

Introduction

1. For the past two weeks we've been focusing on the three ordinances Yahweh commanded Israel to perpetuate when they arrived in the land of Canaan
2. As we've discussed, the purpose of each of these ordinances was to remind Israel of the day Yahweh delivered them from Egypt:
 - a. One was the celebration of Passover which was to remind Israel of how Yahweh had struck the Egyptians but spared (e.g. "**passed over**") Israel (READ 12:24-27)
 - b. A second was the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was to serve as a memorial of the haste in which they left Egypt (READ 12:14-15)
 - c. The third and final ordinance is the Consecration of the Firstborn which we will be discussing today in 13:1-2 & 11-16
3. Like we've done with the ordinance of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we will be focusing on three things when it comes to the Consecration of the Firstborn:
 - a. The initial intent of the ordinance
 - b. It's spiritual significance
 - c. And, it's ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ

A. The initial intent of the consecration of the firstborn was two-fold: to remind Israel that every firstborn male of both man and animal belonged to Yahweh and remind Israel of how He had delivered them from Egypt (READ Exodus 13:1-2, 11-16)

1. The importance of the firstborn in the ANE:
 - a. The firstborn son held a unique and special legal status in the family because he was the "bikor" (semitic word for "early" or "first fruits") of the father, representing his father's strength, vitality, and continuation of the family line
 - b. He was given the right of primogeniture which means he received a double portion of the family inheritance and was given authority over the family when the father died
 - c. The firstborn sons also had special privileges and responsibility in culture and society
 - d. From a religious perspective, firstborn sons were considered sacred to the gods; meaning they were not only valued by the gods but belonged to them
 - e. This one of the reasons why many of the ANE religions practiced child-sacrifice
2. The concept of the firstborn was also important to Yahweh because He commanded Israel to set apart to Him every firstborn of man and beast among Israel:
 - a. The word "**sanctify**" or "**consecrate**" in v. 2 means to set something apart as sacred or holy

- b. Later in v. 12 the word “**devote**” is used—the Hebrew word and form indicate causing something to pass over to Yahweh; NET: “**then you must give over to the LORD...**”
 - c. We learn in 13:12 that this only applied to the firstborn sons and male animals: “**the males belong to Me**”—this is also made clear in other passages:
 - 1) Exodus 22:29: “**...the firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me**”
 - 2) Exodus 34:19: “**The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep.**”
3. Yahweh intended this to be an ordinance, meaning that it was to be repeated by Israel throughout their generations once they entered the land of Canaan (RE-READ 13:11-12):
 - a. We’ve already seen how Yahweh commanded the celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as ordinances for Israel
 - b. As we saw with both of those ordinances, they were designed to remind Israel of the Exodus and the day Yahweh delivered them from Egypt
 - c. This ordinance served the same purpose and was to be used to teach future generations (RE-READ 13:14-16):
 - 1) It would serve to teach the children of Israel about Yahweh’s sovereignty by reminding them how He delivered them with a “**strong hand**”
 - 2) It would serve to teach them about the consequences of sin and disobedience by reminding them about what happened to Pharaoh when he hardened his heart
 - 3) It would serve to teach them about Yahweh’s judgment and redemption by reminding them how He killed every firstborn son in the land of Egypt but spared the firstborn sons of Israel
4. The consecration of the firstborn was carried out in three different ways, and we see this described in Numbers 18:15-17 (READ):
 - a. The firstborn males of clean animal were to be presented to the priests to be sacrificed as offerings to Yahweh and serve as food for the priests (18:15a, 17)
 - b. The firstborn sons were to be redeemed—bought back from the priests and ultimately God with five shekels of silver because they obviously couldn’t be sacrificed (18:15b, 16)
 - c. The firstborn of unclean animals were to also be redeemed but with the sacrifice of a lamb (18:15c)—if it wasn’t redeemed, they had to break its neck rather than sacrifice it (forbidden because it was unclean)
 - d. We see these same three rules back in Exodus 13:
 - 1) The sacrifice of clean animals in 13:15 (RE-READ)
 - 2) The redemption of firstborn sons and unclean animals in 13:13 & 15 (RE-READ)

B. The spiritual significance of the sanctification of the firstborn
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****There are three overarching themes present in the sanctification of the firstborn and they all have spiritual significance**

1. The main theme is the concept of sanctification:
 - a. The act of sanctifying the firstborns was symbolic of what Yahweh Himself had done (READ Numbers 3:13, 8:17):
 - 1) Notice the statements by God that it was an act of sanctification when He struck down the Egyptian firstborns but spared the Hebrew firstborns
 - 2) He said, **“I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to beast”**
 - 3) He said **“They shall be Mine.”**
 - b. As we discussed a few moments ago, the most basic meaning of the Hebrew word translated **“sanctification”** is that of setting something apart, but it’s primary usage in the OT is that of consecrating something as holy or sacred to the LORD
 - c. Sanctification is a MAJOR theme in both the OT and the NT:
 - 1) The Hebrew word is used over 600 times in the OT to represent people, places, and things that were set apart to God and considered sacred or holy:
 - a) Used of the sabbath (Genesis 2:3): **“Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it...”**
 - b) Used of the ground around the burning bush (Exodus 3:5): **“Then He said, ‘Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’”**
 - c) Used of God (Exodus 15:11): **“Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?”**
 - d) Used of Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:14): **“So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.”**
 - e) Used of Aaron his sons (1 Chronicles 23:13): **“...And Aaron was set apart to sanctify him as most holy, he and his sons forever, to burn incense before the LORD, to minister to Him and to bless His name forever.”**
 - f) The list goes on and on including the elements, utensils, and incense used in the temple
 - 2) Sanctification is also a major theme in the NT:
 - a) The Greek word for sanctification also means to set apart, make holy or sacred to God
 - b) It’s used over 30 times in the NT and most often in regard to our being sanctified in Christ meaning that we have been set apart to God and are now holy and sacred to him (SEE 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11)

