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Redemption of the Firstborn

13: 1-16

Consecrate to Me every firstborn male DIG: Why is God particularly concerned with the redemption of the firstborn (also see 4:22-23; 12:12-13)? How does one give over a child to God? What does this say about the position God wanted to occupy in the lives of the Israelites? By what sign does God want this remembered? Read Isaiah 43:3. Explain how God **has** given Egypt as “the ransom” of Isra’el. What does God mean when He says, “For you I will give people, nations in exchange for your life” (Isaiah 43:4)?

REFLECT: Did your parents dedicate you to God? How old were you when you realized what that meant? Has it made any difference in your life as an adult? How do you let people know He is number one in your life today? If you have no firstborn, what is something equivalent you will give over today to show God’s importance in your life?

This parashat concludes with **two major instructions. The first was that Isra’el was to offer all their first born sons to YHVH, then they would be redeemed.** The **firstborn of Egypt** had died. The gods **of Egypt** had always claimed **the firstborn** as their own. But now **God** claimed **the firstborn** of Isra’el as **His** own. **ADONAI** often gave **the Israelites** traditions to remember **Him**. Because **God** struck down every **firstborn** male **of Egypt**, and redeemed (**to see link click [Bz](#) - Redemption**) the **firstborn** male of every **Israelite**, **He** instituted this permanent instruction as a memorial of **His** power in rescuing **Isra’el** from **Egypt**. **He** also wants the first from us today. **God** claims our best, our very best and claims the first of everything but many believers put **Him** last. **God** is given what is left over.²³⁷



The basic principle that **ADONAI** wanted **Moses** to convey was this: **Set apart and make holy to Me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to Me, whether man or animal (13:1-2).** This command did not apply to the Gentile world because **God** had adopted **Isra'el** as **His firstborn son (4:22)** and brought **him out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1)**. Therefore, **the firstborn of every male was set apart for Him.** In **verses 3** through **10** we have the background of the dedication of **the firstborn**, which is the redemption of **the firstborn** in **Egypt**.

Moses spoke to **the people of Isra'el** on the very day **they left Egypt.** **They** were to remember **the Passover** and **the day they came out of Egypt.** Then **Moses** reminded the people of the importance of the **day of their deliverance: Set this day apart and make holy the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery because ADONAI brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast (13:3).** This repetition was to emphasize the importance of **the Passover** to the nation of **Isra'el.** It would come to symbolize the concepts of freedom, deliverance and redemption. **Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving (13:4).** The word **Abib** was used earlier of a barley crop (**9:31**). Historically, the barley harvest in Palestine takes place in April.

The second important command is that in every generation, until eternity, Isra'el is to remember the great event by celebrating Passover. **The Hebrews** were no longer to serve **the Egyptians**; from that point onward **they** were to serve **God** and **Him** alone. **When ADONAI brings you into the Land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites - the Land He swore to your forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, a Land flowing with milk and honey - you are to observe this ceremony in this month (13:5).** The basic promise of **3:8** and **17** is reiterated. **God** is a promise keeper and **He** was in the process of fulfilling what **He** had said to **His people** earlier.

Like **the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread** had great educational value in the home. **For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to ADONAI (13:6)**. The number **seven** in **Hebrew** often symbolizes completeness (see my commentary on **Genesis Ae - The Number Seven**). Here **the Passover** reaches its climax on **the seventh day**. It is **a festival** day in which all the people gather for **a festival to ADONAI (Deuteronomy 16:8)**. **Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders (13:7)**. This is repeated from **12:15** where **the Israelites** were instructed to keep **yeast** out of **their** homes. Here, however, **they** were instructed not to have any within their **borders**. At this point **they** didn't have any **borders**. In fact **they** wouldn't have any **borders** for another forty years. This was told to **them** in faith, for **the borders** they would eventually have in **the Promised Land** of Canaan (**Joshua 12:2, 16:2-8**).

The redemption from **Egypt** needed to be told to all succeeding generations. **On that day tell your son, "I do this because of what ADONAI did for me when I came out of Egypt (13:8)**. The *Haggadah* is a word that means *the telling* or simply *narration* because this is a book that narrates the core, the essence of the Seder, or **Passover**, ceremony. In a real sense the Seder is a *talk-fest*. The basis for the development of the *Haggadah* is found here in this verse that literally states *you shall tell*. The Hebrew word for *you shall tell* has the same root as the word *Haggadah*; therefore, the *Haggadah* is *the telling* of **the Passover**. Four different times in the Torah, the Jews are commanded to repeat the story of **the Passover (Exodus 12:26, 13:8, 14; Deuteronomy 6:20)**. The story need not be complex for the children. It is simply enough to tell them what **God** has done for them. The answer is simple. **God** has **redeemed** them.

