

Because of What the Lord Did for Me

Exodus 13:1-16

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

September 23, 2001

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 13. Tonight we begin a twelve part study that will carry us through the grand events of the Exodus itself. Now during the summer we looked at some passages in Exodus 12 that covered the institution of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We will revisit that institution of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the passage we're studying tonight, but Exodus 13 actually inaugurates that period in the history of Israel when God is actually bringing them out of Egypt and on the way across the Red Sea and towards the Promised Land through the wilderness. It's of course very exciting in terms of the glorious events and miracles that God does on the way. It's so exciting that it has provoked more than one motion picture depiction and many of you perhaps still have the Cecil B. DeMille's *Ten Commandments* sort of emblazoned upon your memory. But these events are indeed stirring.

But as the apostle Paul made very clear to us in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, the Lord wrote these things and these things occurred for our instruction on whom the end of the ages have come. So we don't simply look at this material as very interesting history, we don't even look at it as very interesting Bible history with great stories and miracles recounted. We read it for what it is, God's holy and inspired Word, which is profitable for our growth, our training, our correction, and our spiritual grounding in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's hear God's Word in Exodus 13 beginning in verse 1:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast, it belongs to Me.'

And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery, for by a powerful hand the Lord brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten. On this day, in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth. And it shall be when the Lord brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to

give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen with you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a powerful hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. Therefore you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.

Now it shall come about when the Lord brings you to the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, that you shall devote to the Lord the first offspring of every womb, and the firstborn of every beast that you own. The males belong to the Lord. But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it then you shall break its neck. And every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, 'With a powerful hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. And it came about when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beasts. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.'"

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired Word. May He write its eternal truth upon our heart. Let's pray.

Have you ever had someone say to you, "Theology doesn't matter. That's just something for professionals to sit about in their classrooms and speculate about. It really doesn't impact my day to day life." Well, one of the things that's very clear in this passage is that theology does matter. God is stressing through Moses in this passage that all of life, our worship and our work, is to be ordered and informed by God's redeeming work. In other words, what we know by God's revelation about His redeeming work (and the shorthand for that is theology) is to inform all of our life in its worship and work. That's the great lesson of this passage. It's the great lesson of the rites of this passage and especially of the rite of the consecration of the firstborn. So let's attend to God's Word in this passage and let's do it in two parts.

I want to skip the first two verses to begin with and lump them with verses 11 through 16 because all of those have to do with the consecration of the firstborn, and I'd like to look at this passage in two parts. First in verses 3 through 10, there we see the Feast of Unleavened Bread instituted. It's been instituted before but

now we're getting further instructions and we're seeing the practice of the Feast of Unleavened Bread directly linked to the Exodus. It's being explained to us how the Feast of the Unleavened Bread is to bring to the minds of the sons of Israel the events of God's redemption in the Exodus. We see that in verses 3 through 10. Then in verses 1 and 2 and verses 11 through 16 we see the consecration of the firstborn, this rite of consecration, this command of consecration of the firstborn is established and this acknowledges God's ownership over Israel and especially her firstborn.

So let's look first at verses 3 through 10. This great passage, the whole of the passage, verses 1 through 16, contains both the divine directives regarding the consecration of the firstborn and further instructions regarding the Feast of Unleavened Bread, but both commands are related directly to the Exodus and to our remembrance of God's work in the Exodus. Now here the Exodus, unleavened bread, and consecration are all linked together and grounded. They're explained by what God has done in the Exodus. Look at verses 3 through 10. Here, God is calling us to remember His redemption through the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. He's calling us to remember His redemption through the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And as we do this, we realize that our worship itself, our worship itself is a recollection of redemption - our worship itself, especially when we are worshiping with the use of, the means of, the sacrament, is a recollection of redemption.

