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Jordan L. Szaroletta April 16, 2012

Separating the Dough from the Leaven: The Role of Food Provision and Deprivation in Establishing the Israelite Nation

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Abstract

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Food and its consumption play a distinct role in ancient Near Eastern literature. One of the most under-examined series of narratives that have a relationship with food and eating is in the book of Exodus. It is clear that food consumption plays a large role in the Jewish faith today, specifically in the food laws contained in Torah. Before these food laws, there are instances that involve food consumption. There is a particular focus on food in the Exodus narrative. In the narratives of the plagues, the food availability of the Egyptians is affected. The Passover meal, as a ritual, brings the Israelites closer to the divine through food. The journey in the wilderness uses nourishment as a demonstration of God's power to provide as well as a means for establishing the Israelite nation. One of the most interesting aspects of Exodus is how food, and its availability, is a literary device used to elevate the Israelites and lay the groundwork for the founding of their own nation.

In Exodus, there is a narrative progression that demonstrates God's ability to provide as well as to deprive. In the beginning, God withholds food. As the narrative continues, he provides it. Specifically, the reader first encounters God depriving Egyptians of food. Over the course of the narrative, God demonstrates his ability to provide for the Hebrews. God makes it clear in both the Passover and in the journey in the wilderness exactly what the Hebrews will eat. The story, then, revolves around two central questions: Who gets to eat and what do they eat?

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Introduction

Food and its consumption play a distinct role in ancient Near Eastern literature. One of the most under-examined series of narratives that have a relationship with food and eating is in the book of Exodus. It is clear that food consumption plays a large role in the Jewish faith today, specifically in the food laws contained in Torah. Before these food laws, there are instances that involve food consumption. There is a particular focus on food in the Exodus narrative. In the narratives of the plagues, the food availability of the Egyptians is affected. The Passover meal, as a ritual, brings the Israelites closer to the divine through food. The journey in the wilderness uses nourishment as a demonstration of God's power to provide as well as a means for establishing the Israelite nation. One of the most interesting aspects of Exodus is how food, and its availability, is a literary device used to elevate the Israelites and lay the groundwork for the founding of their own nation.

In Exodus, there is a narrative progression that demonstrates God's ability to provide as well as to deprive. In the beginning, God withholds food. As the narrative continues, he provides it. Specifically, the reader first encounters God depriving Egyptians of food. Over the course of the narrative, God demonstrates his ability to provide for the Hebrews. God makes it clear in both the Passover and in the journey in the wilderness exactly what the Hebrews will eat. The story, then, revolves around two central questions: Who gets to eat and what do they eat?

Although God is the actor who provides or deprives persons of food, these questions are rooted in the social context of the Israelite readership. Issues of consumption are consistent throughout cultures because food is a basic human need. Just as any natural disaster could be seen as an agent of God's displeasure (Anderson, 68), the absence of food could also have been

viewed as a sign of God (Soler, 945). The Exodus contains within it an explicit connection between God and access to nourishment.

God's connection to food is important in the Israelite context, because so much of what distinguishes the Israelites from their neighbors is their diet. Israelite food laws are first brought up in Exodus, and there has been extensive scholarship on the significance of these dietary restrictions. But the text explicitly deals with food long before these dietary restrictions are articulated. Understanding the importance of these foodways yields a more holistic understanding of the Israelite view of their cultural history and heritage. Specifically, dietary laws and narrative are equally telling when examining the relationship between Israelite identity and food consumption. Although I do not deal with the issues presented by the dietary restrictions in the later parts of Exodus, as well as Leviticus and Deuteronomy,[1] these laws have a distinct relationship with the themes of provision discussed in this paper. The dietary restrictions, among other Israelite institutions, are the culminating point or end result of God's cycle of provision. God uses food as a tool to distinguish the persons that he favors and to set up a uniquely Israelite nation, of which the aforementioned dietary restrictions are a part.

Similarly, even though God provides the food it is the people who will consume it. Food itself is useless to God because he does not need it. The need for nourishment is a need of living beings. God manipulates something that he does not need, which gives him power over the human situation. Although God depends on some human beings (the Israelites), he is himself unaffected by food availability. It is with the understanding that nourishment is needed only by the living creatures in Exodus that I postulate there is a shifting dynamic of power. God's choice

[1] The dietary laws are part of overall Israelite law and so are consistent in the three books. The first dietary law appears in Ex 22:31, but common ones examined are the prohibitions against boiling a goat in its mothers milk (Ex 23:19 and 34:26) as well as the eating prohibitions in Deut 14 and Lev 11.

of tool, food, is effective in furthering his agenda because it cannot be used against him. In political terms, nourishment is an effective negotiating strategy. Therefore, we should approach the language of food with an understanding that it is political.

Food can also be seen as an instrument which indicates or forges relationships between people. People who sign treaties with each other or those people who are already allies often share meals together. Besides forging relationships between people, food is also culturally specific. Food is not merely about the actuality of nourishment or political power. Attitudes about food can also reflect the culture and identity of people. This is an important consideration because food can then communicate as well as indicate culture.

From an anthropological stance, Gillian Feeley-Harnik argues "nutritional and other utilitarian considerations do not adequately explain the ideology and behavior involved in the production … and consumption of food" (Feeley-Harnik, 6). Because of this, I have chosen to examine some anthropologists who deal with the semantics of food in the biblical context as a starting point for my methodology and argument. Mary Douglas, in her essay, "Deciphering a Meal," presupposes that food is a code: food has a message (Douglas, 231). However, she does not suppose that food has a "panhuman message" (232). It is with this basic idea in mind that I located the food of Exodus. While food has a 'language' or 'code' of its own, this message is culture specific. This especially important in my research, as nourishment is a literary device used by the authors of Exodus to relay their specific worldviews and assumptions to their own people. The food sources in Exodus have a symbolic relationship to the remembered history of Israel's founding. The specific food items withheld or provided have an underlying relationship or meaning that is not immediately apparent to us. However, the meaning of the food was likely

clearer to an Israelite. Therefore, it is important to grapple with the historical and cultural semantics of the food items in the text.

Douglas also argues that a meal is full of contrasts (236). Instead of the contrasts being within a shared meal, it is in the literary significance of the food. The contrast between deprivation and provision then has a narrative function beyond that of nourishment. Although the contrasts she provides are mostly related to the food itself,[2] the contrasts of Exodus are the relationship between withholding and providing. Not only does this create an exciting story, but it also creates a socio-political message within it. One of the main considerations in the question of who receives access to food is the notion that those who have food are more blessed than those who do not. From the cultural perspective of the Israelites, they see themselves elevated above their former oppressors through access to nourishment.

Besides making a social statement, the consumption of food can also be seen as having an important political message. Marcel Detienne studies alimentary and sacrificial practices among the ancient Greeks, but his work is also helpful in understanding Exodus. He outlines four tactics for approaching a ritualized alimentary context.[3] His third tactic is most useful here because it "concerns the political and alimentary vocation inherent in sacrificial practices" (Detienne and Vernant, 5). While this paper does not deal only with notions of sacrifice, it is important to note that Detienne makes the connection between politics, ritual contexts, and food. Food availability, and the food consumed, has a relationship with both politics and ritual. The specific ways in

[2] For example, she notes contrasts in the texture of the food. While the contrasts she mentions are related to the components of the actual meal, the idea is still relevant.

[3] The first tactic is to view system of sacrifice externally, in order to view its boundaries. The second would be to recognize and analyze the structure of sacrifice from within, especially concerning the relationships between people, gods, and animals in the act of sacrifice. The fourth tactic is to examine sacrifice as a "mythic operator in a group of narratives in which sacrifice stands in opposition to or compliments" certain activities (like hunting or warfare) (Detienne and Vernant, 4-5). Detienne's tactics are all useful for my study, but I chose to highlight the third specifically because it places the most emphasis on the relationship between food and politics.

which this occurs is the main focus of this paper. As previously stated, God uses the provision of food as a tool for political change. Therefore, like Detienne, I rely on this 'tactic' to help illuminate the meaning of food in Exodus.

Another extremely helpful scholar in the matters of biblical food is Jean Soler. In his article, "Sémiotique de la Nourriture dans la Bible," he identifies food as an agent in the creation myths of all people (Soler, 944). However, over the course of time there are developments in the people's relationship with God that separate out the people he favors from the rest of the world. His two stages or examples are the story of Noah and the establishment of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the dietary laws have the same function as the institutions of circumcision or the Sabbath: they narrow the focus, or allegiances, of God (945). This means that Soler has identified food as a vehicle for expressing the ways in which the Israelites were separated from the rest of civilization, but in a positive light. Inspired by this theoretical approach, I will undertake my study of Exodus in the same way. Food is a marker of group identity and membership. What Soler may have overlooked is how food is related to the institution of the Sabbath. While he recognizes that language in Leviticus separates what is edible and inedible in the same way as the Hebrews were separated from the Egyptians (945), he does not spend time analyzing the socio-political significance of food in Exodus before the Ten Commandments. There is a wealth of food and nourishment that occurs before the establishment of the Ten Commandments, and these instances are the primary focus of my work.

Not only will I consider the theories of modern anthropology, but I will also look at the writing of ancient anthropologists and historians. I have referenced Herodotus, Pliny the Elder, Diodorus Siculus, and Plutarch in this project when consulting sources on the Egyptian diet. What is relevant to me is not so much the historical accuracy of their works but rather the ways

they indicate that Egyptians had a reputation for having those alimentary practices. If Egyptians had the reputation for certain dietary practices, it could have a connection with the way events take place within the narrative (such as the Passover or the plagues). Ancient Mediterranean cultural stereotypes reveal attitudes towards the Egyptians. Throughout Exodus, there are some details that suggest that these stereotypes made their way into the narrative.

The notion of historical accuracy had been a particularly problematic stumbling block, because I do not want to treat Exodus as if it is a historically accurate account. For this project, I am attempting to construct the viewpoint of an Israelite who would have heard this story when it first came together, specifically in the 6th Century BCE. Therefore, the project tries to recreate the worldview, knowledge, and cultural stereotypes of an individual living within that context. The narrative describes the process by which Israelites were freed from Egypt and so is primarily analyzed from a literary standpoint. However, I recognize that narratives such as Exodus are rooted in the Israelites socio-historical identity. There may be some historical truth in the details of the text. This is why I have consulted references, both archaeological and textual, on the dietary habits of Egyptians and Israelites. The story may well have been influenced by the actual dietary practices of Egyptians that were encountered through trade and other means of contact. This is not to say the exodus occurred, but rather that Israelite authors married their experience with living Egyptians with their knowledge of their cultural heritage. Such knowledge of Egyptian norms would help to authenticate the narrative for Israelites readers, thus making an at least rudimentary understanding of Egypt likely. I make the assumption that the food and foodways mentioned in the narrative have some bearing or connection to actual dietary practices, whether they are historically accurate or merely reputations.

The other methodological assumption that I uphold is that the narrative was considered holistically. I am mainly concerned with the readership of the entire text in the exilic and post-exilic period. They would not have had access to only one source for the exodus narrative, but rather heard the entire story. Similarly, the theme of provision is consistent throughout the different biblical sources that make up Exodus, which may indicate that the theme was considered by most of the people who contributed to Exodus in its final form. The theme is consistent among the narratives to the point that any editor of the text would not have to purposefully arrange the text to showcase the themes of provision. Rather, it seems to me that the stories which make up Exodus in its final form were all in some way concerned with provision. At points where the narrative feels disjointed, I do engage in some source criticism. However, at no point is the theme of provision compromised because there were several sources combined. The narrative still demonstrates a consistent consideration of the theme of provision so that even when the source changes there is still an observable progression in provision. Therefore, I examined the text holistically.

With this specific methodology in mind, I approach Exodus. My analysis specifically covers Exodus 7:1-17:9. For the sake of my argument, I have divided the text into three sections, based on their slightly different focus on themes of consumption. The first section, dealing with Exodus 7:1-11:10, discuses with the reversal of provision in the plagues. The plagues have an effect on the ecosystem at large which prevents the Egyptians from eating and so affects the society as a whole, especially in matters of religion and politics. Egyptian food norms are then reversed in the second section, covering Exodus 11:1-13:22 which recounts the Passover meal. This reverses the dietary practices of Egyptians and reinforces the dietary practices of the Hebrews. The meal also is laden with sacrificial undertones. Finally, the third section covers a

set of narratives in the wilderness, specifically Exodus 15:22-17:9. Two stories about dehydration and miraculous water frame the episode of manna and quails as well as the establishment of the Sabbath. Throughout these sections we see a progression from deprivation to provision that articulates the relationship between the Israelites, God, and their newly founded nation.