This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that ADONAI brought you out of Egypt with His mighty hand (13:9). Later, **Moses** would write: **Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:8, 11:18)**. And for two thousand years and more, observant **Jews** have taken those passages literally. The four scriptures that form their contents (**13:1-10, 13:11-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-22**) are written on four strips of parchment and placed in two small leather boxes, one of which the pious Jewish man straps on his forehead and the other on his left, or weaker arm before he says his morning prayers. The practice may have originated as early as the period following the exile to Babylon in 586 BC. Today, these scriptures are also found in a little box on the doorpost of an observant Jew's home.

It hardly needs to be said that there is nothing inherently wrong with such a custom. The boxes, called *phylacteries*, are mentioned in **Matthew 23:5**, where **Jesus** criticizes a certain group of Pharisees and Torah teachers for wearing them. **Messiah**, however, did not condemn the practice as such, but only those who flaunt their religiosity in public. **He** said: **Everything they do is done for men to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long (Matthew 23:5).**

So although the use of *phylacteries* might be spiritually legitimate, it is probably best to understand the references from **Exodus** and **Deuteronomy** as figures of speech, since similar statements are found elsewhere in the Old Covenant. For example, of love and faithfulness it is said: **Bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart (Proverbs 3:3)**, and, even more to the point, of a father's commands and mother's teaching it is suggested: **Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck (6:21, also see 7:3; Song of Solomon 8:6)**. Perhaps the explanation of **Deuteronomy 11:18** says it best: **Fix these words of Mine in your hearts and minds for we can stumble others when we wear our religion on our sleeves.²³⁸ You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year (13:10).**

On the basis, then, of what happened on **the Passover**, we have the principle of **the firstborn** in **verses 11 through 16**. **Then Moses** continued: **After ADONAI brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as He promised on oath to you and your forefathers, you are to give over, literally *pass over*, to God the first offspring of every womb (13:11-12a)**. Here we have a play on words. Just as **God *passed over* the Israelites** during the tenth plague, so now **the Israelites** were to *pass over* their **first offspring** to **Him**.

Yeshua, Mary's firstborn son (Luke 2:7), was brought to **Jerusalem** and presented to **God** at the appropriate time. **Joseph and Mary** brought the infant **Jesus** in accordance with the divine command **to give over to God their first male offspring. When the time of their purification according to the commandment of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to God (as written in the commandment, "Every firstborn male is to be dedicated to ADONAI")**, and offer a **sacrifice in keeping with what the Torah of the LORD has said (Luke 2:22-24a)**. This obligation was two-fold: first, to ceremonially cleanse **the mother** with the proper sacrifices (see the commentary on **Leviticus Bt - Women After Childbirth**). The family of **Yeshua** was not wealthy, and therefore presented the less expensive offering of **two pigeons**. The second part of the obligation was **redeeming the firstborn son** through the *pidgin ha'ben* ceremony. The child **Yeshua** was not exempt from this **redemption**. Although

He was the Messiah, He was not from the levitical tribe. In fact, the Scriptures predicted that **the Messiah** would be from another leading tribe - **Judah (Genesis 49:10)**.

Yeshua's pidgin ha'ben ceremony is described in **Luke** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Au - Jesus Dedicated in the Temple**).

The verb *to pass over* is also a commentary on the pagan practice of child sacrifice. Pagans of the ancient Near East would take a child and *pass him over/through* the fire as a child sacrifice (**Deuteronomy 18:10; Second Kings 16:3**). **God** does not require such barbarism. **He** wants **the first offspring** to be **set apart** and devoted to **His** service. Thus, **the Israelites** were not to *pass over* their **first offspring** in the fire to death, but **they** were to *pass them over* to **God** to life. **They** were to be **set apart** for **His** service. This commandment applied to both humans and animals.²³⁹

