

Dr. Elaine Phillips, OT History, Lit. and Theology, Lecture 10

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Preliminaries and Prayer

Introductory Issues

We're going to pick up with chapter 5 of Exodus and we're going to race all the way through chapter 18 hitting the highlights. I'm counting on you to read the narratives and get the details even though I may not go over all of them. We'll try to shape the background here a little bit.

Contest Between the God of Israel and the Gods of Egypt

I've entitled this section: "A contest between the God of Israel, Yahweh, and the gods of Egypt." It really is a cosmic contest as God is about to deliver this people. So on the left hand side [visual on screen], we have, as I'm sure you've guessed, a text of Torah.

Actually it happens to be a manuscript of the book of Esther which we're going to get to a little later on. One of the reasons for showing this is there are some interesting parallels between what we have in the divine deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the divine deliverance of Israel from the horrors of the Persian government under Haman and the king Xerxes at that point. At any rate, that is going to represent the Yahweh side of our contest if you will. Here [right side] we have a head of a very, very large statue of Ramses II. Again, just notice there is a cobra on the head of Ramses. The cobra was one of the deities of Egypt. Interestingly enough, it was intended to terrify the enemies and represent the power of pharaoh, who of course himself is considered to be divine in this whole complex of deities. So keep that in mind because one of the very first things that happened when Moses and Aaron came into pharaoh's presence was that the rod of Aaron swallowed up the rods of the magicians, all of which had become serpents. Notice these particular serpents were devoured by the rod of Aaron. Even in that initial confrontation, there is an indication of what's going to happen in terms of the outcome.

Well just a couple more things to look at - here we've got again a nice picture of the pyramids, remembering that, as the Israelites went down into Egypt, these pyramids were already standing. They'd been standing for centuries at that point. What's this next

item? I've intentionally not labeled it. [exchange with students over identification of mummification table] What they would do would be to put the corpse here and all of the fluids as this process was taking place, would drain out that particular hole. Then they would extricate the major organs, taking out some of the brain through the nostrils. They took out the heart and preserved those organs in tiny little sarcophagi. Then they had a way of embalming these bodies. As I said the other day, if you go to the museum in Cairo, you can actually see a whole bunch of these mummies and Ramses II is there as well.

Here we've got another interesting picture; obviously these are mud bricks. The idea of making bricks with straw is not an anomaly in the Exodus text. It's something they did customarily. It was an important process because when the straw decayed, that decaying material actually made the clay more plastic and therefore when the clay bricks dried, they wouldn't crack and shatter.

Let's talk about the God of the Hebrews versus Pharaoh in conjunction with the gods of Egypt. And of course, Pharaoh is one of those divine figures as well. We'll start with chapter 5. Moses and Aaron had been commissioned. Moses made his way back to Egypt, met up with Aaron, and they went to Pharaoh. In chapter 6 verse 1 they said, "This is what the Lord the God of Israel says, 'Let my people go so they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'" This by the way was not an unusual request. We have evidence from some of the texts from that time period that some of these groups that were slaves in Egypt, Asiatic groups, actually did go and worship their gods. So for Pharaoh to receive this request from Moses and Aaron was not completely out of the blue. However, notice what he said. "Who is Yahweh (the LORD) that I should obey him and let Israel go? I don't know Yahweh and I will not let Israel go." And of course, that "who is the Lord?" is going to get answered in a fairly dramatic way as these things that we call the plagues unfold. When we start looking at the purposes of the plagues, we will learn that one of the reasons for the plagues was to demonstrate to Pharaoh who Yahweh really was. He obviously didn't have a very good idea up until that point.

A second important point: chapter 5 makes it fairly evident that this deliverance

process was not quick and easy. You know, sometimes we expect God to act in quick, easy, and fast ways. “Let’s get on with it!” we almost tell him. That’s not the way it works. In fact, initially, if you remember chapter five, pharaoh assumed “Well! These people have got all this extra time, they can go cut their own straw.” Life actually got harder for the Israelites at that point rather than easier. And of course, all you’ve got to do is read a little bit between the lines and realize that this was pharaoh’s really nasty way getting the Israelites to turn against Moses as well, which they did! At the end of chapter 5, they complained against Moses and he went back to the Lord. So Pharaoh made life harder for the Israelites.

