

**Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church**  
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, VIC. 3166

DHW

## LESSON 11

### THE BOOK OF EXODUS

#### Chapter 13

#### INTRODUCTION

Nine plagues had been inflicted upon Egypt because Pharaoh stubbornly refused to allow God's chosen people leave Egypt. At the end of the ninth plague, Pharaoh angrily warned Moses (10:28): *Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die.* Moses aptly responded: *Thou has spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.* Moses must have felt exasperated thinking that after all these plagues Pharaoh could not be moved. Since the LORD had told him that it was not going to be easy for Pharaoh to let the children of Israel depart, he was resigned to the LORD'S will to humble and bring Pharaoh down. This the LORD God would do as He told Moses (11:1): *Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely*

*thrust you out hence altogether.* God is sovereign and is in control of the affairs of men. The LORD gave clear instructions to Moses and the children of Israel specifically what they must do. The children of Israel obeyed God and finally Pharaoh drove the children of Israel out of Egypt.

In this present study, the idea of dedicating one's firstborn or first-fruits as in the matter of material gains which are practised by some Christians originates from here. This chapter is rich in the Christian understanding of the doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement and also the teaching of Sanctification after conversion. In this regard, it helps us to understand our annual commemoration of the death and resurrection of the Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour during Easter. And it also helps us to appreciate our observance of the Lord's Supper whenever it is administered. In addition, it helps us to understand the need to live a holy life.

The following is an outline of chapter 13:

1. The dedication of the firstborn (13:1-2);
2. The observation of the Feast of Passover & Unleavened Bread (13:3-7);

3. The responsibility to pass down to future generation their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage (13:8-10);
4. The sanctification of the firstborn (13:11-16);
5. The route of the exodus led by the LORD (13:17-21).

### *STUDY THE WORD*

#### **Dedication of the Firstborn**

The LORD gave to the Israelites a new commandment. The LORD commanded them, *Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast, it is mine* (v.2). The word “sanctify” (Hebrew, root word, *qadash*) has the meaning “to consecrate, to dedicate, to separate, to hallow” with regards to our children. The sanctification of the firstborn of man and beast was to consecrate or to hallow the same specially or exclusively unto the LORD.

#### **The Feast of Passover & Unleavened Bread**

The LORD instructed Moses that the people should commemorate the day of the Feast of Passover. The LORD had in a great and mighty way delivered them from destruction and bondage in Egypt. And for the next seven days

they were to eat only unleavened bread and remove all leaven in their homes (v.7). This was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This feast would be commemorated in the month of Abib (the old name for the month of Nisan, which is the first month of Jewish religious calendar which falls in March/April). The children of Israel should observe these feasts when they settle in the land of the Canaanites, the Promised Land, which God described as *a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month* (v.5). The Promised Land was a good and fertile land. Note the use of the word “service” to describe the keeping of the feasts. The word “service” means labour or work. The keeping of these feasts was to serve the LORD.<sup>1</sup> On the seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened the children of Israel would congregate together to celebrate. The removing of anything leaven from use and their homes was significant. Leaven was a symbol of uncleanness or sin.<sup>2</sup> They should

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<sup>1</sup> Compare this with Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 – *Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

faithfully observe these feasts when they enter the Promised Land.

### **Passing From Generation to Generation**

The LORD also required the parents to teach their children the meaning and significance of the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread (vv. 8-10). In addition, the LORD commanded them that the testimony they gave to their children would be for *a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth* (v.9a). The literal interpretation of “upon thine hand” and “between thine eyes” had led the Israelites to have small leather boxes, one tied between their eyes on the forehead, and the other tied round their left arm. These boxes are called phylacteries or *tefillin*. They contained strips of Scriptures. But in a non-literal sense the references to the hand and forehead between the eyes and even the mouth would mean that the remembrance of the feasts should be close to their heart and mind and to speak of them frequently.

