

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 13:1-16

To understand more about the importance of remembering God's faithfulness through ritual.

Read the Text:

And The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." 3 Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. 4 Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. 5 And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. 6 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. 7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. 8 You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' 9 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. 10 You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year. 11 "When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, 12 you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD'S. 13 Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. 14 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. 15 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.' 16 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." (Exodus 13:1-16, ESV)

Study the Text:

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Exodus 13:1-16 centers around God's commandment to Moses (and by extension, the people of Israel) to annually remember the Passover by eating unleavened bread for seven days, and on the seventh day celebrating with a feast. The purposeful use of unleavened bread recalls the haste with which Israel was meant to leave Egypt (Ex. 12:34). Below are some of the key details surrounding this practice.

THE MONTH OF ABIB

Verse 4 indicates that the Israelites came out of Egypt "in the month of Abib," a demarcation similar to the western calendar (January, February, March, etc.). The word *Abib* is a collective noun that means something like "ears of grain," or more loosely understood as "spring," sometime likely around March or April. This is the same month that is later referred to in the Old Testament as "Nisan" (Neh. 2:1; Esther 3:7). "Nisan" is borrowed from the Akkadian language during the Babylonian exile. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a springtime festival that was practiced each year to commemorate the Passover event and was to be carried into Israel's imminent occupation of the land promised to them by God to Abraham.

A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY

God originally promised the land of Canaan to the Israelites in Genesis 12:7, when God first came to Abraham (then named Abram) and made a covenant with him. That oath was renewed to Abraham's son, Isaac, in Genesis 17:21, and then again Isaac's son Jacob in Genesis 28:13. Even in Genesis 15:16-18, the covenant is extended unto all of their descendants. He again reiterated this promise in Exodus 3, when God came to Moses in the burning bush. Now here, as He did in chapter 3, God spells out the various tribes over which Israel will have conquest. What began as a promise in merely words to Moses has now been greatly strengthened by a host of plagues, the toppling of Pharaoh, and the release of Israel into freedom. God now is reaffirming this promise before leading them into that land. That it is described as a land "flowing with milk and honey" describes both its size and ability to nourish its inhabitants. Milk and honey were two of the three major staples of Israelite commerce (the third being grain). The Hebrew word for "honey" connotes a syrup made from grapes or dates, not honey from bees. Old Testament scholar William Propp adds, "The sense of the metaphor is that Israel is so fertile, its springs exude, instead of water, nutritious fluids ready for consumption."¹

AS A SIGN AND FRONTLET

The language of "signs" and "frontlets" here in verses 9 and 16 recall the small containers of key verses and the commonly worn leather bands of ancient Israelites. This language is also used in the so-called *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:8-9, as well as in the book of Proverbs (Prov. 6:20-21; 7:1-3). In some passages the signs and frontlets are literal, but here in Exodus they seem to be more figurative. The purpose of signs and frontlets was to call to memory something important. Given the importance of the Exodus, the people were to remember it yearly through celebration and worship.

AN OPPOSITE PASSOVER

Beginning with verse 1 and expanded in verses 11 through 16, God issues a command of Israel concerning their firstborn: "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine" (Ex. 13:2). Further explanation is given in verse 15 for this demand: "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" (Ex. 13:15). In the Passover, God killed all of the firstborn Egyptians and the firstborn of animals, and now conversely, God will now require the firstborn of Israel to be sacrificed. The only exceptions are firstborn females (Ex. 13:12). There is also a substitutionary clause for firstborn donkeys and firstborn humans, which should be redeemed with a lamb. The substitution for human is obvious; they are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). The donkey substitution is likely more practical than spiritual; beasts of burden are helpful commodities for a host of responsibilities. Again, this act of consecrating the firstborn is an act of remembrance. When children ask, "Why do we do this," it gives opportunity for the Exodus story to be passed on from generation to generation (Ex. 13:14).

What About Now?

One takeaway is the provision of God for His people. The story of Exodus is not simply about God bringing His people out of a bad situation and into neutrality, but delivering them from oppression and into plenty. The LORD not only does what is necessary to bring them out of Egypt, but He will deliver them into the land He once promised to Abraham so many generations before. Another major takeaway is the importance of remembering the works of God throughout history. Much of the practices commanded for Israel entail

¹ William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 202.

remembering God's faithfulness during this time. They will eat unleavened bread to remember the haste with which God delivered them. They will celebrate the Passover. They will celebrate leaving Egypt. They will consecrate their firstborn children through sacrifice in remembrance of the tenth plague. All of these practices were intentional. It's tempting to sometimes think that sacred practices in the church are "ritual" and are done for the sake of doing them, but that is rarely (if ever) the case. Ritual practice is intended to make us remember something through the imagery of the practice. Remembering God's faithfulness is important. When we begin to forget the past works of God, the future becomes less clear.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 13:1-2. What did God say to Moses?

2. Read Exodus 13:3-4. What did Moses say to the people? What is the month of Abib?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 13:5. To where will the LORD bring His people? What is the significance of "milk and honey?"

2. Read Exodus 13:6-8. In your own words, describe verses 6 through 8. Why are they to eat unleavened bread, and then celebrate on the seventh day?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 13:9-10. What are the aforementioned practices to be like to the people of God? What is the purpose of them? How often are they to keep these practices?

2. Read Exodus 13:11-13. What are the Israelites to do once they enter into the land of the Canaanites? What are the exceptions to sacrifice (v.13), and what things can be substituted for a lamb? Why? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Four

1. Read Exodus 12:14. How does the consecration of the firstborn serve to educate the generations? What are the parents to say to their children when they ask the meaning of this practice?
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2. Read Exodus 13:15-16. Why is the command to consecrate the firstborn in verses 11 through 13 given? What is the purpose of this command? What is it intended to accomplish?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 30 Discussion: Rituals for Remembrance

It's not uncommon to hear Christians and even non-Christians who grew up in church criticize the sacred practices of the church as "rote and ritual." This is often said about weekly communion, liturgical prayers, and a number of other repetitive practices carried out through the years in churches. But are they rote and ritual? The Book of Exodus provides a different perspective. Ritual is intended to provoke remembrance. Rituals are laden with imagery that is meant to bring to mind the faithfulness of God throughout the generations and evoke a response of gratitude and worship. Talk as a group about how certain practices can go from stale to beautiful with a simple change of perspective.

1. Icebreaker: What are some routine rituals you practice in your day-to-day life (this doesn't have to be spiritual, necessarily)?
2. When you think of rituals within the church, what immediately comes to mind?
3. What is one repetitive practice in the church that you think has gotten a little bland? Why?
4. What are some repetitive practices that never get stale (think: "baptism")?
5. How can you be more intentional in remembering God's faithfulness as you participate in weekly, repetitive practices?
6. What is your most favorite church "ritual" or repetitive practice?

Takeaways:

1. The people of God will celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread to remember the haste with which they left Egypt during the Exodus.
2. The people of God were to sacrifice every firstborn of the womb (excluding females) to remember the tenth plague, but were to substitute the firstborn donkeys and humans with lambs.