

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Exodus 13:13-15; Luke 2:22-32

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, December 20, 2015

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, December 20, 2015**, is from **Exodus 13:13-15; Luke 2:22-32**.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **[International Bible Lessons Commentary](#)** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **[International Bible Lesson Forum](#)**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Exodus 13:13-15

(Exodus 13:13) “But every firstborn donkey you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem.

A donkey was a valuable beast of burden. Domesticated, it relieved its owner from bearing heavy workloads himself. The donkey was also an unclean animal that was not to be eaten. If the owner wanted to keep his firstborn donkey, he would need to redeem it by sacrificing a lamb in its place. If he did not sacrificially substitute the lamb for the donkey, he would need to put the donkey to death (or violate the Law of God). The Law of God required that every firstborn male child must be redeemed, and no child must ever be put to death. The pagan neighbors of the Israelites sacrificed their children, while the Law of God forbids child sacrifices. When the Israelites turned to paganism, they also sacrificed their children to pagan gods. Evil King Ahaz sacrificed his son to the idol Molech (2 Kings 16:3). One could argue today that in many countries parents sacrifice their children to the gods of personal peace and prosperity, though they do not recognize this as a return to pagan practices. God's commands regarding sacrifices pointed to the coming and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. By their sins, everyone has become morally and spiritually unclean. To save us from our sins, uncleanness, and death, Jesus redeemed us by substituting His death upon the cross as the Lamb of God so we would not need to die as an unclean unredeemed donkey. God gave His firstborn

and only begotten Son as a sacrifice, and Jesus came of His own free will to die in our place so God could forgive us and save us without violating the Law of God. As believers in Christ, we are domesticated, and we love to serve the God who saved us by His grace.

(Exodus 13:14) When in the future your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall answer, ‘By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.

The death of a lamb was substituted for the death of the firstborn child on the night of the first Passover in Egypt, when the LORD brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt in order to lead them into the Promised Land. When Jesus, the Lamb of God, died on the cross during Passover, He died so those who believe in Him could be freed from slavery to sin and Satan. Believers accept the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in their place so they can live forever in the Kingdom of God as Jesus promised.

(Exodus 13:15) When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.”

Unlike pagan sacrifices, the sacrifices God required of His people will protect and save people. A substituted lamb’s death protected the firstborn son from death, and no other children in Israel were ever to be sacrificed to God or to the gods of their pagan neighbors. When Jesus died as a sacrifice in our place, He died to save people and give eternal life to all who would believe in Him. The angel told Joseph the mission of Jesus: “She [Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Luke 2:22-32

(Luke 2:22) When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

In Jesus’ day, the circumcision of a baby boy would often be at home and usually be performed by the head of the family on the eighth day. The rite of purification was done by a priest forty days after the birth of a male child, according to Leviticus 12: 1-8. Jesus would have been taken to the temple 32 days after His circumcision when Mary could legally enter the sanctuary for the priest to make atonement for her. Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to be seen by a priest for the ceremony. In everything, they obeyed the Law of Moses. To present Jesus to the Lord was to present Him to God, His heavenly Father, which the law required of all firstborn males (see Exodus 13). Knowing Jesus was the Son of God, Mary had much more to ponder as she took part in the ceremony.

(Luke 2:23) (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”),

Each firstborn male was set apart for service to the Lord, for service to God as “holy to the Lord.” Firstborn animals were often sacrificed to the Lord. According to the Law of Moses, firstborn male Israelites were redeemed and not sacrificed. Human beings were never to be sacrificed (killed). Paganism often required human sacrifice or child sacrifice, but this was always forbidden by God. In the Promised Land, some Israelites adopted pagan practices, disobeyed God, and sacrificed their children to idols, which led to their punishment by God and the eventual destruction or exile for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

(Luke 2:24) and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Joseph labored as a skilled carpenter, so he could probably provide for his family financially wherever they lived. The fact that Joseph and Mary offered a sacrifice that the poor were permitted to offer instead of a lamb indicates that Jesus was born into a family of humble means that obeyed God according to His requirements. Jesus knows how people in poor families live and how they need to depend on God for their daily bread; because that is the way He lived growing up from being a child to being a man. Though poor, Jesus and His family obeyed the law of God. The Lord’s Prayer was very real to Jesus in His experience of total reliance on His Father and “Our Father which art in heaven.”

