



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 12:43 - 13:16

Topic

Moses gives further details about the removal of all leaven from households during what is to be an annual observance called the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Title

"Leaven Can Wait"

There are a lot of diets and diet plans out there: Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, NutriSystem, Atkins, Paleo, Slim Fast, South Beach, Dash, Mayo Clinic.

According to ABCNews, 100million people fuel a \$20billion weight loss industry.

If you're going to shell-out cash, for around \$6000 you can spend a week losing weight in Switzerland at the Beau Rivage Palace, including massage and personal training sessions.

Every now and then a diet said to be based on the Bible gains popularity. The Daniel diet is one. Daniel fasted twice:

1. During the first fast, he ate only vegetables and water to set himself apart for God.
2. For a second fast mentioned in a later chapter, Daniel stopped eating meat, wine and other rich foods.

The First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu holds an annual 21day "Daniel Fast" for members to not only encourage healthy eating, but to help people keep their faith by refocusing their attention on their diet.

My favorite Bible diet is the Ezekiel diet. It's really a misnomer, because all you get from the prophet Ezekiel is a recipe for a certain type of bread. Ezekiel was required by God to make the bread from a restricted list of ingredients: wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt (4:9). The prophet was required to eat this bread and nothing else for 390 days, while lying on his side, to symbolize the coming disobedience and defilement of the Israelites.

Proponents of Ezekiel bread always neglect to tell you how the bread was to be baked: "And you shall eat it *as* barley cakes; and bake it **using fuel of human waste in their sight**" (4:12).

It's an effective diet if you have to use the recommended fuel, 'cause you pretty much lose your appetite.

When the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, they were given a strict menu for the Passover meal: roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. The morning they left Egypt, they took only unleavened bread for their journey.

Later, after they entered the Promised Land, they were to follow-up the annual Passover meal by eating unleavened bread for a week straight, observing what we commonly call the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Like Ezekiel bread, this wasn't meant to be a diet plan. It was rich with symbolism. It told the story of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt to their freedom to serve the Lord in the Promised Land.

As we discuss some of that symbolism, we want to suggest what all this might mean to us as Christians who are under no obligation to observe Passover or Unleavened Bread as feasts.

To that end, I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 You Have The Power Of An Unleavened Life, and #2 You Have The Priorities Of A Redeemed Life.

#1 You Have The Power Of An Unleavened Life (12:43-51 & 13:3-10)

As great as yeast is for baking, it is an agent of corruption. It is therefore used in the Bible as a symbol of evil in general. In the New Testament, for example, the church at Corinth was tolerating the sexual sin of one of its professing members. The apostle Paul wrote to them about it, saying, "Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven..." (First Corinthians 5:6-7).

He compared the sexual sin to leaven that would corrupt the entire church. His counsel was to remove the sinner - the leaven.

Paul went on to say, “Then you will be like fresh bread made without yeast, **and that is what you are**” (5:7). Because of our relationship with Jesus, we are considered already unleavened. We don’t become unleavened by removing sin, as important as it is to do so. No, we are considered by God to be unleavened, and therefore must guard against allowing corruption to enter our lives and our church.

We still sin, do we not? Yes, so that tells me what the apostle means is that we have the power to not sin. We have, by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the power of an unleavened life.

I ran across this quote attributed to R.A. Torrey. It captures what I’m trying to say.

The Holy Spirit can take a man whose mind is blind to the truth of God, whose will is at enmity with God and set on sin, and transform that man, impart to him God's nature, so that he thinks God's thoughts, wills what God wills, love what God loves, and hate what God hates.

Keep that in mind as we take a look at the verses.

Exo 12:43 And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This *is* the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it.

Exo 12:44 But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it.

Exo 12:45 A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it.

The tenth wonder, the death of the firstborn of man and beast, had just occurred. The Egyptians had given the Israelites tremendous spoil, and sent them out of Egypt.

