultimately, it takes an infinitely valuable sacrifice to deal once and for all with our sin problem that separates us from God.

The characteristics of the Passover lamb point us to Christ. Although fully divine, Jesus was also fully human, thus a better fit for substitutionary atonement than a mere animal. Like the one-year old lamb, Jesus was in the prime of life. Of course, the description of the lamb without physical blemish points to the greater reality of Jesus Christ without spiritual blemish:

²¹For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

¹⁸...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19).

¹³For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more shall the blood of Christ, who

Exodus I – Notes

through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13-14).

The bitter herbs of Exodus 12:8 may be reflected in the bitter myrrh given to Christ to drink upon the cross (Mk. 15:23). Certainly the command not to break any bones of the Passover lamb (12:46), which is picked up in Psalm 34:20, is fulfilled in Christ upon the cross (John 19:31-36). Paul makes the connection between Christ and the Passover sacrifice explicit when he says, “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). Like the firstborn of Egypt, we deserve death for our sin and rebellion. But we have a substitute, One who by His shed blood provides expiation (satisfaction) and propitiation (covering) for our sins. Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb. We are no longer under condemnation, but are in fellowship and at peace with our God. Praise be to our Savior, Jesus Christ!

B. Unleavened Bread (12:14-20; 13:3-10)

The second major subject we need to look at is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Moses describes this feast in 12:14-20 and again in 13:3-10. There is some overlap between the two passages.

1. Remembering the Feast (12:14, 13:3-5)

We need to recognize that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was not observed during the exodus, since the hosts of Israel were marching out of Egypt at this time. Rather, these instructions are given by Moses to be followed in subsequent years and by subsequent generations. This emphasis is repeated by Moses in the way he introduces the feast: “So this day shall be to you a *memorial*; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD *throughout your generations*. You shall keep it as a feast by an *everlasting ordinance*” (12:14).

Although this feast is given as a separate ordinance from Passover, practically speaking they are virtually indistinguishable. The feast of Passover continues on into the celebration of Unleavened Bread. Throughout the rest of the Pentateuch, they are combined into one of three great feasts of the Israelite calendar (Ex. 23:14-17; Lev. 23:4-7; Num. 28:16-25). For example:

¹Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. ²Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name. ³You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life (Deuteronomy 16:1-3).

The Israelites were never meant to forget what God had done for them. God knew that once they settled into the good life in the land of Canaan, they would tend to forget the hardships of the past (13:3-5). So God designed this feast to be a memory aid to them. The purpose of the feast was to remind God’s people of their salvation, of their redemption, of their deliverance from the darkness of slavery. This memory aid was not simply for the exodus generation, as forgetful as they tended to be. Rather, this feast was “clearly for the benefit of those generations who did not participate in the exodus itself. Yahweh’s acts on behalf of His people are never meant to be anything less than acts that transcend time and space” (Enns). Thus, this feast is for us as well. Of course, we celebrate the memorial of Christ’s great redemption on our behalf in the regular observance of the Lord’s Supper.

Exodus I – Notes

2. *Observing the Feast (12:15-20, 13:6-7)*

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was fairly straightforward in its observance. Only a few characteristics of the feast are described here. The first is its duration: *seven days* (12:15; 13:6). Since the number seven time and again refers to completeness or moral perfection, the length of the feast is symbolic for a complete time of remembrance by God's people. This was no quick meal and then back to the hum drum of ordinary life; a seven-day period was to be set aside for remembering the salvation of God.

The second key aspect of the feast is contained in its name: only *unleavened bread* could be eaten during the seven-day period (12:15; 13:7). For the entire seven days, no yeast or leaven could be used or even kept in the houses of Israel. In its historical context, the unleavened bread is meant to symbolize the haste in which the Israelites left Egypt. However, the deeper meaning is spiritual. To understand the symbolism of unleavened bread, we must first understand both the physical and spiritual significance of leaven.

Since refrigerated yeast packets had not yet been invented, the most common method of making leavened bread was to save a pinch of old dough and use it the next day for the new dough. We do the same type of thing today when making sourdough bread. As the yeast in the old lump ferments, it works its way completely through the new dough and causes it to rise. That's what yeast does; it grows and spreads. Thus, physically "leaven was used as a symbol of development over time, of the pervasive spread of something" (Mackay).

