

## UNIT 22: THE DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT (Exodus 12:29-32)

### INTRODUCTION <sup>1</sup>

#### **Text and Textual Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> The next section records the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and so becomes the turning point of the book. Verses 28 and 29 could be included in the exposition of the previous section as the culmination of that part: the message developed God's requirement for deliverance from bondage through the application of the blood of the sacrifice, God's instruction for the memorial of deliverance through the purging of corruption, and the compliance of those who believed the message.

But these verses also form the beginning of this section (and so could be used transitionally). This unit includes the judgment on Egypt (29,20), the exodus from Egypt (31-39) and the historical summation and report (40-42).

**12:29** It happened<sup>2</sup> at midnight--Yahweh struck<sup>3</sup> all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the prison, and all the firstborn of the cattle. **12:30** And Pharaoh got up<sup>4</sup> in the night,<sup>5</sup> he and all his servants and all Egypt; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no house<sup>6</sup> in which there was not someone dead. **12:31** And he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and he said, “Get up, get out<sup>7</sup> from the midst of my people, both you and your children; go and serve Yahweh as you have

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<sup>2</sup> The verse begins with the temporal indicator (*wayhi*), so often translated, “and it came to pass.” Here it could be left untranslated: “In the middle of the night Yahweh struck.” The word order of the next and main clause provides the emphasis: “and/that Yahweh struck”--the *waw* disjunctive on the divine name preceding the verb. The sentence clearly states that Yahweh struck the firstborn in the middle of the night; but the emphasis on Yahweh, and on the suddenness of the attack at mid-night, can be reflected in the translation.

<sup>3</sup> The plague struck in total darkness, when they were at their deepest rest, contributing to the terror of it. Unlike previous verses that talk of a plague or a destroyer, here only the stark “attack (kill)” is used with no explanation. Sudden death, with no apparent cause or warning was a frightening divine secret (Jacob, p. 334). He adds that the Torah is not concerned with the explanations, only with the defeat of a tyrant and the deliverance of the covenant people.

Critical scholarship, often looking for explanations of such things, have suggested a couple of causes for this. Some who wish to see the Passover as a Hebrew development of an earlier harvest festival are troubled by the death of the humans, for only firstborn animals were offered in those rites. Others like Driver suggest a commonly occurring epidemic struck in the middle of the night. He even suggests that people report these breaking out in the spring time (p. 98). This is surely carrying the natural explanation too far. At least Driver quotes Dillmann as saying, “the plague here, by its momentary suddenness, as also by its carrying off as its victims exclusively the first-born of the Egyptians, bears a wholly supernatural character . . .” (p. 99)--but then the quote goes on to say how this tradition might have grown up. Jacob rightly says that all this is theoretical and without basis, and reverses matters completely (p. 335).

<sup>4</sup> Literally, “arose,” the verb *qum* in this context certainly must describe a less ceremonial act. The entire country woke up in terror because of the deaths.

<sup>5</sup> The noun is an adverbial accusative of time--“*in the night*” or “*at night*.”

<sup>6</sup> Or, so it seemed. One should not push this description to complete literalness. The reference would be limited to houses that actually had firstborn people or animals.

<sup>7</sup> The urgency in Pharaoh’s words is caught by the abrupt use of the imperatives--“get up, go” (*qumu tss<sup>e</sup>’u*), and “go, and serve” (*u-l<sup>e</sup>ku ‘ibdu*) and “take” and “leave/go” (*q<sup>e</sup>hu . . . waleku*).

spoken.<sup>8</sup> **12:32** Also, take your flocks and your herds, just as you have spoken, and leave. But bless me also.”<sup>9</sup>

**12:33** And the Egyptians were urgent<sup>10</sup> on the people, that they might send them out of the land quickly,<sup>11</sup> for they were saying, “We are all dead people.” **12:34** And the people took their dough before it was leavened,<sup>12</sup> their kneading troughs bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. **12:35** And the Israelites had done<sup>13</sup> according to the word of Moses--they had asked from Egypt articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing. **12:36** Yahweh<sup>14</sup> gave favor to the people<sup>15</sup> in the eyes of the Egyptians,<sup>16</sup> and they gave them what they wanted,<sup>17</sup> and so they plundered Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> It appears from this clause that Pharaoh was expecting the Israelites to go for three days to sacrifice--except that with the severe judgment on him for his refusal he would have known that this people were no longer his subjects, and he was no longer sovereign.