Moses had earlier mentioned that a “mixed multitude” went with the Israelites. The question would naturally come up, “What was their part in the future Passover feasts?”

Moses instructed them it was only to be eaten by Israelites and those Gentiles who converted to Judaism by becoming circumcised - which was the physical sign of the covenant God made with Abraham.

So Passover was at once both restricted to the Jews *and* open to anyone who believed God. Hearing this, the Jews should have understood that God had saved them for a greater purpose, and that was to reveal Him to the other nations and peoples of the world.

Exo 12:46 In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones.

Passover wasn't a picnic to be enjoyed outdoors; it wasn't a BBQ. It was restricted to indoors to remind future generations that the Angel of the Lord had been outside, killing the firstborn of man and beast in every house that lacked lambs blood on their doorposts.

As far as the bones being unbroken, this is in keeping with the fact that Jesus, the future and final Lamb of God, would not have a bone of His body broken - even though breaking the legs of those who were crucified to effect a quick death was common.

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

Exo 12:48 And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised,

and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.
Exo 12:49 One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."

On blogs, and in hip-churches, you hear the word "missional" tossed around quite a bit. As popular as it is, I couldn't find a single, coherent definition. It seems it takes an entire blog post or two to get to the bottom of it.

As I said, Israel was to represent God and invite Gentiles to convert to Him - to believe Him. It was a mission - thus they were to be missional.

Once converted, a Gentile and a Jew were under the same "law." They were equal.

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

If I'm remembering correctly, this is at least the second time they are commended for being doers of God's Word. They started well... But they would not finish well.

Anyone can start well; it's endings that are hard. Don't grow weary in well-doing; throw off weights that hold you back, and run to the finish line of your faith.

Exo 12:51 And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies.

They were brick makers and farmers. They had no military training. Yet God saw them as an army with various ranks.

We, too, are soldiers in a spiritual warfare, fighting battles everyday using spiritual weapons to defeat fell foes.

Let's move into chapter thirteen, but begin with verse three for now.

Exo 13:3 And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this *place*. No leavened bread shall be eaten.

To help future generations “remember,” in addition to observing Passover, there would be another observance on its heels - the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Exo 13:4 On this day you are going out, in the month Abib.

The commentators I read suggest that “Abib” was the Egyptian name for what would come to be called Nisan. It corresponds to April on our calendar.

Exo 13:5 And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month.

God had just called them “armies,” and here they learned that as wonderful as the Promised Land would be, there would be hostile armies to fight, and powerful nations to overthrow.

Remember that pop song, *I beg your pardon; I never promised you a rose garden?* There was serious work to be done in the Promised Land- not just gardening.

The goal of your Christian life shouldn't be to get to retirement and hit cruise control. We're to be like Caleb. When he entered the Promised Land, he was a very old man - seeing he and Joshua were the only ones of their generation who survived the forty-years of wandering in the wilderness.

He asked for a mountain to climb, with giants on it to fight. Real giants, Nephilim. It was arguably the most difficult and strenuous part of his life.

Exo 13:6 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day *there shall be* a feast to the LORD.

The last day of the observance was to be considered a Sabbath - a day of rest.

Exo 13:7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters.

I don't do a whole lot of baking from scratch, but I know how tiny those yeast granuals are. Not even one of them was to be found anywhere in your house.

Exo 13:8 And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, '*This is done* because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.'

They had to leave in haste - and that's what unleavened bread represents, since there was no time to wait for it to rise.

Exo 13:9 It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.

Later in the history of Israel, certain Jews took to wearing prayer boxes on their foreheads and forearms, containing key Bible verses. They are commonly called *phylacteries*.

The practice comes from a literal reading of this verse.

As far as I know, they didn't put anything in their mouths - even though in the same breath it says, "that the Lord's law may be in your mouth."

How can you take a part of it as being literal - *but not all of it*? Clearly this was to mean that whatever you think, do, or say, it ought to be in accordance with God's law.

Exo 13:10 You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.

