

Exodus 12:26-27; 13:8-10; 13:14-16 (Part I)

Over the last six weeks, we've been reflecting on the 2nd Act in this drama of redemption. If the 1st Act consisted of the first nine plagues, then the 2nd Act is the 10th and final plague (the death of all the firstborn in Egypt) and Israel's actual exodus from the land of Egypt. But carefully woven into this 2nd Act as an essential part of the drama (remember all the sandwiches), we have the blood of the Cover-over lamb and the Cover-over meal, we have the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and we have the Consecration of the Firstborn. All three of these things (the Cover-over blood and meal, the Unleavened Bread, and the Consecration of the Firstborn) are intended to help the people of Israel understand and fully embrace and experience the greatness of their redemption, and so in turn to *respond* to their redeeming God with wholehearted obedience and worship. And now we've seen how today all three of these things *are* fulfilled, and are *being* fulfilled in Christ.

So in a sense, we've finished Act II. We've by no means exhausted it! We never will. But we might almost say that we've finished it for the purposes of this Sunday morning series through the book of Exodus. I say "almost" because I think there's one particular thing that's connected to *all three* of these themes that we need to give special attention to – only because *the Scriptures themselves* give the same special attention. There's one particular theme that's connected with Cover-over, **and** Unleavened Bread, **and** the Consecration of the Firstborn – and that actually helps us to understand even *more fully why* God gave these three things to His people in the first place.

After all the instructions have been given regarding the perpetual, annual observance of the Cover-over sacrifice and the Cover-over meal, we read in chapter twelve verses 26-27:

- ✓ Exodus 12:26–27 — And when your children say to you, “What do you mean by this service?” you shall say, “It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Cover-over, for he covered over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

A little later, after all the instructions have been given regarding the perpetual, annual observance of the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread, we read in chapter thirteen verses 8-10:

- ✓ Exodus 13:8–10 — You shall tell your son on that day [when you celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread], “It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.” And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.

And finally, after all the instructions have been given regarding that perpetual ritual of the Consecration of the Firstborn, we read in chapter thirteen verses 14-16:

- ✓ Exodus 13:14–16 — And when in time to come your son asks you, “What does this mean?” you shall say to him, “By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in

the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.” It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.

So, very carefully and very explicitly **connected** with the observance of Cover-over, **and** Unleavened Bread, **and** the Consecration of the Firstborn we have this emphasis on parents (with fathers especially being assumed responsible) teaching and instructing their children. Chapter twelve envisions the children asking their parents: “What do you **mean** by this service?” (12:26) Chapter thirteen envisions a son asking his father: “What does this **mean**?” (13:14) In later years, the asking of this question by one of the children actually became part of the tradition of Cover-over. That’s fine, and maybe even a good thing, but it wasn’t necessarily the point here. Even if the children never did ask any questions, the main point was the responsibility of the parents to “religiously,” purposefully, and diligently take each and every single one of these opportunities to teach, and instruct their children, explaining to them especially the **meaning** of what they were doing.

Now this isn’t just a good idea. This isn’t just a strong suggestion. “You *shall* say... you *shall* tell your son on that day... you *shall* say to him...” We see that the teaching of the children was no less of a divine command and requirement than the observance of Cover-over itself. And we can begin to understand why this is when we read these verses in chapter twelve:

- ✓ Exodus 12:14 (cf. 12:42) — “This day [of Cover-over] shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; **throughout your generations**, as a statute **forever**, you shall keep it as a feast.
- ✓ Exodus 12:17 — And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, **throughout your generations**, as a statute **forever**.

God, in His sovereignty and wisdom, has chosen to work **generationally**. Parents and children are certainly no accident. This creation order of fathers and mothers and children isn’t just “the way things *had* to be.” Instead, this is an essential part of God’s infinitely good and wise plan from the very beginning. God has purposed from all eternity to raise up worshipers for Himself and to call out people for His own name by **means** of parents teaching and instructing the next generation – the generation of their children. (cf. Gen. 18:19) Now this doesn’t mean that *all* children will listen to the instruction of their parents. And this doesn’t mean that God won’t also work in numerous other ways. But we are meant to see that the generational design of families is actually a major, wonderful part of God’s eternal purpose to call a multitude of people out of this world to worship and glorify Him.

So once again, we see clearly in these verses the responsibility of the parents to “religiously,” purposefully, and diligently take each and every single one of these opportunities (Cover-over, Unleavened Bread, Consecration of the Firstborn) to **teach**, and **instruct** their children, explaining to them especially the **meaning** of what they were doing. It was never to be enough just to go through the motions with their children. It was never to be enough just to observe the “rituals” with their children. Instead, there was always to be this growing awareness and

understanding of the *meaning* of all that they did. So what *did* it mean? What was the “*answer*” that fathers and mothers were always to be giving to their children?

- ✓ “You shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Cover-over, for he covered over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” (12:27)

That’s a pretty short and simple answer. But, of course, the point isn’t that parents should memorize this answer and quote it to their children. The point is that here is a guide to the heart of what all Jewish parents were to be diligently communicating to their children. On the one hand, divine wrath and judgment (“[Yahweh] struck the Egyptians”); on the other hand, divine mercy and redemption (“but [Yahweh] spared our houses”).

