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Plague Ten: The Death of the Firstborn

Exodus 11:1-13:22

Part Two

Introduction: Significance of the Passover

Before leaving the study of the Passover, we shall give some attention to its place and meaning in perpetuating the concepts which were revealed in the plagues, including the death of the firstborn. In the ritual observance of Passover there are five, traditional questions that are asked by the youngest child. First, why is this night different from all other nights? Second, why do we eat only unleavened bread on this night? Third, why do we eat bitter herbs on this night? Fourth, why do we dip the bitter herbs into salt water and into *haroseth* (a mixture of apples, nuts, and cinnamon to represent the brick mortar)? Fifth, why do we eat reclining instead of sitting up straight? Later in the service the significance of each act is discussed with the family. There are two important lessons which every Jew is expected to learn from this observance are: (1) In every generation, every Jew must feel as if he himself came out of Egypt; (2) Every Jew must realize that God did not only redeem our ancestors but He redeemed us with them.

While the New Testament stresses the spiritual aspects of redemption, the Old Testament places stress on the physical. It should be noted, however, that both the physical and spiritual elements of redemption are present in both testaments. From the time of the Passover onward, the Hebrews were set aside as the people of God. Redemption was, in this sense, collective as well as individualistic. That is the Jews were the people of God's redeeming grace by birth, but until God is acknowledged on a personal level, redemption as a spiritual reality does not take place. The Passover raised the hope of future redemption and looked to the time when Christ would be our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). This means that the Old Testament gives us the picture of redemption, i.e. the deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian bondage. The New Testament presents the Person of redemption, our Lord Jesus who came to fill the promise of spiritual redemption, see and read 2 Cor 1:20; Eph 1:3-13; Col 1:14-18, 24-29.

Dr. James Hardee Kennedy, long time professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, presents the following outline which clarifies the significance of the Passover on the night of its first observance and for all subsequent observances.

What was the meaning of the Passover night for the people of Israel?

- (1) This ritual was a means of professing their faith in Yahweh. The instructions had come mediated through Moses to the Israelite community. What they did in response was their way of demonstrating their faith in the Lord.
- (2) It was God's means of certifying their purpose by calling upon the Hebrews to share in the deliverance of redemption from Egypt. This was accomplished by the death of the firstborn with the provision that the Israelites be bypassed provided they placed the blood on the doorpost.
- (3) It was a means of learning the place of blood redemption. There are repeated references to the blood in the passage that presents the Passover (12:7, 13, 22, 23). This helped them to see the place of suffering and sacrifice in redemption and lay the groundwork for the inclusion of blood sacrifice in Israel's worship. (23:18; 24:6,3; 29:12,16,20,21; 30:10; 34:25).

What was the intended meaning for the subsequent observance of the Passover?

- (1) It was intended to serve as a perpetual memorial of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. It was to keep in focus the fact that it was Yahweh's deliverance.
- (2) It was intended to be a new year's celebration. It marked the beginning of a new era. History was thereafter to be faith-history.
- (3) The subsequent observance was to serve as a religious symbol of Yahweh's special claim on Israel. While the whole ceremony symbolizes Yahweh's special claim on Israel, the consecration of the firstborn was to be a further reminder that He redeemed them.

These significant ideas form the seedbed from which the hope of redemption through the Messiah finally grew. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper it is our Passover (1 Cor 5:6-8; 11:23-26; Rev 5:6-14).

The Passover, a Type of Christ

There are two places in Exodus where the extremes of interpreters may be easily discerned; the Passover and the tabernacle. Many interpreters strain to make even the smallest detail apply, in some way, to Christ. Others see nothing which relates to Christ or the New Testament. Both extremes are incorrect and both miss entirely the point of these two types of Christ. All sacrifices were tokens which pointed to the ultimate sacrifice; Christ (Heb 9:26-28; 10:1-39 are very important passages in this regard).

The whole tone of the Passover with God's care to perpetuate it was saying there is more here than meets the eye. Certainly in light of the New Testament revelation of God in Christ, we can see the applications which may be made in His sacrificial death and the Passover (cf. 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:18-2C). Let us note the following:

