

January 31:

Exodus 12:29-13:16, today's reading in **THE ONE YEAR BIBLE**, covers the tenth and final plague God brought upon Egypt. God took the life of all the firstborn among animals and humans. The exceptions were persons who sacrificed a lamb and put its blood on their door. This forms a strong introduction in Israel to the need for a spotless lamb to be slain to turn away God's wrath and bring forgiveness of sin.

Two other noteworthy lessons in this passage include: (1) A "mixed multitude" left Egypt with Israel (12:38), in other words strangers or sojourners who were not Hebrew, but had converted to faith in the true God (12:48). Though often unnoticed in the Old Testament, this happened throughout Israel's history and was part of her purpose as a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6). (2) The Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, and consecration of the firstborn in Israel are instituted as ways of remembering what God did in saving Israel from Egypt and as means of communicating God's saving work to the next generation (12:43-16). It is interesting that from the very beginning of the exodus and stretching to the point that Israel was poised to enter the Promised Land, God was interested in Israel passing on to the next generation the good news of God's redeeming work and their faith (e.g. Deut. 4:9-10; 6:6-9).

Three questions of application arise from the reading in Exodus today. First, have you trusted Jesus Christ, the true and ultimate spotless lamb (Rev. 5:6), as your Savior? Second, if you have, are you seeking to share this good news with those who don't know Him? Finally, are you seeking to pass on the good news and the knowledge of our God to your sons and daughters?

Two lessons we must pass on to our children and internalize in our own heart are found in the Psalms and Proverbs readings: When we face difficulties or needs, we must turn to God in prayer (Psalms 25:16-22) and we must live a wise and holy life which gives attention to our heart, speech, and actions lest we become one who does not embody the things God values—in other words, lest we become a worthless person (Proverbs 6:12-15).

Four strong lessons meet us in Matthew 20:29-21:22. First, we must be careful not to conclude the Gospels contradict each other when we first see some differences in the text. Matthew 20:29 says Jesus healed two blind men "as they went out of Jericho". However, Luke 18:35 reads it as "as He drew near to Jericho". What is more, Mark and Luke mention only one blind man (whom Mark names Bartimaeus). Are these examples of contradictions? Not at all. In Jesus' day there was new Jericho and old Jericho. Most likely Matthew was focusing on new Jericho (Jesus was departing from it) while Luke was focusing on old Jericho (He was drawing near to it). And, the fact that Mark and Luke focus on only one man does not mean there could not have been two. Two men could have been healed, but for whatever reason Bartimaeus was more memorable or known so two of the Gospel writers zero in on him. We have diverse emphases, then, by the writers, but not contradictions.

The second lesson has to do with Jesus' identity. Matthew is demonstrating more openly as his book progresses that Jesus is the Messiah. This is seen in how the blind men address him (Son of David), His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before He was crucified (fulfilling Messianic prophesy in Zech. 9:9), His healing the blind men, His cursing the fig tree, and His authoritative cleansing of the temple (the second time He had done this. John 2:13-17 records the first time toward the beginning of His ministry).

Lessons three and four consist of the reality that those who don't bear fruit in keeping with repentance will be judged (seen in the fig tree cursing) and the reminder that God answers prayer (21:20-22).