They must observe this ordinance every year continuously. These feasts were made into an ordinance, which was a religious rite or ceremony. The reason for imposing on the people of Israel was quite obvious. Firstly, it was

a celebration of joy and freedom from slavery. Secondly, as humans they would soon forget the good that God had done for them. God instituted this so that they would always remember the day of their deliverance or salvation. They would recall the greatness and goodness of the LORD their God. Thirdly, as God's people they ought to respond with deep gratitude and thankfulness to Him. Fourthly, this great event would be an undeniable historical account that could not be erased or rejected by future generations. It is factually and historically enshrined in the annual celebration by the people.

### **The Sanctification of the Firstborn**

It is not difficult to understand why the LORD required the sanctification of the firstborn of the Israelites. On the night of the LORD'S Passover, the angel of death destroyed the firstborn of all the Egyptians and that of their animals. The firstborn of the Israelites and their animals were spared because they obeyed the directive will of God. They were told to kill a lamb and to smear the blood on the two side door posts and the upper post above the head. So this sanctification of the firstborn reflects the killing of the firstborn of the Egyptians and also the sparing of the

firstborn of the Israelites. Since the firstborn of the Israelites was spared when they obeyed God, it was appropriate that their firstborn should be *set apart unto the LORD* (v.12). The phrase “set apart” (Hebrew, *abar*) means to “give over.” In other words the firstborn of animals should be given over to the LORD, meaning the firstborn belonged to the LORD. While the LORD claimed only the firstborn of the children of the Israelites and that of the animals, we know that He can rightly and justly claim that every human being, animal and non-living thing belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1).<sup>3</sup> While the firstborn of animals was to be sacrificed unto the LORD at the altar, the firstborn of sons was redeemed with a lamb (13:15). The firstborn was representative of the whole family for he signified the centre and future of the family. He was also given greater responsibility and privileges. This also included the right of inheritance. Hence the point of consecrating the firstborn and that of the animals was meant to show that the whole family and its possessions belong to the LORD God.

We see a parallel here in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb, who was slain so that

those who receive Him are delivered from the penalty of sin which is death. We have passed from death unto life eternal. Paul brilliantly argues that in view of the mercies of God, we should present our bodies *a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service* (Romans 12:1). Not only the first born but all of us who are in Christ should be sanctified unto the LORD our God for His service. And there is no greater pleasure and privilege on earth than to be called to serve the King of kings and the Lord of lords!

### **The Route of the Exodus**

When the children of Israel left Egypt, *God led them not through the way of the Philistines, although that was near* (v.17a). The way of the Philistines was a direct route and the shortest. But God did not lead the children through this way. God gave the reason why. The Philistines, who were inhabitants of Canaan, were not listed among the other Canaanites whom Israel had to dispose of when they entered the Promised Land. It seemed that the Philistines did not pose a spiritual danger to Israel although they were idolatrous but they did not intermarry indiscriminately with the children of Israel. They were not the original dwellers of Canaan. They

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 24:1 <A Psalm of David.> *The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.*

came from other parts of the Mediterranean between 1300 – 1200 B.C.. They were a warlike people, and the children of Israel were slaves not soldiers for they had been slaves in Egypt for many years. If they had travelled directly through the way of the Philistines, they would definitely be attacked by the Philistines. The children of Israel would be discouraged and would seek to return to Egypt. Hence, God led through another route to the Promised Land.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him to bury them in the Promised Land as Joseph had charged the children of Israel to do this believing that God would one day lead them back to Canaan. The Lord went before the Israelites *by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light* (v.21). The pillar of cloud and fire was one pillar. During the day, it was a pillar of cloud. This was how the LORD protected and provided for His people against the scorching heat of the midday sun and the penetrating cold of the night in the desert of Sinai. And in the night, the same pillar of cloud became a pillar of fire. The night would be in complete darkness and cold but the pillar of fire lit the whole camp-site and provided the necessary warmth they needed to enable them to have a good

night's sleep and rest for the tiring journey the next day across the soft sandy land of the desert. One marvels at the greatness and goodness of God. The LORD God knows and He protects and provides for His people in a marvellous way! This is the God whom our Lord Jesus Christ came to reveal in all His glory and majesty! How marvellous is His love, and how wonderful is His grace towards us.