Notice several things here in verse 3 - first of all the command to remember. You'll remember that "remember" is the first word of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath command. And here, just like there, "remember" means more than simply calling something to mind. The day of the Exodus is to have a controlling influence on the life of Israel and so the command is given — "Remember this day when you came out of Egypt." Notice also the phrase, "Remember the day when you went out of Egypt, from the house of slavery." The house of slavery is perhaps a graphic recollection of the practice of the Egyptians. They would have a large house within a walled-slaved city where all the slaves would be kept. And it became a metaphor to the Israelites of the whole land of Egypt. It was their experience of bondage and oppression. They are brought out of the house of slavery.

Notice again how the power of God is emphasized in verse 3. How was it that they came out of the land of Egypt? By the "mighty hand of God," by the "power of the mighty hand of God." "The powerful hand of the Lord brought you out of this place." And that's not only emphasized in verse 3, but it's repeated in verse 9 and verse 16. God wants it to be clear that it wasn't through a stratagem, it wasn't through Moses' brilliance, it wasn't through Moses' courage, it wasn't through the people's courage — it was through His powerful hand that they came out of Egypt.

Notice also that it is over and over emphasized that they were "brought out" of

this particular situation. Verse 3, verse 4, verse 8, verse 9, verse 16 — all of those verses emphasize, some of them more than one, that the children of Israel are “brought out” of Egypt. This is part of course of them being set apart for the Lord as they are brought of the world, out of Egypt. Notice that in remembrance of these things, no leaven is to be eaten, only unleavened bread for seven days. In other words, God is giving Israel a concrete way of remembering and expressing what He has done by depriving themselves of the normally leavened bread, they are remembering the bread of haste that they had to make in the wake of God's deliverance in the Exodus. So just as we have a rationale for fasting, in that the bodily deprivation reminds us of our need of the Lord and this impels us to pray to Him, so also the unleavened bread reminds them of the work of God that He has done in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

Look at verse 4 — the feast is directly associated with the date of the Exodus. That would have occurred in the springtime near the barley harvest which is the month of Abib. Put that in the back of your mind because it's going to come to play in understanding something about this feast in a little bit later. In verse 5 we're told explicitly that the rite is to be commenced once the Lord has brought them into the land which He has promised. Notice the language there. “When you come into the land which the Lord has given you, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite,” those phrases not only remind the children of Israel that God had promised to do this as far back as Genesis 15, He had promised to give them this land and He had reiterated that promise early in the book of Exodus, but it also reminds them how improbable was this command from a human perspective. That this small people, that this insignificant group of seventy people who went down into Egypt would come out and take the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, all the people's land, they're going to take the land? “Yes, because I'm giving it to you.” You see, it emphasizes that it took the power of God to bring this about. And so this rite is to be commenced once the Lord brings you into the land.

You'll see this same thing mentioned with regard to the devotion of the firstborn children. This particular feast is to be instituted once the children of Israel are in the land. What's the significance? God doesn't ask His people to respond to Him in worship until He has completed and fulfilled His promise of redemption. And so He's saying, “Look, My word's good. You're going to be in the land that I promised you. When you're there, then institute this feast in remembrance of what I have already done for you.” Worship is always a response to what God has already done, even though it may also look forward to what God will do in the future. He never said, “Look, just trust Me. I'm going to take care of this. Go ahead and start now.” Our worship is always a response to what He has already done and that is the case here.

Specific instructions are reiterated in verses 6 and 7 and then in verse 8 the command is given to instruct one's children in the meaning of this rite. They are to understand that the reason this is being done is “because of what the Lord did

for us in bringing us out of Egypt.” Look, however, at the specific language that is used in verse 8. “Tell your son is it because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.” Now that language is not only to be the language of the first generation as they tell their sons; it's to be the language of the next generation and the next generation and the next generation so that twenty generations down the line — when it's your great, great, great, great, great, great, great — fill in the blank — grandfather who the Lord brought out of Egypt, you're still telling your son, “We're doing this because the Lord brought *me* out of Egypt because you wouldn't be there if the Lord had not fulfilled His promise.”

