

Exodus 13

Chapter 13 returns to the concept of “firstborn” by saying that Israel’s firstborn - since they were redeemed by God through the offering of blood - must be given back to Him. In this discussion, the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread are discussed again. The chapter concludes with Israel leaving Egypt, guided by a pillar of fire (at night) and a pillar of cloud (by day).

TRANSLATION - 13:1-16:

1 And Jehovah said to Moses, saying, **2** “Sanctify to Me every firstborn offspring of every womb of the sons of Israel, of man and of beast, to Me it [is].”

3 And Moses said to the people, “Remember this day when He brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery because by a strong hand Jehovah brought you out from there and leaven will not be eaten. **4** Today you are going out in the month of Abib. **5** And it will be that Jehovah will bring you to the land of the Canaanites and Hittites and Amorites and Hivites and Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give to you, a land flowing with milk and honey and you will serve this service in this month. **6** Seven days you will eat unleavened bread and the seventh day [will be] a festival to Jehovah. **7** Unleavened bread will be eaten seven days and there will not be seen to you leaven and there will not be seen to you leaven in all your borders. **8** And you will announce to your son in that day saying, ‘For the sake of this, Jehovah did for us to bring us from the land of Egypt.’ **9** And it will be for you for a sign on your hand and a memorial between your eyes for the sake that it will be a law of Jehovah in your mouth because by a strong hand Jehovah brought you up from Egypt. **10** And you will keep this ordinance at the appointed time, from days to days. **11** And it will be that Jehovah will bring you to the land of the Canaanites just as He swore to you and to your fathers and He will give it to you. **12** And you will set apart all the offspring of the womb to Jehovah and all the offspring of the litter of animals which will be to you the males to Jehovah. **13** And every offspring of the donkey you will redeem by the kid and if you will not redeem, then you will break its neck and all the firstborn of man and your sons, you will redeem. **14** And it will be that your son will ask you tomorrow saying, “What [is] this?” And you will say to him, ‘By a strong hand Jehovah brought us up from Egypt, from the house of slavery. **15** And it was that Pharaoh made difficult to send us away so Jehovah killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt from the firstborn of man and until the firstborn of the animal; thus I am sacrificing to Jehovah every offspring of the womb, the males, and all the firstborn I, myself, am redeeming. **16** And it will be for a sign on the hand and for symbols between your eyes because by a strong hand Jehovah brought us out from Egypt.’”

HEBREW WORDS:

“To sanctify” (ver. 2) is used 171 times; the related noun “holiness” is used 470 times. It was used in Genesis only at 2:3. It will be used in Exodus 28 times and Leviticus 30 times.

“Firstborn” was used earlier at 4:22-23; 6:14; 11:5; 12:12, 29. “Offspring” is used 11 times; it is a synonym for “firstborn.” The word is used mostly in Exodus: 13:2, 12-13, 15; 34:19-20.

“Womb” is used 26 times; in Exodus, at 13:2, 12, 15; 34:19. The verb “to remember” (ver. 3) was used at 2:24; 6:5. “Slavery” is also the word for “slaves;” see at 4:10. “Strong” is related to the verb “to harden.” This adjective is only used here in Exodus: 13:3, 14, 16. It is used 57 times in the OT. “Leaven” was seen earlier at 12:15.

“Abib” (ver. 4) is used in Exodus (13:4; 23:15; 34:18) and Deuteronomy (16:1). It is related to the word “ear” from Exodus 9:31 or “heads” in Leviticus 2:14. “To swear” is used 186 times; the verb is used in Exodus, only at: 13:5, 11, 19; 32:13; 33:1. The “land flowing with milk and honey” was earlier used at 3:8, 17. For “unleavened bread” (ver. 6), see 12:8, 15, 17-18, 20, 39. For “festival,” see 10:9; 12:14. The first word “leaven” (ver. 7) was seen at verse 3. The

second word “leaven” was seen at 12:15, 19. These are synonyms. “To announce” (ver. 8) was used earlier at 4:28.