Of course, as soon as this answer is given to the children – as soon as these two themes of wrath and judgment, and mercy and redemption are emphasized – other questions are raised. *Why* did Yahweh strike the Egyptians, killing all their firstborn? *Why* did Yahweh cover over and spare the houses of the people of Israel? What’s the *connection* between this lamb, and this blood, and this meal that we eat, and the striking of the Egyptians, and the sparing of the Israelites? And so these questions would in turn compel Jewish fathers and mothers to go back even *before* the exodus to God’s promises to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and then even before that to God’s creation and the fall of man, and the curse, and the first promise of redemption, and then the flood, and God’s covenant with Noah. And, of course, all of this would lead parents to ultimately point their children not just backward, but forward to God’s final provision of redemption through a Messiah. You see, all of this has to be assumed in the answer to this one simple question: “What do you mean...?” What do *we mean*? This is what we must never forget.

We see that to answer the question, “what do you mean?” requires a very purposeful, and a very careful communication of *history* and *theology* – a history and a theology that’s just as much for children as it is for parents. Indeed, the whole *reason* parents *exist* is so they can pass on the mighty deeds of God (history) and so the truth about God (theology) to their children. But we also see that to answer the question, “what do you mean?” requires a history and a theology that’s been personally appropriated and *experienced* by the fathers and mothers who are doing the teaching. Notice what every Jewish father in every generation was to say to his children, “It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Cover-over, for he covered over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared *our* houses.” (12:27) We see this same emphasis in the next example of an “answer” that parents were to give their children in connection with Unleavened Bread.

- ✓ “You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did *for me* when *I* came out of Egypt.’” (13:8)

The point of Unleavened Bread is not simply remembering what the Lord *did* when *Israel* came out of Egypt, but remembering “what the Lord did *for me* when *I* came out of Egypt. Before any Jewish parent could rightly communicate any history and theology to his children, he or she first had to have been able to personally own this history and theology for himself. It *is* a history lesson, but it’s not *just* a history lesson. It *is* theology, but it’s not *just* theology. It’s *life*; it’s *my*

life – now. Today. “This is why I keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread **today** – it’s because of what the Lord did **for me** when I came out of Egypt.” And so here once again, we have a short and simple answer. But, of course, this simple answer obviously assumes other questions and answers – questions and answers that all go to the *heart* of what all Jewish parents were to be diligently communicating to their children. *What* did Yahweh do for you when you came out of Egypt? *Why* did Yahweh do this for you? What’s the *connection between* this unleavened bread that we eat for an entire week every year and what Yahweh did for you so many years ago?

And so now we see that if the point isn’t *just* history and theology, then neither is the point *just* Dad’s and Mom’s *experience*. It’s not ultimately their experience that’s the point, but **what** they’ve *experienced* – the mighty, saving deeds of Yahweh revealed in history and explained and interpreted in His word. And so we come to the third example of an “answer” that parents were to give their children – this time in connection with the consecration of the firstborn.

- ✓ “You shall say to [your son], ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought **us** out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let **us** go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’”

Once again, in this one answer, how many other questions and answers have to be assumed? — questions and answers that would inevitably compel Jewish fathers and mothers to go back even *before* the exodus to God’s promises to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and then even before that to God’s creation and the fall of man, and the curse, and the first promise of redemption, and then the flood, and God’s covenant with Noah. And, of course, all of this would lead parents to ultimately point their children not just backward, but forward to God’s final provision of redemption through a Messiah. All of these things had to be assumed in the answer to this simple question: “What does this *mean*?”

And so we see that the task of all Jewish fathers and mothers was actually to give their children a comprehensive, fully developed, “religious” education – instructing them in **all** the essentials of the faith, and in the true and **full** knowledge of the one true God. As one person says, the ultimate purpose was not *just* to impart information, but rather, to show “**why** [this information] is important **for us**, and **why** it is important **for you**.” (Hamilton; references Long)

But could all of this really happen on just a few days out of every year? Could fathers and mothers really complete the religious education of their children just at these few special events during the year? *Immediately following* the example of what parents were to say to their children concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Moses goes on to say this:

- ✓ “And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.” (13:9-10)

And then we read the same thing *immediately following* the example of what parents were to say to their children concerning the Consecration of the Firstborn:

- ✓ “It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.” (13:16)

In other words, the point of these observances and rituals was not just so Israel would be reminded once a year, but rather to set the tone for a remembering and an observing – and so therefore a teaching, and instructing, and explaining – that takes place *all year long*. Remember that this month of Cover-over and Unleavened Bread was to be the *beginning* of months – the *first* month of the year for Israel. (13:1-2) Eventually, there will also be the weekly Sabbaths, in addition to the annual feasts of Firstfruits, of Weeks, of Trumpets, and of Booths. (Lev. 23; Num. 28-29) Israel’s entire calendar year was to be **built around** these reminders and observances of God’s mighty, saving deeds. And so we see that every day of the year was sanctified for parents to use in faithfully imparting to their children this awesome **history** and this wonderful **theology**.