Section One: The Plagues

About half of the exodus story takes place in Egypt, and focuses on the circumstances that allowed the Israelites to leave. Said circumstances are related in many ways to consumption. While the Passover Meal also takes place in Egypt, it is markedly different from other issues surrounding food in the Egyptian portion of Exodus. It is for this reason that this section focuses solely on the first nine plagues, the majority of which have an effect on the availability of food.

Although not all of the plagues on Egypt affect the food availability in the region, the majority of them, as depicted by the narrative, would have some effect on food consumption. The food sources affected have a relationship with the Egyptian diet, even in cases where the Egyptian diet significantly differs from that of an Israelite's. The connection between a plague and an Egyptian's ability to eat or drink is only explicitly stated once. However, because the food sources which were harmed by the plagues were meaningful to the Egyptians, it is clear that there is a relationship in this passage between the diet of an Egyptian and the plagues. From an understanding of the Egyptian diet and a close reading of the text, it can be reasoned that several plagues had the primary or secondary function of denying at least some people in Egypt food.

The plagues demonstrate to the readership the process by which the Egyptians were destroyed. This process appears to have happened over the course of some time and affected more than the food supply. The lack of food would cause other socio-political tensions that would affect the way in which society is 'ordered.' It was a common understanding that the piety of a ruler determined the land's prosperity (Propp, 346). As Pharaoh was unjust, it makes sense that plague befalls the land. The correct ordering of a society is akin to the process of creation (Fretheim, 385). As Pharaoh is responsible for the welfare of the state, bad leadership would

cause a reversal of said welfare. Said reversal means that society would become less ordered. As Terence Fretheim argues, there is a symbiotic relationship between the ethical order and the cosmic order (385). If the state endorses 'unethical practices,' then there would surely be repercussions for said state. In the eyes of God, the Egyptians have behaved unethically towards the Hebrews. Therefore, the plagues happen as an indication that the 'cosmic order' has been changed. The plagues narrative depicts the 'anti-creation,' or destruction, of the Egyptian state. Israelite literature does link food availability to virtue; for example, the repercussions for the sins of Adam and Eve directly affected their food availability (Walton, 28). Since this theme already exists, it is easy to see it taking shape in the plagues narrative. This process is done slowly and through natural events. Interestingly, these natural events have a distinct effect on the food availability of the Egyptians to the point that the readership of the text may wonder how any Egyptians survived the dehydration and starvation that befell them.

Before moving into an examination of the text, the archaeological evidence of Egypt may further illuminate the foods described in the text. Specifically, the tombs at Saqqara[4] had many different types of food sources. There was a surprising quantity and variety of meat (most of the food offerings were meat), none of the foods seemed to be unusual for an Egyptian diet. As we examine the text, let us keep in mind the foods that Egyptians seem to have eaten. The tomb had offerings of emmer wheat, bread, barley porridge, ribs and other cuts of beef, quail, pigeon, and fish (Leonard, 178). These foods are both delicacies and common Egyptian foods found in the tombs. The plagues attack both delicacies and staples. The archaeological finds do not prove the biblical account of the plagues but they suggest a mentality: the Israelite authors of the narrative likely understood what foods were prized to the Egyptians. From an Israelite perspective,

[4]These tombs were used during the first dynasty, circa 3100 BCE (Leonard, 176)

destroying those particular foods would make sense, especially in the cases where Egyptian diet contrasts with the Israelite diet.

The first plague is more explicitly associated with the ability to drink or consume clean water than it is with food. Drinking is a form of consumption which is not the focus of this paper, but is semantically tied to consumption and nourishment. Besides the semantic connection that drinking has with eating, if the exact consequences of the plague are examined, the connection of this first manifestation of God's anger with eating becomes more apparent. First, God has Moses and Aaron announce that the Nile will be struck and turned to blood (Ex 7:17). Clearly, it is not palatable or even hydrating to drink blood in place of water. The first consequence, then, affects the well-being of humans in the area. But in a greater ecological context, if the water has turned to blood it means that neither livestock nor wild game has the access to hydration. In an arid, desert climate like that of Egypt, many wild animals have adapted to last without water, but domesticated species would not fare well without water for seven days.

The occurrence of water turning to blood is an ancient Near Eastern literary trope which is commonly connected with someone committing a taboo (Propp, 349). In fact, most of these stories emphasize that the blood makes the water impossible to drink and therefore we could extrapolate that blood is undrinkable in most cases (349). In the Israelite context specifically, there is evidence within the biblical texts that the consumption of blood was taboo. For example, Leviticus 7:26-27 reads: "You must not eat any blood whatever, either of bird or of animal, in any of your settlements. Any one of you who eats any blood shall be cut off from your kin."[5] Similar prohibitions occur in Leviticus 17:10-14, 19:26, Deuteronomy 12:16, 12:23-24 and 15:23. Leviticus also gives a reason for this prohibition: "therefore I have said to the people of

[5] This, and other biblical quotations, are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted

Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off" (Lev 17:14). Therefore, an Israelite reader might interpret this as the Nile water becoming a Hebrew taboo as well. Egyptians who drink of it, or eat things that come from the Nile, are therefore to be cut off from the Israelites. Incidentally, this is what happens over the course of the narrative.

From what can be deciphered about the ancient Egyptian diet, it is known that livestock were not commonly consumed, if a family even had livestock. Even so, the dehydration and death of weaker animals would cost the family an essential source of milk. Milk in the Mediterranean context was mostly consumed by those who cared for livestock: the poorer, shepherding classes (Dalby, 217). The calories that milk, and its by-products, provides a family are often essential and can make the difference in survival of the family (Dalby, 217). The transformation of Egypt's main water source into blood therefore affects more than water and meat availability, which would doubly damage a person's ability to acquire the nutrition needed for survival.

The secondary effects of lacking water are even worse, however, in that water is also an essential ingredient in producing the foods of the masses: bread and beer. Both bread and beer were the main components of an Egyptian diet, among all classes of society (Wenke, 141). The process of making both of these foods starts with water. If the water source is contaminated, or non-existent, then making bread and beer is nigh impossible. While the text may not explicitly say this, it reasonable to assume that an Israelite reader would understand this side effect of the first plague because bread making was a daily activity (Wenke, 61). Most people would know the process much more intimately than we would. Therefore, it is important to note the implications that such an event would have on the reality of experience of the average Israelite or

Egyptian. Such an experience may not be immediately obvious to us, but it stands to reason that an Israelite would understand how lack of water affects baking. The first plague demonstrates perfectly the relationship between food availability and the plagues.

From Exodus 7:17 it might be easy to assume that since God struck the Nile, it is the only source of water turned to blood. Albeit the Nile is the main source of water for all of Egypt, but perhaps there would be other sources of water. If it was only the Nile that was turned to blood, the classical interpretation of the Nile as a god which is struck down by God is highlighted, as it is the only body of water struck. However, the entire account of the plagues is likely a combination of two sources (Propp, 314). In one source, the P source, all of the water of Egypt becomes blood. But in the other source, which encompasses Exodus 7:17 gives the impression that the Nile was the only water which turned to blood. For this narrative, the E Source narrative, the focus is on the Nile (Friedman, 131). Such an emphasis or focus could be because Israelites understood the religious significance of the Nile according to Egyptians. It is in this narrative that we see both water sources and food sources being diminished. It is also true that the Nile was considered a deity. If the Israelites were aware of this fact, singling out the Nile to become blood is likely deliberate.

The text also tells us that all of the fish in the river died. This would clearly affect an Egyptian's ability to consume fish. Ancient sources that recount the diet of the Egyptians are conflicting, some writers like Herodotus claim that Egyptians refused to eat any fish while others claim it was a common staple (Dalby, 127). There is archaeological evidence that fish consumption was common, especially before agriculture and animal husbandry were widespread (Darby, 337). Fish were commonly consumed by lower classes, but were in high demand among all classes. It is interesting that the biblical narrative specifically emphasizes the death of the fish

because Israelite consumption of fish was not widespread until the Talmudic age (Cooper, 9-10); only those peasants who lived near significant water sources would occasionally consume fish at the time when an Israelite in the sixth century BCE would have been eating. If the Israelites are describing within their narrative the destruction of the Egyptian state, then the death of the fish signifies that the Hebrews had some basic knowledge of the Egyptian diet. They would know that fish is a significant part of everyday life. There is also evidence of salted fish being used as a means of currency between King Ramses XII and the Prince of Byblos (Darby, 372). Not only is the fish suitable for consumption, and very popular among all people, but it was also used in trade. Certain types of fish were delicacies that were often means of trade and acquiring wealth (Dalby, 145). This means that Egypt's fish could have been in high demand across the Mediterranean. The death of the fish is arguably significant because fish were a common food source for the Egyptians. Not only are the Egyptians deprived of drinking water, bread and beer, but also one of their main sources of protein.

There is also something nourishing about the water of the Nile itself. There are ancient sources which claim that the river of the Nile, in itself, is fattening. In accounts of feeding the sacred Apis bulls, the bull is specifically prohibited from drinking water from the Nile because the bull is not allowed to become fat; it was believed that the waters of the Nile could fatten any creature (Darby, 133). At first this might not seem so flattering, especially because the belief is most attested to in prohibitions, but in reality any water which is seen as fattening is probably seen as nourishing. Because this is a unique property of Nile water, turning the Nile to blood is destroying something which is especially nourishing to the Egyptian people. For those that did not have other sources of food beyond bread and beer, the fattening or nourishing properties of Nile water is a significant blow to their perceived availability of food.

The Nile was personified as a deity. In the pantheon of the Egyptians, however, the Nile itself was not only a deity but also the creation of another deity, and it was another god's domain. The god who had authority over the Nile was Hapy; he was responsible in particular for the inundation of the Nile (Wilkinson, 106). The yearly flooding of the Nile was thought to encourage bountiful harvests. From this a connection could already be made between the first plague as signifying God eliminating an Egyptian deity and the availability of food. To see if the connection was explicit in the ancient Egyptian context, we can look at the Hymn to Hapy. The hymn is quite long and a recurring theme is the one of provision. The hymn addresses Hapy as "food provider," "Lord of the fishes," and "Maker of barley" (Lichtheim, 206). It begins with "Hail to you, Oh Hapy, Sprung from the earth to nourish Egypt" (205). From this hymn, it is clear that the Egyptians saw both the Nile, and the deity Hapy, as the provider of food for their nation. Perhaps, instead of simply killing Hapy, the plague of blood actually represents God usurping the role of provider for the Egyptians. He demonstrates that he holds more power over provision than even the Nile; God demonstrates this by destroying the nourishing essence of the Nile. Unfortunately for the Egyptians, God is upset with them. This does not bode well for food availability.

According to the E Source narrative, where only the Nile turns to blood, the Egyptians dig wells along the Nile in order to be able to drink. This passage clarifies to the reader that the plague affected all of Egypt and specifically deprived Egyptians of nourishment: "And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile" (Ex 7:24). In this case, not all of the Egyptians would have had difficulties with dehydration but it demonstrates that the authors of this section understood the Nile as an Egyptian's main source of hydration. It means that for the entirety of the first plague narrative

‘all the water of Egypt’ and ‘the Nile’ have similar significance in the story. Between the two sources, the Israelite readership is meant to understand that the Nile is an important, if not the main, source of water for Egypt. The digging of wells also suggests that work was then temporarily stopped because they had to gather and dig wells. This process would be very time consuming and would likely have an effect on the daily life of Egypt. Therefore, even the first plague affects the general livelihood of the Egyptian people.

Although the frogs of the second plague have little to do with food production, subsequent plagues are definitely relevant. The gnats and flies of Exodus 8:16-23 should be addressed together, as their effect on food would be basically identical. Egyptians had dietary restrictions of their own: “Egypt was remarkable to Greeks and Romans for the food rules and avoidances which were an especially noticeable feature of everyday life” (Dalby, 127). When Joseph and his brothers share a meal in Egypt in Genesis, it reads: “and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians” (Gen 43:32). This is an eating prohibition, and we later see something like it in the laws of the Hebrew bible, including the Passover meal. Some theorists will argue that the dietary restrictions that the Hebrews adopted were influenced by Egyptians in the sense that many of the things which the Egyptians found unclean, the Hebrews eventually found to be unclean as well (Simoons 1961, 89). According to Herodotus, Egyptians could not sacrifice their livestock to the gods if they had any blemish. For example, even if the hair on an ox was growing in an “unnatural manner” or one black hair was found on it, the ox could not be sacrificed (Herodotus, 25). Herodotus writes that any animal sacrifice must be “clean” (26). Both the gnats and the flies bit livestock, which would make them unsuitable for sacrifice (Ex 8:18). It is also unlikely they were suitable for consumption. While this is not the end all of food production, it does seriously

impact the lifestyle of those in the upper classes. They would have to cut back on their meat consumption. It is unclear whether or not it was acceptable to eat or drink animal byproducts that were from blemished animals. If consuming the flesh of a blemished animal was taboo, it could be argued that the Egyptians were also discouraged from eating meat because of the bites incurred by the flies.

