

Exodus Chapters 13-14 - John Karmelich

We now come to one of the most famous stories in the bible, the "Parting of the Red Sea". Obviously, most of us know it well. The big question is how does this famous story apply to us today? If I had to describe these two chapters in one word, it's "obedience". I'm well aware most of us struggle with that. I'm well aware that none of us are perfect and we're only saved by faith that Jesus is God and He is the Lord of our lives. Even with that understood, God demands obedience from us. OK, so how does that work practically? First keep in mind that we as Christians are saved by faith but we'll be judged by our works. That simply means we have eternal rewards based on how we used our lives to glorify God for the time period we served Him! Does it mean we have to eat kosher? No but God's laws are there as a guide as how He expects us to live for Him. I'm not positive how our lives affect our eternity, but I am positive it does. Yes that scares me and keeps me focused on serving Him!

Gee John, that's neat and I suppose I accept that. What does any of that have to do with these chapters in Exodus? In the last chapter, God killed the first born humans and animals in Egypt to emphasize the point that God's in charge of how long we will live and we must deal with it. The Israelites were spared of that punishment by trusting in lamb's blood being put on their doors. It's a reminder that God is now in charge of their lives and they (and us) must be obedient to Him. It just means He wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him. Most of us know that most of those Israelites failed to trust God later. They failed to use their lives as a witness for God and weren't allowed to enter the Promised Land. That is a big topic in the book of Numbers. My point is we are to trust God to guide our lives, then what? What I'm getting to, is that tough word "obedience". God doesn't guide out of ego, but because that's the best way for us to live! One of the main purposes of the bible is to teach us the best way to live! The point here in Exodus is now that they did what God told them to do (the lamb's blood thing) now what? The answer is to use our lives as a witness for Him and that requires obedience.

For example, these two chapters include the famous crossing of the Red Sea scene. Obviously if those Israelites wanted to follow God as well as escape from the Egyptians trying to kill them, they had to be obedient to follow God's command to walk through a newly created path in the middle of this sea. It's an example of trusting God in difficult situations. Even before we get there, there's a lot of verses of God telling the Israelites in effect to remember what happened here! Let's be honest for us to be obedient to God we need to keep Him present in our minds. Therefore doing things to focus on Him reminds us of what He desires, a life of obedience to Him. It's not about being perfect, but perfectly forgiven. Then I would argue once we realize and remember that, we do the best we can to use our time as a witness for Him. That involves realizing what gifts we have, finding ways to use them to glorify God, plus we got to do our share of what's necessary. As I love to joke, no one has the spiritual gift to take the trash out, but it must be done. Anyway, these chapters spend a lot of time focusing on remembering what God's done for us so that we can be obedient in what He desires of us to be a witness for Him. With that lofty speech out of my system, it's time to discuss these two chapters.

Let's start of by remembering where we left off. The last chapter was about the Passover service where the Israelites put lambs blood on their door so that only the first born sons of those who didn't perform that ritual would suffer. The important thing is the Israelites were obedient to what God told them to do and that's that. Chapter 13 opens with God stating, "For now on the firstborn of all Israelites as well as their animals belong to me". This doesn't mean all non-firstborns are condemned to death. In essence, the issue's about remembering what God did here and performing a ritual to remember that! I'll explain further and how that affects our lives today!

Obviously the Israelites didn't have to kill their first born children. (Note that other religions back then did require killing of one's children to honor those false gods!) They did have to pay a "religion tax" as a way to redeem that son. Their first born animals were killed or in the case of a donkey, a lamb can be substituted. Again, the main point is to get our focus on God. I would argue that Christians don't have to do this ritual, but we should all be daily in God's word.

Speaking of rituals, the next bit of text focuses on the fact the Israelites were not to eat leavened bread, as leaven is a symbol of sin. In essence, leaven is what causes bread to go bad as it corrupts the bread. The text even says this ritual is a reminder to you of what God did for you.

Then after more explanations about "firstborn killings (and redeeming)" we get instructions about other ways God wanted obedience. This is when God told them to walk towards the Red Sea (as opposed to a direct route to Israel) so that God may prepare them better for what He has for them. Remember that God wants to guide our lives. It doesn't mean for example we got to pray about say brushing our teeth! God in effect says to us, "I gave you a brain and I expect you to use it!" We just need to make the best decisions we can and assume God's guiding those decisions. The Israelites were taking "baby steps" in learning to trust Him, so in effect He's holding their hands as they learn to trust Him more. With most new believers God's very active to guide their lives as we learn to trust Him to guide our lives!

It is here where God gives the Israelites a pillar of fire (by night) and a cloud by day for guidance. As I said, God often makes it more obvious when we first start to trust Him as to where to go. That leads us to Chapter 14. When the Israelites got to the Red Sea, God told Moses He'd hardened the hearts of the Egyptians pursuing them and this would lead to God's glory. We get text about the Egyptians in pursuit in their best chariots (the ancient version of tanks) going after those Israelites. Obviously, the Israelites got scared. They complained by saying in effect, "It's better to be slaves than dead!" Yes I can run with that statement, but hopefully one grasps freedom is always better than slavery! Moses tells them not to be afraid. (Fear is the opposite of faith!) Then he tells the Israelites in effect to trust God and He'll do a mighty work.

OK it's now "Charlton Heston time" (A reference to the movie the 10 Commandments). Realize there's about 2 million Israelites crossing the sea, so the wall of water was bigger than how that movie showed it! One also has to love what God said to Moses right before the big moment. God said in effect, "Why are you just standing there? Raise your stick in the air as it's show time!" As we all know the Israelites crossed that Sea and then the Egyptians pursued them and God drowned them all in that sea!

OK John, we all know the story. What's the point for us? Obviously we're not going to get miracles in a tough situation. Like Moses said to the Israelites when they were panicking, "Fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord". In other words, God's still guiding our lives even when we have no idea what to do next. The answer is always to start our day in prayer and ask God to guide us, then we make the best logical decision we can, given the situation in front of us and trust that God is working out our lives for His glory. That's how we glorify God with our lives. We make the best decisions we can and we trust in Him to work the situation out for His glory. Life doesn't always go smoothly when we trust in God, but we can be assured He's working the world out for His glory.

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John