

BaptistWay: A hurried meal for a dangerous journey

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- *The BaptistWay lesson for March 22 focuses on Exodus 12:1-14, 24-27; 13:8-9.*

Sometimes the path to release is through the fire. Sometimes in order to reach the desired goal, we must look danger square in the face, because the Promised Land is on the other side of danger. In those times, we must prove if we want the Promised Land enough to go after it or if we'd rather just talk about it. After crying out for freedom and being heard by the Lord, will we follow the Lord's lead—even through danger—or will we shrink back?

On the eve of their freedom, the Israelites were faced with just this question, and they were given an interactive picture with which to remember this moment for the rest of time. On the eve of their freedom, they were to sacrifice a spotless lamb and to paint the lamb's blood on the doorframes of their homes. On the eve of their freedom, they were to eat a brand new meal in a completely new way. They were to remember this meal and partake in this meal for the rest of time.

The eve of freedom

On the eve of their freedom, they were to be ready to go out from Egypt into the unknown. On the eve of their freedom, they were to remain in their homes under cover of blood as death passed over. They were to remember for the rest of time that their freedom was purchased through slaughter.

We still must remember the way to freedom is through the fire, but like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, we do not go through the fire alone.

Along with the instructions for this new Passover meal, a new designation for Israel is given. “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying ...” (Exodus 12:3).

What the *New American Standard Bible* renders as “congregation,” the *New International Version* of the Bible renders as “community.” According to the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, the Hebrew *odth* means “company assembled together by appointment.” F.B. Huey’s commentary on Exodus indicates “congregation” becomes “the technical term for Israel as an organized religious people.” The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the God of Israel’s past—was calling these same people together, to go out from Egypt together, and in calling them “the congregation of Israel” was promising to be the God of their future.

Instructions for the Passover meal

Following this first appearance of “congregation,” God continues with instructions for the Passover meal, suggesting the first experience of “the congregation of Israel” would be to prepare to go through the fire of death together. Give attention to the conclusion of these instructions: “This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste” (12:11).

The people were to eat the meal as though going through a fast-food drive-thru. They were to eat it ready to go. Once death passed over, the congregation of Israel was commanded and urged by Pharaoh and the people of Egypt to “hurry and leave:” “Up! Leave ...” (12:31-33)! As they went, they were to take their “flocks and herds” (12:32), and they took their dough along with silver, gold and clothing given to them by the Egyptians (12:34-36).

Sending out the disciples

By contrast, when another congregation was sent out, they were sent

without material provisions: “Jesus had called the Twelve together ... and he sent them out ... He told them: ‘Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt’” (Luke 9:1-3).

This time, the congregation called together by Christ was sent with nothing but his “authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases ... (and the message of) the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:1-2). Later, when Jesus sent 72 out, he sent them with the same provisions, telling them, “Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3-4).

In both places, the Lord called people together as the Lord’s people to *be* the Lord’s people in the world into which the Lord sent them. Both congregations faced dangers. Both went out into a hostile world. The Lord sent both with provisions, though the provisions were not the same. Those provisions were expected to sustain the people through the fire into which they went.

As has been true so often throughout history, we live in dangerous and shifting times. The Jewish Passover meal— *seder*—and the Christian communion—the Lord’s Supper—portray an important message for us in such times. Freedom will come and at a heavy price, and the God who has brought us freedom, who is freeing us, and who will free us from sin and all its effects will sustain us through the fires of these times.

Incorporating elements of a *seder* into this lesson can help learners develop a deeper appreciation for the meal and its significance for the Israelites. Consult Jewish sources, such as a local rabbi, before including a *seder* to be sure you are engaging in the meal properly and with due respect.