



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

G. The final plague and the Passover (Exodus 11–13)

Part 4: Further legislation – Exodus 12:43–13:16 (i)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

THE PASSOVER account continues with a second set of ordinances forming a parallel with 12:1-18. This set of instructions focuses particularly on the ongoing celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread through the generations when Israel is in the land. It also deals with the redemption of the first-born.

The ordinance of the Passover

12:43 And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance¹ of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof:

12:44 But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof.

12:45 A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof.

12:46 In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone² thereof.

12:47 All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.

12:48 And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males³ be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

12:49 One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.

12:50 Thus did all the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.⁴

12:51 And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.⁵

Comment

This passage is all about inclusion and exclusion, about who is 'in' (and may keep the Passover) and who is 'out' (and may not). This has everything to do with the principles of fellowship which must be worked out within ecclesias today. Three particular lessons may be drawn.

'Inclusion' (according to which everyone is 'in') is one of the buzzwords of modern Western society, but it is not a Biblical concept. As far as the keeping of the Passover is concerned, there is a very clear demarcation between in and out, according to which both inclusion and exclusion are necessary concepts. Circumcision is a prerequisite for Passover, so there can be no fellowship unless the eater is in covenant relationship with God. This means being a part of the community of Israel, though it need not imply genetic descent.

A slave owned by an Israelite is able to partake (the slave must be bought, not hired), but circumcision allows any foreigner to align himself with God and Israel and thus to partake. Such parties, normally considered 'out', may draw near—"let him come near" (v. 48)—and enjoy the privileges of fellowship with God as citizens of His country—"he shall be as one that is born in the land"—provided they are circumcised. Everyone else is excluded from Passover celebration. (Incidentally, this principle of exclusion might be seen to underlie the injunction that nothing of the Passover animal is to be carried forth out of the house; the lamb is only for those who are 'within' the household.)

A second point in relation to inclusion and exclusion is that those who are 'in' are 'in', there are no further distinctions relating to fellowship, save that the community is subdivided into houses, just as we are grouped into ecclesias. Notice the emphasis of verse 46: "In *one house* shall it be eaten"; furthermore, the Passover lamb is not to be splintered or fragmented: "neither shall ye break a bone thereof". Within the fellowship, then, there is to be a unanimity. Splintered fellowships, and 'fellowships within fellowships', contravene the spirit of the feast, for everyone within the house partakes of the one whole lamb.

Neither are there to be tiers or rankings; this means that the "strangers", once they are circumcised, are fully 'in' as paid-up members, and partakers on the same basis as everyone else: "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger" (v. 49); there is no class or caste.

The third point is even more straightforward: if you are 'in' then you keep the feast. It is not an option, whereby one may be a partaker if one happens to feel like it. It is rather a compulsion: "All the congregation of Israel shall keep it" (v. 47).

The relevance of each of these three points to our fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ is obvious.

The firstborn is God's

13:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
 13:2 Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb⁶ among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is Mine.

Comment

Entrances and exits carry with them a symbolism in the Bible (witness Jesus's "I am the door"), and this is true also of the entrances and exits to and from the body, the bodily orifices. What goes into the body is most important (what we see and hear, what influences us; compare the laws of eating and uncleanness), and what comes out even more so (what we say and do, what proceeds forth from our hearts).

The sexual functions of the body and sexual purity also tie into this, and of course there are important laws concerning the sexual entrances and exits, and the issue of semen and menstrual blood. The key reason why these latter are important would seem to be because they are connected to *life* and (pro-)creativity. This in turn brings us to the significance of "whatsoever openeth the womb" (v. 2; cf. vv. 12,15). The womb can be seen to stand for an important entrance to and exit from the body, to be protected from defilement on the one hand, and the source of new life on the other.