And my friends, it's the same for believers. We may be fifty generations removed from the Lord Jesus Christ, but what the Lord Jesus did, He did for me. Not simply for us, not simply for the people of His day, not simply for His disciples and their immediate associates, but for me — individually and specifically, though I am a part of a multitude that no man can number, though I am connected with the saints who have gone before and those who will come afterwards, yet He has done it for me even as He has done it for you as you trust in His name. And so the command is given to instruct your children in this truth of why the rite is performed. And we'll see again when we get to verse 14 how significant this is for our own practice of catechizing. Notice specifically it is the father who is to explain this to his sons, to his children.

Then in verse 9, we're told again that the Passover, the unleavened bread, is to serve as a reminder, as a sign of the Lord's redemptive work. The theology of redemption is to inform the theology of worship and that is to impact all areas of life. The remembrance of unleavened bread is to permeate the whole way you look at the world. You are to look at the world remembering that you are a redeemed person. That's the whole point of the rite. The rite isn't the end of the remembrance; it is the occasion of the remembrance in every circumstance. In fact, the very language of verse 9 emphasizes this. Look at the language — “It shall serve as a sign on your hand and a reminder on your foreheads.” Now you know that the second-temple Jews actually started the practice of wearing these Scriptures on their left hand and on their forehead. But that's of course not the point. The point is that the sign is to be so pervasive in our experience that we carry it about with us as if it were on our foreheads, between our eyes, and on our left hand. We can't get away from it. It's absolutely everywhere. It's comprehensive in our lives. It's to impact everything.

Now of course for us as believers we can quickly see the application of this truth to the Lord's Supper. Isn't it interesting that in Luke 22 verse 19 when the Lord Jesus is instituting the Lord's Supper He takes the bread and He says to His disciples, “This is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” And He's calling up all the richness of this instruction to remember the redemptive work of the Lord in the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover and He's applying it to the Lord's Supper. That doesn't mean that the Lord's Supper is a bare remembrance, but it does mean at least this — at the heart of

the Lord's Supper is the finished work of Jesus Christ and our realization of it and our drawing strength from it. And so it's no surprise, is it, when Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, verses 23 through 26, says this — “For I received from the Lord that which I also deliver to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ And in the same manner He gave the cup and He said, ‘Do this in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.’” It's the memorial of redemption. You're looking at the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the whole point of the remembrance is to impact the totality of your life so that you realize that and you live like you are a redeemed person. You have literally been redeemed by the hand of the Lord and it's to impact every area of life. It's to impact your consecration, your vocation, your dealings with your family — it's to impact every area of life. You're a bought person. God has paid a price for you. You belong to Him. You are His.

You see how the theology of redemption informs your theology of worship which informs your whole approach to life in work and in worship. Theology matters. This past week I've had the opportunity like many of you to overdose on the observations of the pundit. And one pundit that I had the opportunity to hear was an imam who teaches at Union Theological Seminary in New York, who was vehemently assuring me that theology had absolutely nothing to do with what those hijackers did. Now my friends, you don't have to have a PhD from Harvard to figure out that theology had everything to do with what those hijackers did, everything. It had a direct bearing on what they did. It may have been warped theology; it may have been twisted theology. We might want to stand aside and say this theology is not representative of mainline Islamic thought, but whatever we say, what they did had direct bearings on theology. Or rather we should say it this way — their theology had direct bearing on what it did. We'll never again be able to say that theology doesn't matter. Tell that to the hijackers. It has everything to do with how they acted.

Well the Lord is trying to impress upon us that our view of redemption and our realization of what we are because of redemption has everything to do with everything in life. That's one of the great messages of this first part of Exodus 13. Our worship is a recollection of redemption and as we remember God's redemption that puts the rest of life in perspective.