For “sign” (ver. 9), see 4:8-9, 17. “Memorial,” related to the verb “to remember,” was used earlier at 12:14. The word “law” was used earlier at 12:49. “You will keep” (ver. 10) was used earlier at 10:28; 12:17, 24-25. “Appointed time” was used earlier at 9:5. “Ordinance” was used earlier at 12:14, 17, 43. “To set apart” (ver. 12) also means “to cross through;” it was used earlier at 12:12, 23. “Litter” is used 5 times: Exo. 13:12; Deut. 7:13; 28:4, 18, 51. “To redeem” (ver. 13) is used 60 times in the OT; the verb is used in Exodus at 13:13, 15; 21:8; 34:20. “To break the neck” is used only 5 times: Exo. 13:13; 34:20; Deut. 21:4, 6; Isa. 66:3. The verb “to ask” was used earlier at 3:22; 11:2.

“To make difficult” (ver. 15) was used earlier at 7:3. “To kill” was used earlier at 2:14-15; 4:23; 5:21. “To sacrifice” was used earlier at 3:18; 5:3, 8, 17. For “signs” (ver. 16), see 3:12; 4:8-9. “Symbols” is the word often translated “phylacteries;” it is used only three times: Exo. 13:16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“From days to days” (ver. 10) is the literal translation; it means “from year to year.”

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

See comments at 2:24 for comments about the covenant God swore with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

For these nationalities mentioned in verse 5, see comments at 3:8, 17.

After the exile, the Jews began taking verse 9 literally, although there is no reason to believe God intended this to be understood literally. The Jews wrote verses 1-10 and verses 11-16, as well as Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21, on parchment and placed them in boxes and then strapped them to their foreheads and left arms before their prayers in the morning. These came to be called “phylacteries” by the time of Jesus (see Matthew 23:5).

COMMENTARY:

God has said that Israel was His “firstborn” (Exo. 4:22). He saved Israel’s firstborn from the destroyer, through the blood on their door frame (Exo. 12:12-13). Now God commands Israel to sanctify to Him “every firstborn,” whether man or beast. He will give further details about that procedure here and in later legislation (see “Moses’ contemporaries” below).

In verse 3, Moses calls on Israel, again, to remember that God has brought them out of Egypt (this verb is used five times between verses 3-10), from the “house of slavery, by His strong hand” (see comments on 3:19). Because God did redeem Israel from Egypt, He has both: the right to require from them their firstborn, and the right to forbid them to eat leaven during the respective celebrations. Verse 4 notes that this “first month” in their religious calendar will be known as “Abib,” the word for “ear of grain.” In verse 5, Moses reminds Israel that God had promised to bring them to the land of Canaan, the land inhabited by these five nations, which He had sworn to the patriarchs, the land flowing with material blessings: milk and honey (see comments at 3:7-9). For this reason, Israel will serve “this service” (the two words are related) to God at that point.

Verses 6 and following repeat the details of the celebration of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. For the whole seven days, they will eat unleavened bread and the final day will be a celebration to Jehovah God. No leaven should be found in their homes during this celebration (ver. 7). The process of removing the leaven, and involving the family (ver. 8) in such removal, will impress on the minds and hearts of Israel what God did for them in the exodus. Parents need to take the initiative in instructing their children (ver. 8). God had already mentioned in the plague of locusts (10:1-2) that Israel would inform the next generation what God had done for Israel in Egypt. It is important not to forget God’s blessings.

The pagans would wear amulets which were believed to bless them and keep them safe. God does not approve of such physical manifestations of trust. He does, however, use that concept as a metaphor for keeping His words and commandments close to one's mind and heart - thus the idea of "phylacteries." Again, this passage (ver. 9) was not meant to be done physically, only metaphorically. Since the text says this law was to be "in your mouth," Moses shows that he is speaking metaphorically. God's laws were to be in their hands and in the minds, or hearts, continually. This celebration is to be kept indefinitely, literally "from days to days" (ver. 10).

Verse 11 repeats what Moses had said at verse 5, using "Canaanite" as a figure of speech for all the nations living in Canaan. See comments at 2:24 for the covenant and oath which God swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Because of these blessings God is giving Israel, they are obligated to "set apart" all the offspring of the womb, the firstborn, to Jehovah God, both man and animal, specifically the males (ver. 12).

The donkey was a work animal and was used for many things for the Israelites. The donkey would be redeemed by offering a kid of a lamb or goat; otherwise, it would have its neck broken (ver. 13). Breaking the neck of the animal makes the animal useless to the owner, which is done in place of sacrificing the animal. Again in verse 14, Moses anticipates that children will ask their parents the reason for the annual behavior and Israel is supposed to share with them what God had done in Egypt for His firstborn son, Israel. Jehovah God killed the firstborn of the land of Egypt, man and animal (ver. 15); therefore, Israel would sacrifice their firstborn to Jehovah God and redeem the lives of their firstborn children. To repeat the necessity of keeping these laws central to their lives, verse 16 says the law would be "for a sign" on their hand and a "symbol" between their eyes, reminding them that Jehovah God brought them out of Egypt "by a strong hand."

