

Message #23

Exodus 13:1-16

Now we saw in Exodus 12 that just as soon as Israel left Egypt, God demanded that the Passover be celebrated. God wanted Israel to continually celebrate this because it pointed to that blood sacrifice that saved them. That of course pointed to Jesus Christ.

Now it is one thing to remember this when you are traveling as a group through the wilderness; but it is quite another to remember this once you get to the Promised Land of Canaan (**13:5, 11**). God always wanted Israel to think about His redemptive program which was focused on that shed blood.

So as we come to Exodus 13, God gave specific information about what He wanted Israel to do when she got into the Promised Land. He wanted to remind her of His deliverance every time any firstborn thing was born. He wanted His salvific program to be remembered so He demanded that the firstborn of everything had to be dedicated to Him. This included the firstborn of humans and the firstborn of animals.

That blood that covered the door kept the firstborn from being killed. This redemptive point is so significant that God established another ordinance to remind Israel of this very point. All of the firstborn belonged to God because God redeemed all firstborn from death by that blood on the door (Ex. 12:12-13).

GOD WANTED ISRAEL TO ALWAYS REMEMBER THE SALVIFIC REALITY OF THE BLOOD SACRIFICE BY THE DEDICATION OF ALL THE FIRSTBORN CHILDREN AND ANIMALS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GETTING RID OF LEAVEN.

One commentator summed this section up well: all of this forces Israel and us to remember and declare God's system of salvation and the greatness of His salvation.

This is the very point that Israel has overlooked. When Jesus Christ came to this earth, Israel could not conceive of the idea that she needed a righteousness that could only be found in His shed blood. Israel was religious, but she thought her own works and law religion would make her right with God. She forgot about the blood. Had she gone back to this book of Exodus, that would have never happened and she would never have rejected Jesus Christ.

The Israelites needed to recognize God saved her firstborn by the blood sacrifice. Israel needed to see that. God purchased her and He owns her and He deserves the first and the best. In whatever God gave to Israel, whether children, animals, spoils of war or harvests, God wants the first and the best. He deserves it because He gave it.

Now think about this for a moment. The only reason Israel is in a position to have anything is because of God. In amazing grace, God literally saved that nation and without that she would be nothing and have nothing. God never wanted Israel to forget about this, and neither should we.

God saved us. Without that we are nothing. God give us physical life, spiritual life, skills and many wonderful things. We owe Him everything. Certainly we should give Him the best of what we have and are. We should give Him the first and the best of ourselves, our possessions and our money.

Now this is an interesting text and there are four firstborn facts we want to see:

FIRSTBORN FACT #1 – God gave this firstborn instruction directly to Moses. **13:1-2**

God spoke to Moses, who in turn had the responsibility to speak to the people. I want to make a point about this before we actually analyze it. God typically does enable a specific individual to carefully understand His Word so that he may communicate that to the people. **The job of the one who has been gifted by God is to accurately communicate precisely what God's Word says.**

The reason why we make this observation is because today there are many churches think it is cute to cancel corporate worship services and then suggest that everybody go to their home and understand the Word of God. It is clear that God's Word better be taken seriously and communicated accurately and someone better know it and communicate it. That someone was Moses.

There is an elder of a church I know who stood against home gatherings on Sunday night rather than corporate meetings. He took a stand as an elder and said, "If God has truly given the gift of pastor/teacher to the church, why would we want to spend Sunday night listening to someone without that gift?" "If God has given the gift of pastor/teacher to the church, why would you want to sit in some home meeting listening to someone ramble about what he thinks it means to him, when you actually have someone who could accurately dissect what it means?"

Can you imagine Moses saying to the people, all of you go home and try to figure out what this Passover and firstborn thing means? No, he stood up and taught it to the people. Moses predicted another prophet would come through Israel and you better listen to Him (Deut. 18:18-19).

It is the job of the spokesman of God to accurately teach the people the Word of God and there are many ministers today who are shirking their responsibilities.

Now God came to Moses and said, "Sanctify to Me every firstborn offspring that of every womb." This would include both humans and animals. **The word "sanctify" (qaddes) means to give something over to the Lord or set something apart to God as holy.**

God wanted Israel to remember that He is the One who gave life and every firstborn thing born, whether animal or human, was to acknowledge that.

Victor Hamilton, in his commentary on Exodus, raises an interesting point about child dedication.

He says that many people get their idea of dedicating children to the Lord from passages of Scripture like this one.

But he accurately observes the technical point of this is the dedication of the firstborn and it does not say anything about the second born son or third born son or daughters (*Exodus*, p. 204).

FIRSTBORN FACT #2 – Moses first stressed to Israel the importance of keeping the feast of unleavened bread. **13:3-10**

Now what we cannot help but observe is that in **verses 3-10**, Moses once again brings up the importance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover Meal before developing the specifics of the firstborn dedication.

Why is that? Again, this is the very thing Israel has missed; **this clearly shows that the blood sacrifice of an unblemished lamb is the very reason for her having a living relationship with God. This is the only reason the firstborn are alive.** Secondly, this shows that before God will give His ultimate blessing, leaven must be removed.

