

## **Exodus 13:1-16**

*Israel's first-born are consecrated*

One of the greatest blessings in my life has been the privilege of being a parent

- It is a tremendous joy to my heart to be the father to Faith and Jonathan

But parenting is also a serious responsibility

- Especially as a father, I am realizing how serious God intends me to take my role

Since the beginning, God has had high expectations for parents

- Children are dependent upon their parents for so much

It is easy to think that once we have given them shelter, food, and clothing that our task is done

- I would submit that many unbelievers have loftier goals for their children than this

There is a serious spiritual responsibility that is imperative upon us as parents

- We must discipline them
- We must train them to fear God
- We must point them to the cross
- We must not grow weary of telling them about Jesus Christ

If you are a Christian parent here this morning, I trust that you feel the weight of which I speak

- We fail so miserably

But I am so grateful that God is gracious

- He is more powerful than our feeble efforts

This morning, we will examine how God expected Israelite parents to teach their children about the event of the Exodus

- The parents were reminded that their children didn't really belong to them
- Their children belonged to God

### **Let's read Exodus 13:1-16**

These verses give us three interconnected facets of Israel's consecration of their first-born

- Consecration involves stewardship (13:1-2)
- Consecration involves sanctification (13:3-10)
- Consecration involves salvation (13:11-16)

#### **I. Consecration involves stewardship (13:1-2)**

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

We have seen various regulations pertaining to Passover and Unleavened Bread

- And some of that will be repeated here in the early verses of Exodus 13

But there is a new topic that is discussed here

- And that is the consecration of the first-born of the Israelites

We see here in verse 1 that it is the LORD who speaks these additional regulations to Moses

- Moses, then, passes this information to the people of Israel

Moses most likely passes the information to the elders of Israel

- They, in turn, would filter the information down to the people

2 ‘Sanctify to Me every first-born, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.’”

God issues forth a command to open verse 2, “Sanctify to Me every first-born”

- We need to take a closer look at this term “sanctify”

The noun takes on meanings such as

- Holy
- Sacred
- Consecrated
- Singled out

The verb form takes on a similar meaning

- To be holy
- To be sacred
- To be consecrated
- To be singled out

What God is after here in verse 2 is that Israel set aside their first-born

- To recognize them as being holy
- To set apart the first-born for a special purpose

This type of consecration had two contrasting facets<sup>1</sup>

- Separation from the world
- Separation for the Lord

Verse 2 defines who the first-born is, “the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast”

- Whether human or beast, whatever is first from the womb is considered the first-born

The first-born males in ancient societies were given special privileges

- Rights of inheritance
- Rights of leadership

Really, the first-born represents the entire family

- Just as a captain represents a team<sup>2</sup>

As far back as Exodus 4, God made it clear, “Israel is My son, My first-born” (4:22)

- Israel has held a special place in history<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, 161.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word, Exodus*, 370.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, *Everyman’s Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 65.

What we see is that the consecration of the first-born is tied very closely to Passover<sup>4</sup>

The consecration of the first-born is not demanded based on God being Creator

- It is demanded based on God being Redeemer<sup>5</sup>

Why does God want the first-born?

- This goes back to the events of the 10<sup>th</sup> plague in Egypt

God killed the first-born of every family that didn't take the steps of providing a blood sacrifice

- The Passover animal was the price of redemption so that the first-born of Israel could go free

In thankful response to such grace, the Israelites were to recognize the LORD's right and prerogative to the first-born

- Because He spared the Israelite first-born, He claimed them as His own

That's what the end of verse 2 tells us, "**it belongs to Me**"

- The first-born rightfully belonged to God!

It wasn't just the first-born who belonged to God

- Everything and everyone belongs to God!

God didn't necessarily want to keep the first-born

- As if the parents would never see the child again

It was more of an act on the parent's part of acknowledging that this first-born child really belonged to God

We think of Hannah and how she prayed earnestly for a child, "**O LORD of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head**" (1 Sam 1:11)

- Hannah literally gave her son, Samuel, for the Lord's use at the Temple
- He served with Eli for years

Consider these verses

- "**Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine**" (Job 41:11)
- "**For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all it contains.**" (Ps 50:10-12)

Is that the way that you think?

- Do you consciously remind yourself that everything you have is God's?

It's easy for us to sit here on a Sunday morning and think about it

- But it is different when you are by yourself

---

<sup>4</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol 1*, 340.

<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 382.

Think about time

- It's not your time
- It's God's time

Are you being faithful as a steward of God's time?

- Do you prayerfully seek God as to what you will do that day?
- Or do you just blaze ahead with no real dependence upon God?

