



FROM SLAVES TO SINAI STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS LESSON 9

THE DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT (Exodus 12:40-14:31)

INTRODUCTION

After exactly four-hundred and thirty years of captivity and the Lord's night vigil the Israelites were rushed out of Egypt and the Lord gave to them regulations requiring that they continually celebrate this event among their covenant community on the first month of the year (Abib) through a feast of unleavened bread, and that they consecrate their first born explaining to the next generation the gracious work that the Lord did for them.

Numbering six hundred thousand men plus their dependents Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth with unleavened bread because they had been rushed out of Egypt without time to prepare food for the journey.

I. THE LAST OF THE EGYPTIAN SOJOURN (Exodus 12:40 – 51)

Six hundred thousand men plus women and children plus a “mixed multitude” of others moved southeastward away from Rameses in the land of Goshen where they had lived for four hundred and thirty years.

A. The 430 Years (Exodus 12:40-42)

If the exodus took place in 1446 then Jacob's arrival in Egypt must have been in 1876 B.C.

In two successive verses here we discover the precise length of the Israeli sojourn in Egypt. The clear statement here (recorded twice) is that Israel was in Egypt for 430 years. Jewish genealogies (in and out of the Bible) are often compressed, so there may have been more than four generations from Levi to Moses.

Some feel that the dates are not possible to synchronize perfectly. Stevens wrote:

“It is the conclusion of this writer that the prediction of Genesis 15:13 uses a round number and that, with the Egyptian captivity at an end, the precise length of stay is noted as 430 years. Furthermore, the genealogy of Exodus 6:16-20 (from Levi to Moses) omits one or more names. The Hebrew text, it is believed, is the accurate one. The plain sense of God's prophetic word to Abram and the account here in Exodus 12 appear clearly to refer only to Israel in Egypt and does not include Israel in Canaan. In closing this matter it must be noted again that the precise timing of such ancient events is not the main point in our studying the Bible nor can precise conclusions be reached. Man's need and God's faithfulness must not be missed while struggling for chronological accuracy.” Exodus Lesson 8

However, many Bible scholars see no real contradiction. Constable writes:

The text is very clear that Israel was in Egypt 430 years "to the very day" (v. 41). This probably refers to the time between when Jacob entered Egypt with his family (1876 B.C.) to the day of the Exodus (1446 B.C.). Galatians 3:17 also refers to 430 years. This figure probably represents the time from God's last reconfirmation of the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob at Beer-sheba (1875 B.C.; Gen. 46:2-4) to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Sinai (1446 B.C.; Exod. 19). Genesis 15:13, 16 and Acts 7:6 give the time of the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt as 400 years (1846-1446 B.C.). The "about 450 years" spoken of in Acts 13:19 includes the 400 year sojourn in Egypt, the 40 years of wilderness wanderings, and the seven year conquest of the land (1875-1395 B.C.).²²³....

Scholars have debated hotly and still argue about the date of the Exodus. Many conservatives hold a date very close to 1446 B.C. Their preference for this date rests first on 1 Kings 6:1 that states that the Exodus took place 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign. That year was quite certainly 967 B.C. Second, this view harmonizes with Judges 11:26 that says 300 years elapsed between Israel's entrance into Canaan and the commencement of Jephthah's rule as a judge.²²⁴ Most liberals and many evangelicals hold to a date for the Exodus about 1280 B.C.²²⁵ This opinion rests on the belief that the existence of the city of Raamses (1:11; et al.) presupposes the existence of Pharaoh Ramses II (ca. 1300-1234 B.C.).²²⁶ Also followers of this view point to supposed similarities between the times of Pharaoh Ramses II and the Exodus period. A mediating view has also been popularized that places the Exodus about 1470 B.C.²²⁷ Dr. Constable's Bible Study Notes, <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>

B. The Passover Instructions (Exodus 12:43-51)

One might expect that this section would logically belong earlier, following verse 20 of this chapter. It is possible, however, that (1) this portion was revealed to Moses by the Lord after leaving Rameses or that (2) the reference to “observed by all the Sons of Israel throughout their generations” in the preceding verse dictates its position here as a kind of postscript.

