

Expectations and God: *Moses and the Deliverance (Exodus 13:1-22)*

“When God does it, we do more than remember it--we celebrate it.”
~ Woodrow Kroll

I. Investigation: An Examination of Exodus 13:1-22

A. Introduction

Prior to the climax of the deliverance of the Israelites—the parting of the Red Sea—the Lord stresses the importance of the Passover, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, and the dedication of the firstborn. These religious rituals stress the importance of remembrance in the life of Israel. One scholar observes, “The feasts of Israel were the ritual expression of its life as a community of God’s people. Through the feasts, Yahweh’s faithfulness in the past became the ritual basis for the hope they held for the future” (Armerding, “Feasts and Festivals,” in *DOTP*, 312).

B. Dedication to the Lord through the Firstborn (13:1-16)

vv. 1-2 - The firstborn signified “the center and future of the family” (Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, 251). To consecrate the firstborn was to consecrate the entire family to the Lord. Thus, by requiring the firstborn, the Lord was making an exclusive claim on the Israelite nation.

v. 3 - Passover = This was Israel’s spring festival (Exod 34:25; Ezek 45:21) which recalled the events of the departure from Egypt. As noted by one scholar, “The Passover is all about freedom through sacrifice, and as such is the fundamental OT type on which Christian freedom in Christ, our ‘paschal lamb,’ is built” (Armerding, “Feasts and Festivals,” 310).

The call to “remember” echoes the Lord’s own recollection of, and commitment to, His covenant with His people (3:15; 6:5). From a human perspective, “remembrance” in the Old Testament served as a basis for worship and called for appreciation and commitment.

vv. 6-7 - Feast of the Unleavened Bread = The unleavened bread symbolized the hasty departure from Egypt (Exod 12:8, 14). For seven days, unleavened bread was eaten. In addition, sacrifices were made at the beginning and end of this time frame (cf. Num 28:16-26; Deut 16:1-8).

vv. 8-9 - While some orthodox Jews take a literal interpretation of this passage (i.e., the use of phylacteries), it is best to view this phrase as a metaphor. The Lord is demanding a continual reminder of their deliverance.

v. 13 - Donkeys were ceremonially unclean animals (Lev 11:2-4). Thus, it is interesting that “... God places his people in the same category as donkeys. This showed them that they were sinners in need of salvation. In a word, they needed to be redeemed. Otherwise they would perish, as the donkey did if they were unredeemed” (Ryken, *Exodus*, 372). Later, the Law required five shekels for the redemption of firstborn sons (Num 18:16). As aptly observed by one scholar, “The bottom line is that

for redemption to take place, something must give up a life, or somebody must pay a price to redeem the firstling” (Hamilton, *Exodus*, 203).

The first mention of the term “redeem” in the Bible occurs in Exodus 13:13. In the immediate context, the LORD’s graciousness is revealed by allowing a substitute for firstborn donkeys and sons. “By combining ritual slaughter with redemption, Israel recalls the contrasting fates of the firstborn in Egypt and testifies to Yahweh’s power in redeeming his own firstborn, Israel (13:15-16)” (Hubbard, Jr., “*pdh*,” in *NIDOTTE*, 3:578). Eventually, we are redeemed by the sacrificial Lamb, our Savior, Jesus Christ (cf. Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

“The effect of understanding the Old Testament passover traditions in the light of the New Testament is to affirm the hope of Israel in so far as it foreshadowed God’s true redemption God’s redemption is not simply a political liberation from an Egyptian tyrant, but involves the struggle with sin and evil, and the transformation of life” (Childs, *Exodus*, 213).

vv. 14-16 - “One reason God gave his people so many ways to commemorate the exodus—Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the consecration of the firstborn—was so they would have plenty of opportunities to give their children the facts of salvation” (Ryken, *Exodus*, 375).

Note the following similarities between the eating of unleavened bread (vv. 3-10) and the offering of the firstborn (vv. 11-16) (taken from Victor Hamilton in his commentary on Exodus [page 201]):

- The phrase “when the LORD brings you to Canaan land” is repeated twice (vv. 5, 11).
- The mention of a land that was promised by God is repeated (vv. 5, 11).
- A religious observance is made upon reaching the land (vv. 6-7, flatbread; vv. 12-13, firstborn).
- The son asks his father a question concerning the religious act (vv. 8a, 14a).
- Both the dedication of the firstborn and the eating of unleavened bread have external reminders (v. 9, “on your hand”; v. 16, “between your eyes”).

C. The Leading of God (13:17-22)

The Lord’s concern that the Israelites would want to return to Egypt when faced with adversity is valid. In time, the Israelites did demand to return to the very land where they were opposed (Num 13-14)!

The longer route afforded the Israelites time to hone their military skills and learn to navigate in this terrain.

v. 18 - The “Way to the land of the Philistines” was the route taken by the Pharaohs on their military campaigns to Canaan and Syria. Rather than taking a logical and convenient route to Canaan, the Lord takes the Israelites to the “Reed” Sea, a large marshy area that once existed around Shihor Lake.

v. 19 - Joseph had requested that his bones be taken out of Egypt (Gen 50:25). Eventually, Joseph's bones are buried in Shechem (Josh 24:32; also, cf. Acts 7:15-16). Brueggemann states, "There is the danger of the 'no generation' in the church . . . may scuttle all the old ancestors (their names and their bones) and seek to live in a vacuum, excessively focused on the present. Second, there is the danger that a preoccupation with ancestors may treat the past like a relic . . . Against both temptations, the bones of Joseph are understood as an urgent, fervent bet on Israel's future with God" ("Exodus," 790).

vv. 20-21 - Camped on the edge of the desert, the Israelites were met with isolation, uncertainty, and most likely, fear. And yet, the text is quick to highlight that the Lord went before them.

Note that this is the first mention of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. These manifestations of God's glory reassured Israel of the Lord's presence, His protection, His provisions, and His leading (cf. Exod 14:19-20; 16:10-12).

II. Intersect

A. While grace is free and our salvation costs us nothing, we must remember that our redemption was still costly! It was paid by the very life of His firstborn Son, Jesus Christ!

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 -

B. As followers of Christ, we must remember that all that we have comes from the gracious hand of the Lord. In actuality, all that we have is His.

Job 1:21 -

C. The Lord's leading may not make "human sense", but He knows what is best. In the midst of the leading, He promises to go before us.

Hebrews 13:5 -

"The Christian community is a community of the cross, for it has been brought into being by the cross, and the focus of its worship is the Lamb once slain, now glorified. So the community of the cross is a community of celebration, a eucharistic community, ceaselessly offering to God through Christ the sacrifice of our praise and thanksgiving. The Christian life is an unending festival. And the festival we keep, now that our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us, is a joyful celebration of his sacrifice, together with a spiritual feasting upon it." ~ John Stott