

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35

EXODUS 13-15

This week we are entering the timeframe of the seven week period between the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. This is the beginning of a new relationship between God and His people. Prior to this He had raised up individuals and created a bloodline through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now he is leading a nation on a faith journey—out of captivity in Egypt, and through the wilderness to the Promised Land. There are many lessons to be learned along the way. We will take a look at significant events that happened during this time period as the LORD began teaching and moulding His chosen people.

13:17-18 God did not lead Israel by way of the land of the Philistines, the most straightforward way, for He said, *'if they face war they might change their minds and return to Egypt.'*¹⁸ So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

What does it mean that they went up "in orderly ranks" (or 'in battle array')? "The best explanation is, that the word here means 'organised,' 'in military order'. It might also mean 'with their loins girded',"¹ or staunch, i.e. able-bodied soldiers.

The Hebrew word being translated here is *chamush*, which also means 'fifth'.² The number five in the scriptures is commonly seen to represent "grace". Translating this into spiritual terms, it resonates very effectively with 1 Peter 1:13:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

We can also see a correlation with Paul's appeal in 2 Corinthians 10:4 (*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal...*), and Ephesians 6:13-18 (*Therefore take up the whole armor of God...*). Paul was clearly aware that believers needed to be aware of the enemy of their souls who would seek to bring down their faith.

13:19 True to the promise given to Joseph on his deathbed, Moses took his bones with him. The bones of Joseph had remained in Egypt until they were carried out, and they were finally buried at Shechem, in the parcel of ground Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor. On Jacob's deathbed, this land was given to Joseph's sons "as an everlasting possession" (Gen.48:4); Jacob dug a well there, and it is not insignificant that this is also where Jesus met the Samaritan woman in John 4 – where it mentions that "Joseph's bones were there"; Shechem is also where Joseph came looking for his brethren and found them missing (Gen. 37:12), before they threw him down a well, then sold him to the Midianites. (Putting all these threads together provides a very intriguing study in itself.)

v.20 They journeyed from Succoth — We read back in Ex. 12:37 that the first stop after they left Rameses was Succoth,³ signifying that they were accompanied by Divine love and protection from the moment they set out on their faith journey. *Succoth* refers to the huts which, it is said, the LORD

¹ Ellicot's Commentary for English Readers.

² The word *Chumash* in Hebrew refers to the five books of Moses.

³ When Jacob left his brother Esau, his first stop was also Succoth (Gen.33:17)

provided for them, even before they entered the desert.⁴ The Midrash compares this to a bridegroom who brings the wedding canopy to his bride's door so that she can enter without delay.

v.21 *And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.*

Later, in Ex. 14:19, we read: *Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.*

Q. Who is this “Angel of God” who is “in” the pillars of cloud and fire?

Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. (Nehemiah 9:19)

Chapter 14

The Pursuit - Read 14:1-14

When Pharaoh heard that Israel had fled, he hardened his heart yet again, and they said, *“What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us.*

v.8-9... *the children of Israel went out with a high hand. So the Egyptians pursued them...*

What does it mean when it says that “the children of Israel went out with a high hand?” (NKJV “with boldness”). In other places in the Torah, the phrase “a high hand” appears as a negative expression, implying exaggerated pride. (Num. 15:30; Deut. 32:27) It is probable that the Israelites left Egypt with a feeling of satisfaction, as if they took some credit for their own redemption. Any pride that they had was soon replaced by fear. After the Egyptians caught up with them, Israel finds itself hemmed in completely.

14:10-12 When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD; and they said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

Q. Discuss this descent from faith to fear resulting in blame and resignation.

Moses responds to their fear with words that ring through the ages as a strength to our own faith today: *And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand fast and see the salvation (Yeshuah) of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. . . . the LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.” (14:13-14).*

To ‘*stand fast and see*’ alludes to taking a stand in faith and perceiving the unseen hand of God, especially when the situation looks impossible. Moses says, in effect, DO NOTHING – just watch - your God will do it all.

Q. Have you ever witnessed the hand of God when a situation seemed impossible?

⁴ The annual joyful Festival of *Sukkot* or *Feast of Tabernacles* recalls Israel's hastily built huts in the wilderness. Each year the Jewish people construct *succos* and eat in them for seven days. For more information on *Sukkot* do your own search. There is much to be learned from it.