The Passover was a corporate celebration in that all Israel observed the meal, just as Moses had instructed them (12:28, 50). On the other hand, the meal was a family matter. Each family was responsible for its own sacrificial animal, its own act of placing the blood on the door frame, and its own celebration of the meal. There is no specific mention of any Egyptians celebrating the first Passover, although this is possible, even likely. This possibility is enhanced by the report that some Egyptians had taken heed of previous warnings (9:18-21). Also, in the instructions God gave concerning the future observance of Passover, foreigners who placed themselves under the Abrahamic Covenant (as signified by circumcision) were allowed to participate, with no distinctions made between them and (other) Israelites (12:43-49). Those who did not refrain from eating leavened bread were to be banned from the congregation of Israel, whether or not he was a native Israelite (cf. 12:19).

1. Its cause (12:40-42)
2. Its limitations (12:43-49)
3. Their compliance (12:50-51)

II. THE GIVING TO THE LORD OF THE FIRSTBORN (Exodus 13:1-16)

A. The Lord's Command (Exodus 13:1-2)

It was probably evening of that first day out of Goshen, with Moses and at least a large number of the Israelis now at Succoth, that God revealed His will regarding the firstborn of every man and beast. The feast of unleavened bread, lasting for seven days, was just beginning (at 6 PM as 14th Abib or Nisan ended and the 15th began). “The Lord instructed Moses, ‘Dedicate to me all of the firstborn sons of Israel, and every firstborn male animal; they are mine!’” (The Living Bible correctly reads “Sons” and “male,” since the Hebrew word for firstbornTj masculine in gender.)

The firstborn of all the Egyptians were smitten, while those of the Israelites were spared. We must acknowledge that God had the right (as He still does) to smite the firstborn of Egypt. Indeed, He had the right to smite the firstborn of Israel as well, and this would have happened apart from the provision of the Passover lamb and the shedding of its blood. God therefore struck down the Egyptian firstborn while He spared the Israelite firstborn. Because the sparing of the Israelite firstborn was not a matter of merit, but of grace, God owned them. Since He had spared their lives, He possessed them. The rite of redeeming the firstborn was a constant reminder to the Israelites of all subsequent generations that the firstborn belonged to God, and that this was due to the sparing of the

firstborn at the Exodus. Thus, every time the first boy was born to an Israelite family, the parents were reminded of their “roots” and the reason for their blessing, and every child was retold the story of the exodus.

B. Relay to the People (Exodus 13:3-16)

No doubt the Israeli leader used the tribal heads or other representatives to deliver the actual message to the multitude of people at and near Succoth. There was to be a “remembrance” and then a series of “doings,” the latter being the result of remembering God’s goodness. Specific actions include “you shall observe this rite” (verse 5), “you shall eat unleavened bread” (verse 6), “you shall tell your son” (verse 8), “you shall keep this ordinance” (verse 10), “you shall devote to the Lord the first off-spring of every womb” (verse 12), and “you shall redeem with a lamb” (verse 13).

This last verse includes a reference to the donkey as apparently the only beast of burden used by Israel in its travels. Since this animal was unclean (ceremonially, see Leviticus 11:1-8), it could not itself be offered as a sacrifice. It, too, required a substitute lamb. If the owner chose not to redeem it, it was to be destroyed. The donkey must be dedicated either to God or to destruction. And here again we see the same vital principle illustrated.

One phrase in verse 8 certainly catches the eye. “*“And you shall tell your son on that day, saying ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’”*” (italics added). Here is the personal claim to God’s provision in one’s life (see Exodus 12:26-27).

III. JOURNEY TO THE RED SEA (Exodus 13:17-14:9)

The seven-day feast of unleavened bread began as the Israelites reached Succoth. In a sense they were already out of Egypt (see Exodus 13:3,9). And yet, until they had actually crossed the Red Sea into the Arabian wilderness, they were still within the reach of Pharaoh. When their journey was resumed, the path continued to lay to the southeast, as we will now see.

A. From Succoth to Etham (Exodus 13:17-20)

1. The route followed (verses 17-18)

If Israel’s objective was to reach Canaan by the most direct route, the road to follow was one that lay along the Mediterranean coast eastward and then northeastward from Goshen. This path, however, was fraught with perils because it passed near several Egyptian strongholds in extreme northeastern Goshen, and then wound its way through the land of the Philistines.

Although Moses and his people were very numerous, certainly many times more so than the Egyptians in that area and also more than the Philistines, the latter were especially warlike and apparently well-fortified in their cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, which lay along that road (see Joshua 13:3). Moreover, having been a subject people in Egypt, the Israelie were not equipped or trained for battle and might have panicked had they been attacked. Verse 17 tells us that God was the divine Navigator for the exodus, choosing a route other than the most direct. He knew His people well. Indeed, in the years ahead, a looking back toward Egypt and longing for the life there (a life of slavery!) would characterize the Israelis many, many times.

