

BETWEEN THE LINES™

DEEPER LOOK STUDY GUIDE

FAITH . . . The Currency of Heaven

Circumcision . . .

I don't know that I would have crippled my army right in the face of the enemy, but faith demands that we step out in obedience—even when the logic seems to allude us. In fact, the whole process of circumcision has always been about faith and not really a matter of logic.

For Gentiles, who only know circumcision as a sterile, hospital-performed procedure, here's a primer in the ritual enacted by Jews for 3,500 years...

- ▶ The full name of the process is *bris milah*: the cutting of the covenant.
- ▶ If your mother is Jewish you are born a Jew, but you must choose to be part of covenant.
- ▶ This is seen as a sign in the flesh, a mark at the very source of life itself.
- ▶ For many Jews it is the deepest emotional ritual for it seems to tie them to heritage in a way that no other enacted ritual does. It harkens all the way to Genesis 17.
- ▶ This distinguishing mark has been a death sentence many times in Jewish history.
- ▶ No Sabbath or holiday stops this ritual. Only the health of the child. (The rationale for that is Leviticus 18 says we are to "live by the law" and so, it would seem that we are not called to "die by the law." In fact, there are only three lines that may never be crossed or laws that may never be set aside—even if it costs you your life: idolatry, adultery, and blasphemy.)
- ▶ The *bris* is performed on the eighth day (remember to count by evenings to mornings!) of the child's life or when he is first deemed viable and healthy/able by the attending physician.
- ▶ Why the eighth day? Perhaps it is just *hikum* (an arbitrary command that is allowed just because He's God and He can do that if He chooses). Some have theorized that God actually understood the process of blood clotting abilities and those, apparently, don't completely kick in at birth.
- ▶ It may be a home ritual or a synagogue ritual.
- ▶ For a Jewish father to not have his son so marked was grounds for the penalty of *expiation* (removal from the society). (Moses nearly dies! Exodus 4)
- ▶ The participants in the procedure are—the mother who hands the child to a lady (a *kvatterin*) who carries child to a man, the (*kvatter*), who gives the child to the *sandek* (godfather). The *sandek* sets the child in *kiseh shel eliahu* (the Elijah chair) and then holds the child still for the *mohel* (the ritual circumciser). The deed is performed with proscribed prayers and statements then the father drinks a cup of wine and puts a touch on the lips of the crying infant (a soothing participation!). He then names the boy, gives explanation as to why that name was chosen, and the *kvatterin* takes the child back to momma, and a celebration meal (*Se'udat mitzvah*) is available to all.
- ▶ The *mohel* is specifically trained in both medical procedure and sacred ritual. He actually must capture one drop of blood as this is a "mini-sacrifice."
- ▶ Elijah is provided a chair to prove him wrong for his claim about Israel. (1 Kings 19)
- ▶ One of the statements is a prayer that hopes the boy will "enter into the study of Torah, take his place under the *Huppah* (wedding canopy), and perform many a *Mitzvah* (good deed)." He is to be comforted that "his loss is our gain."
- ▶ A gentile boy who is an adoptee must first be baptized by immersion and then fulfill the procedure. (If any male was already "hospital circumcised" they must still capture the drop of blood by a pin prick.)
- ▶ This used to be a "men only" procedure but women now often observe. After all, it's their one chance to say, "I thank God I was not born a man!" The mother is *kimpatur* (recovering) and much honored.

Circumcision . . . The Cutting of Covenant

The Passover . . .

Rather than rehash the ritual of Passover, let's capture the heart of Judaism in this celebration of their freedom...

Not only Israel, but God also was redeemed at the Exodus. II Samuel 7:23.

—*Exodus Rabbah* 12:2

The moral conduct of the Israelites in Egypt was sufficient to win their freedom.

—*Leviticus Rabbah*, Emor

In every generation a Jew must think as if he himself were redeemed from Egypt.

—*Pesachim* 116b

Why does the Bible give no command to rejoice even once during Passover? Because Egyptians died... And the Bible states (Proverbs 27:17) "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls."

—*Yalkut*, Emor, paragraph 654

When Moses said to Israel, "In this month you are to be delivered," they said to him, "Our teacher Moses, how can we possibly be delivered, since we have no good deeds to our credit?" He said to them, "Since God desires to deliver you, God disregards your evil deeds. What then does God heed? The righteous among you and their actions."

—Midrash, *Song of Songs Rabbah* II, 8:1

Israel was redeemed from Egypt on account of the righteous women of that generation.

—Talmud *Sotah* 11b

We Jews stand between redemptions, as it were, looking back in order to look forward... Messianic hope would not be credible in the world were it not for the fact—rehearsed at Pesah (Passover) that redemption has occurred... And that reservoir of faith, the gift of memory, makes all the difference as we go about the business of living in the world, and trying to redeem it.

—Arnold Eisen

Pesah places all the redemptions, past and future, into the same mold: Creation, Exodus, Return from the exiles past, the Return of the Messianic Age.

—Edward Greenstein

The God that can wreak plagues, split the sea, and all the rest—these are no source of surprise to the person of faith. But Israel's courage to defy the Egyptians—that is truly worthy of being called miraculous.

—Arthur Green

At some point in the seder, we should talk about how bad slavery is. What is the difference between slavery and righteous work—for there is work that makes us feel, if we do it and then eat, that we are not freeloaders on the universe.

—Zalman Schlachter-Shalomi

Let all who are hungry come and eat.

—Passover Haggadah

Next year in Jerusalem!

—Passover Haggadah

The Mezuzah—A Marking and a Reminder . . .

As we discussed on the program, the mezuzah is an ornament that serves both as a reminder to those who dwell in that house and a marking for all to see as a claim about those occupants. Therefore it is both public statement of faith and a nudge to be faithful. Here's a few fun details about that mark...

- ▼ This is seen as a literal fulfillment of the command of Deuteronomy 6 ("write the law upon your doorposts") because the klaff (parchment) contains 22 lines of various proscribed passages of Scripture that serve as a defense against sinning.
- ▼ One Hebrew letter (*shin*) must always be evident on the exterior. It can be accompanied by *dalet* and *yod*.. the three together stand for one of God's titles, *el Shaddai*—the One who guards Israel's doors.
- ▼ The mezuzah is to be nailed on the top third of the right-side door post of any permanent dwelling within 30 days of occupation. It is nailed at a 45 degree angle to remind you that you are both "citizen of the world" and "member of the covenant community" and therefore common things are less important.