Signs and Wonders – Judgments on the Gods of Egypt

Although I will probably keep on using the term “plagues,” actually these might be better understood as signs--signs and wonders, if you will. In fact, that’s the term that’s often used as we read through this. The term “plague” is not used nearly so much. God said He was going to bring these signs to pass. So think of them as signs of forthcoming judgment.

The other things I want you to keep in mind as you read through these is this. Rather than calling them supernatural, I prefer to call them hyper-natural and let me explain why. God is clearly involved in this. It’s at His word. As Moses prays, they start and they stop. It’s God’s definite timing and intensifying of natural phenomenon. And that’s why we’re going to call them hyper-natural. But please be assured that I am not lessening in any way God’s part in them.

Now just a quick run through a couple of the signs and wonders. As I told you before, the Nile River flooded with wonderful regularity. It started mid-summer and went through probably end of September; it could be counted on. But if there were extraordinarily bad floods, the Nile would bring all sorts of sediment, especially from the Blue Nile way much farther south. You’d have some microorganisms in this floodwater that were actually reddish in color. This has been observed when there are extraordinarily high, bad floods, and some of those microorganisms have had rather lethal qualities about them. Some people suggest that when the text says “the water turned to blood,” it refers

to the color and not the substance. The Hebrew word is *dam*, and it can mean “blood red” in color. And we have some other places in Scripture where that is the case. A prophecy in the book of Joel, the end of Joel chapter 2, talks about the moon turning blood red; it turns that color. And so maybe what’s going on here is not that you have literal blood that floods out of your veins, but it’s turning blood red because of the extraordinarily high volume of these microorganisms that are in there.

Now here’s the other interesting thing. The Nile river was construed to be the lifeblood of the god of Osiris, who was the god of the underworld, so there’s all sorts of ironies going on as this “lifeblood” becomes blood red and of course kills all the things that are living in it. It’s an attack on a number of different gods right from the get go.

Then, of course, as things go on, what happens to the amphibians? Well, the frogs hop out of the Nile. Fish can’t escape; frogs can. They come up into even Pharaoh’s bedroom. That too has a little bit of a jab to it, because the frog was a goddess of fertility. So here you’ve got this interesting twist because the text says that the frogs are so overwhelming and they’re actually showing up in Pharaoh’s bedroom.

The narrative goes on to gnats and flies and I’m not going to mention all of them but just a couple we want to make a note on. The cattle are attacked eventually. Again you may think of some kind of disease that would affect cattle. Some people say something like anthrax, perhaps. But in attacking the cattle two things are going on. These are the major beasts of burden, the domestic beasts, things that would have an awful lot to do with the economy of Egypt. So this is an attack at that level now. In addition to their economic value, there were also bovine deities. Hathor and Apis are notable among those that were worshiped. So as you see this flood of signs, you’re seeing some prods at the gods of Egypt, and you’re seeing some definite attacks on the economy of Egypt.

When pharaoh’s magicians do the same thing all over again... remember in the first three they’re able to do the same things that Moses and Aaron did? Basically, they are giving a double whammy to Egypt because if they do the whole blood thing all over again, that just means that Egypt is being devastated once more in the way that it already

had been. And so, for the sake of making an ideological point, pharaoh's magicians are bringing even more damage on their own people; it's an insidious thing.

We're told that the devastating hail was taking place at the time of the barley crop, which we know is February. So we're seeing a rather lengthy time span in these signs as they're unfolding. The sun, Re, was the major deity and therefore darkening the sun was another direct attack. Slaying the firstborn of pharaoh was also an attack because pharaoh himself was a deity as representative of the great sun god. At any rate, that's a long drawing together of plagues and nature gone awry, hyper-natural.