Even if there was not a problem with eating the livestock, or any of its byproducts, the next plague would definitely affect food production. The plague of pestilence specifically affects livestock. It is clear from the text that the pestilence is deadly to the livestock (Ex 9:2). The death of an animal does not just mean that the person who owns the livestock is deprived of meat, but they are also deprived of any product which comes from the animal, especially if the livestock gives dairy. There would likely be an aversion to consuming any animal which died of pestilence, because it died under unhealthy conditions.

This plague, and ones to follow, specifically target livestock. Typically speaking, this would entail the death of sheep, goats and maybe cows. Animals do not just provide meat, but they also provide products, like milk, as well as labor. From as early on as 3000 BCE, the main use of cattle in Egyptian society was not its meat or by-products, but rather its ability to plow fields (Wenke, 64). Thus, killing a domestic animal has more adverse effects than simply the loss of meat. Depending on how the verse is translated, the plague could have affected “livestock” or “cattle” (Ex 9:2). However, William Propp argues that the epidemic has a linguistic connection to cattle disease, making it highly likely that the plague was one that primarily affected cattle but also could be transferred to the other livestock listed (Propp, 350). This may suggest some sort of statement about social class. It has been argued that those who had the biggest connection to cattle were the priests, because they often functioned as butchers (Ikram, 111) and they had the

rights or ownership to the meat (136). This would make sense, as cattle are expensive animals. It is also true that people other than the priests or upper class had meat only a few times a year because of how expensive it was (Cooper, 3). Even if a peasant is herding the cattle it could be owned by a priest and he would not have access to the products of the animals he herds. If that is true, or at least, if Egyptians had that reputation, killing cattle is a way of damaging priests who are both representations of Egyptian religion and Egyptian upper classes. This is important, because it indicates that God does not simply want to take over the religion of the Egyptians but also take over the directional branch of their socio-political system and thus suggests a complete destruction of the Egyptian state.

Bulls were also used as working animals in agriculture (Wenke, 65). For any Egyptian farmer, a bull was an indispensable resource as it provided the strength needed to carry out agricultural tasks. As these plagues are taking place at time when Egyptians would be harvesting grain, not plowing, this element is not an immediately problematic situation for the Egyptians, unless they were using the bulls to help transport the harvested grain (53-54). Instead, it could be a more symbolic representation. The bull and cattle in general, were associated with Isis and Osiris in ritual contexts (Herodotus, 27). These are the deities which gave human beings agriculture in Egyptian religious tradition. As God has already usurped the role, authority, and authenticity of one deity, he could symbolically do that to another. In both cases, these are deities who play a role in providing food for Egypt. God takes over the provisory role in both cases; he takes over the man-made realm of agriculture and the realm of nature that is left up to chance in provision. Since both of his bases are covered, he now has control over the entire sustenance of Egypt.

The animals directly harmed by the plagues were domestic. While most of the animals mentioned in Exodus 9:3 could theoretically have been consumed, there is no evidence that the donkey was ever eaten (Darby, 235). It is also unlikely that horse and camel were consumed. Instead, the death of donkeys and horses could be a means of preventing the harvest. Donkeys were used from very early on in Egyptian society, perhaps as early as 3500 BCE, as a means of transport as well as labor (Wenke, 65). The later plague of hail destroys the barley and flax when it is ready for harvest. Since these plagues are not too far apart, the barley and flax may have been ready at the time of this plague, and the death of the livestock would be the first assault on these crops and the hail would be the second.

Horses were also used for field labor but it seems that horses were more often for hunting by the upper class (Darby, 237). The animals directly harmed by the plagues were mostly domestic. Therefore, if an Egyptian was in need of meat, he might decide to go hunting. There is no evidence that horses were actually consumed as meat (237), so if they were present in Egypt at the time of the Exodus or at the time the Exodus was written, they would be known for uses similar to that of a donkey: labor. As the next plague indicates, this time of year was one of harvest (Ex 9:32), meaning that losing labor animals would be especially devastating to the Egyptians at this time of year. The presence of horses in ancient Egypt is a tricky subject. Apparently, horses may have become extinct in ancient Egypt during the time of the Old Kingdom and then reintroduced in the second intermediate period (236). Apparently, it was common for species to become extinct and be reintroduced (236). It is important to note that, because the end of the second intermediate period was 1570 BCE, the second intermediate period pre-dates most scholarly estimates for the occurrence of the Exodus (Anderson, 48). It especially pre-dates the composing of Exodus, making it likely that horses were present in Egypt

during both of these occasions. Therefore, based on what is historically known about Egypt, it would be reasonable to assume that the Israelites would have thought of the Egyptians as a horse owning society. Their inclusion in the list of animals that perished also indicates that the effect of these deaths is not just to deprive Egyptian upper class of meat but also to effect production and availability of all food sources.

In the plague of hail, there is explicit mention of crops being ruined, specifically barley and flax, yet the spelt and wheat were spared (Ex 9:32). This is probably the first instance in which we can say that the narrative where food is also spared. Most scholars use this as a way of dating the time of year but it is also possible that time span of the plagues is not of much importance, at least to the Priestly source (Propp, 310). Different grains had different uses and carried different social connotations. Documents from the reign of Ramses III record barley as a food of the peasants (Darby, 475). In this instance, a food that was recognized to be a staple of the poor was damaged. It seems to be a poor choice on God's part to deprive the poor of food because the poor are not the ones who are keeping the Hebrews captive. However, it is possible that God is attacking Egypt in totality. Within Israelite literary tradition, God does attack the food sources of entire nations when his will is transgressed, so to say the same of Egypt is no stretch (Davies, 116). It would be especially useful to target the food source of the plebeians because they are the largest sector of the population. By starving the majority of the population, God is basically removing Pharaoh's work force. It is also true that, if the lower class does not perish quickly, there could be political issues. As David Wengrow puts it, "Egypt came to be unified as much by the consumption of leavened bread and beer as by the…activities of…kings" (Wengrow, 89). The availability of food is just as important for the well-being of the state as is a just ruler. In times of hardship, especially famine, it is possible for people to begin to feel upset

with their government. It may be concluded that the Pharaoh is not doing his job, as he was seen as primarily responsible for containing disorder (Wenke, 66). While a revolution or change of power would be highly likely, it is clear that any civil unrest would be unpleasant for the Pharaoh. By eroding the country's support base, God makes it more likely for his people to be released.

Issues of income disparity and food availability are, in a way, at the heart of Biblical tradition. All of the prophets are voices for the overlooked and underprivileged in society (Anderson, 228). Their job was to voice the injustice that the poorer members of society faced at the hands of the elite Israelite classes. It is because of this persistent theme in later books of the Hebrew Bible that it is possible that those who would have heard this story would understand the political implications of a reduced food supply. While it would not oust the Pharaoh from power, it would make his country weaker as well as damage his reputation. The distraction may cause enough anguish for the Hebrews to be released. Because there are more plagues after this one, and the narrative does not give a glimpse into the lives or hardships for the peasants, it is difficult to know how effective such a strategy would be. However, from the plagues that have happened so far, it appears that groups of people affected by potential food shortages are becoming gradually larger. Eventually it might be expected for all of Egypt to be without food.

Barley was also commonly fed to animals, especially horses and cattle (Darby, 484). Barley provides nourishment to both humans and domesticated species that human beings depend on. Its destruction is analogous to the Nile turning to blood; it extends the destruction beyond the human beings. Not only is the availability of food jeopardized by keeping the population from consuming barley, but it is also threatened by starving useful domestic animals. In the case of this plague, the crop failure theoretically only affects domesticated animals,

meaning that hunting is still possible. However, it shows that God's wrath primarily lies with the Egypt's society, not with the land itself. This, perhaps obvious, distinction is important because it bolsters the political implications of the crop failure.

At the same time, if the authors of Exodus knew any Egyptian they might also be making a joke or pun with this plague. Barley being ruined can be interpreted as a pun: barley is masculine in the Egyptian language, and the world *it*, one of the words for barley, means both barley and father (Darby, 483). The Pharaoh is often seen as both the father and head priest to Egypt; he represents both the domestic and religious head of society because it was his responsibility to intervene, on behalf of the Egyptian people, to the gods (Wenke, 272-273). By destroying the barley, symbolically the Pharaoh is being destroyed. The symbolic potential that barley has makes it a good food source to target in the narrative. The destruction of the barley can foreshadow the downfall of the Pharaoh in both cases discussed so far. In one instance, the barley represents the potential for a political threat and in the other represents the potential for the Pharaoh's personal destruction.

It has been argued that barley is also a grain which has more ritual applications than the grains which survived, especially wheat (Darby, 484). A common person, perhaps because it was easier to afford, would be more likely to make an offering of barley. In ritual terms, the inability to make an offering to temples or deities would be disheartening to the Egyptian people. Sacrificial offerings, whether animal or vegetal, serve to keep the relationship between the people amicable, and therefore proper sacrifice is essential for the well-being of the state (Frankfurter, 84). Offering to the gods may appease them and they might be persuaded to come to the Egyptians' aid. An Egyptian, unable to make any offerings to his or her deity, would understand that the lack of sacrifice would affect both the well-being of the state and the

relationship between the gods and Egypt. As demonstrated by the plague on the Nile, God takes great care to overthrow and usurp the roles of the Egyptian gods. By destroying the barley, the number of grain offerings would be reduced. The relationship between the deities and the Egyptian state or people would be adversely affected.

Not only is barley used in ritual, but it also encompasses the secular needs of life. Barley was used medicinally and as currency (Darby, 484). Many cultures will use food as a means of curing ailments, so this fact is not surprizing. What I think is more surprizing is the fact that barley in particular was used as currency. The destruction of the barley may be a reflection of the complete destruction of the Egyptian state. Without currency, the state would lose a large portion of its economy. This seriously weakens the strength of the nation. The use of particular grains as a currency or the representation of currency is documented across the ancient near east. Persons reading or telling the exodus story may have known about this particular practice and understood the multiple implications of losing the entire stock of a particular grain.

Of the grains that survived, wheat has significant ritual association. Wheat was understood to be connected to the Pharaoh. According to Darby, wheat was a grain that the Pharaoh made as offerings to temples (Darby, 486). While other people may have been economically or ritually prohibited from making offerings to temples because of barley crop failure, it was still possible for the Pharaoh to do so in theory. The problem is that when the plague of hail came, the wheat was spared because it was not yet ripe so it would not have been harvested yet (Ex 9:32). This implies that the current state of affairs leaves Egypt ritually less protected. With Egypt less ritually and economically capable, the state may be more easily persuaded to let the Hebrews leave while also inflicting punishment on the Egyptians.

Wheat may also be symbolically linked to the Pharaoh in a more direct way. According to Diodorus Siculus: "Every time a Pharaoh dies, everyone in Egypt grieves…they renounce food that comes from animals and anything made of wheat" (Diodorus, 1 LXXII 3). It is a fairly common practice for people to abstain from certain foods during special occasions, especially if they are unhappy occurrences. This could have two literary interpretations. On one hand, it could be that the destruction of all other crops but the wheat and spelt implies that the Pharaoh has survived this plague, but will not survive for much longer. On the other hand, this foreshadowing could indicate that if Egypt is laid to waste, the people will starve both because they have no crops and because of their religious and political allegiances. As a literary device, the wheat may serve as foreshadowing, especially if the readership knew that wheat was implicitly connected to political leadership. Such foreshadowing would be effective because the plagues and the situation Egypt is about to get much worse.

Wheat is also used as a metaphor for the Pharaoh. When wheat is unripe, it is hard and near impossible to consume. The wheat cannot be easily removed from its shell. The imagery on an unripe grain of wheat could be similar to that of the Pharaoh's inaction in the face of the plagues. Unable to accept the fact that the God genuinely is requesting the Hebrews to be freed, nothing is able to convince the Pharaoh. Even the destruction of the plagues does not appear to fully faze him because in every case, as soon as the plague is lifted, he does not accept the validity of the plague. Therefore, while the more common grains and livestock perish, the Pharaoh remains unaffected by the plagues while his people suffer, just as the wheat remains while the barley is destroyed. The grain could be a literary device used to connect the famine of the people with the actions of the Pharaoh. If Pharaoh was not so stubborn, the food availability of Egypt would not have been affected in such a dramatic and totalizing way. Readership may

not explicitly connect the hardened grain with Pharaoh, but the connection between the Pharaoh's refusal to let the Israelites leave and the worsening condition of Egyptian food availability is crucial.