In a spiritual context, leaven is sometimes used to describe the growth of the kingdom of God (Mt. 13:33), but it is more often used to describe the pervasive spread and growth of sin or corruption (*cp.* Mt. 16:6; Lk. 12:1). Paul makes this connection explicit for us:

⁶Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?
⁷Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. ⁸Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The idea, therefore, of the unleavened bread is one of separation and newness. The people of God were called to leave behind the old lump of leaven – their old life of slavery and sin in Egypt – and live a new life dedicated to holiness and righteousness. Anything and everything which could corrupt them had to be left behind. "God wanted to do something more than get His people out of Egypt; He wanted to get Egypt out of His people; so He told them to make a clean sweep" (Ryken).

If the lump of leaven was the sin of Egypt, then the unleavened bread was the bread of holiness and sanctification. The Passover spoke about salvation and justification, of the one-time act of God's redemption. On the other hand, the Feast of Unleavened Bread spoke about the ongoing walk of faith, of sanctification, and of holy and righteous living. Paul makes the same application for Christians – we are to leave behind the sin of our former lives and live holy and sanctified lives worthy of our calling in Christ.

The third characteristic of the feast is the consequence for failing to keep it correctly: being *cut off* (12:15, 19). Being "cut off" meant expulsion from the community of God's people. In modern terms it would be considered "excommunication." This is a serious consequence and highlights the importance of keeping the feast correctly.

Exodus I – Notes

The final element of the feast is in the observance of *holy convocations* (12:16). These holy convocations were special Sabbaths intended for the gathering of God's people in worship. Once again, we see what our response to redemption should be: remembering God's great acts of salvation naturally leads His people into worship. After all, this is the purpose of the exodus – God's people are saved to serve Him and give Him the glory.

3. *Practicing the Feast (13:8-10)*

The purpose of the feast is to be “a memorial” and “an everlasting ordinance”; it's to be observed “throughout your generations.” In the final verses on the subject of Unleavened Bread, God gives His people three practical ways to remember the feast and its deeper spiritual meaning.

The first practical way to remember the feast is to *teach* its meaning to our children (13:8). Children are great at asking the “Why?” questions. As Christian parents, we must be prepared to answer these questions Biblically and teach our children not only what we do but why we do it. The answer in 13:8 is simple enough – “This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.” The reason to remember is redemption. We need to teach our children what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We must teach them of their own sin and their own need for salvation. We must teach the feast and what it means to our children.

The second way to practice the meaning of the feast is to *meditate* on it: “It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt” (13:9). The Jews of Jesus' day took these words literally. The fashioned small leather boxes or pouches called phylacteries, put this passage and other similar ones (e.g., Ex. 13:1-16; Dt. 6:4-9; 11:13-21) in them, and then attached them to their forehead and left arm. Jesus points out that like the rest of the Pharisees' religious practices, the use of showy phylacteries was empty and vain without the internal reality of the Word written on the heart (Mt. 23:5).

Exodus 13:9 is not commanding that we tape Bible verses to our foreheads; rather, it is exhorting us to meditate on the meaning of the feast. “A memorial between your eyes” points to the mind meditating on the truths contained in the feast. We are to think about God's redemption, we are to speak about it (“law be in your mouth”), and we are to act accordingly (“a sign to you on your hand”). Thus, our thoughts, words, and deeds must all be consistent with the salvation God has accomplished in us. Again, we see that the Feast of Unleavened Bread has to do with sanctification – we are to live our lives in a way that is consistent with our redemption.

The final practical method for remembering our salvation is actually to *observe* the feast: “You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year” (13:10). The feast is a memorial that is meant to be observed. Partaking in the feast is a special opportunity to remember your salvation, to teach your children, and to meditate on God's goodness to you. We have that opportunity every month when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Don't let those opportunities go to waste. Use them for your sanctification and the sanctification of your children. Just like the Israelites, we are called to remember the feast.

C. **Firstborn (13:1-2, 11-16)**

Our third main subject concerns the laws of the firstborn. Of course, the subject of the firstborn is intimately linked with Passover and Unleavened Bread, since these feasts celebrate the redemption of Israel and God's passing over the firstborn in the tenth plague.

Exodus I – Notes

1. *Consecrating the Firstborn (13:1-2, 11-12)*

Because they have been spared by Him, God claims the firstborn of Israel for Himself. The firstborn of both man and beast is to be consecrated, or set apart for God (13:1-2, 13:11-12). God's claim on the firstborn is a reminder that everything belongs to Him already (Ps. 50:10-12). We recognize this fact when we present to Him our firstfruits or tithes (*cp.* Pr. 3:9). Thus, God's claim on the firstborn is a picture for us of His claims on all His children. We are not saved to do our own thing. Our salvation has a purpose – to serve the LORD and worship Him forever.

