



Handout for week of 2/29/16 Lk. 15: 1-3, 11-32 & Joshua 5: 9-12

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Joshua 5: And HaShem said unto Joshua: 'This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.' (*Wherefore the name of that place was called Gilgal, unto this day*). 10 And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal; and they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. 11 And they did eat of the produce of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn, in the selfsame day. 12 And the manna ceased on the morrow, after they had eaten of the produce of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

COMMENTARY: Today's reading – the Word of God for us today – speaks of homecoming. The people of Israel have finally finished their wandering in the desert, and have arrived at the land God had promised them, the land that Abraham had wandered many years before.

Now that they had arrived at the land, the manna stopped coming. It was no longer needed. They now had a land to plant and harvest. They had a place they could occupy and establish as their own. Each family could have a plot for a farm and a garden. And so the manna stopped, and they celebrated their first Passover the feast commemorating the escape from Egypt, and celebrating the first fruits of the harvest.

The sign of God's care for them during the time in the desert was the manna. Now the sign of God's care is the gift of the land. It was promised, and now the promise is delivered. And the celebration of the Passover, and the First Fruits, is a ritual of thanksgiving.

The arrival in the land is for Israel a homecoming. It is not simply that Abraham had been here before, and that this land was promised him and his descendants. It is also that they have arrived at the place they will now call home.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007. Pgs. 66.

For information on the Passover:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Passover/In_the_Community/Biblical_Readings.shtml

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Passover/History.shtml

Gilgal: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgal>

Following is a summary of the Torah readings and Haftarah readings for the days of Passover.

First Day

In the Torah reading (Exodus 12:21-51), Moses instructs the elders of Israel in all of the laws of Passover. All generations to come are to observe the Passover traditions. In addition, the children of succeeding generations are to be instructed at Passover as to the origin and significance of the festival.

The Torah reading concludes with the last of the ten plagues: the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn. Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and tells them that he wants them out of Egypt as soon as possible. Moses and Aaron comply, and the children of Israel begin to make a quick exit, not allowing time for their bread to rise.

The Haftarah is taken from the Book of Joshua (**Joshua 5:2-6:1**, 6:27) and describes the historic Passover that the Israelites observed at Gilgal after they had crossed the Jordan River. It was the first celebration of Passover in the Holy Land. In preparation for Passover observance, all of the Israelite males were circumcised. They then ate the first matzot made from wheat in the Holy Land. [In the Reform tradition Isaiah 43:1-15 is the prophetic reading for the first day of Passover. This reading, which contains a reference to crossing the Red Sea, is a reminder of God's role as Redeemer.]

Second Day

In the Torah reading (Leviticus 22:26-23:44), Moses instructs the Israelites in the observance of the Sabbath and festivals. The reading presents a comprehensive description of the sacred seasons of the Jewish year, including Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

The Haftarah for the second day of Passover (II Kings 23:1-9, 21-25) was chosen because of its account of the great Passover celebrated after King Josiah's reformation. In the 18th year of his reign (621 BCE), during the course of repairs to the Temple, a scroll of the Torah (possibly the Book of Deuteronomy) was discovered. King Josiah was so stirred by its message that he proceeded to vigorously cleanse the Temple of all idolatry. Part of the account of his reform prefaces the description of his celebration of Passover in the Haftarah, and thus its selection as the Haftarah of the second day of Passover.

The Intermediate Shabbat of Passover

(Exodus 33:12-34:26) After Israel worshipped the golden calf, Moses shattered the first set of tablets. Now Moses again ascends Mount Sinai in order to receive the new set of tablets. Moses pleads for God's assurance of support. God reassures Moses and also reveals His 13 divine attributes. Moses then brings down a new set of tablets with the Ten Commandments.

The Haftarah is taken from the Book of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37:1-14). The prophet finds himself in a valley of dry bones and, under the vivifying effect of God's spirit, the bones knit together and become covered with flesh. Ezekiel understands this vision to mean that the people of Israel, having been exiled to Babylon, will again be reborn as a nation.

Both the fact that Passover, recalling past deliverances, looks forward to future redemption and an old tradition that the resurrection of the dead will take place during Passover determined the choice of this passage as the Haftarah for the Intermediate Sabbath of Passover.

The Song of Songs

It is customary to read the biblical book Song of Songs on the Intermediate Sabbath of Passover. Rabbinic tradition interprets the book as a love song, where the "beloved" is taken to mean God and "the bride" to mean the congregation of Israel. This tradition made the Song of Songs especially appropriate to Passover, because it marked, as it were, the beginning of the courtship of Israel and God before, metaphorically speaking, they became finally wedded at Mount Sinai by Israel's acceptance of the Torah.

Another reason given for the reading of this book on Passover is that it is a song of the spring. To the poet and the singer, spring is synonymous with hope and happiness. A people's hope lies in its freedom and its attachment to the law of God. This, too, is the lesson of Passover, for which the people of Israel have fought since they left Egyptian servitude, and this is the eternal message it wishes to convey to the whole of the human race.

The Seventh Day

The Torah reading (Exodus 13:17-15:26) describes Israel's experiences following the exodus. Pharaoh mobilizes the Egyptian army and begins his pursuit of the fleeing Israelites. When Moses and the children of Israel reach the Red Sea, Moses raises his rod, the waters split apart, and the Israelites are miraculously saved. When the Egyptians reach the water, they become bogged down, sink to the bottom, and drown. Moses and the children of Israel sing a magnificent song of thanksgiving.

The Haftarah (Second Samuel 22) connects to the theme of thanksgiving in the Torah reading. In the Haftarah, King David composes his own song of thanksgiving to God for all of his victories and deliverances from the enemy. The Haftarah concludes with this sentence, which is also included at the conclusion of the grace after meals, "A tower of salvation of His king, who shows mercy to His anointed, to David and to his heirs forever" (Second Samuel 22:51).

The Eighth Day

The Torah reading for the eighth day of Passover (Deuteronomy 15:19-16:17) deals with a variety of laws, including those related to tithes, the year of release, the release of slaves, and a comprehensive description of the three pilgrimage festivals.

The Haftarah, from the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 10:32-12:6), begins with a prediction that Assyria will be defeated. This prophecy comes true. The Haftarah continues with Isaiah's message of hope that the Israelites will again be gathered together from lands of exile and return to Israel.

The Haftarah also contains the famous great vision of the Messianic Era when peace and harmony will reign supreme among all people. Because the Haftarah contains several allusions to the redemption from Egypt, it was especially chosen to be chanted on the last day of Passover.

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