

THE DOUBLE PORTION OF THE FIRSTBORN

By DR. PAUL CARAM

In scripture the eldest or firstborn son inherited special *privileges*. The position was one of great honor and responsibility. In the absence of the father he had authority over his brethren. For example, in the Book of Genesis it was Reuben, the firstborn, who saved Joseph from being killed by his brothers, Gen.37:21-22.

The firstborn also had special *responsibilities*, for he was accountable to the father for the welfare of his younger brothers and sisters. Reuben was very distressed when he failed to rescue Joseph from the pit. He tore his clothes and was ashamed to face his father, Gen. 37:29-30.

At the death of the father, the firstborn became the head of the home and received a *double portion* as his share of the inheritance, Deut.21:15-17. If a man with four sons divided up his inheritance, he divided the inheritance into five equal shares, giving two shares to the firstborn and one share to each of the other three sons. In Bible times there was a great *distinction* between a younger son and a firstborn son.

Firstborns Receive the Kingdom

Second Chronicles 21:1-3 also shows us this difference. Before King Jehoshaphat died, he divided up his inheritance as follows: all his sons were given great gifts, but to his firstborn son, Jehoram, was given *the kingdom*. There is a great difference between wonderful gifts, and receiving the throne. The throne is for kings! And although all believers are called to become kings and priests (Rev.5:9-10, Ex.19:6), there are reasons why believers can disqualify themselves from their high calling.

Firstborns in the New Testament

The message of the firstborn is also an important theme of the *New Testament*. Consider the following scriptures:

- In Romans 8:28-29, Christ is “the firstborn among many brethren.” Jesus is our Elder Brother. He has authority and power over us, His younger brothers and sisters. He is the head of the Church. He is honored and obeyed.
- In Colossians 1:15-17, Christ is “the firstborn over all creation.” He has power and authority over the whole creation and universe, for He created them. His Name is above every other name, Phil. 2:9-11. He has authority over all men, angels, principalities and powers. He is King of all kings, and Lord of all lords.
- In Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5, Christ is “the firstborn from the dead.” Jesus has complete power and authority over death. Death fears Him and bows before Him.

Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, and has the keys of death and hell, Rev.1:18, Jn.11:25.

- In Hebrews 12:22-23 we read of “the Church of the *firstborn [ones.]*” In the original Greek the *firstborn* is plural. This speaks of believers who are *firstborn ones* among their brethren. These are given a *double portion*.

There are certain ones among God’s people whom God selects to be *firstborn ones* among their brethren. These shall have a double inheritance, a double portion of God’s Spirit, and double honor. Also, they will have double responsibility to look after the welfare of their younger brothers and sisters in Christ. Will you or I be a firstborn? Will we qualify to become leaders with these blessings and responsibilities, or does God have to look for someone else? Let us look at several examples of men who were firstborn among their brethren, and the reasons they were chosen.

JOB

“...the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.” -Job 42:10

Job was a man who received the double portion. He was truly a firstborn, a leader among many. In fact, the Lord said, “There is none like him on the earth, one who fears God and shuns evil,” Job 1:8. God gives the double portion to men and women who are good *role models*, to those whom others can pattern themselves after. God looks for people of excellent character, whose lives can be *reproduced* in the lives of many others. He will take that man and reproduce him in the lives of others. He will make him their elder brother. Therefore, God will give him a double portion to bear the added responsibility of being a firstborn among many brethren.

A Home in Order

Job had balanced priorities. In Job 1:2-5 we can see that he was a family man! I have seen over the years that a man who fails as a father in the natural will fail as a spiritual father, also. This is confirmed by God’s Word which states, “For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God,” 1 Tim.3:4-5. The first qualification for holding a spiritual office is a marriage and home that is in order, 1 Tim.3:1-7; 3:12; Tit.1:5-9. If we fail in natural things, such as with our marriage, children, finances, or our secular work, we then disqualify ourselves from spiritual promotion. How we handle *natural* responsibilities indicates how we will do with *spiritual* responsibilities, Lu.16:10-12.

Therefore, a qualification for being a firstborn among many brethren, is that our home is in order and at peace. The Church members must be able to see that Christianity really works *in the home* of their pastors and leaders. Remember, the Church is simply a collection of *families*. If Christianity does not work at home, it will never work at church.