The plague of locusts poses some interesting questions about the relationship between God and the Egyptians. In the part where the plague is presented to Pharaoh, Aaron says "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?...For if you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country" (Ex 10:3-4). Earlier plagues seem to have the capacity to cause social upheaval, especially through their secondary result in food shortages. The plagues continue because the Pharaoh does not submit to the will of God. This is an indication of God's approach: causing Egypt to submit, or humble itself, to him.

What is interesting about God's tactics, then, is that the plague, in which a clear indication of humility is requested, is a plague of locusts. So many of the plagues that God brings down upon Egypt affected its food supply, but locusts are an ecological disaster because they leave no plant alive, which would affect far more than simply human beings; it would affect the entire ecosystem (Fretheim, 393). Locusts are known for their ability to remove all vegetation in an area (Houlihan, 192). Any vegetation that survived the plague of hail would be destroyed in the plague of locusts. The degrees of ecological and alimentary disaster increase with every plague, indicating God's anger with Egypt and his willingness to exert control over the area.

In this plague and others before it there is what seems at first to be a curious discrepancy. When describing destruction to crops that would be caused by the locusts, Aaron recounts: "They [locusts] shall devour the last remnant left to you after the hail, and they shall devour

every tree of yours in the field" (Ex 10:5). However, in the plague of hail, the hail "struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail…struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field" (Ex 9:22). From reading the plagues narrative, it is clear that this is not simply a factual error on the part of the writers. It is rather a point of emphasis. If all of the plants in the field and trees in the field were literally destroyed, the plague of locusts serves little purpose. The repetition of complete destruction actually highlights the food availability problem. The food of the Egyptians is not completely destroyed once, but many times. The overarching totality of destruction would be a great dramatic point to the readers, because they would notice that all the vegetation is destroyed more than once. In reading the plagues, then, the alimentary effects of the plagues become more obvious with repetition.

If we accept the narrative in its final form, as one cohesive text, then the factual discrepancies that the locusts cause are irrelevant. Instead, the action of the locusts is simply a rhetorical device to emphasize the continual destruction of the Egyptian food supply. This must be hyperbole to emphasize the decimation of Egyptian food; because from a holistic perspective, the locusts could have finished the job of the hail but there is no mention of the wheat or spelt in the locust passage. The symbolic association of wheat has already been discussed, but this passage would further the discussion by suggesting that the problems facing the Pharaoh have escalated. Essentially, the Pharaoh was spared in the previous plagues but he will not be spared in future plagues. Not only is the Pharaoh completely destroyed, so it the entire land of Egypt: "nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt" (Ex 10:15). The imagery that this destruction invokes is not automatically one related to food, but one of desolation. Considering what has already been discussed, that food is not just a source of calories

but was in some cases currency, medicine, and an expression of culture; the complete destruction of food sources is catastrophic to both lives and society as a whole.

Generally speaking the theme of this thesis is food and consumption from a human perspective. But, one of the only direct uses of the verb "to eat" in the plagues of Exodus is when the locusts eat everything green (Ex 10:15). Although there this is probably not a purposeful choice on the part of the authors, but rather a logical one, it is still important to consider in terms of plot. So far, no person has eaten. There is no explicit statement, but one can assume that Egyptians are eating. One theory about feasting suggests that the act of excessive consumption solidifies social hierarchy (Pollock, 21). While I am not going to argue that the locusts are actually feasting, the excessive consumption of the locust does suggest something about how Egyptians are seen in the eyes of God. If locusts, a disastrous pest, are more deserving of food than any Egyptian, then that makes a statement about how God views the Egyptians and their actions. Theoretically speaking, the choice of plagues is up to the discretion of God, so each plague could suggest something about how the Egyptians function or what they deserve according to God. By allowing all of the food in Egypt to be consumed by a pest, it is almost as if God is placing Egypt below a pest in a social or spiritual hierarchy.

The plagues of darkness and the death of the firstborn are quite divorced from the issues of consumption and food availability. There are some minor connections that could be made. For example, consuming the meat of an ox was a medicinal cure for night blindness but by the time the plague of darkness envelopes Egypt, all the livestock should theoretically be dead (Darby, 157). On that note, even though all the livestock that belong to the Egyptians are supposed to have died twice, the description of the last plague is as follows: "About midnight I will go out through Egypt. Every firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh…to

the firstborn of the female slave…and all the firstborn of the livestock" (Ex 11:5). There could be many different reasons as to why there appears to be a plot discrepancy. It is likely that the repeated death of the livestock, like the repeated destruction of plant life, must then be a rhetorical device to emphasize destruction. However, the fact that the food sources are the recipients of repeated destruction is worthy of note because the theme of ecological and nutritional disaster is also emphasized. For those living societies similar to the Egypt, it is likely that the consequences of the plagues on the lifestyle and food availability would be even more immediately obvious than it is a modern reader.

The plagues are an example of starvation as a sign of divine disfavor. As we know from the biblical sources, the Hebrews came to Egypt under 'good terms' in the story of Joseph and they were motivated to come to Egypt because of starvation. However, over time, the Hebrews were continuously lowered in class until they were slaves. Because the Hebrews came to Egypt during a time of famine[6], it is important to note that the relationship between Hebrews and Egyptians was bookended by problems of food availability. In the beginning of the relationship, God lets Joseph help the Egyptians secure their food sources while everyone else suffers. In a sense, although the text does say that the Egyptians do not eat with the Hebrews, they would have shared the same food (Gen 43:32). From the perspective of a covenantal meal, the Hebrews and Egyptians entered a relationship at the time of Joseph. The starvation of the Egyptians may be a tactic to terminate this relationship in another way, because a contract between two social groups that was originally made through the sharing of a meal can be undone if one of the parties does not eat or fasts (McCree, 120). Starving the Egyptians could be a way to force the 'contract' to nullify. Then, under these circumstances, the Hebrews would not need to stay in Egypt. In that

[6] To see the narrative, look at Genesis 46 specifically.

case, God would have to destroy all food sources in order to make sure that no Egyptian continues eating, thus the totalizing destruction of the plagues.

Much of the discussion so far has the goal of understanding the way the historical facts of Egyptian life contributes to a holistic understanding of the text by an Israelite reader. It is extremely difficult to determine how much of these dietary practices and dependencies the writers of Exodus understood but what is important is that such an understanding of these dietary components is possible. Considering that Egypt and Israel were neighbors, and they had constant contact either through trade or war, it is not a stretch to examine the dietary practices of the Egyptians (Wengrow, 138). In examining the plagues, it appears that they do align themselves to affect the diet of Egyptians. It is also interesting to note that when God prevents the Egyptians from eating, or having adequate access to food, it affects more than simply food. Lack of food affects the political and religious security in Egypt.

Section Two: The Passover Meal

The Passover is a focal point of Exodus in that it is the final act of the Hebrews before they depart from Egypt. In some ways it can be seen as preparation for their liberation. The Passover meal contains many elements that are common to feasts in near eastern antiquity. Many times, because it is linked to the feast of unleavened bread, the Passover meal itself is often understood as a feast (Meyers, 95-96). At the same time, the Passover meal produces a problem because its context suggests something more macabre and urgent than a feast. To understand the significance of the Passover meal, and its status within the story, requires an examination of both the alimentary elements and the social or ritual elements that accompany the meal. The elements to be examined are those that are often explored by those working in the anthropology of feasting: the participants, the preparation, prescribed action during the feast, and the surrounding context of the feast.

There have been several attempts to historicize the Passover narrative. While historicizing is an important element of the study of Israelite festival, the main focus of this chapter is to engage what happens in the narrative. It is also to examine the functions of the narrative. Part of regarding the functional aspects of the narrative does warrant some historical analysis. However, it is not important to examine the historical origins of the Passover festival for our purposes. Instead, what is important to engage is the explanation of Passover as presented by those writing the Exodus narrative. Readers may presume that understanding the historical Passover will give insight into the origins of the religious practice of the Israelites. Instead, engaging the narrative function of the Passover meal will give more insight into the Israelite understanding of their own religious and cultural history.

From the anthropologists that study feasting, it is clear that a feast has many more components than the actual food that is consumed. Feasting is simultaneously uniting and dividing in that a feast often amasses a large group of people. Within that group, people of different social classes would be feasting together. However, there would often be ritual in place to prevent the hierarchical boundaries from being suspended or forgotten. Tamara Bray argues "contexts of food serving and consumption can be used to foster solidarity or to promote competition as a well as to support highly stratified social systems based on distinction of gender, age, and the like. How one consumes is related to who one is" (Bray, 19). Therefore, it could be argued that feasting in the Mesopotamian context was both a way of fostering political unification and a way of demonstrating to lower classes the wealth and importance of the ruling class. Logically, this can be extrapolated into many other cultures, both ancient and contemporary, as Stuart Tyson Smith argues the same of Egyptian feasting protocol: "various forms of feasting are used to create and reinforce social distinctions, foodways also serve to bind individuals in larger social groups" (Smith, 40). Similarly, Feeley-Harnik argues that food in Judaism was a way of underscoring the socio-political relationships between people and between people and God (Feeley-Harnik, 165). The Passover meal can be seen as a new or reversal of the social stratification of Egyptian society (Bergant, 49). The social element of feasting is something that must be considered if the meal is to be fully understood.

A feast is also usually a celebratory act. In antiquity, feasts were commonly associated with religious, familial, or political occasions that are auspicious. Occasions that would often warrant a feast are often associated with abundance. One exception is the phenomenon of a funerary feast. The funerary feast, however, in ancient near eastern tradition can be viewed as celebratory in that it often comes to be a ritually enacted last meal or celebration with the

deceased. This is certainly true in early Greek tradition, where the feasts take place inside of the tomb (Cavanaugh, 337). Greek feasting as described in the literary tradition is a positive act, even in the face of death (Sherratt, 307). The pre-liberation context of the Passover meal is then strange because there is little positivity. The Passover takes place during the death of many Egyptians and the meal that is eaten is not particularly delicious. There is little cause to celebrate yet, seeing as the Hebrews have not yet been freed.

It is also important to note that feasting usually has food which is both seen as delicious or rich and is usually symbolic. A common element in literary descriptions of feasting is the consumption of meat and the consumption of alcohol, usually wine. Again, in the Greek literary tradition, feasts typically have an abundance of wine, meat, bread, and occasionally fruits (305). Similarly, in the Israelite context, meat was only consumed on festival days unless the person was in an elite priestly family (Cooper, 3). Meat was not commonly consumed in ancient near eastern culture because it was expensive. As a feast incorporates several social classes, most of the people attending the feast would not commonly consume meat. The importance of consuming meat, then, links back to the idea that a feast occurs during a celebratory context, or at least a context that is outside of the normal life experience. It is in this liminal space that the opportunity for ritual arises.

When considering these aspects of a feast, the Passover meal fits in some respects and does not fit in others. This is likely because the Passover has several functions within the narrative. Any anomalies that are observably different from common anthropological models of feasting or literary accounts of feasting are likely to be explained by context. Otherwise, such anomalies suggest that the Passover meal functions differently or in more ways than simply a feast. In examining the narrative of Exodus, it is clear that the Hebrews are made to eat bitter

things and to approach the meal with a sense of seemingly incongruent urgency. Feasts in antiquity take hours, and it is clear that this meal was also lengthy. However, the Israelites are instructed to behave as if they are going to rush out of their homes at any minute (Ex 12:11). There are other incongruences that will be fleshed out more in the following pages. Something seems amiss in assuming the narrative describes simply a feast.

Perhaps the reason the Passover is bewildering to categorize as a "feast" is that in Exodus 12, there is a problem with the sources. Many parts of the bible, and Exodus is no exception, are a combination of several different sources and traditions. The narrative that describes the Passover meal comes from a different source and was an insertion into the general narrative that perhaps functions as an etiology for a festival that was already established in Israel, namely the feast of unleavened bread (Propp, 448). So, the feast of unleavened bread could have been occurring regularly at the remembered time of the exodus, but the Passover is inserted almost in place of the usual feast. This means that while the Passover occurs on a feast day, it is clearly marked or different from the traditional feast. This does not mean that it is not a feast, but rather that it is distinct from from the historically earlier feast of unleavened bread.