Think about possessions

- It's not your money, stock, land, cars, clothing, houses, etc.
- They all belong to God!

Are you being faithful as a steward of these items?

- Do you prayerfully consider how they might be used for God's purposes?
- Or do you not even give a thought to this?

If someone were to look into your finances, would they see God as a high priority?

- Have you made a conscious decision to give a portion of the money that God has entrusted to you back to the local church and other sound Christian ministries?
- If not, then why not?

Think about your family

- It's not your spouse, children, or grandchildren
- They belong to God

How you raise your family does matter!

- Husbands and fathers, you will be held responsible for your leadership in the home
- Or your lack of leadership

We need to be reminded that we are merely stewards

- Not owners

Israel needed to be reminded of this

- Their first-born didn't belong to them
- They belonged to God!

God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt

- Their appropriate response was one of willing submission to God
- They were to recognize God's ownership over all things

- **Consecration involves stewardship (13:1-2)**

## **II. Consecration involves sanctification (13:3-10)**

3 And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten.

Yet more regulations are given to make Passover and Unleavened Bread something to remember for future generations

- Israel was never to forget what God had done for the nation!

Notice how God describes Egypt as “**the house of slavery**”

- Not “house of pleasure”
- Not “vacation hotspot”

Once again, Israel would be reminded that they were in a place with a ruthless master

- Pharaoh was a wicked despot, intent on using and abusing the Israelites for his selfish purposes

But Israel would also be reminded that they had been delivered from such a place

- They were no longer slaves
- They were free!

This wasn't by their own doing, however

- Verse 3 reminds us, “**for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place**”

The reference to “**a powerful hand**” is repeated here in verse 3 and in verses 9, 14 & 16

- God, of course, is the One in view here

The “**hand**” of God is, of course, anthropomorphic language

- It helps us to visualize certain actions of God by using human terminology

Yet again, at the end of verse 3, the Israelites are told, “**nothing leavened shall be eaten**”

- This is the week of Unleavened Bread

This was to remind the Israelites of how they had left Egypt

- In such a hurry that they didn't have time to let their bread rise

So in remembering their deliverance from Egypt on a yearly basis, they would eat unleavened bread

- As an intentional tool to remind themselves of how their ancestors had been rescued

#### 4 On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth.

Passover occurred during the first month of the year

- This was the month “**Abib**”

The very first month of the Jewish calendar began in the spring

- It was a fresh start
- A new beginning

At the very beginning of the year was Passover

- A celebration of how the Jews had been delivered from the powerful nation of Egypt

#### 5 And it shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month.

Verse 5 was a tremendous encouragement

- God says, “**when the LORD brings you to the land**”
- He didn't say “if”

God was promising the Israelites that He would bring them safely to the Promised Land

- There was no doubt about it

Five different nations are listed as inhabiting the Promised Land, “the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite”

- This isn't an exhaustive list
- It is a sampling of the nations that already lived in this area

As we have seen recently in Exodus, Israel leaves Egypt arranged in “hosts”

- They would be an army
- They would be called upon to drive out these pagan nations

Furthermore, we are told that this land was that “which (God) swore to your fathers to give you”

- This was a long-standing promise that would soon be fulfilled by God

This promise goes all the way back to the days of Abram

- Hundreds and hundreds of years prior

The Promised Land is described as being “a land flowing with milk and honey”

- It would be a plenteous and fruitful land

Verse 5 closes with these words, “that you shall observe this rite in this month”

- Passover would be celebrated in the first month of the year

6 For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD.

Yet again, the Israelites are told, “For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread”

- As we know from so much repetition, this was referencing the hasty departure of Israel from Egypt
- Their bread had not had time to rise

On the seventh day of the celebration of Unleavened Bread, however, “there shall be a feast to the LORD”

- This was designed to be a celebration!

7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders.

This is very much a repetition of what we saw in chapter 12

- It was repeated for the sake of future generations

There was not to be even a shred of leaven in the camp during these seven days

- As we have seen, leaven stands for the pervasive nature of sin

It spreads to every area of the lump of dough

- Just like sin spreads to every area of our lives

8 And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'

Part of the process of celebrating Passover and Unleavened Bread was to provide a teaching opportunity for parents

- Fathers were to instruct their sons by giving a brief theology lesson

The fathers were to take the initiative<sup>6</sup>

- Proactively teaching, instructing, and training their children

Fathers were to tell their children, “It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt”

- Notice the use of the first person, “me” and “I”
- Also notice two emphases of this statement

First, this theology lesson was intensely personal<sup>7</sup>

- Not, “look what God did for us” (although that was true as well)
- But, “look what God did for me”

Each individual Israelite was to personalize the Exodus account

- Each Israelite owed his/her life to God for salvation

Second, this theology lesson was God-centered

- It was rooted in what God had done for Israel

There was no talk of how great Israel was

- There was only talk of how great God was!

