

EXODUS

Chapter 13

Consecration of the Firstborn

The LORD said to Moses, 2 “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.”

13:1 *the Lord said* – The Lord will personally guide Israel by His Word on the journey ahead (vv 21–22). (TLSB)

13:2 *Consecrate to me every firstborn.* God had adopted Israel as his firstborn (see 4:22) and had delivered every firstborn among the Israelites, whether man or animal, from the tenth plague (see 12:12–13). All the firstborn in Israel were therefore his. Jesus, Mary’s firstborn son (see Lk 2:7), was presented to the Lord in accordance with this law (see Lk 2:22–23). (CSB)

The first born was privileged to receive a double portion of the inheritance (Dt. 21:7) and the leadership over the family (Gn. 35:23; 43:33; 2 Chron. 21:3). Sometimes the birthright was given to a younger son (Gn. 25:23; 49:3-4). The term also signifies the preeminence of the exalted Lord Jesus and His relationship to the heavenly Father (Col. 1:15, 18). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

The first born of human beings and of animals belonged to God. The firstborn of Man was given to God as priest. When the Aaronic priesthood was established, The Levites took the place of the Israelites’ firstborn (Num. 3:12-13; 18:15-17). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

The firstborn of animals were given to the temple offerings. The clean were sacrificed; the unclean were either replaced by suitable sacrifices or killed (Ex. 13:2, 13; 22:30; 34:19-20; Lev. 27:26-29). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

The consecration of the firstborn to the Lord was closely connected with the Passover. Since the firstborn of the Israelites had been spared, the Lord commanded that these be set apart for special service to Him as a reminder of His grace to the people. The Lord also declared that the nation of Israel was His “firstborn son.” By dedicating their own firstborn to the Lord Israel constantly remembered their gracious deliverance by the Lord’s hand. This act of consecrating the firstborn was to be carried out after the Lord would bring His people into the land of Canaan. (PBC)

God claimed Israel’s firstborn as His own because He rescued them from the 10th plague, making the firstborn a firstfruit offering to the Lord. This consecration, or setting aside, served two functions: (1) Collectively, the firstborn represented all Israel, whom God chose as His own firstborn among the nations (4:22–23). (2) As individuals, the firstborn were living reminders of this calling in every home (e.g., Joseph and Mary presented Jesus, Mary’s firstborn, at the temple). Scripture describes firstborn sons as receiving a double portion of the inheritance, a special blessing, and headship of the family. (TLSB)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

3 Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. **4** Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. **5** And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. **6** Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. **7** Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. **8** You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ **9** And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. **10** You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year. **11** “When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, **12** you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD's. **13** Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. **14** And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. **15** For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ **16** It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”

13:3 *remember this day* – The Lord here repeats His ordinance respecting the Feast of Unleavened Bread with impressive solemnity, His name for Egypt being “house of slaves”; for that was the relation in which they had stood to Pharaoh and to all the Egyptians, that of practical slavery. (Kretzmann)

house of slavery. Phrase used here for the first time; the feast is now a celebration of freedom. (TLSB)

13:6–7 Institution of annual seven-day celebration beginning the day after the Passover and ending with a feast. Israel ate bread without yeast all seven days. It became known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (TLSB)

13:8 *tell your son* - God furnished the object lessons, such as the unleavened bread, for parents to use in teaching their children about God’s salvation. See verse 14 and 10:2. Luther: “The children of Israel, whenever they turned to repentance, remembered above all their exodus from Egypt, and remembering turned back to God who had brought them out. Moses impressed this memory and this protection upon them many times, and David afterwards did the same. How much more ought we to remembrance our exodus from Egypt, and by this remembrance turn back to Him who lead us through the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5), remembrance of which is commanded to us for this very reason!” (AE 36:60). (TLSB)

ESV note from Proverbs 1:8...A mature generation, including both fathers and mothers, encourages the next generation to follow the treasures of true wisdom, especially the knowledge

of salvation by grace through faith. Note: In the Ancient Near East, the term “son” was often applied to a student, signifying the closeness of the relationship between teacher and pupil. The OT emphasizes their duty of parents to teach children (Dt. 6:6-9). The address: “my son” in Proverbs may often be regarded as indicating chapter headings. It is used 13 times for this purpose (1:8; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1; 6:1, 20; 7:1, 24). “For this purpose He has given us children and issued this command: we should train and govern them according to His will. Otherwise, He would have no purpose for and father and a mother. Therefore, let everyone know that it is his duty, on peril of losing the divine favor, to bring up his children in the fear and knowledge of God above all things” (LCI 173-74). (TLSB)

13:9 *as a sign on your hand and a memorial between your eyes.* A figure of speech (see v. 16; Dt 6:8; 11:18; see also Pr 3:3; 6:21; 7:3; SS 8:6). A literal reading of this verse has led to the practice of writing the texts of vv. 1–10, vv. 11–16, Dt 6:4–9 and Dt 11:13–21 on separate strips of parchment and placing them in two small leather boxes, which the observant Jew straps on his forehead and left arm before his morning prayers. The boxes are called “phylacteries” (Mt 23:5). This practice seems to have originated after the exile to Babylon. (CSB)

A figure of speech telling the Israelites to keep the object lessons on hand and remember God’s salvation. Passages of Scripture in small boxes, called phylacteries, were discovered at Qumran. Devout Jews strapped them to their foreheads as an act of prayer. Over time, this practice became an empty ritual; Jesus criticized aspects of this practice in Mt 23:5. (TLSB)

