
THE FIRSTBORN FOR THE ALL-BORN

EXODUS 13:11-16



A week ago, I was examined by a church court so that I could be installed as pastor of First Byron Christian Reformed Church. I had studied the history of the denomination, brushed up on my theology, and prepped some answers for some hot-button issues. But the first question I was asked was, "What is the Gospel?" What a great way to start the exam! Because, what's more important than my answer to that question. It's an answer we should never assume and we should constantly remind ourselves of, because it's so easy to get confused, over-complicated, or forgetful when it comes to the Gospel.

God obviously saw this danger when it came to the Israelites and wanted to ensure they would always be able to answer "What is the Gospel?" He not only instituted the yearly Passover Feast, but also the 'Firstborn-to-God' rule in Exodus 13:11-16, to remind them much more frequently of the Gospel.

- **GOD SAVES BY JUDGING SIN**
- **GOD SAVES BY SUBSTITUTING SINNERS**

LEARNING

GOD SAVES THROUGH JUDGING SIN

When the Israelites came into the Promised Land, they were to **set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's** (12). Firstborn male animals were to be sacrificed to the Lord.

When future Israelites asked why they sacrificed the firstborn male animals to the Lord, they were to be told the Exodus story. In summary, God saved Israel out of Egypt by judging the firstborn of Egypt, and therefore the firstborn animals were to be sacrificed to the Lord as a reminder that God saves through judging sin (14-15).

**GOD JUDGES SIN
SO THAT HE CAN SAVE FROM SIN.**

"But how did judging sin, save anyone from sin?" Because God loves to substitute people.

GOD SAVES THROUGH SUBSTITUTION

God saved through substitution at the first Passover, by providing a lamb-sacrifice in place of the firstborn. And, in the annual celebration of the Passover, they were reminded of this lamb-for-the-firstborn substitution again and again.

In the firstborn-to-God rule, God instituted a way that Israel would be reminded of substitution even more often. Every time an animal had a firstborn male, it was to be offered to God as a sacrifice in place of every other animal. The firstborn was sacrificed to God so that the rest of the born could live.

There were only two exceptions to this firstborn-to-God rule. The first was donkeys, yes, donkeys! Firstborn donkeys could be redeemed with a lamb (13). Instead of offering a donkey, they could offer a lamb. Why donkeys? Most likely it was the practical reason that it was the F150 of the day and therefore extremely valuable to the owner, especially for carrying heavy loads long distances. Therefore God allowed an alternative sacrifice.

The second exception was baby boys. Instead of offering their first son as a sacrifice, God allowed the Israelites to pay some money as a redemption price (Num. 18:6). So there was a substitute for firstborn sons as well. But whether the firstborn animals or boys were sacrificed or redeemed, the whole idea of substitution, something in place of something was prominently and constantly in front of them in everyday life.

THE FIRSTBORN WAS SACRIFICED
SO THE ALL-BORN COULD LIVE

LOVING

We cannot hear about this 'Firstborn-to-God' rule without thinking of Jesus, can we? God sacrificed his Firstborn Son to save all his sons and daughters. That's the Gospel, isn't it? Although we don't have to follow the 'Firstborn-to-God' rule now because of the greatest 'Firstborn-to-God' we should use the birth of every firstborn to remember **the Firstborn over all Creation** (Col. 1:15), **the Firstborn among many brothers** (Rom. 8:29), and **the Firstborn from the dead** (Col. 1:18). No wonder we read in Hebrews when he brought **the firstborn into the world, he said, "Let all God's angels worship him"** (Heb. 1:6).

LIVING

Let's always remember, **Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (Rev. 1:5).