Godly Character

Not only was Job a good *role model* for husbands and fathers, he also had many other godly areas of character. He was sensitive to the needs of the oppressed and poor, Job 29:12-17 & 31:13-22. Job was morally pure, guarding carefully his eyes and emotions, 31:1-12. He was a man of vision with a sense of destiny. He knew where he was going because he had direction and promises from God, 19:25-27. Job served God, not selfishly for the benefits, but because he loved God. Job showed this when he declared, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord,” even after he had lost everything, 1:21. Job was a man who became purged from the spirit of self-righteousness, learning *never* to find fault with God, 42:1-6. These qualities in Job’s life show us what God looks for in a man whom He will choose to be a firstborn.

ELISHA

“And Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.”
-2 Kings 2:9

Elisha is another classic example of a man who inherited the blessing of the firstborn. He was not a son who inherited the blessing from a *natural* father, but from a spiritual father—Elijah. The prophet Elijah had many *spiritual sons*. He raised up many young men who would later become prophets to the nation. Elisha was one of those sons among many brethren who were his peers and equals. Elisha, however, had several characteristics that promoted him above his brethren.

Elisha was a servant! He was industrious, hard working, steadfast, and loyal. When he is first mentioned in scripture, we find him laboring in the field with twelve yoke of oxen, 1 Kg.19:19. Elisha never allowed boredom or laziness to rule his life. He was a man of purpose.

Also, he stood the test of *time*. For immediately upon receiving the call of God, he forsook his past and dedicated himself to serving Elijah for many years, 1 Kgs.19:21 & 2 Kgs.3:11. Elisha was willing to take the low place. He submitted to the trainings and disciplines of his spiritual father. Also, he overcame long periods of dryness and boredom when nothing exciting seemed to be happening.

Elisha was wiser than his brethren, staying close to the side of his spiritual father. Elisha did not commit the tragic mistake so many other spiritual sons make. Many “sons,” after a certain amount of growth and success, believe that they have *outgrown* their spiritual parents, and then have little use for them. Pride sets in as they assume that they have become *significantly superior* to the spiritual fathers who have brought them up and nourished them in the ways of the Lord. To the opposite of this, Elisha maintained a

relationship of love and respect for his spiritual father, Elijah. It was this close relationship that qualified him for receiving the double portion of the Spirit that rested upon Elijah.

Elisha never became arrogant or independent after receiving the good teaching and prophetic mantle from his spiritual father, Elijah. He remained teachable and loyal to his master right up to the time of their parting. By this time Elisha was no longer a youth, for he was already bald, 2 Kg.2:23. God cannot give the double portion to men who are disrespectful to their spiritual fathers, for they would reproduce the same in the lives of many others. Men who receive the double portion are those who continue to honor their father and mother, even when they become old.

We Choose our Levels of Relationship

Elisha's peers could have had that same close relationship with their spiritual father, had they so desired. Scripture says they followed *afar off*, 2 Kg.2:7. They were spectators rather than participants of what God was doing. They, too, could have had the double portion if they had been *close* enough to the prophet when he was taken up into heaven.

We have a similar account with the twelve apostles. John leaned upon the bosom of the Lord Jesus Christ, becoming known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," Jn.13:21-26. However, God has no favorites. The Lord wanted all the apostles to be as close to Him as John, but they did not have the same *desire*. Surely, every one of us can be as close to the Lord as we desire to be.

Elisha also passed the tests of *rejection* and *discouragement*. Elijah repeatedly told his pupil to "go back," or *stay here while I go on*, 1 Kg.19:20; 2 Kg.2:2; 2:4; 2:6. Elijah continued to give him opportunities to find an excuse to quit and go home. Never once does sacred scripture record Elijah encouraging Elisha to go on. But Elisha desired something in his heart that would not be denied. He wanted *a double portion* of his master's anointing. He looked for no excuses to be offended. He refused to give up. He plodded on through the years of boring service, 2 Kg.3:11. He kept his spirit open and teachable to his spiritual father, and he maintained a love and respect for him even in the maturity of his life. Then the moment came, after years of preparation and testings, to receive the second mantle. Read 2 Kings 2:1-15.

"Ask what I may do for you, before I am taken away from you?"

Elisha responded to this question of Elijah by asking, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." Elijah replied to this and said, "You have asked a hard thing," 2

Kg.2:10. As we have repeated over and over, a double portion of God's Spirit means double responsibility. It means a heavier load and a more difficult task to accomplish.

Elijah continued and said, "Nevertheless, if you *see me* when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." The double portion is only given to those who are *very close* to the Lord and to their spiritual fathers. Elisha was *close enough* to receive the second mantle. Other brethren who viewed from *afar off* did not receive the blessing.

"Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him," 2 Kg.2:15. At the moment Elisha received the double portion, he became **firstborn** among his many brethren. This *distinguished* him and set him apart. There came upon him an authority that was recognizable, and they acknowledged that special anointing and authority by bowing in reverence. Elisha had become their elder brother, the firstborn among many brethren.

JOSEPH

"Joseph shall have two portions"-Ez.47:13

Joseph was a young man beloved of his father, Jacob. We may think that Jacob showed favoritism among his sons, but he had a reason for making Joseph, his eleventh son, the special heir. Joseph was very righteous and spiritual, even as a child. His brothers, on the other hand, were evil, Gen.37:1-11.

Another point to consider is that God knows what every man or woman will do with the promises and gifts He entrusts to them. This is the reason God chose Jacob instead of Esau to have the birthright, even before they were born, Gen.25:22-26. God knew that Esau, the elder brother, would take the birthright lightly. Therefore, God gave it to Jacob.

God had a very important plan for Joseph's generation. There was going to be a great famine in that part of the world and He needed a special man with unusual answers for the coming crisis. But in order to become that special deliverer, intense preparation was required. All of Joseph's brethren failed the tests, although none of them realized that God was testing them. They were unable and *unwilling* to pay the price. The cost of being a deliverer to *any* generation is very high.

The Cost of Joseph's Double Portion

Joseph was rejected by his brethren. In fact, their envy and hatred brought about a plot to kill him, Gen.37:18-20. Being rejected by your brethren is painful enough, but they hated him enough to kill him. Why was there such envy and jealousy among the brethren? It was because of the kind of home they grew up in. Jacob married several women, and there was constant envy and strife, Gen.30:1-16. Therefore, the children had the problems of their parents.

Reuben protected Joseph by putting him in a pit, but in his absence Joseph was pulled out and sold as a slave into Egypt. Therefore, in addition to growing up in an unhappy home, he was rejected by his own brethren, sold as a slave, and exiled into a foreign country. While in Egypt, he was accused of a crime of which he was totally innocent, Gen.39:7-23. Thus, his reputation was ruined and he was cast into the dungeon for years. Yet God was with him and was testing him, Ps.105:16-19, Gen. 49:22-24.

Thus, Joseph had to *overcome* a bad childhood and home life, rejection and cruelty of the brethren, exile, slavery, loneliness, homesickness, sexual temptations, false accusations, imprisonment, a ruined reputation, and many other injustices. In addition to all of these, he had to wait during long and painful delays, and battle against tremendous doubt and discouragement. Yet every injustice became his servant to move him closer to the throne. Every delay, heartache, and difficulty was building iron into his soul, preparing Joseph for the great task he was called to perform. Joseph fully understood that God was using every injustice to bless and exalt him, Gen.45:4-8, 50:20. This enabled him to have a great capacity to *forgive* his brethren and emerge as the firstborn with the double portion from among all the brethren, Gen.48:5, 1 Chron.5:1-2.

THE LEVITES

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Take the Levites *instead* of all the firstborn among the children of Israel.” -Num.3:44-45

God’s original purpose was to take the firstborn sons of *every tribe* and make them priests to Himself and to the nation. The blessing of being a firstborn enabled a man to have special access to God, and the privilege of handling the priestly affairs of God’s sanctuary. Firstborns were given a special ministry to the Lord and to the people. That special ministerial anointing opened up to them an understanding of the ways of God and the Word of God.

After the shameful apostasy of *the golden calf*, however, God changed His mind. Taking away the right of the firstborn from the other tribes, God gave it to the whole tribe of Levi instead. When originally every firstborn of every tribe would have been priests unto God and the people, God revoked their birthright and gave it uniquely to the Levites,

Numbers 3:6; 3:9-12; 3:41; 3:45; 8:6; 8:14-16; 8:18. Here we see the rejection of the birthright by a whole nation.

As we have said before, we do not know when we are being tested. Moses went up the mountain for forty days, and here was the test—the test of *delay*. Israel grew restless, making a golden calf to be their new god. When Moses returned and beheld their wickedness, he drew a line and demanded, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” (Read Exodus 32:1-28). The whole tribe of Levi quickly sided with the Lord and with Moses. The Lord, through Moses, then commanded the Levites to take their swords and slay iniquity in the camp, which the Levites obeyed.

God did not forget what happened at the foot of Mount Sinai. A whole nation had failed the test. The Lord was so grieved with the fickleness and wickedness of His people that He decided at that moment to take away their birthrights, and give it to a tribe who honored and revered Him. God would not have an inconsistent, immoral, idolatrous, and rebellious priesthood. God would not give a double portion of His Spirit to men who handled the sacred things of God lightly. He looked elsewhere for a godlier people.