All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to God (13:12B). If **they** owned an *unclean firstborn* male animal, like a horse, **donkey** or whatever, it needed to be substituted with a *clean firstborn* male animal. For example, **they** were to **redeem a firstborn** male **donkey with a firstborn** male **lamb**. The owner of an unclean **firstborn** animal was allowed to *buy it back* by slaughtering one of his own clean firstborn animals as a substitute. **But** if a man did not want to substitute one of his clean animals for an unclean animal, he was to kill the donkey by breaking **its neck** (slaughtering the **donkey** might be mistakenly thought of as a sacrifice, so **its neck** was to be broken instead). Since man was depriving **God** of his *price*, meaning a **lamb**, he was denied the use of the **donkey**. **The Lord** commanded the Israelites to **redeem every firstborn among their sons (13:13)**. With the ransom complete, **God** said that **all of Israel's firstborn** men and **livestock** belonged to **Him**.²⁴⁰

The reason is then given. Because **YHVH killed all the firstborn in Egypt** in order to let **the Israelites** live, **all the firstborn in Isra'el**, even **the animals**, by right, belong to **Him**. **In the days to come, when your son is curious and asks you, "What does this mean?"** say to him: **With a mighty hand God brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, ADONAI killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to God the first male offspring of every womb, and redeem each of my firstborn sons (13:14-15)**.

And the dedication of **the firstborn will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that God brought us out of Egypt with His mighty hand (13:16)**. Both were reminders of **God's** gracious deliverance from the land of bondage.²⁴¹

Near the drinking of the Second Cup, the Cup of Deliverance, there is a time when the

Haggadah tells us to all raise our cups in gratitude and adoration. This is because we have just finished telling of all the wonders that **ADONAI** did for us, **His** redeemed, on **that Egyptian Passover**. After we raise the cup, we say these words together, “Therefore, it is our duty to thank and to praise in song and prayer, to glorify and praise **Him Who** performed all these wonders for our forefathers and for us. **He** brought us out from slavery to freedom, from anguish to great light. Let us therefore sing before **Him** a new song. Praise **the Eternal!**”

Haftarah Bo: Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 46:13-28

(see the commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

Punishment upon **Egypt** is progressive. Here, the prophet **Jeremiah** prophesies that **Pharaoh** will fail to defeat **Babylon** at **Carchemish** on the Euphrates (605 BC, about eight centuries after **the Exodus**). **Egypt** was competing for world domination with **Babylon**. **Jeremiah** warned that **King Nebuchadnezzar** was coming to strike the land of **Egypt**, preventing **her** from becoming a world power ever again. Finally, **Egypt** needed to be punished for **her** sin of idolatry. **Amon-Re** (the head of **Egyptian** pantheon and special god of **Egypt's** rulers) needed to be destroyed forever (**Nahum 3:8; Jeremiah 46:25**). The good news is that **Egypt** will be restored as a **humbled nation** after being crushed by **Babylon** (**Ezekiel 29:13-16**). In the end, **ADONAI** promises mercy to **Egypt** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Dh** - **A Message Concerning Egypt**).

B'rit Chadashah suggested readings for Parashah Bo: Luke 2:22-24; (Yochanan (John) 19:31-37; Acts 13:16-17 and Revelation 8:6-9:12, 16:1-21

Rabbi Sha'ul addresses **ADONAI'S** methods and purposes for redeeming mankind: (1) Can **God** be righteous and show favoritism (**Romans 9:14-15**)? (2) If **YHVH** hardens whom **He** pleases, then why does **He** still find fault, for who is able to resist **His** will (**Romans 9:19**)? (3) Does mankind really have a right to ask: **Why did You make me this way** (**Romans 9:20**)? (4) Can **Ha'Shem** just conclude and “cut things short,” doing so in **righteousness** (**Romans 9:28**)? Then Rabbi Sha'ul answers his own questions. (1) **God** shows **mercy**. This is not unrighteousness (**Exodus 9:16** in **Romans 9:17**). (2) Granted, no one can resist **His** will - not even **Pharaoh** (**Exodus 9:12, 10:20** and **27, 11:10**). But it's patently absurd to criticize **the Creator**. Mankind is a mere **pot** without **hands** (**Isaiah 45:9**). (4) **God** can judge the world for evil, same some (**Romans 9:24**), “cut short” the rest (**Isaiah 10:23; Romans 9:28**), and still show compassion with **righteousness** (**Romans 9:29; Isaiah 1:9** and **13:19**).²⁴²