<sup>9</sup> The form is the *piel* perfect with a *waw* consecutive (*u-beraktem*); coming in the sequence of imperatives this perfect tense would be volitional--probably a request rather than a command.

Pharaoh probably meant that they should bless him also when they were sacrificing to Yahweh in their religious festival--after all, he might reason, he did let them go (after divine judgment). To bless him would mean to invoke divine blessing or good gifts on him.

<sup>10</sup> The verb used here (*khazaq*) is the same verb used for Pharaoh's heart being hardened. It then conveys the idea of their being resolved or insistent in this--they were not going to change.

<sup>11</sup> The construction uses two infinitives construct here in a hendiadys, the first infinitive becoming the modifier

<sup>12</sup> The imperfect tense after the adverb *terem* is to be treated as a preterite, “before it was leavened,” or, “before the yeast was added.” See GKC, par. 107c.

<sup>13</sup> These verbs “had done” and then “had asked” were accomplished prior to the present narrative (Driver, p. 99)..

<sup>14</sup> The holy name has the *waw* disjunctive with it. It may have the force: “Now it was Yahweh who gave the people favor . . . .”

<sup>15</sup> God was destroying the tyrant and his nobles on the throne, and the land's economy because of their stubborn refusal. But God established friendly, peaceful relations between His people and the Egyptians. The phrase is only used elsewhere in Gen. 39:21.

<sup>16</sup> Literally, “Egypt”

**12:37** The Israelites journeyed<sup>19</sup> from Rameses<sup>20</sup> and Sukkoth. There were about 600,000 men<sup>21</sup> on foot, beside women and children.<sup>22</sup> **12:38** And a mixed

<sup>17</sup> Here the verb is the *hiphil* form of the earlier *qal--wayyash'ilum*. It is frequently translated "and they lent them"; but lending does not really fit the point here. What they gave the Israelites were farewell gifts sought by demanding or asking for them. Driver translates it "let them have." He adds that the people may have lent the Israelites things to use in the wilderness, assuming they were coming back; but as it turned out, Israeli had plundered them.

<sup>18</sup> See Benno Jacob, "The Gifts of the Egyptians; A Critical Commentary," *Journal of Reformed Judaism* 27 (1980), pp. 59-69.

<sup>19</sup> Literally, "and the Israelites journeyed"

<sup>20</sup> The wilderness itinerary begins here. Kaiser records the identification of these two places as follows: The name Rameses probably refers to Qantir rather than Tanis, which is more remote, because Qantir was by the water. And Succoth is identified as Tell el Maskhuta in the Wadi Tumilat near modern Ismailia--or the region around the city (Kaiser, p. 379).

Of the extensive bibliography, see George W. Coats, "The Wilderness Itinerary," *CBQ* 34 (1972):135-152; G. I. Davies, "The Wilderness Itineraries: A Comparative Study," *TynBulletin* 25 (1974):46-81; and Jerome T. Walsh, "From Egypt to Moab. A Source Critical Analysis of the Wilderness Itinerary," *CBQ* 39 (1977):20-33.

<sup>21</sup> The text has it "who were men"; this word for men (*hagg<sup>e</sup>barim*) stresses the hardiness and capability of them--strong.

There have been many attempts to calculate the population of the exodus group, but nothing in the text gives the exact number other than the 600,000 people on foot who were men. Estimates of two million people are very large, especially since the Bible says there were seven nations in the land of Canaan mightier than Israel. It is probably not two million people (note, the Bible never said it was--this is calculated by scholars). But attempts to reduce the number by re-defining the word "thousand" to mean clan or tribe or family unit have not been convincing, primarily because of all the tabulations of the tribes in the different books of the Bible that have to be likewise reduced. B. Jacobs rejects the many arguments and calculations as the work of eighteenth century deists and rationalists, arguing that the numbers were taken seriously in the text (p. 347). Some writers interpret the numbers as inflated due to a rhetorical use of numbers, arriving at a number of 60,000 or so for the men here listed (reducing it by a factor of ten), and insisting this is a literal interpretation of the text as opposed to a spiritual or allegorical approach (see Ron Allen, *Numbers* [EBC], pp. 686-696; see also George Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26," *JBL* 77 [1958]:52-66). This proposal removes the "embarrassingly" large number for the exodus, but like other suggestions, lacks the completely compelling evidence. It is probable that the number was much lower, but

multitude<sup>23</sup> went up also with them, and flocks and herds--very much cattle.<sup>24</sup> **12:39** And they baked cakes of unleavened bread with the dough that they had brought from Egypt, for it was not leavened--because they were thrust out<sup>25</sup> of Egypt and were not able to tarry, neither<sup>26</sup> could they prepare<sup>27</sup> food for themselves.