Pharaoh's Hardened Heart

I mentioned a moment ago that the Egyptian magicians could do some of these same things. Why initially are these Egyptians magicians able to do some of the signs? [some student exchange] To make him stubborn and not believe - absolutely. And let me push this even a little bit further. As you read about the Egyptian magicians, the text says their work was "wrapped in secrecy" – that's the Hebrew. The subtext here is that they are tapping into malevolent supernatural powers. We're not going to rule that out. There's a dark side to this whole process, and so when they're actually able to do some of these things, they're making a rather ambiguous situation for pharaoh. His gods can do it, but this god of the Hebrews can also do these things. What is he to believe?

As you look all the way from chapter four right on through chapter thirteen, we have repeated references to the hardening of pharaoh's heart. Let me just make a couple of comments on this, if I may. It's a long discussion, by the way, and an important one. As you look at these narratives, there are actually three separate Hebrew words that are used. One of them means "to strengthen," another one means "to be heavy," and another one means "to be hard." And then to make matters even more complicated, some of them are active, some of them are passive, and some of them are reflexive (in other words, pharaoh hardens his own heart). So even in the grammar of these narratives, we're seeing the complexity of this whole business between what God sovereignly does, and what a human being responsibly does. Are you getting my point there? The complexity of the words that are chosen, and the verbal forms of the words are a very interesting study.

As you see this narrative unfold, hardening of the heart occurs about fifteen to twenty times, and with all this complexity actually built in.

Second, pharaoh, in making people slaves, in that declaration in chapter one, “let us deal shrewdly with them,” then enslaving with the intent to kill them, and then for having that edict to throw the little baby boys in the river, pharaoh had pretty much dehumanized the Israelite population. He had intentionally put them into a position where they were not fully human, because of the oppression that was going on. This is a measure for measure punishment on God’s part. Pharaoh had done that to God’s people, who are his firstborn; therefore, God would do the same thing to pharaoh. In hardening pharaoh’s heart, God made him sub-human, no longer having the volitional capabilities to do what is right. But notice, God didn’t just do it by himself. Pharaoh, if you want to put it this way, tragically and willingly cooperated with the process.

And that brings us to a third point. Even though the first couple of plagues may have had an ambiguous message, and he could get by with saying “well I don’t know who’s responsible for this; it could be my gods or it could be that one,” by the time we get to the end of the series, what’s going on? Pharaoh prayed and he said “I know I’ve sinned, pray for me. Take this plague away, please” and then once it was gone, what did he do? He reneged. And so that hardening is definitely indicative of the fact that he had no intention of coming back to the Lord at that point. But again, it’s a long, long process and, of course, we owe it much more conversation than that. Any questions or comments before we move on?

[student question] The three words... one is *kaved*, which means “to be heavy,” which by the way is a very interesting word in the Egyptian context. In the whole idea of judgment in Egyptian scene, when somebody died, do you know what happened? There were scales and your soul got weighed against a feather. And so the whole idea of weighing and weight was really important in the context here. So that was one of them, “to be heavy.” And so pharaoh’s heart there would be heavy – guilty - in the context of the Egyptian judgment scene. The second word is “to be strong” - *hazaq*. And then the third one is simply to be hard, *kashah*.

Purposes of the Plagues

Well, let me get to the purpose of the plagues. Pharaoh had rather brashly, as we indicated, said in chapter five, “Who is the Lord?” and, interestingly enough, this is going to be one of the ways that God demonstrated to pharaoh who He is. Let me read for you Exodus 9:14. It’s not the only place but this is probably the most helpful one. This is in the middle of something that the Lord says to Moses to say to Pharaoh “Let My people go, they may worship me.” Here’s verse 14, “or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and against your people *so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.*” So, this is just going to be another bit of evidence in the context of the confrontation between the gods of Egypt and the LORD to demonstrate overwhelmingly, in every sphere, to pharaoh who had said “who is the Lord?” Now he would know, and Egypt would know as well. So, that might be part of the answer.