However, the problem may be that the anthropological theories of feasting are not wholly applicable to the Passover meal. To gain a clearer understanding of a feast, ancient Near Eastern literary conventions of feasting were also examined. The point of examining feasting in literature from a similar socio-historical context is to see whether the literary use of a feast differs from modern anthropological theory in such a way that both illuminates the Passover meal and presents it as a feast. Literary feasts are different from practiced feasts in that it can be argued that they have a specific functionality for the entire narrative. In looking at other literary conventions, it can be seen whether 'literary feasts' are simply feasts or demonstrate something

about the story itself. Anomalies may be even more telling in that they could be a semantic signal to those reading. Throughout the narrative there may be parts which seem perplexing in that they are not typical of a supposed feast.

To begin, the Passover is clearly a ritualized or religious meal. The authors of Exodus link the Passover to another feast which they understand as pre-dating the Hebrews in Egypt. It is possible that this feast of unleavened bread is the festival or worship Moses requests Pharaoh to allow throughout the plagues, specifically the services that Moses requests of Pharaoh in Exodus 10. This is because Moses insists that "you [Pharaoh] must let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings…our livestock must go with us" (Ex 10:25-26). Moses also makes the claim that the practices of the Hebrews are offensive to Egyptians, and as we will see later, this may be true in the sacrifice of a lamb (Ex 8:26). This illustrates an important point: the ritual lives of the Hebrews are connected to specific foods. If this is the case, the Passover and death of the firstborn could have been understood as an event that replaces an older tradition. However, under the pretense of requiring freedom or at least the necessity of practicing the festival away from Egyptians, the feast cannot occur as it usually does. The ritual circumstance has changed.

It is also important to note that eating in the context of a religious event, even if it is not necessarily 'happy' was practiced in the Israelite context. In fact, meals were often consumed at events which reinforced the religious and political identity of Israel. For example, eating was a common precursor to the public reading of law (McCree, 122). There was also a shared meal before the opening of Solomon's temple (122). The mixing of the human need to eat with a religious event changes the ritual circumstances as well because the human need for nourishment is incorporated into larger religious and political messages. Because the Passover is related to the

Israelite identity it is not difficult to see how this relates to later ritualized meal practices of eating before or after major religious events.

Another way in which the ritual circumstance is changed and so affects the festival is that God is freeing the Hebrews from Egypt. However, this freedom is gained in the context of death and destruction. While the text does not explicitly state that the Hebrews feel solemn or understand the implications of the death that is going to affect all of Egypt, it is likely that would understand that they are eating within a context of destruction. The reader knows that the Hebrews are aware of God's actions as Moses announces to them that "For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians" (Ex 12:23). Clearly they are aware of the death that will befall the Egyptians. As I have previously pointed out, feasts that are in a context of death are still usually celebratory. However, it does not seem to be the case here. At this point, it is relevant to note a trend in the Homeric tradition which is also related to death and violence. Specifically, feasting in literary traditions can often be associated with militaristic violence, because it happens to celebrate the victories in *The Iliad* (Sherratt, 307). While these two situations are dissimilar, the point is that violence or death does have a relationship with feasting in that it can be a reaction to a violent situation.

Feasting in the Homeric tradition can also tell us about our expectations as readers. One would expect that the feast would follow a great victory. However, feasts could be announced at the beginning or development of exciting action as well (307). It can also signify the end of a harrowing episode: "they [feasts] are often, more or less, formulaic punctuation points that, among other things, allow the bard to gather his thoughts and remember where he wants to go next" (307). Therefore, the fact that the Israelites are sharing a meal in the midst of destruction and near the end of their stay in Egypt (an arguably harrowing episode) means that the

discordance in the timing of the feast may not be so unusual in the socio-historical context and specifically as it is expressed in literature.

This can explain some of the ritual preparations of the feast. The people are instructed to paint their lintels and doorposts with the blood of the lamb they are going to eat. The blood has several functions. First, the blood keeps away God, or the destroyer that God sends. It is clear from later in Exodus that blood has a symbolic relationship to orthopraxy because later in the narrative blood prescribed as an appropriate thing to place at the sides of the altar (Ex 29:12). Therefore an Israelite reader may interpret the willingness to sacrifice as signaling those who are followers of God, and is why "when he [the LORD] sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door" (Ex 12:23). The splattering of the blood on the doorposts in Exodus 12:23 could be ritually similar to that prescribed on the altar in Exodus 29:12. The blood also functions apotropaically. Perhaps it also indicates that something has died in the household and so further death is in some way not needed. However, the death in the homes of the Hebrews is a lamb or goat that they will then consume. McCree notes that eating in itself can also be an apotropaic act. While he cites examples from the book of 1 Samuel, it is applicable in this instance because the blood of the food is what saves the Israelites (McCree, 122).While the death of the firstborn children causes the Egyptians pain and serves to weaken them, the death in the homes of the Hebrews nourishes them and serves to elevate them. That is not to say that the Hebrews "feed" off the death of the Egyptians, but rather that the Hebrews are nourished by God while the Egyptians are weakened or 'starved' by the same actions. This is a continuation of the themes that were present throughout the plagues.

Another aspect of preparation is that the Hebrews are instructed to remove all of the leaven from their homes and not to partake of it for seven days. Leaven is an ingredient that God

avoids or does not accept as an offering: "You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened…" (Ex 34:25). This prohibition is also found in Exodus 23:18, 29:2, 29:23. It is not known whether this command starts with the exodus from Egypt or if it is presumed to predate it in the narrative, but the point is the same: God avoids leaven. The people at this point in the narrative are also forbidden to have the leaven in their houses. This specified ritualized cleaning of the home suggests that the Passover is an event that is elevated from the mundane sphere of life into something more profound because the people avoid leaven which is a behavior of God. The cleaning is tied specifically to an ingredient or element of cooking. Abstaining from yeast can mean many things in this narrative, but for now it is important to note that the Hebrews are only cleaning their homes of one specific thing: leaven. The absence of leaven may allow the homes to become closer to God.

Ritual practices, including feasting or other ritually important meals, affect far more than simply the food. The preparation of the Passover meal attests to this because the preparation and consumption of the food is symbolic. Two aspects of a meal are still missing: how the participant consumes it and what he consumes. These two aspects are related in that Exodus prescribes how the food must be cooked. Before addressing the food it is pertinent to address the way in which the participant will prepare to consume the meal. In Exodus this means addressing the question of the participant's dress. All of the people who participate must dress in the following manner: "with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it with haste" (Ex 12:11). The participants are dressed not as if they are about to eat, but rather as if they are about to leave. This is counterintuitive because in the context of a meal, especially a feast, the meal is to be relaxing. It sets up an atmosphere of urgency to reverse this norm.

In any meal, the focal point is the food. Symbolically speaking, the food itself also has distinct meaning in ritualized contexts. The focal point of the Passover meal is the lamb or goat. While this meat dish is the central component, it is interesting to note that it can be either lamb or goat (Ex 12:5). The rest of the meal is specifically planned, even down to the last cooking detail. The symbolic nature or significance of the meat must then be shared by both goats and sheep. One clear connection that both goats and lambs have with the Egyptian context may be the answer. It is thought that many Egyptians abstained from eating lamb or goat and that these meats were rarely, if ever, offered to Egyptian deities (Herodotus, 27-29). Herodotus claims that most cities thought that lamb or goat was sacred and so would avoid consumption of one or the other (27-29). Similarly, Plutarch emphasizes that the religious leaders of Egypt would not consume the flesh of a sheep, nor wear wool (Plutarch, 352 4 D). While it is not explicitly stated in Exodus, it is relevant to point out that in Genesis 46:34 it says "shepherding is abhorrent to the Egyptians." If simply spending time around lambs is seen as taboo and the Israelites knew that, it is likely that it was not acceptable to eat lamb either. Because this was referenced in biblical tradition, it is also plausible that the Israelites knew that eating lamb was also not customary practice among the Egyptians. In both cases, the lamb or goat is a reversal of traditional Egyptian norms. Because this particular meat has connections to both the Egyptian people and Egyptian deities, there is reason to suppose that the Passover meal is relevant or meaningful to both human beings and the divine.

As the meal appears to be relevant to both the divine space and human space, it is also worthy for a moment to examine the lamb or goat as it is eaten in Israelite tradition. It is clear that the lamb or goat was a common food to eat; for example, Abraham offers divine visitors goat in Genesis 18. Both lamb and goat were common Israelite choices for meat, so it is not

surprising that these are the meats of choice in the Passover meal. Similarly, it appears that goat and lamb have a relationship with the divine. Abram offers God a goat, by God's own instruction in Genesis 15:9. Isaac wonders where the lamb for the burnt offering is in Genesis 22:7. Therefore, both of these animals have a connection to sacrifice as well as human consumption. While in Egyptian culture they would have been avoided, they are openly consumed and sacrificed in the Israelite context. Therefore, it must be asked: is the function of the lamb to point out Israelite heritage or to spite the Egyptians? As the meal is a reflection of the Israelite imagination of events, it is likely that both of these elements are at play. The stories of Genesis would be widely known, as would basic knowledge of Egyptian customs. The interplay between these two symbolic understandings of lamb are compatible in that it presents the Egyptian food customs as directly opposed to that of the Israelite heritage.

Much of Exodus 12 outlines the specific guidelines for preparing the meat component of the meal. Many of the instructions given seem to be typical in that the animal must observed and without blemish (Ex 12:5). However, the striking thing about the preparation of the meat is actually the manner in which it is cooked. A participant is instructed not to "eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs." (Ex 12:9). This method of cooking is counterintuitive simply because roasting a lamb whole, and eating every part (as Ex 12:10 commands), was not likely pleasant. Furthermore, it means that the animal has not been wholly prepared for consumption because it still includes the guts, which have the potential to contaminate meat. Similarly, I have found no evidence in my research that the intestines or 'guts' of animals were readily consumed, they were more often prescribed as burnt offerings so it is unusual that people would have 'permission' to eat them from God (Bergant, 52-53). Such a cooking technique also means that certain parts of the meat would be very

difficult to eat as some parts of the animal are tougher than others and would need more time to cook. It leaves the potential for burning the animal. Roasting in itself was considered a typical way to prepare food for a feast in the ancient near east; however it was roasted in pieces (Sherratt, 303). It is also likely that the innards or tougher parts of the animal are not particularly delicious. If this was the case, then the reason behind this mode of consumption was likely symbolic.

The method of cooking the lamb is unusual in and of itself. While the participant must be dressed as if he or she ready to leave in an instant, the lamb is to be roasted. Roasting takes far more time than boiling or grilling meat (314). It is also true that in Israelite tradition meat was most commonly prepared by boiling (Cooper, 3). Even if the sanitary issue is tabled, it is still perplexing within the narrative for this contradiction to arise. Claude Levi-Strauss has argued that roasting was the earliest method of cooking; therefore there may be an implied archaic nature to the meal (5). Roasting could have been seen as traditional or archaic even in this time period, especially because meat was more commonly boiled than it was roasted. As we will see with the bread of the Passover, there is something to be said about food that is 'old' or rooted in ancestry. Given that there is a range of possibilities for the symbolism behind the lamb, especially in the way it is cooked, the contradiction may simply be explained by suggesting that the symbolic layer of the narrative is more important than the potential lived experience. Roasting an animal in its entirety takes a huge investment in time; it is also clear that this meal takes several hours because it lasts all night. Still, if one is supposed to be hasty this does not wholly make sense. Perhaps it is also an issue of preparing for what comes after the meal. The roasting and consuming of the meat is an investment and takes time, but perhaps the haste that is

prescribed suggests to the reader that the participant does not have time to digest or succumb to post-prandial stupor. Instead, he must be ready to leave his home quickly.

When a person offers meat to God as a burnt offering, the meat is not pre-cooked. It is burnt as is (Miller, 108). At first it may not seem as if sacrifices to God have a relationship to this meal, since a participant typically does not eat food that has been designated as a sacrifice, but the method of cooking implies a connection. The lamb is a typical sacrificial animal and Carol Meyers suggests that the feast of unleavened bread is thought to be a festival that celebrates the animals leaving the stables for the first time since winter (Meyers, 96). Such a celebration would usually be marked by a sacrifice, likely a lamb. What I make bold to suggest is that since the Passover happens as almost a replacement for the calendrical typical feast, the use of the lamb changes. Sacrifice is seen as an essential mediary between the people and the divine (Frankfurter, 84). That means that the sacrifice solidifies the relationship between the Israelites and God, thus saving them. It is clear that the lamb's blood saves those in the home from the destroyer (Ex 12:13) and that the method of cooking the lamb is similar to the preparation of a burnt offering. The text does at one point call the lamb a "sacrifice" but this happens only once in the chapter (Ex 12:27). The lamb itself is identified as the sacrifice. It is as if the Israelites are making a sacrifice to God, but in this case, they are also physically nourished from it.