Just like a bracelet or a headband might be worn continuously, and conspicuously, and visibly throughout all the day, so also fathers and mothers were to be continuously creating and taking advantage of every opportunity to teach, and instruct their children – to impart to them a history and a theology of redemption that they had personally appropriated and experienced and owned for themselves. Look what Moses says: “It shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, **that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth.**” For the law of the Lord to be in a father’s *mouth* obviously means that he will be teaching it and imparting it to his children. But it means even *more* than that. To say that the law of the Lord is in one’s mouth is shorthand for saying that that same law has been laid up in his **heart**. (Psalm 19:14; 49:3; Rom. 10:8-10) The teaching of parents is to be always the overflow of their hearts, and of their own experience of Yahweh’s redemption.

So listen to how Moses sums all this up in that famous passage in Deuteronomy chapter six:

- ✓ Deuteronomy 6:4–9 — Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And ***these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*** You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

And then just five chapters later, in Deuteronomy 11:

- ✓ Deuteronomy 11:18–21 — ***You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.***

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, if this was a command for the people of God under the Old Covenant, how much more must we be accountable to this command as those who are living under the New Covenant? How much more must we be responsible to diligently teach and instruct our children as those who have *seen* and *experienced* the *fulfillment* of Cover-over, and Unleavened Bread, and the Consecration of the Firstborn, all in Jesus Christ?!? So how do we do this?

Well, the first key is to understand that what's "in our mouths" is to be no less and no more than the outflow and the overflow of what's in our *hearts*. Nothing causes children to be more resistant and hardened to the instruction of their parents than instruction that doesn't flow from the heart. So one of the most important signs that what we say is actually flowing from our hearts is our faithfulness to personally identify with *all* that we teach. A constant theme in all our instruction of our children should be simply this: This is what the Lord has done *for me*. How can I speak of the wrath of God without reflecting on the fact that I myself was deserving of condemnation? How can I speak of the cross and forgiveness without gladly testifying to my own experience of God's mercy and grace? How can I recount the history of God's salvation from Genesis to Revelation, without joyfully claiming every part of this history as the history of my very own salvation? How can I communicate any single truth about God without failing to communicate that *this God is my God*?

As parents, what is it that's "in our mouths"? And to what extent is this truly just the outflow and the overflow of what's in our hearts? So we see that as parents, we have such a huge and massive responsibility to be in the Word – reading it faithfully during the week and listening to the God-ordained teaching of the Word on the Lord's Day. (One goal could be to always have something to teach our children from our own time in God's Word.)

In the first place, our teaching and instruction must always flow from the heart. But in the second place, our teaching and instruction must be systematic, and comprehensive, and thorough. In other words, we must be diligent to communicate to our children the *whole* counsel of God – the entire, wonderful story of God's redemption from beginning to end – from creation to consummation (that's history), and so also the entire, wonderful revelation of who God really is from beginning to end (that's theology). I think here of Paul's instruction to fathers:

- ✓ Ephesians 6:4 — Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but ***bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.***

And then listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy:

- ✓ 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15 (cf. Acts 16:1-3) — I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well... As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ***and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.***

As parents, are we acquainting our children with *all* of the sacred writings, which together, in their *entirety*, are able to make them wise unto salvation? It's to this end that we must seek out consistent and regular opportunities for the overflow of our hearts in the systematic and comprehensive instruction of our children.

Finally, one thing that we've seen over and over again in all of this is that at the heart of all the instruction and teaching of our children must be the Gospel of Jesus Christ – which is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. (cf. Rom. 1:16) The substance of all our teaching is never to be moralistic lessons (or even “character building”), but always and only that which is able to make our children “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

If all of this was the responsibility of God's people under the Old Covenant, then ***how much more*** must we be accountable for these things as those who are living under the New Covenant? How much more must we be responsible to diligently teach and instruct our children as those who have *seen* and *experienced* for ourselves the ***fulfillment*** of Cover-over, and the ***fulfillment*** of Unleavened Bread, and the ***fulfillment*** of the Consecration of the Firstborn, all in Jesus Christ?!? May it be our love for, and joy in this glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ that always results in us being able to speak to our children with words like these:

- ✓ Proverbs 6:20–23 (cf. 3:1-3; 7:1-3) — My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.

So for the children here, having heard the high calling of your parents, may the Lord always give you a heart to obey these words of Scripture:

- ✓ Ephesians 6:1–3 — Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

We've seen that what's in our mouths is a sign of what's in our hearts, and so we've already asked the question: “As parents, what is it that's in our mouths?” But whether we have any children in the home or not, we can all ask ourselves this question: “As members of the body of Christ, what is it that's in our mouths?” The Apostle Paul exhorts all of us:

- ✓ Colossians 3:16 — Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

May the high praises of our great God truly be always more and more in our hearts, and therefore also in our mouths.

- ✓ Psalms 78:1–7 (Deuteronomy 4:9–10; 32:46–47) — Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter

dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.