Now the second part of this passage is a follow-up to this. And if you'll look back at verses 1 and 2 and then down to verses 11 through 16 we'll see another side to this truth. The first part, verses 3 through 10, speaks of remembering God's redemption. This part, verses 1 and 2 and 11 through 16, speak of acknowledging God's ownership. It speaks of the consecration of the firstborn and this passage emphasizes that we belong to God and that possession of us by God must be tangibly confessed and manifested in our lives. Notice verse 1. It begins with the phrase, “Then the Lord spoke to Moses.” That is a phrase

frequently used in the book of Exodus to indicate that the Lord is speaking directly to Moses and then Moses is to pass on what he has heard from the Lord to the people. And here if you look at verse 2, God calls for the consecration of firstborn males of both man and beast.

And note the following things — consecrate, the word that is used for consecrate or devote, can mean “to sacrifice.” You can find it used that way in various places in the Old Testament. Here it means “to consider as belonging to the Lord; consider as belonging to God.” You can see that from the very last words of verse 2. What does it say? “It belongs to God.” Consecrate it to God, give it over to God, acknowledge that it belongs to God. All the firstborn males of the beasts, all the firstborn sons - consider them as belonging to God. Now why, you ask? What's the significance of this? Well, there are several things to be said.

First of all, remember that the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread coincided with spring and the barley harvest. Do you remember when I told you to just sort of stick that in the back of the mind? Well, this was of course animal birthing season. Have you ever been in an agricultural area in the late March, early April, mid April and see lambing season going on and seen the little lambs everywhere? Well this is animal birthing season and so the emphasis of this passage seems to be associating God's gift of fruitfulness not with some sort of regular cycle of seasons, not some sort of pantheistic worship of the earth and of the seasons and the gods of fertility, but with God's redemptive work of the Exodus. That is, that God's blessing of fruitfulness on man and beast is tied to His redemptive work and benefits.

Secondly we can say this — ancient cultures considered that the firstborn was intrinsically holy. This may well be a polemic against that to emphasize that God alone grants fruitfulness and God alone grants status. We know that elsewhere Moses emphasizes that God can choose whether or not He will use the firstborn. He chooses not to use Esau and instead chooses to use Jacob. He chooses not to use Ishmael and instead chooses Isaac. God will choose whom He will use.

Furthermore, this passage makes it clear that children are not to be sacrificed. Though the firstborn males are to be devoted to the Lord they must be redeemed. That's emphasized in several ways in this passage. Now you say, “Who in the world would have thought of sacrificing a child?” And the answer is, “A lot of people in Canaan would have thought that.” In fact, the Canaanites practiced Molech worship where the firstborn child, the firstborn male child was burned alive in a sacrifice to Molech in order to ensure further fruitfulness. And so here it is being made very clear that this is not to be done in Israel, that the firstborn child must be redeemed by a lamb just like he was redeemed in Egypt. The male beasts are singled out for sacrificed because they were less valuable for breeding. The Lord was being gracious to this agricultural people. Don't sacrifice the firstborn female animal or beast because you need those female beasts for breeding others. Take one of the males. And the male sons and the

sacrifice of the firstborn beasts are clearly related to the tenth plague. As God had spared the firstborn male beast and humans of Israel from the plague of the death angel, so also the firstborn beasts and sons were to be devoted to the Lord.

Notice verse 11 which makes this clear. “Now when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanite” — again we see the link of this command for consecration to the Lord's fulfillment of His covenant promise in bringing Israel into the land. In verse 12, this verse specifies what was implicit in verse 2. Every firstborn male, both man and beast, belongs to God. The rationale for this is explained in verse 15 and we'll get there in just a few moments.

In verse 13, we're told in addition to the clean animals that are to be redeemed or sacrificed that also the donkey, though unclean because it's useful as a beast of burden, must be redeemed or destroyed. And interestingly it is said that if you don't redeem the donkey you must break it's neck. Now there is a lot to be said about this particular thing but a couple of things come immediately to mind. Notice that if the person refuses to devote this animal to the Lord he loses the use of the animal. The Lord will have His redemption honored. Secondly, notice that if you refuse to redeem the animal the animal is not to be slain with a knife. That might look like you were sacrificing it. The animal's neck is to be broken. It's an unclean animal. It's not to be used for a sacrifice and therefore it is to be killed in such a way that there is absolutely no mistake that no sacrifice is being made to the Lord here. And so for these reasons the unredeemed donkey's neck is to be broken. On the other hand, look at the end of verse 13. “Sons must be redeemed.” There's no option here. They must be redeemed. There is to be no child sacrifice. A lamb must be substituted for them just like in the Exodus.

