

Consecrate to Me



Exodus 13:1-16

Chapter 13 begins with God's command to Moses and the Israelites to "*Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.*" It is important for us as human beings, creations of the Creator of the Universe, to recognize that we are subordinate to Him. We tend to lose sight of that fact fairly easily. We see all around us creation that was created to serve us, and be subject to our care and use. Note that we do bear responsibility for its care and careful use. In Genesis 1:28-29 we read of God's command regarding our position over the rest of creation. Because of our authority over the *rest* of creation, we tend to forget that our authority comes to us from the Lord. We have not earned that position for ourselves; and, in fact, we are under His authority and responsibility. This passage in Exodus serves to point out this fact that we owe our place in the order of the universe to the Creator of the Universe. This Consecration/Dedication instruction serves as a constant reminder that we are not the Lord of Creation; we are created to be his stewards. If we are stewards, it puts us in a position of servitude to our Master. It is conferred upon us with the responsibilities the Lord has given us as to the order of creation, but we did not create anything or anyone that has come to us. We "own" nothing. All of creation is "owned" by God. God's demand for the firstborn, whether man or animal, serves as that reminder. It creates a mindset for us under his authority that we are subservient to him, which puts us in a place to be able to receive not only his generous blessings and gifts, but to recognize and accept his help and salvation. If the Israelites hadn't recognized the fact that they were in a position of submission to Yahweh, they would not have been able to be delivered by His mighty hand from Egypt.

According to Exodus 12:37, the Israelites have journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. They are still within the borders of Egypt. Before Israel even gets beyond Egypt, The Lord demands that every first born male, man or animal be consecrated to him. Consecration means to be given over to God for his holy purpose. Someone or something that is consecrated has been designated for a holy purpose as opposed to a secular use. For example, a priest or pastor is consecrated to the holy work of mediating between man and God. The chalice and paten, while they are most certainly dishes, they are consecrated to the holy and special use for communion.

An extremely high price has been paid for the deliverance of the Israelites. God does not hold life cheaply, even the lives of Egyptians and animals. The saving act of grace on the part of Yahweh came at great price. It cost the lives of Hebrew boys at the time of Moses' birth, it cost the lives of countless Egyptians and their animals during the final plague, and it cost the lives of Egyptian soldiers at the Red Sea. This price paid in the deliverance of Israel points to the fact that Israel is now owed by God. They have a new master. Israel is no longer subject to Egyptian rule and authority, Israel is now subject to God's authority.

Not only are the firstborn to be consecrated, the whole of the Israelite population will consecrate themselves by abstaining from the consumption of yeast. Directly following Yahweh's initial instruction of consecrating the first born males, he institutes the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In our previous lesson we spent a considerable amount of time discussing the parallel between yeast and sin. Yahweh institutes the Feast of Unleavened bread as a week long holiday of remembering the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. This particular feast won't be commemorated until the Israelites take possession of the Promise Land. Yahweh institutes it upon their departure from Egypt because it is a momentous occasion to be marked and remembered by Israel for all time to come. They are to observe and remember this event as if it were engraved upon their hand or across their forehead. This event is to be on their very lips – constantly remembered and shared with among them, spoken of and taught to their children as a defining moment in their history. This event sets them apart – consecrates – them as Yahweh's chosen people. He did this for no other nation in history. This one event reveals his faithful dedication to his people. They are to respond by consecrating themselves to his holy and divine purpose as his holy nation. They are to become a nation of priests, a light to the world revealing Yahweh's love and compassion to all mankind. They are to consecrate themselves to Yahweh in this fashion. Remembrance and participation in the week long Feast of Unleavened Bread is to be a living testimony of Yahweh's deliverance.

The unleavened bread is a call to eschew sin which leads to decay. As yeast ferments, it decays giving off gases that cause bread to rise. A direct correlation between sin and yeast can be drawn. Yeast symbolically represents sin, which leads to death and decay. We talked previously about Jesus being the sinless sacrifice commemorated in the Passover dinner present in the unleavened bread. Just as Christ is the fulfillment of the messianic hope represented by unleavened bread, the call to eat only unleavened bread during the Feast of Unleavened bread is a call to rid sin from every aspect of our lives. The Jewish custom is to sweep leavening from every corner of the home in preparation for the Feast of Unleavened bread. Not even the smallest bit was allowed to remain. This symbolically points to the Israelites own preparations to become God's chosen people. This covenant is not ratified until they reach Mt. Sinai, but this feast of commemoration is instituted upon their departure as a preparation for that event. Israel is called to remember this event with such fine detail that they actively relive aspects of it symbolically through the week long feast. It becomes a consecration of the entire nation of Israel.

