

JANUARY 31

If you have been reading with us for the month of January, congratulations are in order! You've read through Genesis and you're into Exodus; you've almost finished Matthew; you've read 24 of The Psalms and you're six chapters wiser than...well, I don't know, a door knob. For some of you, this is a major achievement and it will only get better. You'll discover a lot of great things about the mind and heart of God. Most importantly, you'll grow in your love for Jesus and your commitment as a disciple in the harvest. And next year, if you do this, you'll be surprised how much you've remembered and how much more you'll see as the Spirit weaves His Word into your life and heart as a disciple.

Exodus 12:14-13:16

Exodus 12:14-51

Vs. 14-20 Oddly enough, in Matthew, Jesus is entering the Passover week. He won't be cleaning out the leaven, but maybe cleansing the temple was dealing with a kind of "leaven" that had permeated the people and their minds. Jesus' ministry spanned four Passover feasts and culminates at a Passover. Anyway, back to the OT.

First, the Passover is the major identity symbol, festival, event of the nation of Israel from this point on. Sure, there were other things, the land, the temple, circumcision, the Sabbath; but this was now the beginning of their year and God built a memorial of redemption into the beginning of the year. What is interesting is that it points to their spiritual identity born out of redemption. Circumcision and the Sabbath show that the people are separated (holy) for God, but the Passover shows that they were saved by God.

From this point on God is making a nation and giving them ceremonial and cultural laws, many of which will only apply to Israel as God's nation. This will be important to remember, since some of these laws are very binding on them and very narrow. The laws are meant to highlight God's holiness, the reality of sin and their need for forgiveness/being close to God. For now, this is just to say that while the laws and rituals were binding on them, they are not binding on us. Yet there is something, some aspect of understanding God and His plan or His holiness, which we can learn from. The following law on leaven is a case in point.

Note that if anyone violated this law to have no leaven in the house or to eat what was leavened, they would be expelled from the nation. That's pretty hard. It applied to them and not to us; but the question is, "What was the point, and what can we understand about God?" Also, remember that no one had to remain in Israel. If they didn't like the Lord or His laws, they could have just left and moved back to Egypt or gone to Paris or someplace. But if they wanted to stay, they had to live there God's way.

In the NT, leaven is sometimes referred to as something bad, which slowly works its way into a church or teaching or a person and eventually dominates them. In one instance, leaven is used positively regarding the "invisible," growing kingdom of God in this world. So, this custom regarding leaven is an "object lesson" that God uses to teach us, and it would be woven into the culture and ceremony of Israel as a warning.

In the immediate context, the lack of leaven has something to do with their being ready for action, and putting aside comfort in order to obey God. Think about this, because I think this really applies to us as disciples. We are not often ready for action and it hurts us. We might enjoy "leaven" too much.

Because of haste, the women were to make bread without taking the time to knead in yeast. This fits with the people eating the lamb, while being fully clothed for travel, with their knapsacks on

their backs. The unleavened bread dough was to be taken with them, wrapped into the shawl on a woman's shoulder. The point of all of this was the real-time need for them to be ready to roll.

I've seen reenactments of Passover feasts, but I've never seen one where everyone was standing, eating in a state of readiness, clothed for action and ready for an emergency. I guess we missed that part. The next notable time you see the Passover in the OT is in another state of emergency as Joshua is ready to go into the land. The last two times you see the Passover in the OT (and two of the best), the southern kingdom is in desperate need of redemption. When Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples and redefined it to symbolize the new covenant in His blood, it was a night of emergency and readiness and redemption.

Redemption and readiness is the context of the Passover and that is all in the larger context of emergency. There is an emergency going on right now, bigger than AIDS, bigger than the climate, bigger than terrorism, bigger than getting "supersized" at McDonalds. God's people are to be ready, and for this time of redemption and grace, we need to be willing to do away with "leaven," to be willing to live wholly for God and even put away some comforts and exercise restraint, to be focused and ready to work in the harvest, reaching the lost, making disciples, who make disciples.