The other sense in which the lamb's preparation may be taken is more macabre. Knowing that Egyptians may have held the lamb and goat to be animals that one does not eat for religious reasons, specifically priests, then hundreds of lambs being slaughtered is likely to be recognizable by the readers of Exodus as a slight (Plutarch, 352 5 20). Throughout Exodus, God has taken special care to ensure that both the Egyptian Gods and the Egyptian people starve. Now, as God destroys the Egyptians in a manner that ensures their freedom, it seems likely that

the collective action of the Israelites mimics the behavior of God. As God kills the Egyptians (and their livestock), the Hebrews kill their sheep and goats. The functions of this mimicking could vary, but on the basic level, mimicking divine behavior is worthy of note. It establishes a connection between the people and the divine. Some may argue that the collective action somehow helps the divine actor. Such collective action is more likely symbolic.

By mimicking the actions of God, one can both symbolically help him in his task and gain greater understanding of the actions God needed to take in order to guarantee their freedom. I would not go as far as to call this a form "sympathetic magic," which is an observable phenomenon in ancient near eastern religions (Hoffner, 328). One might be tempted to place the Passover roasting as sympathetic magic because it is commonly practiced through food (Rozin et al, 704) and because it manifests through collective action and relies on the idea that the elements of the meal have a connection to the goals of the participant (703). It does seem that a collective action, on its own right, accumulates and in some way increases the semantic power of the event. Simply the fact that everyone is uniting in the same action is important; especially because it is related to becoming nourished and to cooking, it connects every participant to a network of people on the basis of human needs. It could also be that it gives the participant a window through which to observe how their freedom came about. If every Israelite participates in smiting a symbol sacred to the religious landscape of Egypt while God also destroys Egypt, there is a connection there that is difficult to ignore. The action of God and the actions of the Israelites are connected in so much as the actions of humans mimic divine action, in either destruction or sacrifice.

During the meal, participants must also partake of "the bitter thing" (Ex 12:8). This element most eludes analysis because the text does not even give the reader the specific thing.

Using modern Seders or medieval interpretations are not likely to help figure out the intended original bitter thing. Perhaps, though, the significant aspect of the herb or "thing" is that it is bitter. If that is the only requirement of the food, then it is the aspect that is most important. Most interpreters, including the modern Seder, suggest that the bitter herbs are symbolic of the bitterness and suffering of the Hebrews under slavery (Meyers, 105). For Seders after the original one, this interpretation works because it could take a conscious decision to remember a painful time once the Hebrews are out of slavery. However, it seems likely that the Hebrews in Egypt understand the bitterness of being slaves because technically they are still slaves.

Perhaps the bitterness to those in the narrative is not so much bitterness about being slaves, but a general bitterness that the Hebrews perpetuate. There is something to be said about the Hebrews and bitterness throughout Exodus. The root for 'bitter' occurs three times and twice it relates to consumption. In Exodus 12:8, bitter herbs are prescribed as a condiment that goes with the bread and lamb. In Exodus 15:23, when the Hebrews are in the wilderness, the Hebrews find that they are unable to drink of the waters of Marah because they are bitter. While this incident will get more treatment in my next section, it is important to note that in Egypt, the Hebrews are made to consume bitter herbs. Later in the narrative, at Marah God cleans the water of its bitter taste so that it becomes drinkable. So at that point in time they do not need to experience bitterness. At this point in the lives of the Hebrews, it is likely that they are bitter. However, being made to eat something bitter could serve not as a reminder of the bitterness of slavery but rather the bitterness of the Hebrews. There is something to be said about understanding one's own emotions that could potentially make the meal more powerful. It should be noted, however, that the text gives little indication of any particular significance of the bitter herbs, conventional or not.

Another element to consider is ritual cleanliness. William Hallo examined Sumerian taboos and their relationship to 'biblical abominations.' What was interesting about the study was that strong smelling, or arguably bitter, foods were considered ritually unclean especially during certain times of the year and among priestly people (Hallo, 31). The foods that are identified as 'unclean' are strong smelling roots and herbs, such as leeks, onions, and garlic (32). Egyptian priests were similarly prohibited from eating strong smelling foods like garlic (Simoons 1998, 151). Diodorus Siculus also claims that Egyptians "absolutely refuse to eat…onions and things like it" (Diodorus, I LXXXIX 4). In *On Isis and Osiris,* Plutarch makes a similar claim about priests: "The onion cannot be eaten when one [a priest] wants to stay pure nor when one participates in a ceremony"[7] (Plutarch, 8 353 F). It may be a loose connection, but as we do not know what the 'bitter thing' is, it is plausible that it had some sort of strong smell or may have caused a person's breath to smell. It is also interesting that all of these sources identify bitter tasting or strong tasting foods as taboo to some extent in Egypt. This is important because we have already seen that the consumption of lamb was offensive to Egyptian priests. The entire meal may be a rejection of Egyptian food taboos and reaffirmation of an Israelite food identity.

The bitter thing could also be something far more mundane. Bread in the ancient near east was not nearly as porous or palatable as bread today. In families where bread was the basic food staple, it was necessary to make bread more interesting by eating it with herbs or other strong tasting food items (Cooper, 5). This would be especially important if the bread was unleavened because it would be very dense and quite flavorless on its own. This preparation of bread was common throughout the ancient near east. Bread was commonly consumed with raw

[7] Some translations render the vegetable described as "garlic" and some render it is "onion." The French I am translating from renders it is onion, but we shall proceed with the understanding that we are talking about a potently smelling food either way

onions and leeks in ancient Egypt (11). Bread made from barley was eaten in the same way in ancient Israel (12). This helps indicate that the Israelites had some knowledge of Egyptian customs. It also shows that the writers of Exodus are making a connection between the food that is regularly consumed by the Israelites and the food that is atypical of a daily Israelite meal; namely the bread and the meat.

Finally, the third component of the Passover meal is the bread. Bread is a typical staple of ancient diets, so it is unsurprising except for the fact that this bread has no yeast or leaven. The prohibition against leaven is repeated several times throughout chapters twelve and thirteen, making it a clear focal point of analysis. Later in Exodus God does not allow people to offer him leaven (Ex 34:25). It is thought by archaeologists that Egyptians were the first people to cultivate yeast and eat leavened bread (Cooper, 4). They were at least likely to be the culture that introduced leaven to the Levant region (Wengrow, 39, 138). Because Egypt and Israel were so close and had contact often in trade routes, it seems likely to me that the Israelites would recognize the Egyptians' preference for bread that is made with yeast. If that bread is associated with the Egyptians it is reasonable to assume that shunning it would be like rejecting the Egyptians. The shunning of the Egyptians likely means that Hebrews are also turning back to their ancestry.

There is also a linguistic reason that appears to express an Israelite-exclusive identity in the unleavened bread. In verse 12:39, the text reads: "And they [the Hebrews] baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt…". The word translated as cake is the Hebrew root עגה. This word occurs once in Genesis, in Genesis 18:6. The divine guests that announce the birth of Isaac partake in this bread, which is also unleavened in that it was made in haste. It was also,

presumably, before the Abraham or his descendants had contact with leaven. From this connection it is possible that the bread that is described in Exodus 12 is one that has roots inherently tied to Abraham's people.

Similarly, the word that occurs more often for "unleavened bread" in Exodus is מַצָּה. This word also occurs once in Genesis. It is used in Genesis 19:3, when divine beings sent to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah stop at Lot's home. Lot feeds these divine beings unleavened bread. Both instances of the consumption of unleavened bread have a particular association with the divine and with haste. In the case of Genesis 18, the bread is clearly tied to the lineage of Abraham as it is given to those announcing his heir, making it tied to a distinctly Hebrew identity. In Genesis 19, the bread is associated with the destruction of immoral cities. Both of these instances apply to the situation of the Hebrews in Egypt. The Egyptian civilization has offended, oppressed and actively denied God.[8] Linguistically, the connection is made between these stories and the story of the Passover, yet the connection is more than simply the use of words but rather the circumstances of those related to or descended from Abraham. It is also clear that the people who make the bread (and in the case of Exodus, eat it) are the ones who are favored by God. Through a particular type of food, the narratives acknowledge the people who are favored by God and those who are not.

There is one other common element in the story of unleavened bread through Genesis and Exodus. Namely, these instances all share an element of haste. For Abraham, his duties of hospitality prescribe that he must feed his guests quickly. The same thing happens with Lot, but Lot also faces the issue of impending destruction. It is especially true that haste is an element in

[8] Through slavery, denying Hebrews the ability to practice their religious festivals and through denying God's work in the plagues

the Israelite norms of hospitality because bread does not last more than a day, so while the guests need to be fed quickly, there is no pre-prepared food to offer them. While the Hebrews in Exodus are not facing impending destruction or are being rushed because of a guest, they are awaiting a quick departure once the meal is over. This can be inferred from the Israelites eating as if they are dressed to leave. It is true that later in the text, when the Hebrews think they are free, the Egyptians come after them (Ex 14:3-9), meaning that haste was needed on their part. The issue of being hasty, then, is not only related to the participants dress but also to the bread that the participant consumes.

The conclusion of the Passover meal is abrupt. There are certain ritualized prescriptions of dealing with leftovers, specifically letting no lamb remain. Any lamb that remains is burned. The motivation for burning the leftovers would be that the meal models a sacrifice in some ways and that the Hebrews would make sure the entire animal is sacrificed. Therefore, disposing of the remains in a traditional offering style would be necessary. This simple act of burning the leftovers makes it clear that the meal which the Israelites consume is close to a sacrificial offering. This can explain specificity of the meal, for an offering to God is very formulaic. It suggests that the Israelites are so close to God that they share a meal with him. This is the ultimate connection between the Hebrews and God, because to share a meal with God is to be close to him.

In the passage directly after the Passover meal, there is a perplexing etiology. Knowing that God's Passover worked and freed them from bondage, the Hebrews hasten to pack up all their belongings and depart. This quick departure has an interesting consequence: "And they baked unleavened cakes of dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for

themselves any victual"(Ex 12:39). This verse gives the reader the explanation for unleavened bread's existence in the Passover Meal. Such an explanation is perplexing because this verse implies that the Hebrews had leaven in their homes at the time of the Passover. This was strictly forbidden earlier in the chapter. Egyptian bread baking methods took a long period of time. The dough was placed in a clay mold and baked for several hours (Wengrow, 95). So, it would seem that this verse tells us the Hebrews were making bread in a traditional Egyptian way.

Perhaps this contradiction with the bread tells the reader about different conceptions of unleavened bread by different source writers of the Bible. As previously mentioned, Propp suggests that the entire sequence of the Passover and its meal in verses Exodus 12:1-20, 43-49 is an insertion from the priestly tradition (Propp, 448), meaning that the significance of the meal and its components vary slightly in nuance between the two sources. Similarly, unleavened bread has different historical significance to these different source writers. In one case the bread is tied with the freedom of the Hebrews and in the other case it is tied to the heritage of the Israelites, although it seems that there is a connection to Hebrew heritage in both cases.

The Passover meal, and its surrounding context, is perplexing in that it is often accepted as a feast but does not share some of the 'fundamental' qualities of feasting. I propose that instead of using the term 'feast,' the Passover meal is recognized as meal of ritualized separation. The word feast is never used in the original text, yet later scholarship often refers to the event as a feast (Meyers, 96). If taken at face value, the Passover does not seem to constitute a feast or it seems to be a feast out of context. It could then be understood as something of a 'pre-feast.' Perhaps, though, it is a feast in that it is a reflection a feast which is practiced at the time Exodus was written. However, the function of the Passover meal is both uniting and separating at the same time. The meal distinguishes, or separates, the Hebrews from the Egyptians. It confronts

the social stratification of the Egyptians, thus elevating the Hebrews (Bergant, 49). Emphasis is also placed on participation: every man must complete the ritual if he is an Israelite (49). It unites all of the Hebrews because they perform the same rituals and are marked in the same way.

What is clear about the Passover meal is that it presents itself as both the continuation and the beginning of Israelite history through its connection with food. The historical element of the Passover meal is primarily seen in the consumption of the unleavened bread, which has roots both in the accounts of Abraham and in the Passover. Food embodies the nation history of the Israelites, which makes the food a clear indicator of a person's cultural heritage. The Passover meal ritually connects the Israelites with their past. The food, in this case the bread, brings the reader or eater back to his or her cultural heritage. A person who then accesses the text after it is written receives a glimpse into their past; their cultural heritage is spelled out for them and connects them to their ancestors through the food that they consume.