2. The bones of Joseph (verse 19)

Hundreds of years earlier, when Joseph had died, his embalmed remains had been put in a coffin and kept against the day of the exodus. Joseph was a man of great faith, believing that the Lord would one day lead Israel back to Canaan where he wanted to be finally buried. (Genesis 50:24-26) The coffin was carried out of Egypt and for 40 years in the wilderness. After crossing the Jordan and fighting their way into possession of the promised land, the Israelites interred the bones of Joseph in the place of his desire (Joshua 24:32). What a remarkable instance of faith in the promises of God!

3. To the edge of the wilderness (verse 20)

Again, it is not possible to identify the location of Etham, except that it was “on the edge of the wilderness.” No doubt it was southeast of Succoth.

B. The Cloud and the Fire (Exodus 13:21-22)

The means that the Lord used to guide His people (verse 17) is next described.

1. The pillar of cloud (verse 21a)

At what point this pillar (and also that of fire) first appeared is not stated, but it is assumed that the Israelis did not even leave Rameses before God's guidance was evident to them. The shape of these pillars is not known. Perhaps each was more of a wall than a narrow pillar inasmuch as the people moved along on a broad front.

2. A pillar of fire (verse 21b)

For direction at night (and Israel obviously did some of their marching at night) this other miraculous means was used.

God's guidance was clear to His people. Sometimes He combined verbal directions to Moses with the pillars (see Exodus 14:2); sometimes the cloud and fire alone were used. These two heavenly signs were always there, reassuring Israel of God's Presence to guide (see Numbers 9:21-23 and Nehemiah 9:19). It was, in any case, a miraculous and wholly inexplicable two-fold phenomenon.

C. From Etham to Pi-hahiroth (Exodus 14:1-9)

1. The route to Pi-hahiroth (verses 1-2)

The journey thus far had apparently not deviated from a steady push toward the southeast. At Etham, however, "on the edge of the wilderness," there came a change in direction. We can assume that, not only did God verbalize the change to Moses (verse 1-2), but also the cloud and/or fire moved in the new direction as well. What we cannot know for sure is whether they turned northward or southward from Etham. Bible commentators favor one direction or the other. The Hebrew term "turn back" or "turn aside" does not presume either to the left or to the right. All that is certain is that new path took them to a spot "by the sea."

The term, "Red Sea," which occurs many times in the Bible, is a translation of the Hebrew words, *yam suph*, which has often been translated "the sea of weeds" or of "reeds." But it seems to have originated

"...not in the Egyptian language but in Hebrew. Many scholars have claimed it came from an Egyptian root word meaning "reed." It may be that it came from a Hebrew root word meaning "end." Yam is also a Hebrew word that means "sea." The yam sup is then the sea at the end. The ancients used the name yam sup to describe the body of water that lay beyond the farthest lands known to them. It meant the sea at the end of the world. It clearly refers to the Red Sea often in the Old Testament (Exod. 15:4; Num. 21:4; 33:8; Josh. 2:10; 4:23; 1 Kings 9:26; Jer. 47:21; et al.). The Greeks later used the same term, translated into Greek, to refer to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. The translation of yam sup as "Red Sea" is evidently both inaccurate and misleading. It implies that the Israelites simply crossed some shallow marsh when they left Egypt. Such an interpretation lacks support in the inspired record of Israel's Exodus. – Constable, op. cit.

2. The Egyptian chase (verses 3-9)

When Israel left Goshen traveling southeastward, rather than due east toward the wilderness, Pharaoh may have been perplexed. When they got far enough south so that they were boxed in by the sea on the east and the Egyptian "wilderness" (verse 3) or desert on the west and south, he perhaps concluded that they had made a mistake. Then, when they turned back toward the north, thereby "wandering aimlessly in the land" (or at least appearing to), it seemed time to him to act. His heart was now so hard against the Person and purpose of God that he quickly forgot the death of his own firstborn son and ordered out the charioteers. His servants also "had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done. that we have let Israel go from serving us?'" (verse 5).

With six hundred chariots behind him, Pharaoh raced toward Pi-hahiroth. Jewish tradition places the crossing of the sea on 21 Abib (Nisan), the seventh day after the Passover and the conclusion of the feast of the unleavened bread. If the people took one day to go from Rameses to Succoth, one day to get to Etham, one more to reach Pi-hahiroth, and then rested there for four more days (the cloud and fire remaining stationary while Pharaoh approached), then this theory is correct.

