

Is the Night to be Observed the Last Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

There are a few who believe that the night to be much observed occurs on the last day of unleavened bread. Ironically, the primary basis for their belief stems from a verse in which God speaks of the observance the night He first brought Israel out of Egypt—not the last day. Notice the way in which this verse is worded:

And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It *is* a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. **This *is* that night of the LORD, a solemn observance** for all the children of Israel throughout their generations (Exodus 12:41-42).

A small number of believers have chosen to understand this verse as referring to the day when Israel was taken completely outside the territory of Egypt. They view this as the time God cut them completely off from the Egyptians after the miraculous Red Sea crossing. At that time there was tremendous celebration. Since it is believed that the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread fell on the same day the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, and the people celebrated greatly, some conclude it is the last day of the Feast which is “a solemn observance.” However, the night to be observed is celebrated the evening beginning the 15th of the first month and there are several reasons demonstrating this.

First, there is no verse in the Bible stating that the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the night to be observed. Since there is no direct statement, in order to come to this conclusion, those who believe it is the last day must interpret verses to fit their scenario. Remembering that the Bible is not to be interpreted, and that it interprets itself, we need to put all the Scriptures on the subject together before drawing a conclusion (2Pet. 1:20). When this is done, we will see that the Bible precludes the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread from being the night to be observed.

It is also important to remember that no one actually knows for certain what day the Israelites went through the Red Sea. The churches of God have speculated that it was the last day of unleavened bread. Many Jews believe the same, and there are reasons why this could be true. Nonetheless, there is no absolute proof. It is possible that the Israelites went through the Red Sea on a different day. Thus, we cannot base a conclusion on speculation.

What it Doesn't Say

Regarding the statement which says “on the seventh day *there shall be* a feast to the LORD,” this verse does not refer to the night to be observed (Exo. 13:6). This is understood by taking the context of the verse into account.

Verse six speaks of the entire Feast and the last day does not stand alone. It is included in the entire statement in which a several other events are mentioned. Notice the context of Moses' words:

And Moses said to the people: “**Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt**, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this *place*. No leavened bread shall be eaten. On this day you are going out, in the month Abib” (Exodus 13:3-4).

These verses are worded so that the day to be remembered is mentioned first. This was the time when Israel came out of Egypt. It was the very day they were freed from bondage. Therefore, the day to be remembered is the day they departed.

Then God declared that “no leavened bread shall be eaten.” There would be no need to remind readers to abstain from leavened bread if this were the last day of the Feast. They would already have been eating unleavened bread for six days at this point. This is definite evidence that the day to be remembered is the first day of Unleavened Bread.

The recognized scholar John Gill also concluded that this verse refers to the first day of the Feast. He wrote:

Now they were come out of this place and state of servitude, even that very day, the fifteenth of Nisan; and which therefore it became them to remember, they and theirs, in all succeeding generations, as the Lord had directed (*John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

As Exodus 13 continues, Moses went on to explain that this same service is to be kept when they entered the new land. The service which includes the night to be observed was followed by seven days of unleavened bread. As Moses declared:

And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day *there shall be* a feast to the LORD (Exodus 13:5-6).

When verse six is read in context, it becomes clear that the entire passage is speaking of all seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The reference to the Feast on the seventh day does not imply that it is the night to be observed. It simply proclaims a final celebration to end the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8).

The Meaning of Out of the Land

Another point to consider is that God commanded Moses to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of the land. By this He meant to leave the land of Egypt proper. In order to be out of the land they were only required to go three days journey into the wilderness. As Moses wrote:

So they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, **let us go three days' journey into the desert** and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword” (Exodus 5:3).

Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to **let the children of Israel go out of his land** (Exodus 6:11).

It appears that going out of the land meant to go into the wilderness. This was an area not under Pharaoh's control. As God continued to say:

Go to Pharaoh in the morning... And you shall say to him, 'The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness"' (Exodus 7:15-16).

God spoke of bringing the people out of the land and then indicated that it meant going three days journey into the wilderness (Exo. 8:25-27). Therefore, they were considered to be out of the land of Egypt in three days—not seven. God did not begin their journey on the last day of Unleavened Bread. They went out on the first day. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea they were already well outside the borders of Egypt.

