

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 7

Chapters 12:37 – 13:22

Rameses to Succoth – First Day’s Journey

Exodus 12:37 Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. ³⁸ And a mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. ³⁹ And they baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. ⁴⁰ Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹ And it came about at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

The statement, “**Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth**” causes some problems with some older commentaries. We know that Rameses was a city in the land of Goshen. It was one of the cities built by the Israelites with mud bricks. It was probably one of the last cities built there and therefore the greatest community of Israelites was living in the area although that is just speculation.

Where was Succoth? Locating this site causes a problem. If the location is according to Map 11, Succoth was about one day’s journey out of Egypt. This location seems most reasonable. However, many Bible maps have Succoth located much farther south as in Map 12. The location in Map 11 cannot be correct. Why? The bread was still dough and it needed to be baked in order to provide food for the Israelites. The night of the Passover had been long and disturbing. After being up all day on the 14th and up all night of the 15th and then traveling by foot all day on the 15th, surely the multitude stopped for rest. It seems



Map 10: Rameses to Succoth - about one day’s journey out of Egypt



Map 12: Alternate Location for Succoth, several day's journey from Rameses

almost impossible for a multitude of that size to have continued without rest for several days to reach a location as far as that in Map 12.

The phrase, **“Four hundred and thirty years, to the very day”** gives a definite time marker to the story in the Bible. If the Israelites left Egypt on the sixth month and the 15th day, 430 years from the exact day of their entry into Egypt, it means that Jacob and his family moved into Egypt in the sixth month and the 15th day, 2281 years after the creation of Adam or our year 1880 BC. In the story, the exodus occurred 2711 years after the creation of Adam or 1464 BC.

First Night Out of Egypt

Exodus 12:42 It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations.

The sentence, **“It is a night to be observed,”** means that the night of Abib 15th, 2711 will be remembered as a permanent memorial feast because it was the night of the Passover.

Reminder of Covenant and Passover

Exodus 12:43 And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it; ⁴⁴ but every man's slave purchased with money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it. ⁴⁵ " A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it. ⁴⁶ "It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. ⁴⁷ " All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this. ⁴⁸ "But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. ⁴⁹ " The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you." ⁵⁰ Then all the sons of Israel did so; they did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ And it came about on that same day that the LORD brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

In this reminder, the LORD has Moses and Aaron specify the instruction of the covenant. It is interesting because this is the same instruction given to Abraham when the circumcision covenant was made. This reminder ties the covenant of circumcision to the Passover.

Sanctification of First Born

Exodus 13:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² " Sanctify to Me every first-born, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me."

In Succoth, the LORD instructed Moses to sanctify the firstborn of all humans and animals to Him. The word “sanctify” is the Hebrew word *Kadesh* and it means to *set apart from all the rest*. Sometimes we use the word *consecrate* to mean *sanctify*. When something is sanctified, such as an animal, it is set apart or separated from its earthly use. Humans are to live holy lives totally dedicated to the service of God. As such, the firstborn of the humans and animals were

dedicated to the service in the work of the tabernacle that will be constructed soon while they are in the wilderness. In the sanctification process, some of the animals would be sacrificed in worship of the LORD.

“Firstborn” is an extremely important term in the whole Scripture. It is used literally and figuratively in the Bible and the context of each passage determines the meaning. In the literal sense, Abraham’s firstborn was Ishmael; Moses’ firstborn was Gershom. We can name many others as listed in the Scripture, each being the first male child of a man’s family. In a figurative sense, Jesus is the first born of the Church,²⁴ there is the firstborn of the poor meaning the poorest of the poor,²⁵ and there is the firstborn of death meaning a disease that causes death.²⁶ In all cases, whether literal or figurative, the word firstborn means *preeminent* or having a special place that no one else can ever have. Care must be taken when reading the Scripture to interpret the word firstborn correctly. For example, Ishmael may have been the firstborn of Abraham and no other son could assume that place; however, Isaac, the second son of Abraham held the right of being the heir of everything and the preeminent son of his father. Nevertheless, in the wilderness, on the first day out of Egypt, every firstborn male was set aside for the LORD.