God was adding to His annual calendar. We'll see more on His agenda as we progress - seven feasts, four in the spring, and three in the fall.

Since we have the whole story, we know that the Passover Lamb illustrates Jesus as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. He died in your place - as your substitute - to deliver you from death and give you eternal life.

We know He fulfilled the Passover by dying on the Cross exactly as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple.

And because He lived a sinless life, and in death saw no corruption, He fulfills the Feast of Unleavened Bread as well.

We'll see that during this same observance is the Feast of Firstfruits - an illustration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead as the firstfruits of all those who would believe in Him.

Do you believe in Him? Then you are understood to be "in" Him; what is true of Him is true of you.

By virtue of being saved, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, you have the power of His unleavened life in order to overcome sin and the world.

We talked about diets. Most of them have a lot to say about your consumption of water - how important it is to overall health.

With regards to your spiritual life, Jesus invites you to ask Him, and then believe you've received, rivers of living water. You really do have the power of an unleavened life. Say "No" to sin.

#2 You Have The Priorities Of A Redeemed Life

(13:1-2, 11-16)

Back in 2013, an Indian farmer decided not to sell his prized bull for a then-world record price of \$1.7million.

Locally, every now and then you'll see a truck from *World Wide Sires*. Their mission is genetic modification to produce better bulls. Some of them are extremely valuable commodities.

The Israelites had flocks and herds. They were extremely valuable commodities to them. We read in 13:1-2,

Exo 13:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Exo 13:2 "Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, *both* of man and beast; it is Mine."

What does that mean - "consecrate?" That's what these next verses explain.

Exo 13:11 "And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you,

Exo 13:12 that you shall set apart to the LORD all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males *shall be* the LORD's.

Before we continue talking about the firstborn of man and beasts, we need to stop on the word "when" in verse one. Getting to the Promised Land was a matter of "when," *not* "if." It would have been a tremendous encouragement to the Israelites to know God's plan, especially after having seen in the ten wonders He performed that He had the power to accomplish it.

I was reminded of that old campfire song, *When I get to Heaven, gonna walk with Jesus... Talk with Jesus... See His face.... Saved by His wonderful grace.*

If you believe Jesus Christ, Heaven is a matter of “when,” *not* “if.” You’re not saved based on your performance as a Christian, but on account of His having declared you righteous when the Holy Spirit freed your will in order to choose Him.

There is a lot going on with the theme of “firstborn.” For our purposes in this study, in context, it’s as simple as what one commentator wrote:

The setting apart of the first-born was a grateful acknowledgment of the Divine mercy in sparing the first-born from the midnight destruction. The first-born of the Israelites had been mercifully preserved from the stroke of the Destroying Angel, which had inflicted death upon the first-born of Egypt in the silent midnight hour. Hence what more reasonable than that the life that had been thus spared should be separated unto the Lord.

Great; set apart and consecrate the firstborn. How do you do it?

Exo 13:13 But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.

What? Break the necks of donkeys? What just happened?

What happened is this: The firstborn of clean animals were to be set apart by being sacrificed to God within a year.

Think back on that prize Indian bull. Or a World Wide Sire. If a firstborn, it would be sacrificed. If not, its firstborn would have to be sacrificed. Suddenly things got very costly.

The firstborn of certain animals listed by God as unclean, such as a donkey, could not be sacrificed to the Lord; therefore, it had to be redeemed by the death of a lamb; that is, a lamb had to die in its place. If the donkey was not redeemed by a substitute, then its neck had to be broken. It was a choice between redemption and destruction.

The firstborn of men also belonged to the Lord; but they were never to be sacrificed. Moses does not here specify the manner of the redemption of the first-born of male children, but it was probably originally by a lamb also. The redemption was subsequently changed to a money-payment of five shekels (Numbers 18:16).

Any unredeemed life had to die. The basic transaction is this: Either you die, or a Substitute dies in your place.

