

Seventh Day of Chag HaMatzot

Exodus 13:17–15:26; Numbers 28:19–25; 2Samuel 22:1–51; Luke 24:13–52

notes by Tim Hegg

The last day of Chag HaMatzot (Festival of Unleavened Bread) is designated in the Torah as a day of gathering (מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ, *mikra qodesh*) as well as a Shabbat: “you shall not do any laborious work” (Lev 23:8; Num 28:25). Until the return of our Messiah Yeshua, and the restored Temple in Jerusalem, we celebrate the Seventh day of Unleavened bread by gathering together in the synagogue and remembering it as the concluding day of the Festival.

It is worthwhile for us to contemplate what might have been taking place on that first Pesach—the historical event of our exodus from Egypt and from the harsh slavery under which we labored for so many years. According to the narrative of Exodus, it was at midnight that God struck the firstborn of the Egyptians (Ex 12:29), causing Pharaoh to summon Moses and Aaron and ordering them to “Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship Adonai, as you have said” (Ex 12:31). So we left Egypt very early in the morning before the sun had risen on the 15th of Nisan, having eaten the Pesach meal the previous evening. Of course, we knew that our departure was imminent even though we weren’t exactly sure at the precise hour it would occur. So some of us were undoubtedly still awake, even into the very early morning hours.

We left Egypt on foot, with our flocks and herds. There were about 600,000 men (Ex 12:37), so there were at least that many more women beside all of the children. What is more, there were foreigners who had joined us as well, for many had come to accept the God of Israel as their God. So our number may have been nearly 1.5 million people!

The first leg of our journey was from Rameses, and we camped that evening and baked our dough which was still unleavened. The next day (16th of Nisan), we journeyed to Succoth, where we stopped for the evening (Ex 12:39; Num 33:5). On the 17th we journeyed from Succoth to Etham, where we camped on the edge of the wilderness (Num 33:6). On the next day, the 18th of Nisan, we journeyed from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which faces Baal-zephon, and camped before Migdol (Num 33:7). By this time, Pharaoh’s generals (who were keeping watch on us from a distance), reported back to Pharaoh that we had journeyed for four days but showed no indication that we were heading back to Egypt. Just the opposite! We were leaving for good. Pharaoh became outraged and quickly mustered his armies to pursue us. Exactly why God had directed us to turn back and camp near the sea was difficult to understand. After all, if we were leaving for good, wouldn’t a straight path away from Egypt have been the best decision? Regardless, there we were, camped near the sea with Pharaoh’s armies in hot pursuit.

According to tradition, by the time Pharaoh and his armies reached us as we camped near the sea, it was 20th of Nisan. God did a miraculous thing as the sun began to set on that day. The pillar of cloud, the very presence of the Almighty, leading us on our journey, moved from in front of us to behind us as we camped. As the sun set, and the pillar of cloud became the pillar of fire, a wall of fire separated us from the Egyptian armies who were pursuing us. We were protected by the very fire of God as we camped near the sea. Then, as the seventh day since our departure began, God instructed Moses to raise his staff over the water of the sea. He brought a strong wind from the east that blew all night and dried out the sea bed, with the waters divided on the left and right of a passageway through the sea.

As we passed through the escape route, right through the midst of the sea, we realized that our God was fighting for us, making a way of escape from our enemies. It was a miracle, the likes of which we had never seen. Never before had a people been delivered from their enemies in this manner! It was an event which would forever define us as the people God rescued out of Egypt by His own, mighty, outstretched arm.

After we had all safely passed through the sea, another miracle took place. The wall of fire that had protected us during the night, separating us from the Egyptian armies, was no longer there,

but the pillar of cloud was now with us, leading us forward. Suddenly the Egyptians realized that they could pursue us through the same opened path, through the waters of the sea. So they began coming at us full speed—the best of Pharaoh’s chariots coming after us through the very same path through which we had escaped. Then, when they were all in the midst of the sea, coming on the dry ground we had just traversed, God, our God, took away His mighty hand by which the waters had been separated and the waves crashed in upon the Egyptian armies. They all perished in the sea—not one of the troops survived.

The shout of victory that arose from our people is something that will never be forgotten. In fact, Moses, Miriam, and others began to sing a song—a song that became one of the grand anthems of our people and is still sung today. It is the “Song of the Sea,” and captures the spontaneous praise and worship that erupted from our people as we watched the words of Moses being fulfilled, the words with which he quieted our uneasy spirits as we watched the Egyptian armies approach to destroy us:

But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of Adonai which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. Adonai will fight for you while you keep silent.”
(Ex 14:13–14)

Now, many generations later, we celebrate the victory experienced by our forefathers. We participate in that victory as we worship the God of our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and are privileged to also know that this great victory at the Red Sea was forever to be a story pointing to the ultimate victory that would be won by our Messiah, Yeshua, as He too defeated the enemy and procured salvation for His people:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (Heb 2:14–15)

If we accept the traditional chronology of that first Pesach week, that the crossing of the Red Sea took place on the seventh day, we can see some interesting parallels. On the third day after our leaving Egypt, we circled back toward the sea and camped there. It was the circling back that puzzled us. Why would God lead us back to a place of vulnerability rather than just moving us in a direct line *away from the enemy*? After He divided the sea for us, and destroyed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea, we understood why. God had put us in a place where we had no choice but to rely upon Him. He had put us in a most difficult place to show us His miraculous power, and to teach us that if we would rely upon Him, He would be our protection and He would save us from the enemy.

Consider the place of vulnerability into which Yeshua entered at the time of Pesach. He allowed Himself to be taken by the guards who came early the morning of the 15th of Nisan. It was on that very day that He became obedient to death, even death on an execution stake (Phil 2:8). He entered the place of greatest vulnerability—the place of life and death. Then, being laid in a tomb and appearing to be defeated by death, He remained there until the third day when He rose triumphantly, forever conquering death for all who are in Him.

We therefore learn not only the grand and greatest lessons of eternal salvation as we see the

manner in which our exodus from Egypt foreshadowed our salvation from the slavery of sin, but we also learn some very important lessons for life as we journey through this wilderness in anticipation of eternal life in the world to come. First, God may bring us at times to a place of vulnerability—a place where we face one of our constant enemies, the enemy of fear. And, He may bring us there in order to prove Himself to us. Sure, God could have proven His strength to Israel by taking us on a straight path away from Egypt, but He did not. In His all wise and sovereign plan, He made us circle about and come back to camp at a place that, by all estimations, was the worst place to be when the Egyptian armies were pursuing us. Yet by doing so He not only demonstrated His greatness to us, but He also defeated our enemies through a strategy we would have never considered possible.

A second lesson we learn is that when God clearly leads us to face a challenge that seems well beyond our ability to face, we should consider that in bringing such a challenge He is offering us the opportunity to see Him work in ways we may have never known before. I'm not talking about "tempting God" by venturing out unwisely or making foolish decisions and then expecting God to do miracles that will overcome our foolishness. I'm talking about being faced with challenges that are clearly from God, a challenge to which He leads us even as He led the children of Israel by the pillars of cloud and fire. Often, these challenges are already clearly stated in the Scriptures, but we simply have not taken them to heart. As we consider this theme during the last day of Chag HaMatzot, it is appropriate for each of us to ask ourselves: With what is the Lord challenging me now? What step of faith is He urging me to take, a step of faith that presents me with a challenge I've not been willing to face before? May we follow His leading, relying upon Him, and in facing the challenges before us, witness His faithful and mighty hand in our lives!