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - The Law will also prescribe the writing of God's word on the doorframes of their houses: Deut. 6:9; 11:20. This, also, was likely intended to be a metaphor. The Law will later prescribe the Levites will take the place of the firstborn: Num. 3:11-13, 40-51; 8:14-18. Also, five shekels were given to the temple when the firstborn was one month old: Num. 18:15-16. This will apply as well to their cattle (Num. 3:45). God forbid the sacrifice of children (or other humans): Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31; 18:10. Israel will go to war soon after leaving Egypt: Exo. 17:13. Deuteronomy 9:26 refers to God redeeming Israel out of Egypt.

Moses will refer to Israel's stay in Egypt as a "house of slavery" frequently in Deuteronomy: 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10.

Later Jewish writers - The wiseman will use the metaphor of "jewelry" also for the commands and teachings of God; see Prov. 6:20-21; 7:1-3. Israel, under the influence of pagans, performed human sacrifice later in their history: 2 Kings 3:27; 16:3; 17:31; 21:6; Ezek. 16:20-21. The prophets condemned the practice: Isa. 57:4-5; Jer. 7:30-34; 19:4-9; Ezek. 16:20-21. Later (Judges 6:8) and even at the end of OT history, God will remind Israel that He brought them out of the "house of slavery" in Egypt: Micah 6:4.

NT writers - Jesus was Mary's firstborn (Luke 2:7) and He was presented in the temple, based on this law from Moses (Luke 2:22-24), where Luke quotes Exodus 13:2. When Jesus says that His disciples need to "eat His flesh and drink His blood" (John 6:52-58), He is using the same type of metaphor that Moses uses here in verse 9. Jesus simply means that His disciples need to take His words into their inner being, their hearts and minds. Christ is known as the "firstborn" in Romans 8:29; see "Application: NT Writers" under comments at 4:22. When Paul (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and Peter (2 Peter 2:1) write that Christians have been "bought with a price," this practice from the OT is likely in view.

TRANSLATION - 13:17-22:

17 And it was when Pharaoh sent out the people that God did not lead them on the way of the land of the Philistines because near it [was] that God said, “Lest the people regret to bring them war and they return to Egypt.”

18 So God led the people by the way of the wilderness, the Red Sea, and being equipped for battle, the sons of Israel went up from the land of Egypt. **19** And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because to swear he swore the sons of Israel saying, “To visit God will visit you all and you will bring up my bones from here with you.”

20 And they journeyed from Succoth and camped in Etam, on the edge of the wilderness. **21** Now Jehovah was going before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way and by night in a pillar of fire to shine for them, to go by day and by night. **22** The pillar of cloud was not removed by day and the pillar of fire by night before the face of the people.

HEBREW WORDS:

“To lead” (ver. 17) is used in Exodus only at: 13:17, 21; 15:13; 32:34. It is used 39 times in the OT. “Philistines” is used only here and 23:31 in Exodus. They are found most extensively in Judges (34 times), 1 Samuel (152 times), and 1 Chronicles (29 times). They are found in the OT 290 times. “To regret” was used in Genesis at 5:29; 6:6-7; 24:67; 27:42; 37:35; 38:12; 50:21. It will be used in Exodus only here and 32:12, 14. It is used 108 times in the OT. “War” was seen earlier at 1:10. It will be used here (13:17); 15:3; 17:16; 32:17. It is used 319 times.

“To be equipped for battle” (ver. 18) is all one word in Hebrew; it is used at Exodus 13:18; Joshua 1:14; 4:12; Judges 7:11. “Bones” (ver. 19) was used earlier at 12:46. “To camp” (ver. 20) is used 143 times in the OT; it is used in Exodus 9 times: 13:20; 14:2, 9; 15:27; 17:1; 18:5; 19:2. “Pillar” or “column” (ver. 21) is used 112 times in the OT; it can also be translated “tent pole.” It is used in Exodus 39 times. “To lead” was used earlier at 13:17. “To shine” is used 44 times in the OT; it is used in Exodus only here; 14:20; 25:37. “To remove” (ver. 22) is used only here and 33:11 in Exodus. It is used 21 times in the OT.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

The verbs “to swear, he swore” and “to visit, he will visit” (ver. 19) both translate a phrase in Hebrew which is emphatic; it is the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in the perfect (to swear) or the imperfect (to visit).