Secondly, not only that. In the same context, we have God saying essentially, “The word about this is going to go far beyond here.” Verse 15: “By now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the face of the earth.” God could’ve done that. But in his sovereign wisdom, he had more things in mind. Let’s read verse 16: “I’ve raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” In other words, this would be such a dramatic unfolding of God’s power in the natural realm, particularly with implications for the supernatural realm, that everybody would know about it. We even have indications of that in the scripture. Who’s Zipporah’s father? Having heard what happened, he came. What happened when the people got to the land? We haven’t studied this yet, but when the Israelites conquered Jericho, who was the woman there who was spared? Rahab, and what did she say? “We’ve heard what your God has done.” Then centuries down the line, when the Israelites were fighting the Philistines, what did the Philistines say? “We know there’s a tradition about your God and what he did to the Egyptians.” I’m paraphrasing but you get the point. It’s a word that went out far and wide, transcending geographical boundaries

and actually transcending temporal boundaries. And it actually became paradigmatic for God's really effecting a deliverance from the horrible evils of ongoing besetting sin that that whole time in Egypt represents for us.

Well, let's carry on to additional purposes. The Israelites needed encouragement as well: "...so that you may tell your children and your grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them. So that you may know that I am the Lord." In other words, Yahweh - God's covenant name meaning "I am who I am, I will be what I will be, I am your reliable covenant, loving God" - now Yahweh would act on their behalf. And so the plagues would show that in a very real way that nobody could contradict. They wouldn't be able to say it was not God's doing.

This next purpose is a kind of a big one. Chapter 12 has an interesting declaration. On that same night, God said, "I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn, both man and animals and I'm going to bring *judgment on all the gods of Egypt*." This culminated with pharaoh and striking the firstborn of pharaoh, who were acknowledged as divine once they took the throne. The whole series of these signs demonstrated something about the gods of Egypt and certainly brought judgment on them from Yahweh himself. So the whole process showed that God in this cosmic context was far and above anything in the whole Egyptian pantheon.

One more purpose: Eschatological foreshadowing - in other words, these plagues help us look ahead to end times. What's in the book of Revelation? Lots of tribulation, and plague-like events. [student exchange] There's going to be darkening of the astronomical bodies, that's quite true. There are some very significant mentions of locusts and hail. And then in chapter 11, there's a mention of two witnesses and they're not named. But they sure sound like they could be referring to some of what we might have from Exodus. There might be some allusions to Moses and Elijah in that chapter 11. And so obviously we're seeing some cataclysmic end time, signs of God's impending judgment. You're actually right to connect them with the bowls of wrath turning over.

The Meaning of "Passover"

When we think of Passover, we usually understand it as “passing over.” We need to make some further biblical connections, however. The Hebrew word, *pesach*, refers to the celebration and the term for the sacrificial animal. It is a noun. The related verb form (*pasah*) is used very seldom. But it shows up in this chapter and it shows up in Isaiah 31:5, and that passage helps us to think a little bit about what it actually means. We will return to that in a moment. Let me read for you verses 12 and 13 and verse 23 of Exodus 12: “On that same night I will cross through (a different Hebrew word) the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn [specifies] to bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. Here’s verse 13. “The blood will be a sign on you.” Okay, they’ve just taken the Passover lamb, they’ve put the blood on the lintels and the doorposts. “The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are. When”--now listen carefully, or read carefully—“when I see the blood I will *pasach* over you. Your NIV says, “I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.” Now let me read verse 23 and we’ll talk a little more about it. “When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians He will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe, and he will *pasach* that doorway.” The NIV says “pass over” that doorway. But now listen to the next clause, which is really important. “He will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.” So it is not a matter of “Oh, you get to this doorpost of this house that has blood on the lintels and doorposts and you hop over that one, i.e., pass over.” Notice there’s some sense in which the Lord himself who’s both destroying and also guarding is going to keep the destroyer from coming in and taking the firstborn of that house. Are you getting the picture?