Vs. 21-28 How humbling and moving...*when I see the blood, I will pass over you* (12:13), and they worshiped and obeyed. We need to do likewise and to obey, meaning serving Christ in the harvest. Never be ashamed to say, "The blood of Christ." Explain it, but don't be ashamed to say it. On account of the blood of the Lamb of God, we are saved.

By ignoring God, the Egyptians, though not all the Egyptians, came under God's judgment. All humans are under His judgment. Later, when Israel is about to enter the land I'll mention something about God's right to judge and bring death. Now is probably a good time to think about this too. God is loving, yet thousands of children died on this night. The most natural place for a person to stand would be before God. That is what we were made for, a relationship with Him. We are separated from Him because of sin, and that separation is spiritual death. Death is separation. Because of sin and spiritual death, our bodies are frail and our spirits eventually separate from the body. This is physical death. When our spirit separates from the body we stand before God, entering His presence. That shouldn't be a bad thing, but it is if we are also separated from God spiritually. God has the right to call any of us into His presence at anytime. We should be ready. For those who know God, that is the beginning of blessing. For those who have ignored God, that is the beginning of judgment.

In my understanding here, the children who were under the age of accountability were brought into God's presence and blessed. Those firstborn who were older and could have followed and accepted the God of the Hebrews, but didn't, were called into God's presence and judged. Death, for now, is how we enter God's presence. It doesn't have to mean judgment and doesn't have to scare those redeemed by Christ. Without sin, there would be no separation. With Christ, there is no judgment and only blessing.

Vs. 29-39 Moses said Pharaoh would never see his face again. Here, either it was just a message sent, or Pharaoh, being in mourning, never looked up or unveiled his face.

A lot of the stuff they were given by the Egyptians was jewelry, used later, unfortunately, for the golden calf, and then to make the tabernacle and the priests' clothing. Remember, they were slaves with no credit cards or other resources.

Vs. 40-42 This is an historical summary, recapping and adding to some of what was said to Moses before the Passover. Notice that from the time Jacob stepped into Egypt until now was exactly 430 years to the day.

Vs. 43-51 Note that future Passovers could be celebrated by any foreigner with one stipulation: those males had to be circumcised. The male represents the head of his family, so the women and children were covered.

V. 46 No bone was to be broken on the Passover lamb/goat. *For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."* (John 19:36)

Circumcision was the symbol of being separated to the promise to Abraham, of making a nation through which all the nations would be blessed. Again, for the heart of faith, circumcision was linked to the plan of redemption.

You've noted that many Egyptians moved out with Israel in the Exodus. It might have been that the men were required to be circumcised first. For an Egyptian to be circumcised would have been a big deal, hopefully symbolizing their faith in the redeeming God of the Hebrews. Again, no one was being forced to live in Israel and keep these laws. I hear the south of France is pretty.

Exodus 13:1-16

It could very well be that as the people were gathering for their Exodus out of Egypt, God had Moses give this information to the elders and people. Moses left Egypt with over a million people. The logistics of this would not have been easy. There must have been some structure for gathering and there must have been some responsibility by the elders and tribes/families to hang together and direct themselves.

V. 1 This law of the firstborn is mentioned here because the Passover lamb had to be a firstborn. God, again, as a good educator, is establishing some cultural and ceremonial things into the life of Israel that He will use later referring to Christ. Luke refers to this law when Joseph and Mary take Jesus into the temple and meet Simeon.

V. 8 mentions something we'll see a lot more of in Deuteronomy. The people were to teach these things to their children. Just like us, the kids would naturally say, "Hey, how come we have such strange customs?" The parents' answers would all be linked to redemption and God's mercy and power and love. In Deuteronomy, God says that parents should always be talking to their kids about the Lord and what He has done. It should be as natural as air, weaving it into all kinds of things. After quoting Deuteronomy 6:7, *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise,* Howard Hendricks would say, "So, when else do you live?"

Vs. 9 & 16 were taken literally and perverted by Israel in the phylacteries. Properly understood, what God had done was, figuratively, to be on their hand, controlling all they did, and as frontlets on their eyes (like horses,) focusing their vision, all of this keeping their redemption and mission as a nation controlling their hearts and lives.