Consider these verses from Psalm 78

- “We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. That the generation to come might know, *even* the children *yet* to be born, *that* they may arise and tell *them* to their children, that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (78:4, 6, 7)

Parents, are you taking the time to teach your children about God?

- It’s never too early to start!

Don’t procrastinate

- Don’t pass on your spiritual responsibilities!

It’s been said before that “in any particular family, church, or nation, the Gospel is only one generation away from extinction”<sup>8</sup>

- Keep in mind that what we teach our children will most likely be what they teach their children

With that in mind, what are you teaching your children?

- What are you teaching your grandchildren?
- Think about that one!

---

<sup>6</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Exodus*, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Ryken, 366.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

9 And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.

As Israel celebrated the Passover, this celebration would obviously include the use of the hands and head

- Their hands would take steps of action
- Their head would involve the aspects of remembrance, obedience, etc.

The Israelites were told to keep these teachings in two ways

- “as a sign to you on your hand”
- “as a reminder on your forehead”

These words were most likely intended to be metaphorical

- Not to be taken literally

We have to remember that most people during this time were not literate<sup>9</sup>

- Writing material was extremely expensive

The annual reminder would help as a memory aid

- It would help to cement the reality of Passover

The Jews eventually came to the point where they took this quite literally<sup>10</sup>

- Some of you may be familiar with the practice of the Jews wearing phylacteries

They would take four portions of God’s Word from Exodus and Deuteronomy

- Then would write these verses on four strips of parchment
- Then they would place these pieces of parchment into two leather boxes

They would strap one box on their forehead

- They would strap the other box on the left arm

Jesus never condemned the practice of wearing phylacteries

- He condemned the Pharisees for being ostentatious with widening their phylacteries

Listen to Jesus’ words, “**But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments**” (Mt 23:5)

God didn’t want the Israelites to externalize their religion

- That’s not what He wanted

God wanted His people to internalize their religion

- Keeping the Passover always before them
- Remembering its significance

Yet again, we are told, “**with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt**”

- God was the One who brought Israel out of Egypt
- It was His powerful hand

---

<sup>9</sup> Stuart, 315.

<sup>10</sup> Youngblood, 66.



10 Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.

Every year, Israel was to celebrate and remember the Passover and Unleavened Bread

- It was more than just a ritual
- This was a rich time of remembrance

For Israel, this was a time to reflect upon her very history

- A time to reflect upon the greatness of God

It was a time for each Israelite to personalize what had happened in Egypt<sup>11</sup>

- To identify with the events that took place

This remembrance should spark a desire in each of the Israelites to pursue sanctification

- To love God more
- To obey God more

- **Consecration involves stewardship (13:1-2)**
- **Consecration involves sanctification (13:3-10)**

**III. Consecration involves salvation (13:11-16)**

11 Now it shall come about when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you.

The LORD again reminds Israel that He will bring them to the Promised Land

- He says “**when the LORD brings you**”
- Not “if” the LORD brings you

Yet again, the promise of God made to the fathers is referenced here

- God was in the process of fulfilling His promise to Abram!

12 that you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD.

Verse 12 goes back to explain what was mentioned back in verse 2

- There we read, “**Sanctify to Me every first-born, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me**”

Once again, we are told that it is not just the first-born of mankind

- It is also the first-born of beasts

In verse 2, we read that the first-born “**belongs to Me**”

- Here in verse 12, we read, “**the males belong to the LORD**”

Israel was to “**devote**” the first-born to the LORD

- This word literally means to “pass over”

---

<sup>11</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *NAC, Exodus, Vol 2*, 315.

So there is a bit of irony or word play going on<sup>12</sup>

- In Egypt, God passed over the Israelites
- Now, God is asking the parents to pass over their children to Him

13 But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck; and every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem.

The only exception to the rule is that of the donkey

- Verse 13 tells us that a donkey should be redeemed “with a lamb”

Donkeys were considered to be work animals

- They were used to transport heavy loads

Donkeys were considered to be unclean animals

- Thus, they were unacceptable for sacrifice
- They were also unacceptable for eating

With the first-born of donkeys, they couldn't be offered as a sacrifice

- So there had to be a substitute
- In this case, it was a lamb

If the person didn't want to offer a lamb for the donkey, there was only one other alternative

- “then you shall break its neck”

This may sound harsh to us

- Why kill a perfectly useful animal?