The Dividing of the Waters - read: 14:15-31

v.15 "Lift up your staff and stretch forth your arm ..." (see also v.30)

Moses' outstretched arm was a reflection of the outstretched arm of God—*And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. (Ex. 14:22).*

As Israel walked through the waters they underwent a change of status from a lowly bunch of slaves to the holy people belonging to the LORD. Their freedom was not complete until they had crossed through the sea. Only now could they really say, 'slavery is behind us, freedom before us.' On the one hand this was salvation for the people of Israel, but on the other, it was the final judgment against Egypt. Torah sources teach us that the miracle at the Sea, which took place on the 7th day of Passover, constitutes a completion of the Seder night. Together they complete the exodus from Egypt to eternal freedom.

Paul makes a profound statement 1 Cor.10:2: ... *all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.* That same preposition (Gk. *ein* into) is used with regard to Christian baptism. We are baptized 'with' water but 'into' Christ.

Romans 6:3 - *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*

Galatians 3:27 - *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

Baptism, like the *mikveh* in Judaism, symbolizes a change in status. Believers are baptized into Christ's name, into His death and into His body (the church), and much more. It is meant to be a complete identification with Christ. Just as Israel was called to follow God's appointed leader, we as Christians are to follow God's appointed leader and submit to Him in every aspect of our lives.

Following is a quote from Saint Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th CE:

No one who hears the account of the crossing of the Red Sea should be ignorant of the mystery of the water. He who has gone down into it with the army of the enemy emerges alone, leaving the enemy's army drowning in the water. For who does not know that the Egyptian army... is the various passions of the soul by which man is enslaved: feelings of anger and the sensual impulses to pleasure, sorrow, and covetousness are indistinguishable from the aforementioned army... then the staff of faith leads on, the water gives life to those who find refuge in it but destroys their pursuers... Those who pass through the mystical water in baptism must put to death in the water the whole phalanx of evil... After we have drowned the whole Egyptian person (that is, every form of evil) in the saving baptism, we emerge alone, dragging along nothing foreign in our subsequent life.⁵

14:25 *And He took off their chariot wheel(s), so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."*

Hebrew insight: The Hebrew word translated "wheels" in our Bibles is actually written in the singular. Thus the sages have seen the wheel as representing the *spiritual life force* (as in the wheels in Ezekiel's vision). "Here it refers to the wheel that gave the breath of life to the chariot of the Egyptian empire. By destroying this symbolic wheel, the LORD broke the power of Egypt.... Once the source of life was removed from the guardian angel of Egypt in heaven, the armies of Egypt on earth were handicapped and could only move forward with great difficulty."⁶

Colossians 2:15 describes what God did for those who trust his Son, when he died on the cross: *"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over*

⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa (C.335-395) *The Life of Moses, II, 121F, SC1 (Classics of Western Spirituality Series)*

⁶ Rabbi Elie Munk, *Call of Torah*, p.177.

them in it.” When Christ died for our sins, Satan was disarmed and defeated. The one eternally destructive weapon that he had was stripped from his hand, namely, his accusation before God that we are guilty and should perish with him. When Christ died that accusation was nullified.

Chapter 14 finishes: ³⁰ *So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.* ³¹ *Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses.*

CHAPTER 15 - The Song of Moses

Now Israel *knew* that their God was not just one among many – He was mighty to save – he was God above all gods, and their spirits rose up in exultant praise and adoration.

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Take particular note of verse 15: *Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm, they are as still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased.* Paul picks up this profound theme in 1 Cor. 6:20: *You are no longer your own, you are bought with a price, so glorify God in your bodies.*

As we read through this powerful song we get the sense of permanency and chosenness about the relationship the LORD invites His people into: *"You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. (15:13)*

²⁰*Then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing.* What a triumphant scene of rejoicing it must have been. Deut. 16:3 says *"Remember the day of your departure from Egypt all the days of your life."* In fulfilment, this Song of Moses is incorporated in the daily morning service in the synagogues.

"The Jews have a notion, that the very song of Moses itself will be sung in the world to come, in the days of the Messiah; for they say, there are in it the times of the Messiah, and of Gog and Magog, and of the resurrection of the dead, and the world to come..."⁷

Other beautiful poetic songs have also burst forth from the lips of individuals who have seen the faithful hand of God do seemingly impossible things on their behalf: Hannah sings a song when she gives Samuel into the Lord's service; Mary sings a song when she greets Elizabeth. Both these songs are exultant declarations of truth and faith in the mighty hand of God who has intervened miraculously in their lives.

Bitter Waters

Exodus 15:22-23 ...They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah.