According to **verse 3**, Israel was to remember that day when God brought her out of Egypt and nothing leavened was to be eaten. God had saved Israel from the “house of slavery” just as He has saved us from the slavery house of sin.

According to **verses 4-5**, there was a very specific day and month when this feast was to be celebrated. Abib is a noun that means “ears of grain” or “spring.” It refers to March-April. This month was called later in the Babylonian captivity “Nisan” (Neh. 2:1; Est. 3:7).

Now the land of Canaan had never heard of having a feast of “unleavened bread,” so Moses makes it clear in **verse 5** that when they get into that land they need to observe it. Moses says that the land of Canaan will eventually be a **land flowing with milk and honey. The danger when you get into a land like that is that you forget about who gave you all of the blessings.** This festival would point right back to God.

Now in **verse 7**, Moses says during this feast no unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days and nothing leavened shall be seen anywhere. To enjoy the full blessings of God, sin must be removed.

Then according to **verse 8**, every father was responsible to tell the children what this all meant. Specifically, a sacrificial lamb was offered and his blood was shed that enabled God to save us.

Verse 9 makes it clear that God's people are to take this very seriously and very personally. This ordinance was to be remembered on a hand (by what you do), on the forehead (by what you think) and in your mouth (by what you communicate).

There were literal hand and forehead reminders of things that were used by the Israelites. There are some Jews who, to this day, wear leather pouches called phylacteries (**Ex. 13:16**) that contain Scriptural reminders.

I am not sure that Moses is telling everyone that they needed to literally do this, but he did want them to know that God's Word was to be considered very sacred and this ordinance needed to be remembered even if it meant putting some mark on your hand or forehead (Deut. 6:8; 11:18).

Moses closes the challenge in **verse 10** by once again stressing make sure you keep this every single year.

FIRSTBORN FACT #3 – Moses presents the specifics of the firstborn consecration.
13:11-13

Now this firstborn data is critical to Israel because it will be addressed at least five more times in the O.T. Law: Ex. 22:29-30; Ex. 34:19-20; Lev. 27:26-27; Num. 18:14-18; Deut. 15:19-23. Each reference is important and gives its own slant to things. So this is the first of six addresses on this subject.

Moses says that when God brings Israel to the land that He swore He would give to you, then you are to dedicate the firstborn offspring of every human and animal to the Lord.

According to **verse 12**, the firstborn of every human was to be given to the Lord and the firstborn male of the animals were to be given to the Lord. Now the words "devote to the LORD" mean to bring to the tabernacle and give it over to the LORD. God did not want to keep the children and separate them from their families; but He did demand that they be brought to the tabernacle and dedicated to Him and an animal sacrifice was to be made, which was a sacrifice of the firstborn male animal.

This is a very important point to realize; when a firstborn animal was given to God, it was sacrificed and it did die. So in all reality the redemptive price was paid by the first-born sacrifice. The idea of a substitutionary sacrifice as being the only means of having a relationship with the Holy God is seen right here.

But in **verse 13** God makes provision concerning donkeys. Every firstborn donkey is to be redeemed by a lamb. If you do not redeem the donkey the neck is to be broken. No firstborn animal could be kept for personal use. It either needed to be redeemed or it needed to die.

Why? Because all of this pointed to Jesus Christ, who would have to die in order to redeem Israel and us. Now donkeys were considered to be unclean animals (Lev. 11:2-4), but they could be redeemed by a Lamb. Paul makes the statement that we have been bought with a price.

Now ultimately, the sacrificial Lamb of God would ride straight into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

FIRSTBORN FACT #4 – Moses tells Israel exactly what to say to the children about the firstborn ordinance. **13:14-16**

Children are to learn reasons for the things they do and practice. Children have inquisitive minds and it is the responsibility of the parents to explain things about God to those children.

Message #1 - This reminds us of the fact that the powerful hand of God delivered us from the house of slavery. **13:14**

Message #2 - This reminds us of the fact that Pharaoh was so stubborn that God killed the firstborn of Egyptian children and animals. **13:15**

Message #3 - This will serve as a sign to Israel of the delivering power of God. **13:16**

So this firstborn business was to be a sign of the delivering power of God. A sign points to something.

Now when we turn to the N.T., it is clear that Jesus Christ is frequently referred to as being the firstborn:

- 1) Jesus was the firstborn of Mary—Mt. 1:25; Lk. 2:7;
- 2) Jesus was the firstborn from the dead—Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5
- 3) Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren—Rom. 8:29
- 4) Jesus is the firstborn of all creation—Col. 1:15

So one of the conclusions that we draw from this is that the leadership of Israel had the responsibility to tell the children of Israel that God will eventually send His only begotten Son into this world and this Son will be the Lamb of God who can take away our sin and give us our Kingdom.

These verses are very applicable to us:

- 1) We should always remember the blood sacrifice and the power of God that saved us.
- 2) We should never forget our great redemption even when we are prospering.
- 3) We should always want to be obedient to exactly what God commands.