**12:40** Now the time of the dwelling of the Israelites, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years.<sup>28</sup> **12:41** And at the end of the 430 years, on the same day, all the divisions of Yahweh went out of the land of Egypt. **12:42** It was a night of watching for

lacking object and consistency we just do not know.

<sup>22</sup> For “women and children” the text has “little ones.”

<sup>23</sup> The “mixed multitude” (*‘ereb rab*) refers to a great “swarm” (see a possible cognate in 8:21[17]) of folk who joined the Israelites, people who were impressed by the defeat of Egypt, who came to faith, or who just wanted to escape Egypt (maybe slaves or descendants of the Hyksos). The expression prepares for later references to half-breeds and rif-raf who came along.

<sup>24</sup> Literally, “and very much cattle”

<sup>25</sup> For the use of this word in developing the motif, see 2:17,22; 6:1; and 11:1.

<sup>26</sup> Literally, “and also”

<sup>27</sup> The verb is *‘asu*, “they made”; here, with a potential nuance for the tense, it is rendered “they could [not] prepare.”

<sup>28</sup> Here as well biblical scholars work with the number 430 to try to reduce the stay in Egypt for the bondage. The general solutions try to argue that if the number did include the time in Canaan, that would reduce the bondage by half.

Driver notes that P thought Moses was the fourth generation from Jacob (6:27), if those genealogies are strict and not selective genealogies (p. 102). But there are some other bits of information on that. The genealogy has Levi--Kohath--Amram--Moses. This would require a genealogy of 100 years, and that is unusual. But there is evidence the list is selective. In 1 Chron 2:1 the text has Bezalel (see Exod. 31:2-5) a contemporary of Moses and yet the seventh from Levi. And Elishama, the leader of the Ephraim, was the 9<sup>th</sup> generation from Jacob (1 Chron 7:22-26). And Joshua, Moses’ assistant, was the 11<sup>th</sup> from Jacob. So the “four generations” leading up to Moses is not necessarily complete. With regard to Exodus 6, Kitchen has suggested a whole new scheme: He argues that the four names do not indicate successive generations, but tribe (Levi), clan (Kohath), family (Amram) and individual (Moses) (see Kenneth Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, pp. 54,55). For a detailed discussion of the length of the sojourn, see Merrill, *A Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 74-579.

Yahweh to bring them out from the land of Egypt;<sup>29</sup> and so<sup>30</sup> on this night all Israel is to keep the vigil<sup>31</sup> to Yahweh for generations to come.

## EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

This passage records the deliverance of Israel from their long sojourn in bondage. It may be divided into several parts for ease in development: the judgment on Egypt (29, 30), the deliverance at the exodus (31-39)—two sections that work together, for God delivers his people by destroying the oppressors (and he will again at the second coming); and then there is the report of the historical event after 430 years (40-42). But this is the kind of passage that you would probably not treat in a separate exposition if you had a very limited number of meetings allotted for Exodus.

### *I. The LORD delivers his people and judges the world (29-39).*

The first two verses were discussed above. If they are used transitionally as the first point here, then the thrust would be different—rather than being the result of the institution of Passover, they would now be the reason for the second point, Egypt's urging of Israel's exodus.

The central part of this passage is the exodus (31-39). In fact, it could be the message, and the other two sections a prologue and epilogue. But it can be subdivided: verses 31-33, the urging by the Egyptians; verses 34-36, the spoiling of the Egyptians by the Israelites; and verses 37-39, the sudden departure of Israel from Egypt.

Several things in these sections will need closer analysis. In the urging of Pharaoh, you will have to note “and bless me also.” Undoubtedly the king was wanting some consolation from Moses and his powerful God. Perhaps this blessing is

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<sup>29</sup> There is some ambiguity in *lel shimmurim hu' la'adonay / l'Yahweh* ). It is likely that this first clause means that Yahweh Himself was on watch for Israel to bring them out, as the next clause says. He was protecting His people (Driver, p. 102). Then, the night of vigil will be transferred to Israel, who now must keep it “to” Him.