Now, we’ll take a quick detour to Isaiah chapter 31. This is an important connection. One of the things we’re going to discover when we start talking about Hebrew poetry—which we’re going to do in about a month or so—is that Hebrew poetry, unlike our poetry which has rhyme and rhythm as primary characteristics, is characterized more than anything else by parallelism. Put simply, this means that when you make a statement in a first line, the next line in some way is going to respond to that statement, either by reiterating the thought – that’s called synonymous parallelism—or

perhaps saying the opposite—antithetical parallelism—those are the two most obvious ones. We happen to have poetry in Isaiah. We happen to have in the verse that I’ve noted here for you—a classic case of synonymous parallelism. Let me read for you verse 5. “Like birds hovering over head the Lord almighty will shield Jerusalem.” Okay?—a hovering shield. Now let’s read the next line because it gets even more explicit in terms of the parallelism. “He will shield it—he will shield it – from something that could be bad—and deliver it.” Next line, “He will *pasach*” - and that’s in parallel to “shield.” So best to say, he’ll protect it, and then rescue it, “rescue” being parallel “to deliver.” Based on that particular passage then, we can bring that back into what we’re doing when we’re reading Exodus 12. God is saying, this blood on the lintels and the doorposts is going to protect those people who are inside. Yes, God will “pass over” that dwelling as well.

Now all you need to do is think a little bit of about what the apostle Paul is getting at in 1 Corinthians 5 when he calls Jesus our Passover lamb. There is a remarkable adumbration of what Jesus did at the crucifixion, hanging on the cross with the shedding of blood, making that sacrifice and embodying all of that in himself and protecting his people who are in his household. It’s a beautiful picture.

The Passover Celebrations

As Exodus 12 unfolds, we see two things going on. There are instructions with regard to what to do that night in Egypt. Then those are interfaced with instructions in terms of what to do as they celebrated this festival for centuries to come. So one is the Passover in *Mitzraim* [Egypt], the Passover in Egypt, and the other is the annual celebration. And you’ve got to read and connect those two things and then see some interesting changes in focus.

In the Passover in Egypt that night, the one they’ve been preparing for, they would take a lamb on the 10th day and on the 14th day they were to slaughter this lamb. And, of course, this lamb was to be without blemish. That tells us something, too, in terms of calling Jesus the Lamb of God – He was without blemish. At any rate, the primary focus is on the lamb in that celebration, the shed blood of the lamb, and the protective implications of that shed blood. It’s true; they were eating bitter herbs, indicative of the

bitterness of their slavery, and in their haste they go out without their bread being able to rise. Those were part of the celebration, but the main focus was on the lamb. And so again I just note for you John 1:29. It's a remarkable passage as we start out the gospel of John. It's John the Baptist being quoted by John the apostle saying, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Now, that lamb figure might incorporate more than just Passover lamb. It could mean the sacrificial sin offering, or refer to Isaiah 53, but this Passover Lamb is probably built into it as well. Then, of course, 1 Corinthians 5 refers to "Christ, our Passover Lamb" who was slain. I'm going to come back to that passage in a moment. Peter will make that same connection.

Once we get to the annual celebration, interestingly enough, the emphasis changes a little bit. And, as a matter of fact, those of you who have Jewish friends, they're celebrating Passover on an annual basis but they're not out slaughtering a lamb, are they? That's gone. The temple's gone. The emphasis has changed. First of all, there is the importance of telling their children that comes through in these instructions over and over again. Pass this on, generation to generation. So if you're going to a Passover celebration, the youngest boy says "How is this night different from every other night?" And this starts the recital of the Passover narrative because they were to tell their children.

Now, that's not the only thing I want to emphasize. The real deal for people who are observant today and it's been true throughout centuries, has been getting rid of the leaven. My pretty secular Jewish friends think of it as spring-cleaning. But Jews get rid of the leaven because leaven came to symbolize sin. Again, in the New Testament and especially the Gospels, we know of the leaven of the Pharisees and their hypocrisies. Jesus had things to say about that.