13:10 *appointed time.* God directed Israel to observe the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread every year at this time. (TLSB)

13:11-12 God repeated Himself (v 2) to underscore His promise of land and His requirement to set apart all the firstborn. (TLSB)

13:11 *when the Lord brings into the land* – The Lord here laying special stress upon His faithfulness, which causes Him to keep the promises of His goodness always. (Kretzmann)

Statement of certainty—“when,” not “if.” The promise points to a specific location—Canaan—and is linked to Israel’s patriarchs. *you.* God made the promise personal. (TLSB)

13:12 *first firstborn...males* – The female children and the female young were not included in this order, but the male first-born, both of man and beast, was to be offered and consecrated to the Lord. Cp. chap. 22, 29, 30; Deut. 15, 21. (Kretzmann)

13:13 *Redeem.* See 6:6. The verb means “obtain release by means of payment.” (CSB)

every firstborn donkey. The economic importance of pack animals allowed for their redemption through sacrificing a lamb. (CSB)

Clean beasts were to be substituted for the unclean; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck, for the un-redeemed animal might not be kept. (Kretzmann)

If you broke its neck this was killing without spilling blood (blood made it a sacrifice). (TLSB)

every firstborn of man. Humans were to be consecrated to the Lord by their life, not by their death (see Ge 22:12; Nu 3:39–51; cf. Ro 12:1). (CSB)

The Lord later provided special regulations for the redemption of the first-born sons by means of a certain sum of money, Num. 3, 46. 47; 18, 15. 16. (Kretzmann)

Two special cases. First, the donkey was not acceptable as a sacrifice (Lv 22:19). The people were to redeem a firstborn male donkey by sacrificing a lamb or by breaking the donkey's neck to kill it without spilling blood (blood made it a sacrifice). Second, the Israelites were to consecrate their children to life rather than to death, so this command effectively prohibited human sacrifice. Cf Gn 22:13 and note. The offering of a lamb in place of a human points to Jesus Christ, the Lamb offered by God on our behalf. (TLSB)

13:14 *when in time to come your son asks* – The fathers of Israel are here represented as speaking collectively and as giving individual instruction to their sons, for the Lord did not want a mechanical observation of customs that were no longer understood. (Kretzmann)

13:3–16 The Lord sets Israel apart by instituting observances that help them remember their freedom won in the exodus. Today, God gives us a new start and calls us into a life that is pure and set apart for Him. But we are unfit to come into God's presence unless someone provides a way. Jesus offered Himself as the perfect, "once for all" sacrifice (Heb 10:10). He purifies us from our sin and consecrates us so that God can call us His own. • Lord, let me grasp the magnitude of what You have done for me so that I may praise and thank You for giving me a new start! Amen. (TLSB)

Pillars of Cloud and Fire

17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." **18** But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. **19** Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here." **20** And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. **21** And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. **22** The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

13:17 *land of the Philistinea*. Although the most direct route from Goshen to Canaan, it was heavily guarded by a string of Egyptian fortresses. (CSB)

13:18 *way of the wilderness*. Leading south along the west coast of the Sinai peninsula. (CSB)

A direct trade route to Canaan ran along the coast and passed a series of fortified Egyptian outposts and Philistine settlements. Egyptians called this the Way of Horus. It is also known as the Way of the Sea. (TLSB)

Red Sea. Various locations of the crossing have been proposed along the line of the modern Suez Canal and including the northern end of the Gulf of Suez. (CSB)

equipped for battle. Probably only with spears, bows and slings. (CSB)

Egyptians controlled this route and would obstruct Israel's journey. The Lord had earlier planned for Israel to worship at Sinai. Cf 3:1, 12. (TLSB)

13:18 Israel traveled in an organized fashion, but as former slaves they would have had poor weaponry (probably only tools) and no military training. God’s presence ultimately equipped them for battle (cf Eph 6:10–18). (TLSB)

Red Sea. Hbr *yam suph*, “sea of reeds.” Vegetation floats on the water and washes up to the shore. The name is broadly associated with waters of the Gulf of Suez and also the Gulf of Aqaba (cf Nu 21:4; 33:1–11; Dt 1:40; 2:1). It is not known precisely where they crossed. (TLSB)

13:19 *bones of Joseph.* A man of faith, Joseph knew that God would bring His people out of Egypt, so he had asked that his embalmed body be taken for burial in the Promised Land. (TLSB)

13:21 *pillar of cloud ... pillar of fire.* The visible symbol of God’s presence among his people. The Lord often spoke to them from the pillar (see Nu 12:5–6; Dt 31:15–16; Ps 99:6–7). (CSB)

Supernatural column of clouds. “Fire” can describe lightning (9:24). (TLSB)

13:22 *did not depart.* God was present with His people day and night. (TLSB)

13:17–22 The Lord leads Israel out of Egypt 430 years after they entered it because of Joseph. Joseph had expected God to “visit” His people (Gn 50:25), but he might have been surprised and pleased to learn that God does not cut the visit short. The Lord has become Israel’s traveling companion and guide. God meets Israel where they are, shows them the way, and brings them along by His grace. Similarly, He knows that we are not able to come into His presence on our own; in fact, we sometimes go the other direction altogether! He knows our situation, meets us where we are, and walks with us by day and night to bring us into His kingdom. • Lord, thank You for coming to us in Christ and for not leaving us to fend for ourselves. Amen. (TLSB)