1. The death of Jesus occurred at Passover. The Jews had gathered for its observance and their haste in killing Christ was prompted by a desire to finish before the beginning of Passover and the Sabbath at sundown on Friday. Jesus died and was buried before the end of the day of Preparation, sundown Thursday to sundown Friday (Luke 12:54; 1 Cor 5:7-8).
2. Jesus is identified as the Lamb of God and our Passover Lamb sacrificed once for all for our sins (John 1:29; Rev 5:8, 9; 7:14; 15:3; Heb 10:1-10).
3. Luke pictures Jesus as going to Jerusalem where He would have His own exodus. The word "decease" in Luke 9:31 is the Greek *exodon*, which means an exodus or an exit. His death would be His "exodus" from the material world.
4. Jesus entered Jerusalem on the tenth day and was acclaimed a king by those who were about to shout "crucify him." The people were not so much selecting a king as they were selecting a sacrifice (Matt 21:1-11). Recall that the Passover lamb was selected on the tenth day (Exod 12:3).
5. The chosen lamb must be without spot or blemish (Exod 12:5). Christ, in His sinless perfection, became sin for us that we might have forgiveness in Him (2 Cor 5:19-21; Heb 9:11-14).
6. The lamb of the Passover was slain at the time of evening sacrifice beginning at 3 p.m. of the fourteenth day (Exod 12:6). Christ died on the cross at that precise moment (Matt 27:45-50).
7. To slay the lamb of sacrifice was not sufficient; the blood had to be applied to the doorposts (Exod 12:7). Just so the blood of Christ must be applied by faith to our hearts (Eph 2:13-14; Rom 3:24-25; 5:9; John 6:53-56; Rev 12:11; Matt 26:26-29).
8. The Passover meal was to be a communion meal. It was not eaten to satisfy physical hunger but in obedience to God, as an act of faith, to meet a spiritual need (Exod 12:10). When we partake of the Lord's Supper, it is a commemorative or communion meal (Matt 26:26-29; 1 Cor 11:23-26).
9. The Passover was to be eaten in haste and readiness (Exod 12:11). Christ our Passover commanded us to remember His return and to testify to it by eating His body and drinking His blood (1 Cor 11:26).
10. The bread to be eaten was bread without leaven (Exod 12:15). Leaven was a sign of corruption and decay, so unleavened bread was used. With Christ who is our Passover, we are to put away the corrupting leaven of sin and trust the unleavened bread of truth and righteousness (1 Cor 5:7-8).
11. The Passover was to be known as Yahweh's Passover. There is some evidence that the nomads of the ancient near east observed a rite similar to Passover each spring. God wanted the Hebrews to know this was His Passover (Exod 12:11). Even so Christ has commissioned the new Passover commemorating His redemptive work and has called it the Lord's Supper

(Luke 22:7-20; 1 Cor 11:2), 23-26). Jesus clearly identified Himself as the Passover meal (John 6:31-36, 48-56).

12. The Passover lamb was to be suited to the size and needs of the family (Exod 12:4). Just so, Christ was the perfect lamb of God suitable for the needs of a world in sin (John 1:29; Heb 9:11-14; 10:10-14).

It is clear that we are dealing with much more than mere coincidence. Indeed the Passover was a type of Christ. We may easily identify these associations direct and implied. All that occurred in connection with the Passover and its preparation does not equal some detail in the life and ministry of Christ. He was not slain and roasted like the Passover lamb (Exod 12:9) nor was He a lamb of the first year (12:5). The Passover was a domestic or household feast while the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance (1 Cor 11: 20-26). Again the Passover lamb chosen on the tenth day was confined until the fourteenth day. While Jesus was finally arrested, He was not confined from the tenth to the fourteenth day.

The point is that while not every single small detail implies some fulfillment in the life of Christ, the shadow of Christ is unmistakably there. Let us guard against the temptation to spiritualize everything. These former figures were but imperfect shadows (Col 2:16-17) of Christ who came as God's perfect sacrifice. Let us not be so beguiled by the shadow that we neglect the perfect image of God, Christ (Col 2:8-9).

Conclusion

It is an understatement to say that redemption is a miracle. It is a miracle of the grace and love of God. As Exodus 11-13 presents the miracle of redemption, we are made aware of some vital truths. Redemption is provided by God on His time schedule and initiative. Yahweh, the God of redeeming grace, is the one and only true and living God, the Lord of creation. All the false gods and false philosophies of the ages cannot substitute for His grace.

While He freely provides redemption, we are to understand that it does not come without cost. The lamb of sacrifice bears testimony to the fact that redemption comes out of suffering and bloodshed through God's own sacrifice for us. Exemption from judgment which we deserve does not come as a possessed right but is made ours by grace. Grace is made available, but it is by faith and obedience that we appropriate it.

The miracle of the Passover occurs again and again. Every time we apply the grace of God to the sin of man, we cause judgment to pass over. Praise God for the miracle of redemption and the Christ who is our Passover (1 Cor 5:7-8).