In addition to the consecration of the nation through the symbolism of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Yahweh calls for the specific consecration of the first born of Israel. The night before Israel's departure, God spared the lives of the first born of Israel as marked by the blood on the doors of all the Israelites. He placed a claim on their lives; their lives belonged to him just as much as the lives of the Egyptian first born and the first born of the animals. The Egyptians and animals forfeited their lives. God spared the lives of the Israelites, but there was to be a price to redeem them back among the nation of Israel. Verse 11 tells us,

"After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, 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."

God does not demand that the first born sons or work animals be sacrificed as are the first born animals. God commands that Israel redeem back their firstborn sons and their work animals. Redeem means to buy back the first born son. There is a purchase price attached to the first born son and the work animals. That purchase price is a sacrificial lamb. In buying back the first born son, he returns to his family and to a somewhat secular life. Secular in the sense that he does not belong to the temple and to God for holy service. He returns to his family and goes on with life as a farmer, carpenter, merchant, or whatever secular occupation is in his future. He is still part of the holy nation of Israel and as such he a consecrated member of the nation in general. An example of a first born son who was not redeemed by his parents is the prophet Samuel. When he is old enough he is taken to the temple and goes into active service for God. God values life. He graciously allows Israel to keep their firstborn sons.

The Egyptians lives were forfeited, their lives demanded of them in judgment for their obstinate sin against God and the cruel oppression of God's chosen people. Paul says in Romans 9:14-15, "*What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!*"¹⁵ *For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'.*" (Exodus 33:19) Mercy was not shown to Egypt because they did not acknowledge Yahweh's sovereignty. Mercy was extended to Israel because of their faithful obedience displayed by their compliance with the Passover sacrificial lamb. Yahweh, in his mercy allows Israel to buy back their firstborn sons. As it is described in verse 13, all firstborn animals are given over to the Lord in sacrifice. Children and work animals are to be *redeemed* either with an animal sacrifice or by payment of 5 sanctuary shekels. (This provision is recorded in Numbers 18:15-17.) The point of this lesson of Consecration/Dedication is to point out that if a life is to be restored, it must be bought back or redeemed by a substitutionary payment, often the death of *something* for the life of *someone* else¹.

¹ The New American Commentary, Exodus by Douglas K. Stewart, pg.312-318

This ritual of redemption served to teach three important lessons about Yahweh. First, it was a stark reminder that it was Yahweh that delivered Israel from bondage and oppression in Egypt. Moses wasn't responsible for their deliverance. No man or person achieved this triumph. Only by God's mighty hand was Israel delivered from slavery and death. Death because they were separated from a true relationship with God. A real and abiding relationship with Yahweh was unattainable in Egypt, but brought to fruition in the wilderness. Israel could not enter into a relationship with Yahweh in Egypt until they could come to know him in the wilderness. Consecration was a symbol and reminder of God's gracious deliverance. It was a spiritual mark or seal of belonging to Yahweh.

Ritual redemption reveals Yahweh's high respect for life. It draws a strong contrast against the widespread pagan practice of human sacrifice found throughout Egypt, Canaan and even the land of the Chaldeans (Babylonians). Human life was cheap in the eyes of the pagans. With Yahweh it was respected and protected. Human sacrifice is abhorrent to God; a provision of a substitute sacrifice was accepted in the place of each first born son. Yahweh even provided a redemption substitute for work animals². A family's beast of burden was an extremely valuable asset, one they truly could not survive without. Yahweh allowed for a lamb to be sacrificed in its place. Interesting how a lamb was an acceptable sacrifice for a beast of burden, a beast whose life stood between life and death for a family.

Finally ritual redemption points forward to a day when the Messiah would be the redemption price for the sins of God's faithful. God wants to restore life. He does not want to see life wasted and given over to eternal death. He makes every opportunity, every provision for all life to be redeemed for his good purpose. He redeems us from our slavery to sin and its final result of death, eternal separation from God. He purchased every faithful life at the extremely high price of the death of his perfect and beloved son. The ultimate point of this institution was to prepare the Israelites for the ultimate sacrifice of the Messiah's death for the redemption of all humankind. This sacrificial consecration/redemption is dependent upon one other thing – faith, our faith in the Lord's ability and right to redeem us. This faith is the key to salvation, whether it is temporal salvation as illustrated by Yahweh's mighty hand saving the Israelites from Egypt, or our eternal salvation through Jesus' death on the Cross. We have to believe and have faith in order for the Lord to release this blessing and fulfill this promise in our lives.

² Since donkeys were considered ceremonially unclean animals (Lev. 11:2-4) they could not be sacrificed, but they could be redeemed — Bible Knowledge Commentary