(Luke 2:25) Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

Luke continued to describe the moral and spiritual character of those who made comments about or had a significant relationship to the baby Jesus. Simeon was a righteous man, which meant he lived by faith in God. He was devout because he did what God required beyond mere human expectations of what it meant to be “religious.” He lived in faith and the Holy Spirit rested on him. He lived daily with the expectation that the Messiah would come as God had promised him. Because his way of life was consistent with the truth and the law of God, people respected him and saw that he was particularly loyal to God and sought to serve God to the best of his ability.

(Luke 2:26) It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

The Holy Spirit revealed the truth about the coming Messiah to Simeon. The Holy Spirit also inspired Luke to record God’s assessment of Simeon. Because Simeon lived by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, God called him to meet Jesus and His parents to encourage them and bear witness to them that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. They probably needed this reassurance then, because they would soon need to flee to Egypt because of the danger to Jesus’ life (as recorded by the Gospel of Matthew).

(Luke 2:27) Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,

Luke described the work of the Holy Spirit in Simeon as “rested on him” and “revealed to him” and “guided” him. The Holy Spirit can do all of these things and more in the lives of those who live by faith in the Messiah as Simeon did (he lived with faith in the Messiah who was to come, as did the prophets and people of faith in the Old Testament). The Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers so they can live righteous and devout lives (as He did in Simeon’s life). God arranged the perfect timing for Simeon to meet Jesus and His parents when they went to the temple in obedience to the law of God. All of them obeyed God’s law and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in faith, and they all received a blessing from God.

(Luke 2:28) Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

Simeon was obviously a follower of the Holy Spirit, who devoutly worshiped God in the temple. Because the Holy Spirit rested on him, when he took Jesus into his arms, Mary and Joseph obviously trusted him. Simeon’s response to holding the baby Jesus was to praise God, which is the response of all believers when they hold a baby; they know that every child is a gift of God. But Simeon’s response was more than this because he knew that God had fulfilled His promise to him as he held the baby Jesus in his arms.

(Luke 2:29) “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

Simeon praised God and then explained that God had fulfilled His promise to him. He was holding in his arms the LORD’s Messiah (Luke 2:26). He was seeing the consolation of Israel: God’s solution to the slavery of His people — not just the solution to the enslavement of Rome or the enslavement of religious leaders, but also the solution to the slavery to sin and Satan that afflicted all people and that would eventually lead the religious leaders to crucify Jesus. Having fulfilled His promise to Simeon, Simeon said that God could now prepare him to die in peace according to His promise.

(Luke 2:30) for my eyes have seen your salvation,

Jesus is God’s salvation. Jesus’ name means “God saves” or “God is salvation.” Jesus, in His own Person, is God’s salvation. Salvation is by and through Jesus and His work. By the very nature of who Jesus is, the Son of God and the promised Messiah, Jesus would do all that God promised and required to make salvation possible for all who would believe in Him as Lord and Savior, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, as Salvation.

(Luke 2:31) which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

Simeon revealed that Jesus was born in the presence of all peoples in the sense that He was seen by those of lowly and humble estate and He would be seen by the wise and wealthy as Matthew recorded regarding the wise men that came from the east to see the

baby Jesus. During his ministry, Jesus (as the salvation of God) would be seen by people of every class and rank, and some would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Eventually, the good news of Jesus would spread throughout the world as His followers testified about Him.

(Luke 2:32) a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

God declared that Abraham’s descendants were to bless all nations, which included the Gentiles (all who are not Israelites). Even though the Israelites did not do this as priests to all nations, and even though Jews and Gentiles despised one another, God fulfilled His intentions through one of Abraham’s descendants, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus came to bless all peoples and all nations by revealing the truth about God to the Gentiles who did not have the Scriptures, and by bringing glory to Israel because the Savior of the world was from the tribe of Judah. The Book of Acts and the Letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John reveal how the early Church brought the revelation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. If you were an Israelite and wanted to keep your firstborn donkey, what did the Law of God require of you?
2. What two ceremonial rituals did Joseph and Mary perform after Jesus was born?
3. What type of sacrifice did Joseph and Mary offer at the temple, and what might that reveal about them?
- 4 How does the Bible describe the moral and spiritual character of Simeon?
5. What did Simeon say about Jesus when he held Him?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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