Besides asserting Israelite heritage, the Passover meal also reinforces the Hebrews' relationship with God. This is primarily seen in the lamb, although it can also be seen in the bread as well because the bread was eaten by the divine in the Genesis story. The lamb invokes images of sacrificial practice that would be appropriate to offer to God. Whether the connection with God is more than a sacrifice is up for debate. It may give the participant a way to reenact the actions of God. Either way, the elements of the Passover meal have a distinct connection with the divine. Feasting in antiquity has a strong relationship with the divine; for example, in the Greek tradition as well, feasts catered to both the human and the divine. The gods were said to be co-participants in the feast because they eat the parts of the animal that the people do not but they 'consume' the food at the same time as the humans do (Detienne and Vernant, 21). While Hebrews are not the same in their religious beliefs as the Greeks, it is clear that both the food and

the surrounding events of the feast in the narrative are reinforce the connection between the Hebrews and the divine.

The meal also gives the reader access to the emotional state of the Hebrews, and perhaps the Egyptians. For example, bitter herbs are used, as a condiment for the other elements of the meal. The quality of the herb that is emphasized is its bitterness. The bitter aspect of the herb, therefore, must have a connection either to the narrative or the rest of meal. It seems to me that the bitterness is connected to both aspects. Because the Passover meal encompasses far more than simply food, it is reasonable to understand that there is an emotional component to the items that the Hebrews consume. Bitterness is not simply a flavor, it is also an emotion. The meal and its surrounding circumstances are arguably emotional and thus the meal is another way in which to read the emotions of the Israelite characters in the narrative. It invokes the human experience with death and slavery in such a way that the Hebrews literally consume their grief, and perhaps the grief of their oppressors.

As much as the elements of the meal can pose difficulties of interpretation, there is a distinct reason for this. Much of the Passover text is an insertion (Propp, 448). Also, as demonstrated in this section, the symbolic layers in every aspect of the meal are startling and profound. I am suggesting that meal serves as a reflection back in time of the authors of Exodus. The Passover of these writers could be a reconstruction of the Mosaic Passover in response to another which the author does not approve of (448). It would then be laden with events and transitions that do not appear to make sense. It makes little sense for the Israelites to roast a goat if they are in a hurry, nor does it make sense for them to ruin perfectly good meat by eating it with an especially bitter condiment. However, it does make sense that if an established festival promotes these practices that the text of Exodus could be a backwards reflection of the meal

which was established when the text was written. An Israelite who participates in the Passover meal would likely understand that it is connected to his or her cultural heritage because it is the food of his or her ancestors. It makes them feel as if they are literally dining with their ancestors. Therefore, remembrance, haste, and cultural foods that would not make sense if the narrative was a historical record, take on a far greater meaning.

The Passover is successful in that it merges the divine, the historical, and the human experience in one ritualized meal. As a literary device, the food and its surrounding ritual nuances, capture the experience of the Hebrews in Egypt from their human experiences to their changing relationship with God. Something that is particularly striking is the way in which the meal, as a continuation of the plagues, elevates and separates the Hebrews when the plagues relegated the Egyptians and their religious system. The liminality of the Hebrews' position makes the meal a very vulnerable transition. Yet, it is the gateway or state of transition between an image of God that is destructive and an image of God as a provider. In the Passover, he encompasses both aspects, suggesting that once the Hebrews are physically separated from Egypt, God's role will primarily be one of provision.

Section Three: The Wilderness

Throughout the first two sections we have observed the relationship between food provision and identity. As the Egyptians were slowly starved in the plagues, the Passover narrative demonstrates how the Israelites were nourished through their relationship with God. Within the following narrative in the wilderness, there is an escalating rhetoric which focuses on the continued separation of the Israelites from other nations. Now that they are out of Egypt, the Israelites face a problem they have never encountered before: starvation. For God to replace the Egyptian leadership, he must take a role that is similar to Egypt in its role of provision without the manual labor. There are several implications of this provision. Specifically, there would be a slow transition from a one state to the establishment of a completely new and separate Hebrew nation under the premise of the Covenant. Instead of simply establishing the social and political institutions immediately, God slowly introduces these in the context of provision.

Therefore, in a series of crisis-management stories, Exodus 15-17, God provides sustenance to the Hebrews and through said sustenance takes steps in establishing the Hebrew nation. It is likely that this process happens in steps because the whole experience is overwhelming in the narrative and because it acts as a sort of creation story. Instead of creating the entire universe, there is simply a creation story for the particular country that is created at the provision of a particular deity. As stated before, Fretheim postulates that the creation of a society is akin to the creation of the world (Fretheim, 385). Such a creation is specific to a group of people; in this case the creation of the Israelite nation is related to the creation of the world because it was present in Genesis 1 (Soler, 944). As the experience in the wilderness slowly establishes the institutions and parameters of the Israelite nation, it is appropriate to view this narrative in terms of a creation story that takes place after a period of ‘anti-creation.’

From examining the structure of these crisis-management stories, it seems that there is also a story arc whereby the provision of God has a culmination or focal point. Looking at the accounts of chapters fifteen through seventeen, there is a definite sequence in which the stories take place. The first instance of inadequate, and then miraculous, nourishment is at the spring of Marah (Ex 15:22-26). The second instance would be God's provision of the quails and manna in Exodus sixteen. The final sequential instance of crisis-management is a second spring story. As these stories are sequential and all deal with issues of nourishment, it can be said that there is a pattern. Such a sequence of events places the emphasis on the story in the middle because it varies from the stories that frame it but still is relevant to them.

Because of the escalation of these stories, it is best to examine them in the order that they appear in the narrative. The first sign of trouble for the Israelites is the lack of water. When they reach the spring at Marah the problems are not immediately remedied because the water is not potable. Specifically, the water is described as bitter (Ex 15:23).While previously the Hebrews were made to eat the bitter thing in the Passover meal, they now refuse to. In fact, it seems as if the water is in some way understood to be diseased (Propp, 580). If the water was diseased, or not free-flowing, it implies that the spring is a salt water spring (580). Salt water increases dehydration instead of alleviating it and so presents a problem for the Hebrews as they are not going to be near large bodies of freshwater any time soon. It has been three days since they found water, which means that the situation is dire as consuming no water for forty-eight hours can cause death. As people who lived in a dry, arid environment, the audience would understand the perils of not having water for three days. Therefore, God takes action.

Water is a very real need in the desert and so it is surprising that it was not provided for the Israelites sooner. Throughout these stories, there is an underlying element that seems strange.

Although God has placed himself in charge of the Israelites, and arguably wants to care for them, he does not immediately provide nourishment for them. On the other hand, the Israelites do not trust the deity that saved them from bondage in Egypt. Upon not finding water, they complain. The narrative does not appear to take a specific stance on the issue. Both parties have some reason to be upset. Similarly, it is unclear if God simply 'forgets' that human beings have need of water and other bodily sustenance or if he does not desire to provide it for the Israelites. Instead of offering an interpretation of 'which party is correct' or 'why God doesn't immediately provide water,' I think this is important to point out because it demonstrates how subtle the discussion of provision can be. There is no clear indication of the motivations behind provision until the Israelites become upset.

The prescribed method of fixing the problem, or making the water potable, is reminiscent of the first plague because the wood is used as an instrument of transformation. God provides Moses with a piece of wood, which he then throws into the spring and the water becomes drinkable (Ex 15:25). In the plague of water turning to blood, the water is transformed by Moses' wooden staff. In this case, though, the wood does make the water undrinkable but rather allows the Hebrews to hydrate. It can be said, for this instance and ones following, that God's provision is akin to the plagues in that the events are miraculous. But instead of causing misfortune and starvation, these events instead cause the Hebrews to be nourished. These 'anti-plagues' are informative of God's relationship with the Hebrew people; he cares for them in the wilderness just as he helped them leave Egypt.

It might be said that miraculous action on the part of God, such as a plague or adequate nourishment, is not without a catch. For the plagues, the catch was simple: the plague is the result of the inaction of the Egyptians. God wanted a specific action from the Egyptians and

because it did not happen, they were plagued. In the case of miraculous nourishment, it seems that once the food or water is provided God announces an expectation. From the narrative, it is discernible that this is clear reversal of the structure of the plagues as well. The miraculous event precedes the expectation. God does not tell people that they will receive water once they behave a certain way. Instead, he offers the water and then provides his terms. In this way, the Israelites would be bonded to his terms because they had shared nourishment in the presence of God.[9]

At the spring of Marah, the terms of the agreement are simple. God gives Moses the following message for the Israelites: "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you" (Ex 15:26). God clearly wants to make sure that the Israelites understand that he has power by references to his attack of Egypt. He also elaborates on an expectation he has of the Hebrews; that they will listen to God and act accordingly. While this is phrased in the language of a threat, perhaps this is the beginning of the covenant. Clearly, God wants the Israelites to understand that he is has the ability to provide for them through making the water potable. Secondly, he wants to get the message across that he can also cause the Hebrews harm. In order avoid harm, they must behave themselves. In these stories, there is an agreement: nourishment for good behavior.

Perhaps what is truly telling about this episode is that, while God does provide for the Israelites, he makes it very clear that to them that he is capable of hurting them. He points out that the he can bring the 'diseases' of the Egyptians upon the Israelites as well (Ex 15:26). However, most of the plagues were not necessarily diseases by our standards, but simply

[9] This point was brought up earlier in section one. For more information, see McCree pp. 120

starvation or dehydration. The first thing that we might infer from this, then, is that inadequate nourishment is in some ways considered to be a disease just as potent or painful as the 'actual' diseases inflicted on the Egyptians during the plagues. If this is true then the presence or absence of food in the wilderness is somehow connected to God's sentiment towards the Israelites. God has already demonstrated that he is capable of inflicting disease onto large groups of people but this section counters the previous diseases with provision. As a reader, do these passages of nourishment in the wilderness take small steps towards developing a covenant? It seems that nourishment has a distinct relationship with the gradual introduction of the covenant between God and the Israelites.

The issue of provision could also arise out of doubt. There is little indication in the preceding chapters of Exodus that the Israelites doubt God with any great significance. However, once they are out in the wilderness the situation changes. Throughout this section, the Israelites question God's motives for taking them through the wilderness. Their apprehension is likely justified, if they have been without water for days. It does not make much sense for God to liberate a group of people just to see them starve. However, if his intentions are just, then it seems strange that he has to be reminded or chided into providing nourishment for the Israelites. Both the human actors and the divine actor seem odd in these stories. It is also odd that God's response to the need for water is one laden with expectations. While it does not seem unreasonable for God to expect good behavior from the Israelites, especially as he is taking care of them, it is odd that he must be constantly reminded that people need nourishment in desert environments.

At the end of this episode, the Hebrews are then lead to a place of abundance and rescue: an oasis. The numbers here are symbolic in that there turns out to be a spring of water for every

tribe of Israel and a palm tree for every clan (Ex 15:27). While it is not explicitly stated, it is logical to assume that the Hebrews would have partaken in the water and dates of the oasis. The verse directly preceding this description is the verse discussed above; the verse where God explains that he expects the Israelites to behave according to his statutes (Ex 15:26). In the narrative this has the effect of demonstrating the abundance that is possible if God's expectations are met. However, this abundance of the oasis comes after God is reminded to provide adequate nourishment for his followers.

The opening anecdote in the series of provision, Exodus 15:22-27, is telling in that it presents serious difficulties on the part of people living in the desert. Some of the most basic human needs are water and yet sources of sustenance are few and far between. A main issue at stake is the lives of the Israelites who have been freed. From the perspective of the narrative, they are not used to living outside of the city and therefore it causes unrealistic expectations on the part of the Israelites. This issue will be more clearly articulated in the next story, but for now it is important to note that the grumbling of the Israelites is only mentioned after a crucial need for water has been reached. It is not as if the Israelites complain after three hours of without water, but rather they complain when it becomes clear that dying of dehydration is a real possibility. In some ways, it would seem that God is taking this opportunity to advance his own agenda: getting the Israelites to follow his word. Yet, God provides the nourishment for the Israelites despite the fact that the narrative does not give the reader an indication that the Israelites agreed to or met his expectations.

The next problem that arises for the Hebrews is that they are without food. Presumably bread that they brought out of Egypt and the dates from the oasis did not last very long. As they continue on their journey, the Hebrews find that they are hungry. Because it takes days to die of

starvation, it was considered one of the worst and most painful deaths (Propp, 593). As starvation is painful, the strength of the Hebrews' complaints is not surprising, although they do say that they would have preferred to stay in Egypt because at least "we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us to this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Ex 16:3). It seems strange that the people who have been freed by God would not trust him, but for the moment let us consider their first reflection back on Egypt. It is surprisingly positive. On a similar token, they remember being served many rations of meat. This is likely a hyperbole, considering that meat was a rare luxury in the ancient near east, even among Egyptians. Still, they appear to remember the food in Egypt as opposed to their oppression. This means that the provision of food is the focus of the passage, because without that provision the Israelites would continue to yearn for Egypt.