Although the route of the Exodus is a widely debated topic, the map produced by Ron Wyatt shows the logical and probable route taken by the Israelites—one that would also account for Mount Sinai being in Arabia as stated by the apostle Paul (Gal. 4:25). This route concurs with Exodus 14:3 in which Pharaoh says, "They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in" (KJV). Mr. Wyatt's map and his comments below demonstrate how the Gulf of Suez divides the territory so that Egypt is on the left, and the wilderness (where Israel first went) is on the right. It is easy to see that upon leaving the Israelites were soon outside the land of Egypt. Mr. Wyatt wrote:

In summary, when word came to the people that they were allowed to leave, just after the "angel of death" visited Egypt, they all left their homes in Rameses, or Goshen, and proceeded to leave Egypt "proper." How was this possible—that they were able to be out of Egypt so quickly? On the attached map, you can see that Egypt is extremely long, but its east/west boundaries are very narrow. They left Rameses and assembled in Succoth, which was very near, but at the same time, outside of the boundary of Egypt "proper."



It is likely that the Israelites were already well outside the land of Egypt when they went through the Red Sea. They were outside of Egyptian territory several days prior, but left mentally and emotionally on first day their journey began.

The Primacy of the first Day

Other verses in the Bible indicate the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the night to be observed. It is a day referred to in the Scriptures as the day to be remembered, a memorial, a feast, and the night of solemn observance. On the other hand, the last day is generally referred to as a holy convocation and only once is it referred to as a feast. For example:

So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel (Exodus 12:14-15).

In the verses above, which day is to be a memorial? It is the 15th day of the first month—the first day of the Feast! We know this because the next verse explains that after this first day there is to follow seven days of eating unleavened bread.

In this same chapter the point is made again. Moses wrote that the first day is the night to be observed—not the day they were saved from the attacking Egyptians by going through the Red Sea. It is the night they left as the exodus began:

Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt *was* four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—**on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance** to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This *is* that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations (Exodus 12:40-42).

The night to be observed was the day that they went out. It is the day they departed from Egypt proper. After explaining the ordinance of the Passover, Moses ended this declaration from God by stating what occurred during this time:

And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies (Exodus 12:51).

Thus, the Scriptures state that the night to be observed is the day that they came out of Egypt; the day that they left, and not the day when they went through the Red Sea. For this reason, the primary way God addresses the 15th day of the first month is as the beginning of “the feast.” Consider a few examples:

On the fourteenth day of the first month *is* the Passover of the LORD. And on **the fifteenth day of this month is the feast**; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day *you shall have* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work... And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work (Numbers 28:16-25).

In this particular series of Scriptures, the 15th is called **the feast** as well as proclaiming that there shall be a holy convocation. The 21st day is simply called a holy convocation. Leviticus 23:6-8 states this same truth. The first holy day is called the feast and the last holy day a holy convocation.

Thus we see that God took Israel out from Egypt on the evening which began the 15th day of the first month. The people left their dwellings the morning after the Passover service (Exo. 12:22). They proceeded to take goods and precious items from the Egyptians (Exo. 12:35). They gathered in the area of Rameses and were led out of this area by a pillar of fire that night (Num. 33:3). Understanding that each new day begins after sunset, we can see that this is the memorial. It is the night to be observed and it is designated as the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Symbolism of the Last Day of Unleavened Bread

The Scriptures do not say that the last day of the Feast was when Israel began to leave Egypt. Instead, it is likely that something else of enormous magnitude occurred on the last day. After crossing the Red Sea, Israel rejoiced and Moses later wrote:

So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore (Exodus 14:30).

Israel went out of Egypt on the first day of the Feast. They journeyed through a wilderness and were saved out of the hand of the Egyptians while standing on the shore of the Red Sea. Thus, it is likely that the two high days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrate different events. The first day portrays freedom from bondage and it was on this very day that Israel was set free as they began their journey. The last day is believed to be the day they crossed through the depths of the Red Sea as the wicked Pharaoh and his armies pursued. If this is the case, it pictures God saving us from trials and attacks of the devil and his demons. The night to be observed is the celebration of our freedom from bondage. It is the first holy day—the day God’s people came out of Egypt.

For these reasons, the night to be much observed is the 15th day of the first month at evening. There is no evidence indicating that the night to be observed is the 21st or 22nd day of the first month.