The firstborn are to be set apart or consecrated for service because they have been purchased with the blood of the Passover lamb. In a similar fashion, all Christians have been bought by the precious blood of Christ. We are no longer our own; we belong to God:

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

2. *Redeeming the Firstborn (13:13)*

Exodus 13:13 introduces the concept of redeeming the firstborn. God has made the claim on the firstborn to consecrate them for service. But how was this to be practically implemented? Essentially there are three cases, which are described in more detail in Numbers 18:15-18: 1) clean animals; 2) unclean animals; and 3) humans. In all three cases, the firstborn is consecrated or dedicated to the LORD's house. Although clean animals (*e.g.*, sheep, goats, cattle, etc.) are not dealt with in Exodus 13:13, their case is the easiest: they are to be sacrificed to the LORD (Num. 18:17). It is when we get to unclean animals and humans that the cases become a bit more complicated.

Since unclean animals such as donkeys can never be sacrificed, something different must occur. Two options are given: the animal can be killed by breaking its neck (note this is not a sacrifice); or it can be redeemed by the substitute of a clean animal, which would then be sacrificed in the place of the unclean animal. In other words, the unclean animal would be redeemed by the blood of substitutionary atonement. Even with an animal such as a donkey, God is teaching us that redemption – the buying back at a price – requires the shedding of blood. This is the same foundational spiritual principle we've already seen in our study of the Passover.

The third case – humans – is analogous to the case of unclean animals. By comparing humans to unclean animals, God is telling us that we are also unclean – we are sinful, unholy, and unfit for entrance into God's kingdom. We must be redeemed, bought with a price if we are to be made fit for God's service. Later on, God will substitute the entire tribe of Levi for the firstborn of Israel and call Levi to priestly service (Num. 3:11-13, 40-41). However, the firstborn of Israel must still be redeemed, and that price was set at five shekels, payable to the sanctuary of God (Num. 18:15-16).

The law of the firstborn here in Exodus 13 is the background for the presentation of the baby Jesus in the Temple. Mary and Joseph obey the law of the firstborn by consecrating Jesus:

²²Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of

Exodus I – Notes

the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”) (Luke 2:22-23).

3. Remembering the Firstborn (13:14-16)

Just like for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Moses gives us the same practical instructions to remember the firstborn. We are to 1) *teach* our children the significance of the redemption of the firstborn (13:14-15a); 2) *meditate* on the redemption of the firstborn (13:16); and 3) *practice* redemption of the firstborn (13:15b). Again, we are to think, speak, and do the Word of God.

These practical instructions regarding the law of the firstborn were designed, like the laws of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, to focus the attention of Israel on the great redemption of God in Egypt. “By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage... for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt” (13:15b, 16b). Remembering God’s redemption reminded Israel of who they were before God saved them. It caused Israel to recall the great love of God that condescended to rescue them from bondage even when they didn’t deserve it. It emphasized the great power and might of God to deliver them from Egypt. And it pointed out to them that their children were not their own; they were gifts from God to be raised in “the training and admonition of the LORD” (Eph. 6:4) and dedicated for His service.

Ultimately, the law of the firstborn points us to our redemption in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only beloved Son of God, “the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15). But instead of needing redemption, Jesus provides the means of redemption. He is our substitute, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus pays our redemption price through His blood, the costliest and greatest price ever paid:

¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18-19).

If you are in Christ, you are a member of the “church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23). You have been bought with a great price, and you no longer belong to yourself. You have been redeemed out of the bondage of slavery and death, and brought into the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

All three of these legislative topics – Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstborn – point us to the exact same conclusion. We are to “remember the feast” – that is, remember our salvation through Jesus Christ. We are called to meditate on our great salvation, to contemplate what Christ has done for us. We are called to tell others about our redemption, especially teaching our covenant children what Christ has accomplished. And we are to live lives worthy of our calling, walking in holiness and righteousness, being sanctified more and more to the image of Christ. We have been saved for a purpose – to glorify God. All this and more is signified in our observance of the Lord’s Supper, the New Testament counterpart to these Old Testament regulations. Let us live our Christian lives to the glory of God and “remember the feast.”

Close in Prayer.

Next week: Lesson 12 – Why Did the Israelites Cross the Sea? – Ex. 12:29-42; 13:17-14:31