

Open Heart, Open Bible

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

Passage for weekly readings (week 17):

Exodus 13 – 19

The People of Moses

Just as the Lord had taken to Himself the firstborn male of all the Egyptians, including their livestock, so He also required that every firstborn of the Israelites be dedicated to Him – not through death, but by consecration. The animals were offered in sacrifice and in substitution for the lives of the firstborn sons. Some of the consecrated animals became the priests' share when the law became more fully developed. The lives of the firstborn men were therefore redeemed in this way. The point spiritually is that to oppose God is to forfeit our inheritance. The firstborn represent that inheritance, since theirs is the double portion. The inheritance of those who know God (submit to Him, since He is God) is life eternal, in fellowship with Him (John 17 v.3). Those who resist God are disinherited. Theirs is an eternity outside of His Presence, in the place known in the Greek as "Gehenna", translated as "Hell".

Again, the Israelites are reminded through Moses to observe the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Passover signifies redemption and Unleavened Bread, purity. The Israelites were redeemed from the bondage of Egypt and set free specifically to worship the living God of their fathers, which meant separation from the idolatrous and wayward practices of the other nations (quite apart from Egypt!).

It is often the case that new leadership needs some sort of breakthrough to give credibility and respect, and this is exactly what happened as a result of the destruction of the army of Egypt in the crossing of the Red Sea. The Israelites were still very prone to panic attacks (v.'s 11&12), but both Egypt and Israel realised God's omnipotence and something of his glory as a consequence of that fearful night (v.4 and v.51). In particular, the inspired song of Moses which came out of Israel's deliverance is a wonderful example of prophetic song in praise of the God of Israel.

V.11: **Who among the gods is like You, O Lord?**

**Who is like you –
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?**

The intention of Moses was not to gloat in the humiliation of Egypt, but to exult in the glory of God, Who “**has become my salvation**” (v.2). The Lord will go to any lengths to protect His people, and past deliverance gives confidence in future success (v.’s 13-18). Miriam leads the womenfolk in a memorable praise party! Three days’ thirst is enough to spoil the national celebrations however, and Moses has to cry to the Lord for the provision of potable water. This leads to the Lord’s second revelation of Himself as Yahweh – the Lord who heals, **Jehovah Rapha** in the Hebrew. His promise to His people, then as now, is that, if you listen to me and obey me, I will keep you well. Healing and wholeness is part of God’s covenant blessing to His people – because He imparts Himself, His very Being, to those who will worship Him. There is no dis-ease in the being of God!

Having had another taste of the people’s grumbling at Marah, the same thing occurs yet again in the desert, lack of food being the problem now. God graciously provides quail, followed by manna, to meet their need, but the inability of some to follow the instructions (v.’s 20&27) was remarkable. They were simply to gather enough for the day, and enough for two days on the sixth day. The observance of the Sabbath was therefore enabled in advance of the law being given. The preservation of a small quantity of manna before the Lord demonstrated the importance of this divine provision, and ensured that it would be remembered down the generations.

The lack of water again provokes an outburst of complaint from the people (17 v.2), and Moses is told by God to strike the rock at Sinai (Horeb). Again, the need is met supernaturally. Next, we read of the first commission of Joshua in a leadership role as he defeats the Amalekites, but not without some spiritual support from Moses, Aaron and Hur atop the hill! This victory gives the Lord occasion to reveal Himself as a Banner to the Israelites – **Jehovah Nissi**, the Lord my Banner, Jahweh’s third compound name. The Lord is a Banner to all those who are willing to engage in His warfare, and fight His battles. Only in Him, and through Him, can we triumph (Paul speaks of “reigning in life” - Romans 5 v.17, and John of overcoming in faith -1 John 5 v.4).

Exodus 18 is a well-known O.T. passage which teaches of the need for delegation. Jethro has had much experience as a priest in his own country, and God now uses him to give his son-in-law some useful advice. Moses receives it humbly (v.24). The nation is now properly structured to administer God’s justice – again, just before the law is given! Structure and order are part of God’s plan for His people down the ages. He does not change!

Exodus 19 makes the Lord’s purpose for Israel very clear (v.’s 4-6). Keeping the covenant is the essential condition for that purpose to be realised. She (Israel) will be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”, ministering God’s presence and reality

to all the other nations upon earth. The people were to prepare themselves to meet with God. Outer cleanliness was the symbol of inner separation and singleness of heart (v.15). On the third morning the Lord did appear before the people, and fire was the way in which his presence was manifest over the mountain (v.18). The scene is now set for the giving of the Law – God’s Covenant with Israel through Moses which, if kept, would make the nation that “light to the Gentiles” in revealing the beauty of His holiness.

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) The emphasis which is given to the firstborn in ch.’s 11 – 13 (negatively in the case of Egypt, but positively in the case of Israel), shows that there is something for us to grasp regarding this privilege in the heart of God. The firstborn son enjoys a double portion of the inheritance from his father, he is the apple of his father’s eye. The writer to Hebrews describes the Church of Jesus as “**the church of the firstborn**” (Heb.12 v.23), “**whose names are written in heaven**”, and Paul speaks of Jesus Himself being “**the firstborn among many brothers**” in Romans 8 v.29. Jesus is, of course, unique in this, since He is “**the firstborn from among the dead**” (Colossians 1 v.18), but we are those who have already passed from death to life as we have exercised our God-given faith in Him (John 5 v.24). We are Jesus’ brothers! We are set free to worship because we have been redeemed by Jesus’ blood just as surely as Israel was redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb. We have a glorious inheritance which we can appreciate something of right now because the Holy Spirit of God reveals it to us (Ephesians 1 v.18). Look at Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church (Eph.1 v.’s 17 – 23), and let it inspire our praying this week.

2) Three important lessons come out of ch.16 of Exodus as the Lord provides manna and quail. Can you identify them? (You may see more – there’s no limit!)

3) With hindsight, we know that Old Covenant Israel never did manage to become the “holy nation” that God desired His people to be. It was Peter’s vision for the church of Jesus that she become that holy nation in a spiritual sense, nothing to do with nationality as we understand it, or as Israel understood it (1 Peter 2 v.9). God has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. Let’s be constant in declaring His praises!

Next week’s passage: Exodus 20 - 26