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

“Joseph” (ver. 19) is found most extensively in Genesis (156 times). He is mentioned in Exodus only at 1:5-6, 8 and here. He is mentioned in the OT 214 times. The oath mentioned here is found in Genesis 50:24-26. The promise will finally be fulfilled by Joshua in Joshua 24:32.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The “Red Sea” was seen earlier at 10:19. The phrase is used 26 times in the OT. It will be used in Exodus here; 15:4, 22; 23:31.

“Succoth” (ver. 20) was mentioned at Genesis 33:17; Exo. 12:37. This is its last mention in Exodus. “Etham” is mentioned in Numbers 33:6-8.

The Philistines seemed to have lived between Egypt and Canaan, as we observe in Isaac’s travels from Genesis 26:1-2. The “way of the Philistines” (ver. 17) would be the shortest, direct route from Egypt to Canaan. It would go along the edge of the Mediterranean Sea; it was the southern section of the 1,000 mile *Via Maris* (“Way of the Sea”). The Egyptians called it the “Way of Horus (one of their gods)” as the Pharaohs used it when they invaded Asian countries.

COMMENTARY:

This paragraph records the initial departure of Israel from Goshen, out of the land of Egypt. Verse 17 notes that God did not take Israel to Canaan through the shortest, most direct route. It would have led through areas where Egypt had military outposts as well as the land of

the Philistines who would have been antagonistic toward Israel. God knew that Israel would get discouraged in the face of war (ver. 17) and want to go back to Egypt. They will, in fact, go to war soon, however, in Exodus 17.

The next option was for God to lead Israel “by the way of the wilderness, through the Red Sea” (ver. 18). This would also provide God yet another opportunity to show Israel His great power. In the Introduction, we note the three routes out of Egypt which were optional for Moses and Israel and the one option which is the most likely. However, archeologists have not been able to identify where Goshen was located, nor where Succoth nor Etham, were so we do not know the exact route. The verb “to be equipped for battle” does not mean the Israelites were prepared for war, although they will fight a battle in chapter 17. Rather, it refers to their formation as they “marched” (metaphorically) out of Egypt. Yet, it is also true that the verb is consistent with other indications that Israel was the Lord’s army: 6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 41, 51; see also 15:3. Verse 19 notes that Moses and Israel took the mummified remains of Joseph with them, just as he had asked them to do in Genesis 50:24-26.

God’s presence would go with Israel in the form of a pillar. The pillar would form a cloud during the daytime and it would form a pillar of fire in the night (ver. 21) so that Israel could travel around the clock if God had wanted them to do it. In verse 22, Moses notes that the pillar was always present with Israel to remind them of the presence of Jehovah God.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - God spoke to Israel from the pillar of cloud: 14:18-20, 26; 19:18; 33:7-11; 34:5; 40:34-35; Num. 9:15-23; 11:25; 12:5-6; 14:14; Deut. 1:33; 5:22; 31:15-16. For further association of God with fire, see: 3:2; Deut. 4:24; 9:3. On more than one occasion, Israel *will* want to return to Egypt: 14:11-12; Num. 14:3-4. God’s glory, as He reveals it particularly through the cloud, is known as the *shekinah* (Exo. 16:10; 40:34), which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for “dwelling.”

Later Jewish writers - We see reflected in Psa. 99:6-7 the practice of God speaking from the pillar of cloud. See also 1 Kings 8:10-12; Isa. 6:4; 19:1. The prophets, particularly Isaiah, refer often to the exodus as it pictures Israel’s “exodus” from exile: 11:15-16; 43:16; 51:9-11. See also Psalm 114.

NT writers - God will speak out of a cloud once more, when He shows His approval of His Son in Matthew 17:5. Jesus will be received into a cloud when He ascends into heaven, a likely reference to being received into God’s presence (Acts 1:9). In John 1:14, John writes that the “Word” who was God (1:1) “dwelt” among mankind. This repeats the theme of God’s presence, His “shekinah”, in Jesus Christ (see also Col. 2:9).