Three days ago⁸ they were rejoicing with song, tambourines and dancing, now they become angry and discontented,⁹ and they murmur and complain to Moses, saying "What shall we drink?" Even though they are now free, there is something essential to life that is missing. After three days they

⁷ The New John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible.

⁸ The number three in Hebrew invariably speaks of resurrection life.

⁹ The word *Marah* means *bitter*, but comes from a root word meaning "angry & discontented".

desperately need water, or they will die in the wilderness. This is the very first lesson God gives His people when they come out of Egypt.

Exodus 15:25 *So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.*

Q. Why should a tree sweeten the waters? What does this 'tree' signify?

Our minds might immediately go to the "tree" on which Christ was crucified, and certainly this is a foreshadowing of this. We well know how this event 'sweetened' the bitterness of our lives. However, we need to look more closely at what it meant for Israel in its original context.

Verse 25 continues: *He made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there He tested them.* What was the "test"? And what was "the statute and ordinance"? We aren't told, but we are told in the very next verse what the results of obedience to His statutes would be:

v.26 *He said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you. (Yehovah Rapha)."*

Read this verse carefully and you will see a pronoun change from referring to God in the *third person singular* (His), to *first person singular* (I) within the same sentence. The Sages have suggested that this depicts two aspects of the Divine Being.¹⁰ DISCUSS

We might look back to the first mention of a 'tree'. In Genesis there were two trees in the Garden of Eden—one brought LIFE, the other brought death, bitterness and division. The sages teach that the Tree of Life is the Torah.

Hebrew insight: Torah means more than just "law" – its usual simplistic interpretation, which in the modern Christian church, has become a negative word. More correctly it means "instruction", or "teaching" to a valued individual or group. The word *Torah* comes from the Hebrew root word *arah*, a verb which means "to flow or throw something," e.g. an arrow, or the flowing of a finger to point out a direction. In fact, this word is used in v.25 "He **showed** him a tree".

When the passage says that God showed Moses a tree, what we have is God instructing Moses concerning a tree. God clearly showed Moses the tree to tell him what to do with it. Moses then followed God's instruction by throwing the tree into the water and the water became sweet. Note the progression: God gave Moses instruction, Moses followed God's instruction, and the result was healing and sweetness. The whole focus of what happens at Marah is on the effect of obedience to God's word—the result is sweetness. Thus, the sign indicates the blessing and healing that comes from being obedient to God's commands.

Proverbs 3:13 *Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding . . . She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.*

Water is also symbolic of the Word:

The Torah is compared to water, as Moses proclaims: *May my teaching drop like the rain* (Deut. 32:2). Both rain and Torah descend from the heavens and provide relief to the thirsty and parched. The Torah flows down from God and has been absorbed by Jews in every generation. Torah gives zest and vitality to the human spirit. A life based on Torah will blossom with wisdom and good deeds.

¹⁰ Munk, *Call of Torah, Shemos*, p 201.

Deprived of water, a person will become dehydrated and ultimately disoriented, even to the point where they may not be able to recognize their own father. So too, without Torah a person becomes disoriented -- to the extent they may not even recognize their Father in Heaven, the Almighty God of Israel.¹¹

The Word of God is also vital for Christians—Eph. 5:25-6 ...*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.*

Q. Discuss how important the Word of God has been in your Christian walk.

An Oasis

Exodus 15:27 *Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.*

This beautiful picture stands in stark contrast to the bitter waters first encountered at Marah. In fact, it should be seen as a direct follow-on and consequence of the previous story.

Elim comes from root word meaning ‘strength’; The number 12 represents the “tribes” of Israel; and 70 stands for the “nations”. The picture I see here is that of Israel being the source of the refreshing, life-giving Word of God, surrounded by the flourishing of the nations of the world as they gather around her.

Q. How do you see this image yourself? And are you able to correlate it with the Word of God?

This is what the LORD Almighty says: *"In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'"* (Zech. 8:23)

Psalm 92:12 *The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree.... 13 Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall still bear fruit in old age;*

Psalm 1:1-3 gives us a similar picture of the flourishing of those “whose delight is in the **torah** of the Lord.”

This oasis at Elim is a beautiful picture of the provision that will be there for ALL the nations (70) who identify with the God of Israel and ‘leave Egypt’. Some have seen this as a depiction of Paradise —or the Messianic age.

Elim becomes a place where we are able to drink deeply of the water of the Word. We can rest here. But we must continue on from here toward the Promised Land—there are many more lessons to be learned along the way.

¹¹ <http://www.aish.com/h/15sh/i/48960526.html>