Life, of course, is defining of God, and, insofar as we possess it, is a gift bestowed upon us by Him. Creating things is also God's domain; He is the great initiator. Since He is the author of creativity, production and life, it follows that, when human beings engage in the enterprise, they are imitators of Him. This is commemorated in the sanctification (or separating to God) of the firstborn. Just as our life comes from Him, so any life that we might 'create' is to be acknowledged as being reflective of His own gift of life. What comes out of us in this sense too must be regarded by us as His and a gift from Him. The sexual entrances of the body are a potential source of defilement, which must be guarded against. But they are also the source of production and fertility, which is both a gift from God and the method He has devised for producing the godly seed that He is seeking.

Just as God bought back His first-born for Himself from slavery to Pharaoh, so the Israelites were to imitate this by sanctifying their first-born to Him, and redeeming them, as the following passage (vv. 11-16) will go on to describe in much fuller detail.

The sanctification of the first-born was not the only way in which Israel had to show what came first for them. The firstfruits of the ground were also to be offered to God, in a reminder that the fruitfulness of the earth is a blessing from Him. The first-born of beasts were also to be dedicated to God. For the modern disciple the lesson must also be learned. What is first of ours we must also strive to make God's. The first of our possessions, our thoughts, our time, our resources, our love, our energies, our sacrifices—all these should be given for Him and made with Him in view.

1. **v. 43 ordinance.** The Hebrew term *chuqqah* occurs about 100 times, usually translated 'statute' (77 times) or 'ordinance' (22 times). Abraham was praised in Genesis 26:5 for keeping God's statutes, and from that first occurrence the term does not occur again until the Passover. In Exodus it occurs at 12:14,17,43; 13:10, and then a further three occasions in Exodus 27-29. After this it is in fairly common usage.
2. **v. 46 neither shall ye break a bone.** The link with the Lord's sacrifice is clear enough: not a

bone of *his* was to be broken (Ps. 34:20; Jno. 19:36).

3. **v. 48 let all his males be circumcised.** The implication of this is that the family is an important unit of fellowship; or, to put it another way, that fellowship is expected to have a basis in and a meaning for the family. The family members do not go their own independent ways; whether you are from near or (as in the case of this verse) from far, the expectation is that you bring your family with you and that they keep the Passover along with you (and partly because you do). This principle will be tough to enact in modern society, in which family members have increasing (or sometimes total) autonomy; but it presents an ideal and a principle, which is a Biblical one.
4. **v. 50 Thus did [Israel] . . . as the LORD commanded . . . so did they.** Compare verse 28; the repetition of this point is probably important in grasping the structure of Exodus 12. In obeying the Lord's command the children of Israel are following in the footsteps of Moses and Aaron themselves. Compare the emphasis in 7:6,10,20.
5. **v. 51 armies.** Literally, 'hosts'. The military sense may be relevant here, given God's portrayal as "a man of war" in Exodus 15:3.
6. **13:2 womb.** The same Hebrew term, *rechem*, is translated "matrix" in verse 12. The English term 'matrix' comes from the Latin word for womb. The word '*mater*' and our English 'mother' derive from the same source.

Water, wine and the red heifer*

Sarah Joiner

IT HAS BEEN a number of years now since I first heard my father make several connections between the account of Jesus turning the water into wine in John 2 and the account of the ritual of the red heifer in Numbers 19. Strikingly, no commentator which I have read so far on John 2 has made any association with the red heifer. So was my father being imaginatively overactive and stretching the symbolism of Jesus's first miracle? Or had he found a spiritual treasure which many had overlooked? In this short series of articles I hope to demonstrate that the latter is certainly the case.

1. The red heifer

BEFORE CONSIDERING the ritual of the red heifer in detail, it is important to realise that it underscores for us one of our first principles: that death is not the start of an amazing adventure, it is the punishment for sin. Brother Roberts puts it thus: "[God] being, in

essence, the Life of the universe . . . we may understand how death—as the *negation* of His own work, and the penalty for transgression against Himself, should come under the peculiar reprobation manifest in the Mosaic ordinances, that contact with death made a man defiled with