



The Fullness of our Salvation

Exodus 12:1-20; 13:1-16

The tenth plague, the Passover, and the feast of Unleavened Bread are related events, but they are also events that are distinguished from each other. The Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are liturgical ordinances tied to the tenth plague. Both ordinances are commanded by God, but both ordinances are distinguishable from one another. Consider God's instructions regarding the Passover.

"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' Then tell them. 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.'"

From this statement it is clear that the Passover was an ordinance that God ordained as a means of remembering the tenth plague. More importantly, the Passover was a means of remembering that the salvation of God's people was accomplished by the blood of the Passover lamb. From Exodus 12:13, we can conclude that the blood applied to the houses was a sign that redemption would come only by the shedding of blood and by the proper application of that blood. Ultimately, the blood was a sign that pointed to the blood of Christ. In this sense, the Passover was not only an ordinance that caused God's people to look back and remember, but the Passover also functioned as a shadow of what was yet to come. The Passover had more than one purpose. First, and foremost, it was a religious ceremony, an Old Testament sacrament that was central to the worship of Jehovah. The Passover was also an educational tool designed to provoke the interest of the children. It was useful as a teaching aid, to instruct the children how God had delivered the Hebrews from Egypt.

In the Old Testament, the Passover was distinguished from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The festivals overlapped one another, with the Passover taking place on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month and the Feast of Unleavened Bread commencing with the Passover Feast, but continuing for six more days.

"Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses."

(Exodus 12:17-18)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month, which was the same date that the Passover feast was celebrated. But the Feast of Unleavened Bread continued for six more days. The Festival of unleavened bread lasted for an entire week. Both, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were ordinances that were tied to the tenth plague, but they are also individual events, that were distinguished from one another.

The Passover and the firstborn

When the Lord passed through the land of Egypt, the application of blood resulted in the salvation of the first-born of Israel. The tenth plague was specific to the firstborn; all the firstborn sons were either redeemed or struck dead on the night that the Lord passed through Egypt.

The redemption of the firstborn required both, the shedding of blood, and the proper application of this blood to the entrance of the (Hebrew) home. In order for us to understand the importance of the firstborn we need to return to chapter 4 where Israel is described as Jehovah's firstborn son. *"Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son."* (Exodus 4:22-23)

From this passage it is clear that all of Israel is God's firstborn son. This included men, women, and children. Because all of Israel was God's firstborn son it would have been totally inappropriate for Moses to agree to Pharaoh's terms, when Pharaoh offered to send the men without the women and children into the desert to worship Jehovah. The implications were clear: if Pharaoh refused to let all the Israelites go to worship Jehovah, then Pharaoh would pay with the death of his firstborn son, and all the firstborn sons of Egypt. The statement was conditional: *"if you refuse to let my firstborn son go, so he may worship me, then you will pay with the death of your firstborn sons."*

The tenth plague represented the execution of God's attack against Pharaoh and the firstborn sons of Egypt including the animals. At one point, Pharaoh agreed to send the Israelites into the wilderness to worship Jehovah, but he would not allow their livestock to go with them. Moses refused to negotiate with Pharaoh. Just as every animal had to go with the Hebrews, likewise, the tenth plague was applied to the firstborn among the animals. The fact that the animals are included in both God's judgment, and His redemption, is an indicator to the extent that the firstborn belong to Jehovah.

Consecration of the firstborn

The principle that the firstborn sons of Israel belonged to Jehovah was the basis for the consecration of the firstborn males that opened every womb in Israel, man and beast alike (Exodus 13:1, 2).

What was true corporately of the entire nation was practiced individually through the consecration of every firstborn son that opened the womb. This applied to both man and beast. It would have been impossible for the people to consecrate every individual in the same way that they were instructed to consecrate the firstborn males, because the consecration of the firstborn required either the death of the firstborn or the death of a substitute. If every individual and every beast had to be consecrated through this same means, the people would have been left without any livestock; therefore the practice was limited to the firstborn son of every womb. If the firstborn was an animal, then it could be redeemed by the death of a substitute or it had to be put to death.

