

• *Weak – but a people of faith*

• *After deliverance - dedication*

• *Dedication of the firstborn – four key ideas*

1. God redeems His people in order to own His people

• *At a great price*

• *The firstborn represent the whole people*

• *Also applied to animals*

• *The principle applies to Christians*

• *Sons had to be redeemed from the death penalty by the payment of price*

Exodus 12:50–51 lets us know that the people responded to the instructions of God and of Moses. They were a weak people, as we shall see, but they were a people of faith at this point.

After the great deliverance God requires that His people dedicate themselves to Him. There are two feasts and one ceremony that have been specially laid upon Israel at this time: the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and now the Dedication of the Firstborn.

The idea of dedicating the firstborn son and firstborn animals has several ideas in it. (i) The firstborn was to be regarded as specially belonging to God. In pagan circles human sacrifice of the firstborn sometimes took place (as the king of Moab sacrificed his son to the god Chemosh¹). In Israel things were done differently. (ii) The firstborn had an unshakably secure inheritance. A firstborn son could not be disinherited². (iii) It included the receiving of a large inheritance. A firstborn son had a double portion of his father's inheritance. (iv) It implies authority and right to rule. A firstborn son was the ruler of the father's property. Jesus is the 'heir' of God because He rules the universe for the Father.

1. God redeems His people in order to own His people. Every firstborn male was to be specially consecrated to God¹. At the start of His rescue of the nation God declared that He was taking the entire nation as His 'firstborn son'². Pharaoh was warned that if he did not release God's firstborn, he would lose his own firstborn son³. This is what happened. God intervened in what was happening in Egypt with the specific purpose of getting a son for himself. What gave God special right to the nation was that He had redeemed them. He had executed a generation of firstborn sons and firstborn animals in Egypt in order to get them as His firstborn. They had been redeemed at great price.

Now God requires that the firstborn sons of Israel be specially dedicated to Him. They are the same people who had been specially spared when the lamb died in their place. Yet they represent the whole people of Israel. God wants the firstborn sons dedicated to Him as a sign that the whole nation is a firstborn son for God.

The demand applied also to firstborn animals. His people's wealth belongs to Him as well as the people themselves. Firstborn animals were given to God as a sign that Israel's prosperity depended on Him.

The Christian does not have to go through any dedication ceremony. He is not under the Mosaic law. But the spiritual principle applies. We are owned by God. We have been bought with a price. God wants His people as a whole and each individual Christian to be a 'firstborn son'.

In Israel the life of the firstborn son could not be taken. Firstborn sons could not be sacrificed to God by being literally killed. Only pagans and Israelite idolaters practised human sacrifice. In Israel it was forbidden. The sons had to be 'redeemed' from the death penalty over them by the payment of a price. 'Clean' animals could be sacrificed. The ass which was an 'unclean' animal could not be sacrificed. It had to be redeemed¹ or executed without a religious ceremony. Later the Levites would specially be given to God as a substitute for the firstborn sons of Israel²³. The firstborn sons had to be redeemed by the father's paying five shekels.

¹ 2 Kings 3:27

² Deut 21:15-16

¹ 13:1-2
² 4:22-23

³ 4:23

¹ Deut 15:19

² Num 3:11-13
³ Num 3:45

2. Response to God's ownership - purging out the leaven of the old life

• A constant reminder

• Dedication and purification – a sign of their belonging to God

• First elements of the coming Law

3. Their dedication to God is the acknowledgement of God's faithfulness.

• Children knowing the story of salvation

• For Christians not ritual but obedience

2. **Response to God's ownership starts with purging out the leaven of the old life.** Exodus 13:3–10 seem to digress to talk about the keeping of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But it is not really a digression. It is rather showing what the 'Dedication' means in practise. The Feast of Unleavened Bread stood for the cleansing of impurities that belonged to the period of Israel's history before they were rescued from Egypt.

Israel as God's 'firstborn', a people of faith responsible for representing God to the world, must cleanse out the characteristics of their careless and sinful past. The Feast of Unleavened Bread^{□1} will be a constant reminder.

The connection with the day of their salvation will be maintained. When asked, the fathers will explain. '*I did this because of what Yahweh did for me*'^{□1}. The dedication of the people and their purifying themselves would be a sign to others of their belonging to Yahweh. Other nations used tattoos on their hand or head^{□2} but for the Israelites dedicating themselves to God and purifying themselves from all sin would be the sign which would mark them out to others. They needed no special tattoo on their skin; their entire life was to be an announcement that they belonged to Yahweh, the God who redeems by the blood of a lamb.

Verse 9 is the first mention of the Mosaic law. As the people approach Mount Sinai pieces of legislation come to them. The earliest anticipations of the legislation to be given at Sinai come in the requirements concerning the keeping of passover, the keeping of the feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Dedication of the Firstborn.

3. **Their dedication to God is the acknowledgement of God's faithfulness.** Exodus 13:11–16 comes back to the demand that the firstborn sons and firstborn animals be specially dedicated to God. It is a response to the Lord's faithfulness. He kept His oath to Abraham^{□1}. They respond with national dedication^{□2}. It includes the dedication of their wealth. The animals^{□3} could be redeemed by death or by purchase^{□4}. Pagans sacrificed their sons. Israel redeemed them by purchase. Their dedication to God gave opportunity for testimony and teaching^{□5}. It gave the father's a chance to go over the story of how the people had been saved. The children were to grow up knowing the story of salvation.

Christians fulfil these ceremonies not by ritual but by their obvious dedication to a life of obedience to the Holy Spirit of God.

□1 13:3-7

□1 13:8

□2 13:9

□1 13:11

□2 13:12

□3 13:12b

□4 13:13

□5 13:14-16



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