IV. THE MIRACULOUS PASSAGE (Exodus 14:10-31)

A. The Terror of Israel (Exodus 14:10-12)

The Israelites no doubt reckoned that, upon departure from Goshen several days earlier, they had seen the last of the Egyptians. But now, across the sands to the west or northwest from their camp at Pi-hahiroth, there was at first a growing cloud of dust and then the unmistakable evidence of the onrushing army of Pharaoh. His intent was only too obvious, and the Israelis “became very frightened.” Despite their greater numbers, they were untrained and unequipped for battle. In their terror they “cried out to the Lord” and, at the same time, complained to Moses, accusing him of not having acted in their best interests. It is important to remember that God’s people were in precisely the place where He wanted them to be (compare verse 2 with verse 9).

This is the first of Israel’s many complaints against Moses and Yahweh that Moses recorded in Scripture. It is the first of ten that culminated in God’s judgment of them at Kadesh Barnea (v. 11; Num. 14:22-23).

B. The Courage of Moses (Exodus 14:13-14)

Caught between the army of the Egyptian s and the sea, Moses showed himself the man that God wants to use. He urged the people to stand still and watch how God would deliver them.

C. The Power of God (Exodus 14:15-31)

1. In Moses (verse 15)

Moses himself apparently was slow in obeying God, because he was told to stop praying and begin to move. For surely there is a time for communion with the Lord and, just as surely, there is a time to get up from our knees and put feet to prayer!

2. In the staff (verses 16-18)

Once again the staff or rod, which the Lord had endued with power at Horeb and which had been used to trigger five of the plagues, was to be God’s instrument in the hand of Moses. When lifted up over the sea the water would be divided and the people would pass through. And, God added, the Egyptians will pursue after you, ““and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army.”” If there was yet any lingering doubt about God, it would then disappear; ““the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.””

3. In the pillar of cloud (verses 19-20)

During the previous week’s march the angel of God and the cloud had gone ahead of Israel to indicate the direction to go. Now, at Pi-hahiroth both moved behind them. In this way the Egyptian army was forced to halt and not attack.

4. In the east wind (verses 21-22)

With the hunter and the hunted temporarily at rest, Moses then raised the rod and a strong east wind began to blow. It lasted all night, dividing the waters of the Red Sea in such a way that a dry path was formed through which the hosts of Israel passed safely through to the other side! The two million Israelites could have passed through the sea in the time the text says if they crossed in a wide column, perhaps a half-mile wide (v.22).

5. In the Egyptian army (verses 23-25)

When the pursuing enemy took up the chase along the same path, first, there was a confusion among the troops. The chariots could not be moved successfully. Apparently the exposed bottom of the sea was so dry that the wheels sank in and could not turn (see verse 29). The Egyptians concluded that God was at work against them, and they apparently turned to flee back to the west bank.

6. In Moses’ hand (verse 26-31)

With Israel safely on the east shore and the Egyptians now struggling to retreat safely, God instructed Moses to raise his hand over the sea. The waters then returned to their normal level and every Egyptian was drowned. The bodies of some of them were washed up on the wilderness side. “And when Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses” (verse 31).

Many critics who have sought to explain away God’s supernatural deliverance of Israel

have attacked this story. They have tried by various explanations to account for what happened in natural terms exclusively. It is obvious from this chapter, however, that regardless of where the crossing took place enough water was present to drown the army of Egyptians that pursued Israel (v. 28). Immediately after this deliverance, the Israelites regarded their salvation as supernatural (15:1-21), and they continued to do so for generations (e.g., Ps. 106:7-8). The people of Canaan heard about and believed in this miraculous deliverance, and it terrified them (Josh. 2:9-10; 9:9). The critic's problem may be moral rather than intellectual. Some of the critics do not want to deal with the implications of there being supernatural phenomena so they try to explain them away. The text clearly presents a supernatural deliverance and even states that God acted as He did to prove His supernatural power (vv. 4, 18). - ibid

CONCLUSION

The Lord finished the Israelites' liberation when He destroyed the Egyptian army. The Israelites' slavery ended when they left Egypt, but they began to experience true freedom after they crossed the Red Sea. The ten plagues had broken Pharaoh's hold on the Israelites, but the Red Sea deliverance removed them from his reach forever. God redeemed Israel on the Passover night, but He liberated Israel from slavery finally at the Red Sea. Today these two works of God, redemption and liberation, occur at the same time; they are two aspects of our salvation.