God observed the response of the tribe of Levi during the time of moral backsliding in Israel. He saw in Levi a quality that would do the right thing, not the popular thing, when the pressure was on. Levi was willing even to use the sword on his own flesh, even on his own brethren for the sake of righteousness. These are qualities that are required in firstborns.

How often, when something touches our own flesh, or our family, are we tempted to *compromise* the word of God. We cannot be a firstborn if we are unwilling to use the sword on our own flesh, or if we resort to sympathy or humanism on the moral issues of our times, Jer.48:10.

Thus, God chose Levi to have the priesthood *instead* of all the other firstborns of Israel, Deut.33:8-11. This was the transferal of the birthright from a whole nation to a single tribe. God’s selection of Levi was at a time when the nation was unaware that they were being tested. In Deuteronomy 33:9 the Lord observed that the Levites were more willing to please God than even their closest friends and family.

THE LOSS OF A BIRTHRIGHT

The subject of the birthright is not just an outdated lesson from the Old Testament. The *New Testament* also is filled with the firstborn message. New Testament believers are warned and exhorted not to sell their birthrights as Esau (Heb. 12:15-17). May I suggest, however, that it is irrelevant whether it came from the Old or New Testaments, for “*All scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,

thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). When Paul wrote this to Timothy, he was referring, not to the New Testament, but the Old . The Old Testament was the only scripture they had at that time. The New Testament canon was not formed until 400 A.D.

Disqualified through Profanity

Esau is the prime example in scripture of those who sell their birthrights. Hebrews 12:16 tells us, “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.” He was termed *profane*. To be profane means to be irreverent, disrespectful, and impious. It means to treat sacred things lightly and without care. Esau despised his birthright by trading it for a bowl of lentils when he was hungry, Gen.25:29-34. Esau lacked long-range vision, living only for the moment and his present appetites. God saw what kind of heart he had, even before he was born. Therefore God declared even before birth, “the elder shall serve the younger,” Gen.25:23. God determined to give the birthright to Jacob because Esau treated it with such disdain. Esau had no fear of coming short of the purposes of God for his life, Heb.4:1. Later, when he saw what he had lost, he wanted it back with tears and wailing, but it could not be regained, Heb.12:17. He had made his irrevocable decision to settle for an ordinary portion.

Disqualified through Immorality

We can read how Jacob’s oldest son, Reuben, was disqualified from the firstborn blessings because he was morally unstable. His father said of him prophetically, “Unstable as water, you shall not excel,” Gen.49:4. He committed incest with one of his father’s wives, Gen.35:22. After that his father did not trust him. Therefore, Jacob took the birthright away from Reuben and transferred it to Joseph, 1 Chron.5:1-2. Immorality and incest makes a man unstable and untrustworthy, and it is *possible* to lose the birthright because of this. We must cry out to God to cleanse our hearts of lust and vile affections, or we could end up surrendering our crown.

Impatience, Rebellion, and Idolatry

“Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” Exodus 32:1

In Exodus chapter 32 we read about the loss of the birthright blessing by a whole nation. It was given to the tribe of Levi instead. Things were just not happening fast enough for Israel. They were in a dry, boring wilderness. Moses had been gone for weeks and God was silent. They missed the “good times” back in worldly Egypt. The *delay* was engineered by God to test the people. The Lord wanted to see what their motive was for

serving Him. Were they serving God for the excitement, the miracles and provision? Or were they serving God simply because He is worthy, and because they loved Him? The Israelites gave God His answer when they made a new god after only forty days!

Some lose their birthrights because of hastiness. *The test of time* is one of the greatest evidences of our commitment to God. Many grow impatient and compromise the truth, such as in choosing a wrong marriage partner, or in rejecting their life-long vow and commitment to their mate. How important it is to be obedient on the question of marriage in order to preserve for ourselves the right of the firstborn.

Remember, it was essentially the Levites (those with the birthright and double portion) who ascended Mount Zion in David's time. Those who met the qualifications for being on Zion's hill were mainly Levites, Psa.15:1-5, 24:3-5, 1 Chron.16:1-6. The summit of Mount Zion is for the "Church of the firstborn ones," Heb.12:22-23.

There are still certain ones among God's people whom God selects to be *firstborn ones* among their brethren. These shall have a double inheritance, a double anointing, and also a double responsibility to look after their younger brothers and sisters in Christ. Will you or I be a firstborn? Will we qualify to become leaders with these blessings and responsibilities? By God's grace, let us each press on towards the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ!

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