2. The second theme seen in the consecration of the firstborn is death as the penalty for sin (RE-READ 13:15):
 - a. Yahweh's killing of the firstborn was an act of judgment against Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their sin, and the judgement fit the offense:
 - 1) Previous generations were guilty of killing the baby sons of Israel (READ Exodus 1:16 & 22):
 - 2) Pharaoh also refused to let Yahweh's firstborn Israel go (Exodus 4:23): **"So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn."**
 - b. By having Israel sacrifice every firstborn clean animal, it was not only a reminder of what Yahweh did to Pharaoh and Egypt for their sin, but that death itself was the penalty for sin:
 - 1) Romans 6:23 says, **"the wages of sin is death..."** and Hebrews 9:22 says **"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins"**
 - 2) The entire sacrificial system in the Law was designed to remind Israel of this fact
 - c. So the sacrifice of the first born was to serve as a stark reminder of the consequences of sin and disobedience
3. The third theme seen in the consecration of the firstborn is redemption:
 - a. When Yahweh instructed Israel to sanctify their firstborns, he told them to **"redeem"** every firstborn son and every firstborn unclean animal
 - b. In the strictest or most literal sense, the Hebrew word translated **"redeem"** refers to transferring ownership from one person to another usually through some payment or equivalent substitute, but it's also used to refer to rescuing or delivering
 - c. Numerous passages in the OT refer to Yahweh redeeming Israel from the Pharaoh and Egypt:
 - 1) Exodus 6:6: **"I am the Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also REDEEM you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments"**
 - 2) Deuteronomy 7:8: **"but because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, Yahweh brought you out by a mighty hand and REDEEMED you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."**
 - 3) Yahweh's redemption of Israel is repeated close to 100 times in the OT, and is referred to multiple times as Israel's redeemer
 - 4) By redeeming Israel, Yahweh was transferring ownership of Israel from Pharaoh to Himself and making Israel His own; they now belonged to Him (READ Exodus 6:7): **"Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."**

- d. Yahweh commanded Israel to redeem their firstborn sons and every firstborn unclean animal as an ordinance and symbol to remind them of not just how He redeemed their firstborn sons during the 10th plague, but how He had redeemed them as a nation at the Exodus
- 4. So, we see in the consecration of the firstborn spiritual truths related to sanctification and holiness, death as the penalty for sin, and redemption—and all three of these foreshadow the Gospel

C. The consecration of the firstborn was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ
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**Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of the consecration of the firstborn on multiple fronts

1. First, He is referred to as the “firstborn” six times in the New Testament:
 - a. Firstborn of God (Hebrews 1:1-7, esp. 6) – a reference to Jesus being God’s one and only Son; He is the “**exact representation of His nature**”, the one who “**upholds all things**”, “**the one who made purification for sins**”, and the one who is “**better than the angels**”
 - b. Firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29) – refers to Jesus as the one to whom we will be conformed; we will be made like him
 - c. Firstborn of creation (Colossians 1:15) – refers to his eternal existence as God and with God, and His lordship over all Creation
 - d. Firstborn of the dead (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5) – means that He was the first to rise from the dead, but also that He is the supreme authority over life and death
 - e. Church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23) – a reference to us becoming members of Jesus’s church, His body
2. Second, as Joseph’s and Mary’s firstborn son, He was consecrated to God the Father just as He had commanded Moses (READ Luke 2:22-39):
 - a. The text says Joseph and Mary went to the temple for two reasons: one was to present Jesus to the Lord and the other was to offer the required sacrifices for Mary’s purification after giving birth
 - b. However, what’s interesting about this passage is that Luke specifically mentions Mary’s sacrifice of two turtle doves and two pigeons, but he makes no mention of the redemption price of 5 shekels of silver for Jesus
 - 1) Some believe Luke didn’t mention it because Joseph and Mary didn’t pay the price:
 - a) They suggest they were offering Jesus up to God and not buying him back, thereby leaving Him as God’s possession dedicated to His service
 - b) However, it’s unlikely they didn’t pay the price because three times the text mentioned them doing everything according to the Law

- 2) Others believe they did pay the price, but Luke left it out for theological or symbolic reasons:
 - a) Luke may have wanted to stress the devotion of Jesus to the Father—the point of Israel redeeming their firstborn was to buy them back from God’s service to serve their own family
 - b) God prohibited the Levites from redeeming their firstborn because they were permanently devoted to God for service in the temple; while Jesus wasn’t from the tribe of Levi, He did serve as a High Priest and Luke may have wanted to foreshadow this by not mentioning Jesus’s redemption
 - c) Jesus didn’t need to be redeemed from death; rather as the Great Redeemer He would ultimately redeem others
3. The ultimately way Jesus fulfilled the consecration of the firstborn was by serving as the sacrificial lamb through which God redeemed us:
 - a. 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 we have been bought with a price, and that price was the death of Jesus
 - b. Ephesians 1:7 says, **“In Him we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...”**
 - c. Colossians 1:13 says, **“He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin.”**

Conclusion

1. Each of the three ordinances God commanded Israel to repeat—Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Consecration of the Firstborn—were designed to remind Israel of how God delivered them from Israel
2. But they also served to prepare Israel for the arrival and even the death of their Messiah
3. For us, it reminds us that Jesus is the firstborn Son of God and the Lamb who took away the sins of the world and redeemed us
4. It should also serve as a reminder of our own sanctification that we have in Christ—that we have been set apart to God