In the following passage, Moses provided instructions for this practice.

"you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons."

(Exodus 13:12-13)

All the firstborn male livestock had to be killed or they had to be redeemed by the death of a substitute lamb in its place. Likewise every firstborn son had to be redeemed by the death of a substitute. The lamb would be killed as a substitute in place of the firstborn son or animal that was being redeemed.

After providing instructions for this practice, Moses explained the reason for this practice.

"When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons."

(Exodus 13:15)

With this background information in place, it is easy to see how the consecration of the firstborn and the Passover are tied to the tenth plague. The basis for this practice was the fact that the

firstborn son belongs to the Lord, therefore the firstborn male had to be put to death or the firstborn son had to be redeemed through the death of a substitute.

Mary's firstborn

The consecration of the firstborn was applied to Jesus, because He was the firstborn male child of His mother Mary. As the firstborn male that opened His mother's womb, He was set apart, according to the Law of Moses.

"And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord."

(Luke 2:22-24)

If Jesus had been the second or third born son He would have been exempt from the principle of the firstborn, and the requirement to redeem the firstborn son.

In Romans 8:29 Jesus is called the firstborn among many brethren, in other words He is the firstborn among the new humanity. The new humanity begins with Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, believers are described as the firstborn, by virtue of their union with Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews applies the term firstborn to the church in Hebrews 12:23. Because every believer is united to Christ and a member of His body, the entire church is recognized as the church of the firstborn. The church is corporate in nature, and therefore the church of the first born is in reference to every member who is united to Christ. The entire church has been redeemed and set apart as Christ's body.

In the New Testament, the biblical authors describe believers as "*saints*" (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1). In Greek, the word "*saints*" literally means "the set-apart ones." All Christians are saints, because all Christians are set apart for God, by virtue of their spiritual union with Jesus Christ. Because, all believers are united to the firstborn son of the new humanity, all believers participate in the sonship of Jesus Christ. All Christians are in a special relationship with the Creator because they have been set apart from the rest of humanity, and because the Lamb of God has redeemed them.

The redemption of the firstborn in Israel by the blood of a lamb was a type and a shadow that pointed to the redemption of the firstborn by the blood of Christ. The redemption of the firstborn according to the law of the Lord was accomplished through a substitute; likewise the redemption of the saints was accomplished through a substitute. Jesus Christ is our substitute.

The author of Hebrews writes of the Messiah's work in a similar fashion. The act of redeeming the firstborn of Israel was a mere shadow of the work of Christ. The result of the tenth plague was a deliverance of Israel that was physical, earthly, and temporal. But in contrast, the redemptive work of Christ is much greater: It is spiritual and eternal. The work of Christ is perfect and complete. For this reason the believer relates to the Father with a clean conscience.

The act of redeeming reaches its apex in the redemptive work of Christ. Since our redemption is perfect and complete we can serve the Lord with a clean conscience. The implications for Christian living are profound. Instead of motivating people to strive for obedience through fear and condemnation, the saints are compelled to serve God with a clear conscience and out of thanksgiving. As the firstborn you have been set apart, you belong to the Father through Jesus Christ the firstborn son of the humanity. Because this is true, it is only appropriate that you think and live in a manner that is consistent with this truth.

Just as the blood of the substitute lambs redeemed the firstborn of Israel, likewise the Lamb of God has redeemed us. He has redeemed us by the shedding of His precious blood and by the application of His blood to justified sinners. And therefore when Christ returns in power and glory, you will know and see the fullness of your salvation, because you have been marked by the blood

of Christ, the Lamb of God that brings salvation to God's people. Israel's exodus from Egypt points to an even greater exodus, it points to our exodus from the bondage of sin, death, and the tyranny of the Devil. We celebrate this greater exodus every Lord's Day through the ministry of the word and the sacraments. Every Christian has the ability to celebrate a new beginning that is born out of our redemption.

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