Remembrance of First Day

Exodus 13:3 **And Moses said to the people, " Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten.**

For a second time we see the use of the word **“leaven.”** Thirteen times it will be used in the entire Bible and each time it is in reference to sin. Leaven does to bread dough what sin does in the life of a human, it puffs up. It penetrates secretly and it defuses power, corrupting the heart with perversion. The leaven was a symbol of evil in the camp of Israel.

Remembrance in Canaan

Exodus 13:4 **"On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth. ⁵ "And it shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month.**

We have seen this reference twice before. The land encompassed by **“the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite”** was on the west side of the Jordan River. When the Israelites take the Promised Land forty years after the occurrence in this passage, they will also acquire land on the east side of the Jordan River which has not been mentioned to this point in the Scripture.

²⁴ Hebrews 12:23

²⁵ Isaiah 14:30

²⁶ Job 18:13

Feast of Unleavened Bread and Reason

Exodus 13:6 "For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. ⁷ "Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. ⁸ " 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.'

The Israelites will eventually be allowed to use leaven in their meal preparation again, but not for the first seven days out of Egypt. On the seventh day, a feast will be observed as they were instructed by the LORD before leaving Egypt. In the future, every year, the feast of unleavened bread will be a perpetual seven day reminder of the exodus.

Sign as Reminder

Exodus 13:9 "And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰ "Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.

This passage is interesting. Here are the words of a great Methodist commentator about this passage. ²⁷

This direction, repeated and enlarged Exodus 13:16, gave rise to phylacteries or tephillin, and this is one of the passages which the Jews write upon them to the present day. The manner in which the Jews understood and kept these commands may appear in their practice. They wrote the following four portions of the law upon slips of parchment or vellum: Sanctify unto me the first-born, Exodus 13, from verses 2-10 inclusive. And it shall be, when the Lord shall bring thee into the land, Exodus 13, from verses 11-16 inclusive. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, Deuteronomy 6, from verses 4-9 inclusive. And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently, Deuteronomy 11, from verses 13-21 inclusive. These four portions, making in all 30 verses, written as mentioned above, and covered with leather, they tied to the forehead and to the hand or arm.

Those which were for the HEAD (the frontlets) they wrote on four slips of parchment, and rolled up each by itself, and placed them in four compartments, joined together in one piece of skin or leather. Those which were designed for the hand were formed of one piece of parchment, the four portions being written upon it in four columns, and rolled up from one end to the other. These were all correct transcripts from the Mosaic text, without one redundant or deficient letter, otherwise they were not lawful to be worn. Those for the head were tied on so as to rest on the forehead. Those for the hand or arm were usually tied on the left arm, a little above the elbow, on the inside, that they might be near the heart, according to the command, Deuteronomy 6:6: And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart. These phylacteries formed no inconsiderable part of a Jew's religion; they wore them as a sign of their obligation to God, and as representing some future blessedness. Hence they did not wear them on feast days nor on the Sabbath, because these things were in themselves signs; but they wore them always when they read the law, or when they prayed, and hence they called them תפלין *tephillin*, prayer, ornaments, oratories, or incitements to prayer. In process of time the spirit of this law was lost in the letter, and when the word was not in their mouth, nor the law in their heart, they had their phylacteries on their heads and on their hands. And the Pharisees, who in our Lord's time affected

²⁷ Adam Clarke

extraordinary piety, made their phylacteries very broad, that they might have many sentences written upon them, or the ordinary portions in very large and observable letters.

Adam Clarke explained the interpretation of verses 9 and 10 as lived out in the lives of the Israelites even today. However, we must wonder when the physical display of hanging Scripture from the head and hands began. No one knows that answer. In context, we might think that the LORD was actually speaking figuratively to Moses and the people. Some time after the 40 year journey in the wilderness, the leaders of the Israelites pressed a literal meaning on the passage which has remained its primary interpretation to this day.