Coming back to 1 Corinthians 5 when Paul was saying get rid of that person who was committing incest in your church. They were essentially just patting him on the back and saying "that's fine; you're part of the fellowship." But Paul said, "Get rid of the leaven; get rid of the sin. Get rid of the leaven because Christ our Passover lamb is slain." So leaven clearly comes to represent sin. Therefore, as this celebration of Passover moves on through the generations, the symbolic connection between sin and leaven becomes

very significant and getting rid of leaven was important.

[student question] The question is what do I mean by leaven? It's yeast. They are same thing; maybe even the NIV is translating that as yeast in a couple of these passages but it's the stuff that makes the bread rise. Unleavened bread is the way we usually refer to it as opposed to yeasted bread.

[student question] When is Passover? It changes; it doesn't fit always with our calendar because they're on a still on a lunar calendar for determining it. This year, somebody help me out, it's probably mid-April. It is in the spring time.

Redemption of the Firstborn

Exodus 13 also talks about the importance of the firstborn. And let me just make a couple of points here. Israel, as I've said before, was God's firstborn. Remember the measure for measure principle. Because Pharaoh had oppressed God's firstborn, God would oppress the firstborns of all the Egypt. And not only oppress them but take their lives. To symbolize that overwhelmingly important issue, the Israelites were to consecrate their firstborns to the Lord. That's part of what's being said in chapter 13. Now, one of the interesting issues here is that once that consecration took place, there was a process for redemption, that is, buying back. Redemption is a basic theological term; Jesus has redeemed me from my sins. In the Israelites' society, originally redemption was understood in the economic context--a socioeconomic context. You bought somebody back, you bought something back, you could buy somebody out of slavery and the term there was to redeem. So it's a purchase. It's paying a price to buy back, and that's the basis of the theological concept as well.

Future Celebrations of Passover

Passover's an interesting festival in that it kind of changes locations. It started out being a home festival. We get this from reading Exodus. It became a major festival in the temple once the temple was built in Jerusalem. As a matter of fact there were two kings—very important kings—who effected reforms for their people. One was Hezekiah and the second was Josiah and we're going to study them. And the centerpiece of their reformation in each case was to celebrate Passover. It was the centerpiece of it because

Passover was the festival where they remembered that God delivered them from the bondage of sin.

Leaving Egypt

The text tells us they had been there 430 years—that’s a long time. Do you remember what Genesis 15 said? When the covenant was cut with Abraham, “400 years your people are going to be enslaved in a land not their own.” That’s a round number of course. We’ve got our specific 430 years mentioned here.

Notice that they went out wealthy. Already in chapter 4, the Lord told Moses that when time comes to go, your women are going to ask their neighbors, and they’re going to get wealth. Then as they were leaving, this is what happened. They got all this plunder from their neighbors who gave it to them. All sorts of things. And the text says, “and they plundered the Egyptians ” (NIV). Now, that’s an interesting word. The Hebrew word can also mean “to deliver.” It’s *natzal*. You can indeed understand this as plunder; after all, when you have battles in antiquity the victors plundered the losers. That was part of the whole battle process. God’s army, his people, plundered the Egyptians, or the losers. But you could also perhaps understand it another way. Possibly what’s going on here is the Egyptians are basically perceiving that the God of the Hebrews is really a fairly powerful god, and they may be, in their mind frame, their worldview, paying off this God to get the Israelites to get out of here and leave us alone. And some people suggest that we might want to understand a little bit of this being deliverance (*natzal*) of Egyptians from any more potential plagues coming along.

I have to tell you a funny little story at this point, however. About five or six years ago I think it was now, the Egyptian government actually was going to bring a case in the international court to make Israel pay back the equivalent amount of money that was “taken” when the Israelites left Egypt. Do you know what happened? The response was “fine! Let’s figure out the equivalent wage and you can give us as much money to compensate for six hundred thousand fighting men plus all the people that might be part of that.” And then it just all sort of died. Nothing else was said.