We have to remind ourselves that these animals belonged to God

- He sets the rules

God had already claimed the first-born for Himself

- If the person wouldn't substitute a lamb for the donkey, then the donkey needed to be killed

But verse 13 doesn't end with the discussion on the donkey

- Look what else is included right alongside the donkey
- Humans!

Isn't that humbling?

- That the first-born of man is put alongside the first-born of donkeys!<sup>13</sup>

The donkey was considered unclean

- It wasn't allowed to be offered as a sacrifice

That same principle applies for humans as well

- God never intended for the first-born children to be offered as a sacrifice

---

<sup>12</sup> John D. Currid, *An EP Study Commentary, Exodus, Vol 1*, 274.

<sup>13</sup> Ryken, 372.

Sadly, however, there were pagan nations who practiced such a thing

- They would make their children pass through the fire

It is not surprising, then, to see how strongly God is opposed to such a practice

- In speaking of Ahaz, God says that he “walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel” (2 Kgs 16:3)
- “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire” (Deut 18:10)

What was the right policy for the first-born of humans?

- Verse 13 tells us, “every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem”

The first-born of humans were to be redeemed

- In other words, there was to be a substitute!

Here in Exodus, we are not told what the price of redemption was

- But we are given that information in Numbers 18:16
- Five shekels

Perhaps the first-born were called upon to serve the Lord in a unique manner

- Perhaps Temple service
- Perhaps lifelong service

We know that later in Israel’s history, the Levites would be called upon to serve as priests<sup>14</sup>

- But at this point, the tribe of Levi wasn’t established

14 And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ then you shall say to him, ‘With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.

Yet again, we see that theology should be taught in the home

- Verse 14 gives the scenario of a son asking his father, “What is this?”

In other words, children will be curious and want to know, “Daddy, what are you doing? Why does this animal have to die?”

This gives the parent the opportunity to explain why he is doing what he is doing

- “With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery”

Yet again, theology is infused with history to provide an accurate reminder of what God had done in the past

- Personal – the LORD brought “us” out of Egypt
- God-centered – it was the LORD who delivered us

The words “house of slavery” are repeated from verse 3

- Israel wasn’t able to deliver herself
- It took “a powerful hand”

---

<sup>14</sup> John L. Mackay, *A Mentor Commentary, Exodus*, 238.

15 And it came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every first-born of my sons I redeem.’

Verse 15 continues the parent’s instruction to the son of what God had done for Israel in Egypt

- God overcame hard-hearted and stubborn Pharaoh
- God killed the first-born in the land of Egypt

What we need to be reminded of us is that the first-born of Israel were just as guilty as the Egyptian first-born

- God spared the Israelite first-born on the basis of a substitute

By killing the Passover animal, the Israelite families were ensuring that their first-born would be spared

- God demanded a sacrifice

The parent then brings the message of redemption to a very personal note, “**Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every first-born of my sons I redeem.**”

This father would be looking at his first-born, fully realizing that God has graciously provided a way of redemption

- The father would do anything humanly possible to provide this redemption so that his son could live

The son, in return, would realize that God has rights of ownership over him

- The son would see his father taking the necessary steps to redeem him

16 So it shall serve as a sign on your hand, and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”

Verse 16 is much like verse 9

- A reminder that the Passover celebration was designed to help the Israelites remember their deliverance
- God provided symbols to aid in their memory

But as we saw earlier, the Pharisees externalized the truth of this passage

- Instead of thinking about their own personal redemption, they thought that merely wearing the phylacteries was what God wanted

The same danger exists for us

- We can externalize what God intended for us to internalize

For the fourth time in these verses, we are told, “**with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt**”

- God’s sovereignty and strength are the reason Israel is redeemed!

There is much in this message for us to think upon

- I pray that you have already seen specific points of truth upon which to meditate

What did God intend for the Israelites to learn from the Exodus?<sup>15</sup>

- Consequences of sin and judgment
- Election
- Substitutionary atonement
- Fellowship of believers
- Sanctification

These are the same lessons that God wants us to learn!

- But are we learning them?

Do you view yourself as a steward or owner?

- Your perspective makes a radical difference

Are you pursuing sanctification?

- Or are you trying to coast through the Christian life?

How often do you think about your salvation?

- I would guess that the correct answer is, “Not enough!”

Like Israel, we also have been redeemed

- Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2:14)

Church, may these words from 1 Peter be encouraging to you

- “you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*” (1 Pet 1:18-19)

When we are redeemed, however, we no longer belong to ourselves

- We belong to God

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. ” (1 Cor 6:19-20)

Paul’s words from Ephesians 1 bear repeating

- “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:3-7)

---

<sup>15</sup> Ryken, 369.