Picture 5: Scripture tied to head and hands

Devote First Offspring to LORD

Exodus 13:11 **"Now it shall come about when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, ¹² that you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. ¹³ "But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck; and every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem.**

In this passage, the LORD is preparing for the dedication of the firstborn of every womb to Him when the Israelites take the Promised Land. Here the LORD requires the **"first offspring"** to be dedicated to Him. Previously, the **"firstborn"** was to be dedicated and that was a reference to the first male born in the family. Here, the word **"first offspring"** is correctly used. It means the first to open the womb whether male or female but in this context it is speaking of only males.

Notice that the first "offspring" of the animals was to be **"devoted"** to the LORD. "Devoted" in the original Hebrew means *to pass over*. In other words, the first offspring of every animal was to be passed over to the priesthood who would represent the LORD. The priesthood had not been established by the LORD at this time, but it will be before the end of the first two years in the wilderness.

The first offspring children were to be redeemed which meant a price was to be paid for them as an offering to the LORD and that, too, would go to the priests. The price for the redemption will be given later in the book of Exodus in another announcement from the LORD.

The donkey is mentioned in this passage. The donkey was considered an unclean animal and could not be offered to the LORD as a sacrifice. Therefore, the first offspring of a donkey was to be redeemed also for a price – a lamb was to be offered in its place. If the price was not paid to the LORD, the neck of the donkey was to be broken. Other unclean beasts and livestock will have a similar redemption when the full law is given. To this point in the Scripture, the difference between clean and unclean animals for eating and sacrificing has not been clearly laid

out. The law will speak to this issue soon in this book. At this time in the story, none of it will be required until the Israelites enter the Promised Land.

Answer to Sons

Exodus 13:14 " And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, ' With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ 'And it came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every first-born of my sons I redeem.' ¹⁶ "So it shall serve as a sign on your hand, and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

The offering will be required every year once the Israelites enter the Promised Land. The LORD knew that the children would question the reasoning behind the offering of the first offspring and He provided the people with their answer – it would be a sign of what happened to bring their people out of Egypt.

God's Way Out of Egypt for Israel

Exodus 13:17 Now it came about when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, " Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt."

The people must have wondered why Moses led them south to Succoth. They all knew that the better way out of Rameses was to go directly west to Baal-Zephon parallel to the Great Sea which we call the Mediterranean Sea. It was much closer and safer that way than to head south to the wilderness areas by the Red Sea. Had they followed the Mediterranean Sea they would have run into the mighty Philistines within four days. The Israelites were not ready for war. Neither was the LORD ready to let them have the Promised Land.

Wilderness of the Red Sea

Exodus 13:18 Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt.

In order to get the Israelites ready for war, they would have to be trained. The first thing the LORD had the people do was to journey each day in what is called here **“martial array.”** We would say *battle array*. They were taught by the LORD through Moses to march on their journey in such a way that the elders, women, children and all their precious cargo were protected by the men who were armed for battle by surrounding them on all sides.

Bones of Joseph

Exodus 13:19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God shall surely take care of you; and you shall carry my bones from here with you."

With the initial instructions given to all the people, one more detail weighed heavily on Moses and it concerned the bones of Joseph. It was Joseph who brought the Israelites to safety in Egypt and his bones will be safely carried to the Promised Land. He had made his relatives promise to take him out of Egypt when they left and that promise was being fulfilled.

Succoth to Etham – Second Day's Journey

Exodus 13:20 Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness.

On day two, Abib 16th, which was the Sabbath, the Israelites set out from Succoth to Etham, a day's journey.



Map 13: Succoth to Etham

Led by the LORD

Exodus 13:21 And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²² He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Was Moses leading the Israelites or was the LORD? We do not know for sure about the first day's journey to Succoth, but we know for sure about the second day. Because of this passage, it is likely that the LORD was leading them with the cloud by day and the fire by night from day one. If not, He was definitely leading them this way on day two and for the next 40 years as we will see in the story.



Why were the Israelites traveling at night? By the time they had all gathered in Rameses from all over the land of Goshen they would have arrived at the campsite in Succoth after dark. In fact, it might be reasonable to imagine that the Israelites did not arrive at Succoth until late in the darkness of the night. With the LORD in control, they followed the pillar of fire until it stood still, then they set camp for the night. He was in control.