And that's the Gospel, is it not? You are born dead in trespasses and sins, but Jesus took your place on the Cross, dying to offer you redemption.

As I said, there is a lot we could say about the theme "firstborn" in the Bible... But for our purposes today, verses fourteen and fifteen set the tone:

Exo 13:14 So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What *is* this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Exo 13:15 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast.

Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

“Daddy, why is that man breaking that little donkey’s neck?”

It was important to pass-on the Passover story from generation to generation. The annual observance of Passover, with its restricted meal eaten indoors, and the accompanying observance of Unleavened Bread, would go a long way towards illustrating the wonder of that night Israel was freed.

Passover was so important that the Israelites would also be reminded of it on a daily basis by the consecrating of the firstborn of man and beasts:

- In a congregation of nearly 6million people with their livestock, firstborn human babies were being delivered all the time. As each firstborn male was redeemed by a substituted lamb, and later money, it was a visual reminder that God had passed-over the firstborn of Israel - sparing them on account of the blood of a substituted lamb.
- In a congregation of nearly 6million people with their livestock, firstborn animals were being delivered all the time. As each firstborn male was either sacrificed or had its neck broken, it was a visual reminder that God had passed-over the firstborn of Israel’s beasts - sparing them, too, on account of the blood of a substituted lamb.

If you wanted a way to keep the Passover fresh on everyone’s mind, this was it.

Exo 13:16 It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

I just can't see taking this literally. It's meant to convey that these redemptions make the Passover as conspicuous as if you had the story written on your forehead for everyone to read.

John Gill wrote:

These laws observed concerning the setting apart the firstlings of their beasts, the redemption of the firstborn of unclean ones, and of the firstborn of men, **will bring the reason of it**, the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt, and the preservation of the firstborn of Israel, as fresh to remembrance as any token upon the hand, put there to bring things to mind; and it will be as easily and as clearly discerned as anything upon a man's forehead may be seen by another...

Another commentator wrote:

By the separation of the first-born unto the Lord an Israelite would have many and varied memories awakened within him; he would be reminded of the eventful night on which death visited every Egyptian family, of the departure of his nation from a cruel bondage, and of the wondrous power and providence of God. And even when the multitude that came out from Egypt were dead, in the history of the nation of Israel, the separation of the first-born would always be associated with the idea of national deliverance.

Truth be told, it's easier to wear a phylactery than it is to redeem or to sacrifice the firstborn.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones told a story about the Israelite who went into the house one day to tell his wife and family some good news. “The cow just gave birth to twin calves, one red and one white,” he said.

He continued, “We must dedicate one of these calves to the Lord. We will bring them up together, and when the time comes, we will sell one and keep the proceeds and we will sell the other and give the proceeds to the Lord’s work.”

His wife asked him which he was going to dedicate to the Lord. “There’s no need to bother about that now,” he replied, “we’ll treat them both in the same way, and when the time comes, we’ll do as I say.”

A few days later, he entered the kitchen looking unhappy. “What happened?” his wife asked.

“I have bad news,” he replied. ***“The Lord’s calf is dead.”***

If I asked you, “Do you have the priorities of a redeemed life?”, what would you say?

Before you answer, something the apostle Paul wrote is helpful:

1Co 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

It’s at this point the Holy Spirit must be invited to take over. I cannot decide for you if you are glorifying God both spiritually and physically. I can’t say whether or not what you are giving to the Lord is the dead cow.

I do know that, if you're a believer, you will want to give the Lord your first and your best. It's the only reasonable thing to do considering Who He gave for you - His Son, Jesus Christ.

Take a look at your diet plan:

- We already mentioned the living water of God the Holy Spirit. "Whoever believes in me," Jesus said, "rivers of living water will flow from within them" (John 7:38). He indwells you, and that means He empowers you.
- God's Word is compared to meat and honey and milk and bread. In it we find all we need for life and godliness.

Rededicate yourself to a Spirit-led life, fueled by the Word of God.

Then revisit yourself as a living sacrifice.