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to pray *lead us not into temptations* (trials and tribulations) the LORD God did the same to the Israelites. The direct and fastest route to the land of Canaan was by the north-eastern way. But this route passed through the land of the Philistines. The Philistines were a warlike people. The Israelites would be attacked and defeated. Of course, the LORD could have exercised His power in protecting His people by crushing the Philistines. But the LORD would not. So the Lord took them through the wilderness by the Red Sea. It is a south-eastern route but longer. A second and more important reason is that the LORD had told Moses that He would lead the children to the

mount of Sinai where He would give His Law to His people. (3:12).<sup>4</sup>

We learn that God does not always use supernatural means on behalf of His people to fulfil His plan and purposes. In this instance, He could have led the Israelites quickly into the land of Canaan by way of the Philistines and by crushing any Philistine attempt to stop and destroy the Israelites. But He did not choose this way. How many times we expect God always to use His supernatural power in His providential care over us. God shows us here that His divine providence does not discount the use of natural and careful planning and means. God does use these secondary measures to achieve His plan and purposes.

### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

We learn that for man to worship and be appreciative of what God is doing in the world, he needs to be constantly reminded of the great and good works of God on his behalf. We easily forget the good that others do for us. What more about God whom we cannot see. God's commandment to man is that we should love, worship,

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<sup>4</sup>Exodus 3:12 *And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*

and serve Him. We must always remember what He has done for us. The greatest work which God has done for us is to redeem us from the penalty of sin and bondage.

We learn too that in God's providential activity, He does not always resort to His supernatural power. He often leads us in the natural way that demands from us careful planning and consideration. In this way we learn to become strong, to become knowledgeable and wise. And in this way we also learn to depend on Him.

Finally, our children are our precious gifts from God. The most important thing they ought to know is the LORD God. It is the parents' sacred duty to teach their children the Word of God and in particular the redemptive work of Christ Jesus. This is the top priority. In this respect they themselves must set the example, for children learn more effectively by observing and imitating what their parents say and do.

The idea of dedicating our firstborn or first-fruits as practised by some Christians originates from the account in this chapter. We are taught to give over our firstborn to the LORD. We are reminded of the great and good work of our Lord Jesus Christ when He died for our sins and rose from the dead ensuring our salvation and a place in heaven. Our response should be one of

deep gratefulness and thankfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought to express this gratitude in a practical way and by consecrating not only our firstborn but all of ourselves for the service of the Lord without any reservation.

The celebration of the Passover is not altogether negative. There is the positive aspect of it. As the Israelites celebrated their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, they also celebrated their hope of entering into the land which the LORD God had promised their forefathers, the land of Canaan *flowing with milk and honey* (v.5). Similarly, in keeping and remembering our Lord Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper, we not only look back at what the Lord Jesus Christ had done for us in delivering us from the penalty of sin, but we also look forward to the future redemption of ourselves when we will be clothed with the glorious incorruptible body of the resurrection at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

There is one more important lesson that parents must learn and do. The Israelite parents were instructed to explain to their children the meaning and the significance of the Passover.

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<sup>5</sup>1 Corinthians 11:26 *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

Their children must be taught so that they would know and remember that the great event of their deliverance that took place in Egypt. So also when our children ask us what is the meaning of the Lord's Supper, we must explain accurately to them in simple and clear terms the meaning and significance of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therein is the gospel of salvation. We trust the Lord God that our children at a young age will understand and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. One can never overemphasize this holy duty of parents to nurture their children in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the children of the Israelites wear those phylacteries on their arms and foreheads containing portions of the Word of God, our children should have the Word of God written in the tables of their heart and manifested their works with their hands.<sup>6</sup> AMEN

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<sup>6</sup> The Jews make small leather pouches which are sewed to leather bands by which they strap round the left arm and on the forehead of boys who attain the age of thirteen. Inside these pouches are strips of parchment on which are written certain passages from the Law, namely, Exodus 13:2-10; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21).