<sup>30</sup> “and so” supplied

<sup>31</sup> Literally, “this night is to Yahweh a vigil for all Israelites for their generations.”

to be interpreted as the leaving.

In verse 35 the English verses frequently translate *sha'al* as “borrow,” based on earlier translations. A lot of study needs to be done on this word in many places in the Old Testament. If it is the same verb “ask,” then a meaning of “demand” may be more in harmony. This is a holy war type of activity, spoiling the defeated enemy. The same verb shows up in verse 36, but there it is the *Hiphil*, so it must be a slightly stronger force than the *Qal*.

All of this booty Israel received was part of God's gracious dealings with them. In other words, the only reason Egypt responded to their demands was that God gave them favor. As would later be clear, the wealth of Egypt would be needed.

The leaven/unleavened motif gains a new meaning here and is probably at the heart of the original institution more than the idea of corruption. The point of verse 34 is that the people took their dough before it was leavened. So this gives the interpretation to unleavened bread of the sudden and hasty deliverance from Egypt. Later writers interpreted it more towards corruption.

Two problems surface in verse 37. One is the number of the people. “600,000 on foot that were men” could put the population of the nation between 1 and a half to 2 and a half million people in all. Most commentators pause over that number, for it is rather staggering logistically. It is not an impossible number for God's ability, but it raises some questions. For example, there were seven nations in Palestine more numerous than Israel. That would put a population of 14 million in Palestine in the Late Bronze period! For a discussion of large numbers, see Wenham's article in the *Tyndale Bulletin*. His point is correct: it is not a question of error in the text, but of the translation of *'eleph*. I do not agree with his conclusion, though, because I see no clear criteria for gauging the totals down to the number he decides is correct. Until there is a compelling calculation, I shall leave it with a question mark.

The other problem is the identification of the cities Rameses and Succoth. There is some evidence that Succoth is to be identified with Pithom (see Ex. 1:11). The name Rameses has often been taken as an indicator of the date of the exodus, being understood to be named after Rameses II, and therefore 1290 B.C. However, plausible solutions have been offered for this name, including later clarification of the name (see Dan in Genesis 14).

## II. *The Historical Note (40-42)*

Another problem in the passage concerns the mention of 430 years in Ex. 12:40. Genesis 15:13 uses the round number 400 years (so Acts 7:6; Jos. *Ant.* 2.9.1). One of the problems is that Moses and his generation is listed as the fourth generation from Jacob's sons (Ex. 6:27). Either the genealogy has gaps in it, or "generation" is used more broadly, or the 400 figure is a round number. The versions also offer some problems by their readings: "in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan was 430 years." This is an attempt to lessen the figure. Paul followed LXX and Sam. in Galatians 3:17. If we go for 430 years as the sojourn, and if we take 1446 as the date of the exodus based on 1 Kings 6:1, then 1876 B.C. is the date Jacob and his family moved to Goshen. 215 years earlier would have been Abraham's call and migration to Canaan, or 2091 B.C., and 75 years earlier his birth, 2166. That may be as far back as we can go with relative certainty-but most scholars would certainly reject this in favor of a 1290 exodus and a 1500 or so descent into Egypt by Jacob.

The passage concludes with a note that this is a night to be much observed to the LORD for bringing them out of Egypt. Keeping this night in faithful commemoration would be a major part of Israel's heritage.

## CONCLUSION

This section is rather hard to preach because of its historical notices throughout. Most expositors rightly see it as God's victory over Egypt at the deliverance of his people from bondage. But the correlation with the New Testament is not so easy. One tends to think of the death of Christ since this is still Passover night--but from there the analogy toughens. The departure of the redeemed in haste, the spoiling of the Egyptians, the bread, the mixed multitude--one would have to simply say the redemption forms a great deliverance from the bondage of the world. Others have suggested a comparison with the rapture in 1 Thessalonians when the LORD actually will deliver his people from the world's bondage by resurrecting those who have died and having those alive caught up out of the world when he comes to judge the wicked. So an expository wording would be: *God's deliverance of his people from the bondage of the world is hastened by the judgment of the wicked.*