God's reaction to the Israelites is interesting in two ways: the manner in which he responds and the food that he gives the Israelites. The situation of possible dissent likely places God in a difficult position. Although he freed the Israelites, they are turning away from him because their particular needs are not being met. What is interesting about this particular passage is that the reader is aware that the provision includes a test while the characters in the narrative do not. God tells Moses he will give the Israelites something to eat but that "In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days" (Ex 16:4-5). As with the spring at Marah, the story tells us that God's provision has a relationship with the proper behavior of the Israelites. At this point in the story, Moses relays Gods instructions, saying that "Tomorrows is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil" (Ex 16:23). This is the establishment of the Sabbath. For the

people reading the story, this is an etiology or the narration of the first moment when God commanded the Sabbath. While at first this seems strange, the Sabbath is an institution which distinguishes Israel from its neighbors. It seems that the goal for God is to slowly introduce the workings of the Israelite state in the context of his provision. This is a useful strategy, in that it is a negotiation where he has the upper hand.

The food that God provides is quail and mysterious bread, manna, which appears overnight. First let us think about the quail. The descent of quail on the Sinai Peninsula is not uncommon during their migratory path between the Mediterranean and Africa (Hoffmeier, 173) and so the writers of Exodus may have known something of the natural processes which occur in neighboring areas and nations. However, this point should not be exhausted too much as the important distinction in the narrative is that the quail was in a much larger quantity than is considered 'normal,' at least according to Exodus because the quails covered the camp (Ex 16:13). The quail in this case also has a greater purpose than demonstrating the natural processes of Sinai. The narrative uses the meat as a literary device, not so much as a discussion on natural science or processes.

Looking at the entire episode on its own, the amount of meat that the Israelites received is striking. The large quantity of meat likely has a relationship to the complaint of the Israelites at the beginning of the episode; they bemoan the fact that they at least had meat in Egypt. This is reminiscent of themes that were pervasive through the plagues narratives. Pharaoh has a difficult time believing God was behind the plagues, or accepting them as truly powerful, because his magicians could replicate the first few plagues. This may be part of the reason he plagues got increasingly violent and difficult to recreate. If God increases the intensity of his wonders or miracles when he is challenged, the amount of quail in this section of narrative is not surprising.

The basic idea is that when the Israelites imply that the Egyptians were better providers for them, God responds by 'over-providing' and sending more meat than they would have ever received as slaves.

In some ways, the abundance of quail could be a pedagogical tool because the behavior of the Israelites directly conflicts with God's request at Marah. If the Israelites behave, God would be a provider for them. However, it is difficult for one to see how complaining or deriding a provider of nourishment and freedom is "acting rightly" (Ex 15:26). Yet, the Israelites receive their bread and quail just the same. One possibility is that it is also right for the Israelites to have expectations of God as a result of their relationship. God does not need nourishment, but humans do. If he is going to have the Israelites wander in the desert, he should probably help them find some food and water. The issue at stake is that without food and water, God runs the risk of losing the people he worked hard to liberate. Even so, the Israelites have not behaved 'rightly' and so would be at risk of losing their provision.

Therefore, there may be something at stake on the part of the Israelites. Another account of this story helps flesh out the details of this narrative. Of course it is pertinent that the Israelites survive their journey but this instance is one of three that discuss adequate nourishment. In the Exodus account, the Israelites are instructed to eat only their fair share of the food that is provided for them. However, there is a version of the story in Numbers 11 that can attest to another aspect of the story: the possibility of over indulgence. In this dramatic reworking of the narrative, the people are angry that they have to subsist off of desert food (Num 11:6). Moses fears for his life and so begs God give the Israelites meat (Num 11:10-13). This story can be used to better understand how the readers of the Exodus narrative interpreted the issues surrounding the quail.

The comparison to Egypt, understandably, makes God angry because he has been providing them nourishment in some sense, but it is not good enough for the Israelites. Therefore, he decrees: "The LORD heard you when you wailed, 'If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!' Now the LORD will give you meat and you will eat it…for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD…"(Num 11:18-20). The power of overindulgence, in this case, is potent because eating something for days on end does make it 'loathsome.' This is, in fact, why the Israelites are complaining: their current food source is 'loathsome' to them. It is clear that the quail is used as a means of subduing the complaints of the Israelites and establishing God's power over them. In the retelling in Numbers, the people do not complain about eating too much meat. However, God does strike the people with a plague "while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed" (Num 11:33). This tells us that according to the author of Numbers, the Israelites were not adequately nourished by the quail. Instead, the quail was the tool of a lesson to establish God's power. It is also a manifestation of the decree in Exodus 15:26, as the Israelites did not behave themselves accordingly.

Returning to the book of Exodus, there are no indications that God gave the Israelites meat and then killed some of them before they were able to swallow. The importance of the story in Numbers, though, is that is shows us how people conceived of this particular incident in Exodus. In this passage the quail is not as much of an issue. Simply put, the problem is that the Israelites are used to a certain standard of living and they claim that living in the desert as a freed people pales in comparison to the Egyptian standard of living. On this basis, meat is provided for the Israelites. It is unlikely that slaves, in any ancient Near Eastern civilization, had access to meat. Even in the account in Numbers, the Israelites bemoan not being able to eat fish instead of

more expensive or popular forms of protein.[10] Therefore, the meat that the Israelites are referring to is likely a symbolic way of suggesting that the Israelites miss living in a rich and established society. God's anger is likely a reaction to this, as it appears that he is attempting to reconstruct a society with the Israelites but they are not cognizant of this political process that underlies their nourishment.

The other element of nourishment that is provided is miraculous bread called manna. This bread is the source of much debate because it is difficult to identify what the manna actually is.[11] Essentially, the description of the bread in Exodus does not match the description of anything that is identifiable today. The bread also appears overnight (Num 11:9). While determining what manna is would be an interesting enterprise, I am more intrigued by the narrative use and description of this bread as it relates to the characters and persons who read Exodus. Manna has the intrinsic function of feeding the Israelites. It is the bread that God makes for the Hebrews. This means that within the narrative, this bread almost has to be something outside the realm of human experience.

In the Passover meal, the food which was eaten was removed from the average Israelite's cooking techniques in a drastic way. In particular, the bread was clearly different from bread that was typical in Egyptian meals. Instead, the unleavened bread was related to the cultural identity and lineage of the Israelites. It is also possible that this bread was in some way tied to an experience of the divine. In Exodus 16, the interplay of human beings consuming divine food is taken a step further in that the manna is actually bread which God, in some sense, made. The

[10] I am specifically addressing the fact that fish was a meat that was consumed by the poor because it was more affordable than lamb, goat, or beef. In this case, the Israelites simply remember meat but it is unlikely that an Israelite reader would automatically connect 'meat' with 'fish' because it was rarely consumed in Israel. Instead, fowl or small livestock are more likely meant in this case.

[11] It has been proposed that manna is a lichen as well as a secretion from a bug. (Bodenheimer, 2)

divine element of the bread can be observed in two ways. The first is simply that the bread is unidentifiable. Israelites have never seen any bread that resembles manna nor does manna in its description actually seem to describe bread: according to Numbers 11:7 manna was like coriander seed. It seemed to function more as flour than bread itself because people made cakes out of it (Num 11:8). However, Moses clearly tells the Israelites that the manna is bread (Ex 16:15). In his commentary on Exodus, Propp argues that manna is in direct opposition with human made bread because of how it appears. While human bread is made of wheat, which grows out of the ground and therefore ascends, manna comes from dew which was thought to have fallen onto the earth from the sky (Propp, 600). Therefore, the manna comes from an upper realm and has some relationship with the divine. It is not made of any identifiable substances and its foreignness in both its origin and qualities makes the bread appear to be divine.

The existence of purely divine bread seems perplexing for a couple of reasons. The first is simply that divine beings do not need nourishment and so the existence of divine bread is startling. Secondly, it is rare that a human being would be in the position to consume something that has a divine nature. The Passover meal comes close, but the manna is something that comes directly from God (600). The fact that the Israelites have access to this divine substance, but need it to survive, suggests that the relationship which the Israelites share with God is two sided. It is both highly unique and privileging, but also necessary for their survival. By extension, perhaps this is related to the relationship that the Israelites have with God; it is both a privilege and necessary.

As far as the symbolic nature of the bread goes, it might be worthwhile to examine the exact context of this food item to expand on its relationship with the Israelites or its divine nature. While meat is considered a luxury, bread is a commonplace food. In fact, bread is a

component of ancient near eastern meals for almost every person and is part of the Israelite concept of a complete diet (599). However, the text gives descriptions of manna that do not fit descriptions of bread as is understood in the ancient context. This description of the bread is likely tied to its divine nature.

After being satiated the Israelites again come to experience thirst. As before, the quenching of thirst has a distinct relationship to both politics and the power of God. Although the incident takes about six lines of the text, it reveals the attitudes of the Israelites. When they complain of having thirst in the first story, the audience is not specified. It is quite possible that everybody was present for the event. However, in this narrative the people who are able to watch are the elders. This is one of the first interactions that God has specifically with the elders of the Israelites. From the perspective of the narrative, this is likely the beginning of a political relationship. When the Ten Commandments are established, the Israelite elders are the only ones allowed to receive the news at first. Therefore, the elders going out with Moses and witness a miraculous event reinforces the power that God emanates and also functions to start a political hierarchy.

From this point on, the narrative of Exodus shies away from addressing issues of food and nourishment. These last standing instances of nourishment related narrative are important in that they solidify the association between food and the founding of an Israelite nation. Something particularly striking about these stories is that it addresses the Israelites in all of their problems and expectations in adjusting to life outside of Egypt. From the perspective of the story, both the Israelites and God suffer a little miscommunication and misunderstanding in their needs and expectations. What follows in the text mainly focuses on the conquest and political establishment

of the Israelites, so it is clear that food plays a distinct role in emphasizing the slow development of the Israelite nation.

Conclusion

The sequence of provision in Exodus is such that it sets the groundwork for the establishment of the Israelite nation. The narrative indicates that food is an important literary device which portrays the creation of not only an Israelite nation, but also an Israelite identity. The food of Passover establishes a festival that is still practiced today, and that festival still focuses on the same ritually prescribed foods. Provision of quails and manna is important because it is through this miraculous nourishment that the Sabbath, a uniquely Israelite institution, is created. The food, while at many times implicit within the narrative, bears a strong relationship with the political and cultural identity of the Israelites.

Access to food also indicates the status of relationship between God and a group of people. The Egyptians do not have a strong relationship with God and this is emphasized or made clear by the fact that they do not have access to food. Similarly, within the plagues narrative, the Egyptians do not have access to nourishment while the Israelites do. The distinguishing factor between these two groups is that one can eat and the other cannot. This elevates the Israelites over the Egyptians in status. The Passover meal then distinguishes the Israelites from the Egyptians by the food that they consume. Consumption indicates status of the people in the narrative. Food is an important literary device used to show who has an amicable relationship with God.

The provision of nourishment in the later chapters of Exodus demonstrates that food is a means of exchange. God provides food for the Israelites in the wilderness and in exchange, God expects to receive good behavior. This exchange is emphasized in the text especially towards the

end of the narrative. The Sabbath, a uniquely Israelite institution, is established within a context of provision. God feeds his people with the expectation that they will observe his conditions.

The notion of exchange is where further exploration of foodways in Exodus might lead us. After provision in the wilderness, there are still instances of consumption but they do not fit as nicely with the transition from deprivation to provision of food. Thematically speaking, these instances are related to what is examined in this paper; however, it is also true that after the Sabbath is instituted, the focus of Exodus explicitly deals with the establishment of Israel. Food is not as much a factor in the politics of Israelites after this point. There are a few instances, besides the usual exploration of food laws that are perhaps related. We notice that the arrival of the Ten Commandments is sealed with a meal between God, Moses, and the elders of Israel. The food is not provided, but still signals that food signifies a political exchange. Similarly, when the golden calf in Exodus 32 is discovered, Moses grinds up the calf, mixes it with water, and makes the Israelites consume it. In this case, the food is a punishment for poor behavior. We saw this in the Numbers 11 retelling of Exodus 16. This is a theme that is also connected to the contents of this paper, although they would likely make good case studies on their own.

In the instances I covered, and the remaining instances in Exodus, God manipulates food to advance his agenda. The theme of provision is reinforced throughout the text. Although the role of food in the exodus narrative is often under examined from a holistic standpoint, food is being used as a code throughout to the text to signify the relationship between people and God. Nourishment plays a distinct role because it a tool used to send messages about the cultural and political identity of the Israelite nation.

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