Towards the end of chapter 13, as they went, they took the bones of Joseph with them. Because in chapter 50 of Genesis, Joseph made them swear a vow, “when you go up from here” - in other words, he was confident that God would indeed bring them a deliverance—“when you go up from here, you must take my bones with you.” So they do!

Where did they go, after fulfilling that oath? Well, they were on the Exodus route and we’ll look at a map in just a moment. They had protection of cloud and fire; in other words, God manifested his protective presence there for them. This was an urgent journey. They were moving. Day and night, at first. When they came to that dramatic scene at the edge of the Sea of Reeds, He even kept the Israelites from the Egyptians. When they crossed the sea, chapter 14, the text is emphatic that they crossed on dry ground. I’m going to talk about the possible location of the “Sea of Reeds” in a moment. Even if it’s not the deep Red Sea, there was sufficient water that when all the walls of water came rolling back on the Egyptian army, they were overwhelmed, while the Israelites had gone through on dry ground, and that’s important to keep in mind. We have some adumbrations here as well. Jesus lived out or embodied in his own life as a human being, as the God-man -- he embodied the experiences of national Israel. So, therefore, Israel crossed the sea; they had a time in the wilderness. We’re going to see that time in the wilderness is a time of real testing. Likewise, Jesus was baptized and then went into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. Kind of a parallel of Israel’s 40 years in that time of temptation.

The Song at the Sea

Exodus 15 – once all these wonderful events had taken place, narrated in prose, now Moses put it into a song. That song sounds pretty much like Miriam’s teaching at the end of the chapter where they started singing the thing all over again. What’s interesting about this song is that it emphasizes that God is king. His kingdom is forever. We’re going to see toward the end of the song as it reminds us of the whole idea of theocracy

which we're going to get into more. As we are talking about theocracy, we are talking about all of the government under the control of God. God is the King in this contest.

The song starts out by talking about how God has delivered Israel from pharaoh and his armies. All the deliverance in the past, how pharaoh had set himself up and made boasts, but all those things became as nothing. But then there's a switch. Verse 12 says "you stretched out your right hand the earth swallowed them, waters have come back over them." Now starting on verse 13, we're moving on to the future. And notice it mentions the fact that they're going to deal with the people of Philistia, the chiefs of Edom, the leaders of Moab, and the people of Canaan. And then, once those folks are dealt with, this is a look ahead—then it says, "You, God, will bring your people and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance." This looks forward to the establishment of Jerusalem, so promises for the future, declarations about the past. It closes down with verse 18, "the Lord will reign forever, and ever."

Geographical Connections

Well, let's look at a map a little bit. The Israelites lived primarily in Goshen, which is the Delta region around here. The Hebrew phrase that's translated "Red Sea" really means "Sea of Reeds" and the general thought is that it's probably referring to an area right in here that was tremendously swampy. The idea by the way the water level was significantly higher back then so what we have is a Red Sea edge here. It may have made its way into more extensive swamps up in this area. Just where it is we don't know. The text tells us that God did not want them to go "by way of the Philistines." That would be this red line right here. Remember the International Coastal Highway? They were not ready to go that route because they were just a ragtag bunch of recently freed slaves. So, God led them here and then made them appear as if they were confused so pharaoh would come out and make that final attack. But eventually they did cross what was probably this swampy area. I'm not in any way trying to diminish the force of the miracle when I say that. If you try and go through a swamp that's 8-10 feet high with papyrus reeds all through it with who knows how many thousands of people, it's not easily done and again

I reiterate what I said before. They went across on dry ground. Clearly, it was a miraculous event.