Again, I can still hear Hendricks' Philadelphia brogue after reading Deuteronomy 6:8-9, *You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* "This was to control all that you did and all that you thought, the doorpost of your house being the most intimate areas of your life, to the city gates being the most social areas of your life."

God is a great teacher. As disciples in the harvest, investing in the lives of others, this teaching is definitely for us. God's love and redemption is to be the topic of our passion, controlling all we do, see, and think, from the intimacy of our homes...to our presence in our communities.

Tomorrow we'll be back to the real-time adventure. Pharaoh gets mad and the Lord intensifies his hardness which makes Pharaoh really, really irrational, with a cherry on top.

Matthew 20:29-21:22

Matthew 20:29-34

A couple of notes:

There were two cities of Jericho, an old one and a new one. To leave one Jericho was to enter the other. A road filled with beggars and merchants went between the two. Matthew says, “leaving,” and Luke says, “entering,” and this is the explanation. Also, Matthew says there were two beggars, but Luke only names the spokesman, Bartimaeus.

It is significant that they were told it was Jesus (Lk., *Jesus of Nazareth*) but they cry out *Son of David*. Remember, the widow in Sidon said the same to Jesus. Again, the emphasis here is on the “promised one,” signifying that these blind men saw something in the reports that those with sight were blind to.

Very cool that they kept crying out when everyone told them to shut up. They knew their chance was passing and they had to act now. What faith! I wish more lost people were this “blind.”

Just for trivia, the story of Zacchaeus takes place here in Luke 19. I wonder why Matthew, the former tax collector, left out the story of another tax collector coming to faith in Christ. I'll have to ask him when I see him.

Matthew 21:1-22

Vs. 1-11 This is a very sad portion of Scripture for me. Luke says Jesus weeps here. They are visited by their Maker, the Author of life, their King and their Redeemer, and even with all the religiousness of their response at His entrance, in a couple of days they will be yelling to crucify Him. The power of sin is beyond comprehension. They missed the day of their visitation.

V. 9 Many of the people in this crowd would be shouting for Jesus' crucifixion in a few days. Emotion doesn't mean knowing Christ.

V. 11 Notice that unlike the blind men, the crowds are calling Him Jesus, the prophet *from Nazareth of Galilee*. Remember, Nazareth meant branch. Those who were perceptive could have made the connection.

Vs. 12-13 Jesus cleansed the temple on the first Passover during His ministry (Jn. 2:13) and when confronted, foretold His death. This time, Jesus will die.

Vs. 14-16 So who do you really identify here as *the blind and the lame*?

Vs. 17-22 Obviously the lesson was not to show His disciples how to show off power. The tree symbolized “faithless” and “fruitless” Israel. The curse was made as they passed it, going into Jerusalem for the day, and they saw the effect when they were on their way back to Jerusalem the next morning. *At once* means that, though not cut down, it was totally withered when they returned. That didn't normally happen to a tree.

So, is the lesson here on the power of faith to make things wither or fly into the ocean, or the power of faith to bring life and fruitfulness? In another place Jesus uses this same illustration to tell about the power of prayer; but here, since the tree represents a faithless, fruitless generation, it might also signify that even a small amount of faith can bring life and the blessing of God.

On the other hand, Jesus has told His disciples that they will have authority on earth in the harvest. They will be able to bind and to loose, which probably involves judging and releasing. This authority would be dependent on their faith.

Psalm 25:16-22

Vs. 16-18 This is a continuation from yesterday. Notice that in the beauty of this expression, David really was afflicted and distressed. But this is what drove him to God and gave the beauty to his words. It is interesting to me that David also asked God to forgive his sin. Jesus often mentioned prayer and the need to be forgiven in the same teaching. *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.* (Mark 11:25)

Vs. 19-22 Notice the cries for help, the waiting on God, and the desire not to be put to shame. Amen!

Proverbs 6:12-15

Interesting here that God is warning us that “secret” communication is a sign of insincerity, dishonesty and a bad heart. Since reading this, I’m careful about what is *going on in my heart* when I “wink” at someone behind another person’s back. Is it for non-verbal affirmation in a tough situation, or am I being a dipstick? People who are not honest will eventually be dealt with by the Lord.