And then when we get to verse 14 we see again that the significance of all this must be explained to the children, especially to the firstborn son. And here again we see the glorious example of catechizing and we should never underestimate the power of a father telling the truth to his son. There's nothing in the world that can replace it. There's nothing in the world that can substitute for it - a father telling the truth about God and His redemption to his son, explaining it.

In verse 15 this explanation is supplied to the father. Here's what you say to your son. The rationale is given for this consecration. The Lord killed Egypt's firstborn, both man and beast, and He spared Israel's firstborn, both man and beast. How? By the blood of the Passover lamb. And therefore, by virtue of this blood redemption, the firstborn of Israel belong to Him and they must be devoted to Him. They wouldn't be alive had it not been for the mercy of the Lord. And that act of consecration and devotion, that act of giving over those firstborn beasts and giving over those firstborn sons is to serve as a sign, verse 16, of the Lord's mighty deliverance. It is to be so tangible as if it were, it will be as if the words themselves were tied to your head and to your hands. You see, this is not a command for literal phylactery — little cylinders in which Scriptures would be

stuffed and then attached to the head and to the wrists. This is a metaphorical usage which was subsequently misunderstood by second-temple Judaism. The idea is much more here like Paul says in Romans 12 verse 1 — “Therefore I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” You are to realize in the very act of the ritual of devotion that you yourself belong to God. You wouldn't be here if it were not for His redemption. And especially the children, the firstborn males of Israel, would not be here were it not for the Passover lamb.

We must see ourselves, our own lives, as a stewardship that we owe to God. We are stewards of ourselves not just of what we have. We give account to ourselves because of what the Lord has done. “We have been bought with a price,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6. We are not our own. We belong to the Lord and therefore we must render to Him, not only an account of what He has given us, but of our whole lives. We are to present our bodies, ourselves, as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is our spiritual service of worship.

Well what are we to say about this passage for today? Well, just a couple of things. First of all, we are God's firstborn via our union with Christ. We are a kingdom of priests. We've been bought by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus Christ is the firstborn. He is the first fruits. But because we have been redeemed by being united to Him, we now share in the benefits and blessings of the firstborn of God. That language is used repeatedly in the New Testament. In fact, if you will come on Wednesday night, Derek Thomas, as he works you through 1 Peter, this Wednesday night he's going to be speaking about a passage which picks up this language of “firstborn” and applies it to believers. It will be fruitful if you hear that message. That's what the groundwork is being laid for in this passage, so that believers will understand what it is to be the firstborn, kin to the firstborn of God. Now there's the first thing we see.

The second thing is this, however. We must live ourselves realizing that we belong to God and that possession must be tangibly confessed and manifested in our lives. You see, it's not just that the firstborn of ours belong to Him, it's that all who trust in Christ belong to Him because we've been bought with a price. What's our response to that realization then? Well John Calvin put it this way — “We are not our own. Let not our reason nor our will therefore sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own. Let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own. In so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's. Let us therefore live for God and die for God. We are God's. Let God's wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's. Let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward God as our only lawful goal.” We belong to Him and we must manifest it in every area of life.

Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we bow before You and we acknowledge that through the cross work of Jesus Christ, we belong to You again. We belong to You as Your creation. You made us. In You, we live and move and have our being. But now, because of what You've done in Jesus Christ, we redemptively belong to You again. Grant that we may live like it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Would you stand and receive the Lord's benediction?

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith through Jesus Christ our Lord, until the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, **subscriptions are free**. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).