Once they got across, then the huge question is where did they go? There are at least eleven different proposals in terms of where Mount Sinai is located. Some people even put it way over here in the area of what they think was Midian [western Saudi Arabia]. It's a silly proposal but you can read about it online if you want to. Ron Wyatt proposed it. Some folks put it up in this area [northern Sinai] because there are some mountains that might fit the narrative. My favorite place is in the southern third of the Sinai Peninsula for a couple of reasons. It is the traditional location. It's isolated. You know, God would take a year to shape them into a people. This is a very isolated region. What better place to do it? It's a dramatic region I'll show you pictures in a moment and we've already done some. It does have some water sources, unlike this section right in here, which is called Et-Tih, which is a vast dreadful wilderness. There are at least some water sources that, of course, could be augmented by God's provision for them. Even down in this section there are different possibilities in terms of the Mount Sinai. We don't know for certain.

Tests in the Wilderness

We'll look at some of the tests in the wilderness and if we have time I'll just show you a few more Sinai pictures. What time frame do we have at the end of chapter 15 of Exodus? Months? Years? Weeks? Three days. Three days? Now, with all due respect, we do need to see ourselves in the Israelites. We really do. People don't change. And after three days in Sinai - long about April, it can be hot during the day. Three days without water for a whole congregation of people does get to be scary. It really does. Particularly when you show up at a place and, as you have read the text, the water isn't fresh! It was bitter. If that area north of the gulf of Suez there was swamp, you can understand why it would be bitter. There would be salt infiltrating or seeping into that region. So they came across bitter water, but God made it sweet when Moses tossed a rod into it.

Chapter 16 is a very important chapter. Now, they were hungry. And God provided, in a remarkable way, manna for them. The quail, by the way, also showed up in this context but the quail are of less significance because they seem to be a seasonal thing. We still have migration patterns of these birds across the Sinai peninsula and they're not there for long. They're going to show up again in Numbers chapter 11.

The manna, however, was a daily provision from God to the people. It's a remarkable and continuous provision and it even has a built-in Sabbath observance. Just a bit of an aside. Sometimes we chafe with regard to keeping the Sabbath. We kind of like to squirm away from it and work for seven days a week as we feel compelled to be successful. But think of how an enslaved people who had been working seven days a week all their lives would respond; think about how they'd respond to the gift of the Sabbath. God instituted the Sabbath for them as a real gift to them. They could rest and enjoy God's presence. The tragedy is, of course, some of them didn't and they had to learn some lessons the hard way.

Don't lose sight of some connections here between the giving of manna and what Jesus had to say in John chapter 6. We don't have time to talk about it at length but in John chapter 6, Jesus had a fairly extensive dispute with some people who were opposing him. It was right after the feeding of the 5000 so he had just brought bread down from heaven. They were challenging his identity. He said, "I am the bread who has come down from heaven, the bread of life." More to say on that later.

A further test was the lack of water in chapter 17, and we have Moses striking the rock.

Then finally, at the end of that chapter we also have the Amalekites. Let me just say a little bit about the Amalekite situation. As you read Deuteronomy 25, we get a different picture about this Amalekite attack. In the Deuteronomy parallel, we see that the Amalekites were really being ugly. They were picking off the people who were vulnerable at the end, attacking those who were weak. God had little patience, I would

suggest, with that kind of thing. That's the reason we have such a strong condemnation against the Amalekites in this context. You've got to read those two together.

Joshua, Aaron and Hur – well, you may remember that you've got Joshua leading the fight, and that's going to prepare him for something—i.e. the conquest—and then Aaron and Hur are on either side of Moses holding up his arms. Again, think of some symbolisms. Aaron is the priestly line. Hur is the line of Judah. That's going to be the kingly line. Some interesting things about that as well.

Well, what lessons are we to learn? I've intimated some of them – give them some further thought. Finally, Jethro came along, as I said earlier. He recognized - because he had heard the reports of what God has done—he had recognized who God is. There is going to be this remarkable ceremony in which Jethro basically became a convert to the Israelite religion and then made himself very useful right away. We'll save the pictures till next time because it's 10:10. See you Friday.

Transcribed by Elaine Hong
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt
Final Edit: Dr. Elaine Phillips