



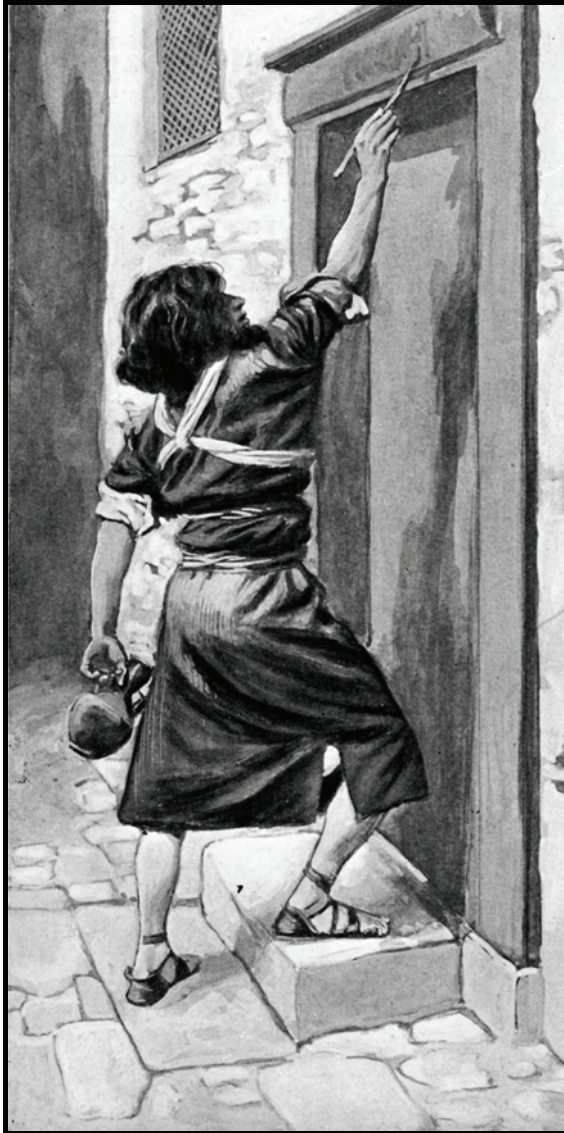
“The First Passover” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

The Passover

Exodus 12:1-51

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the

sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roasted over the fire - head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if



*“The Marking of the Doorways”
by J. James Tissot*

some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into you belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.

On that same night, I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn - both men and animals - and I will bring judgement on the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord - a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day, remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day to the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days except to prepare food for everyone to eat - that is all you may do.

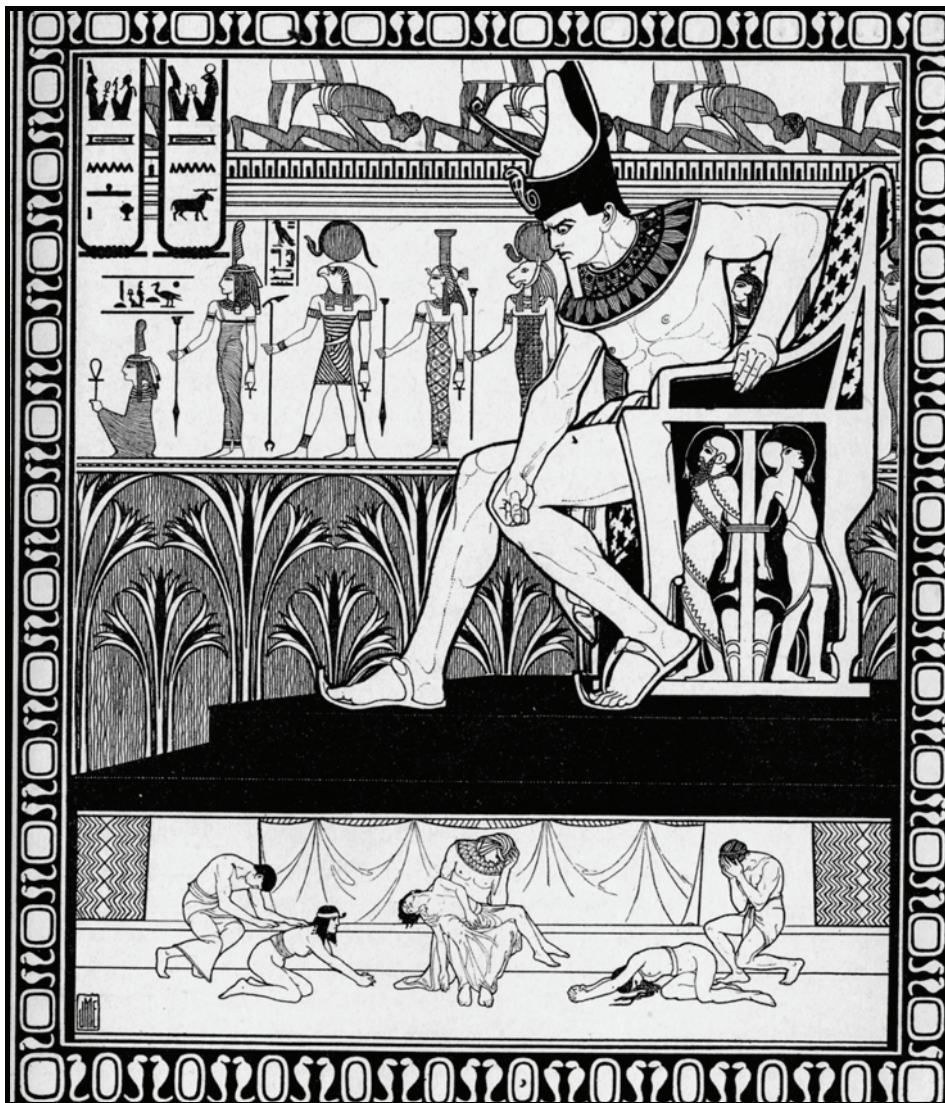
Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt.

Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month, you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the

community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a branch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the door frame. Not one of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the top and the sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.



“From the Firstborn of Pharaoh” by E. M. Lilien

When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron.



*“The Lord Struck Down All the Firstborn of Egypt”
by Lord Leighton*

At midnight, the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take

your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.”

The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country, “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die.” So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for: so they plundered the Egyptians.

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. With the dough they had brought from Egypt they baked cakes of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.

Now the length of the time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord’s divisions left Egypt. Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the Lord for the generations to come.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “These are the regulations for the Passover: ‘No foreigner is to eat of it. Any slave you have brought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, but a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it. It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside of the house. Do not break any of the bones. The whole community of Israel must celebrate it. An alien



*“The Death of Egypt’s Firstborn”
by Gerard Hoeyt*



“The First Passover” by Gerard Hoeyt

living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you.”

All the Israelites did just what the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.

“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.’” - Pharaoh and his court are now brushed aside and forgotten. Moses and Aaron need not concern themselves with them. God will deal with them. The narrative shifts its entire focus to the Children of Israel and the details of the establishment of

the Feast of the Passover. The crucial importance of this festival for the future identity of the nation is demonstrated by the meticulous care which God lavishes upon its institution. The Passover, and the deliverance from bondage in Egypt which it will forever commemorate, marks a new beginning for the Children of Israel and for humanity. In recognition of this most important turning point, the calendars must be reset - ***“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.”***

“On the first day of the first month of the new year - that is, at the beginning of a new period of time in human life - God communicates to them joyful tidings; the new calendar period marks a new historic epoch in the life of Israel.” (Cassutto, p. 136)

The Hebrew makes this point more effectively as it designates the month in question as *“the head of the months”* - that is, not merely the first month in the calendar sequence but the primary month, the most important of all months. This unique significance is derived from the fact that it was during this month that God brought

the nation of Israel into existence. The month was originally called “*Abib*” in the Hebrew calendar, referring to the ripening barley in the fields (cf. Exodus 23:13; 34:18; Deuteronomy 16:1). It later came to be known as the month of “*Nisan*” after the Babylonian captivity (Nehemiah 2:1).

“Tell that whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.” - The instruction is to be issued to **“the whole community of Israel.”** The Hebrew word for **“community”** in this phrase is **“*edah*”** which along with its counterpart **“*gahal*”** are the Old Testament equivalents for the Greek **“*ecclesia*”** - the church of the New Testament. A number of English translations attempt to reflect the spiritual identity of this community by translating the term here as **“*congregation*.”** The ancients divided their months into three segments of ten days. It was common for the significance of particular events to be signaled by their commencement on the tenth day of the month. Thus, for example, the Day of Atonement took place on the tenth day of the month of **“*Tishri*.”** The Israelites entered the land of Canaan on the tenth day of the first month (Joshua 4:19). The prophet Ezekiel received his vision of the heavenly temple on the tenth day of the first month. (Ezekiel 40:1) In this instance, the tenth day was to be the time at which each household began its preparation for the observance of the Passover. Hebrew tradition further specifies that for the first Passover the tenth day was also a Sabbath. In the first century A.D., Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria suggested that this detailed specification of a time for preparation was provided so that the Passover sacrifice not be casual or rushed but the result of pious deliberation which resulted in the selection of the finest animal in the

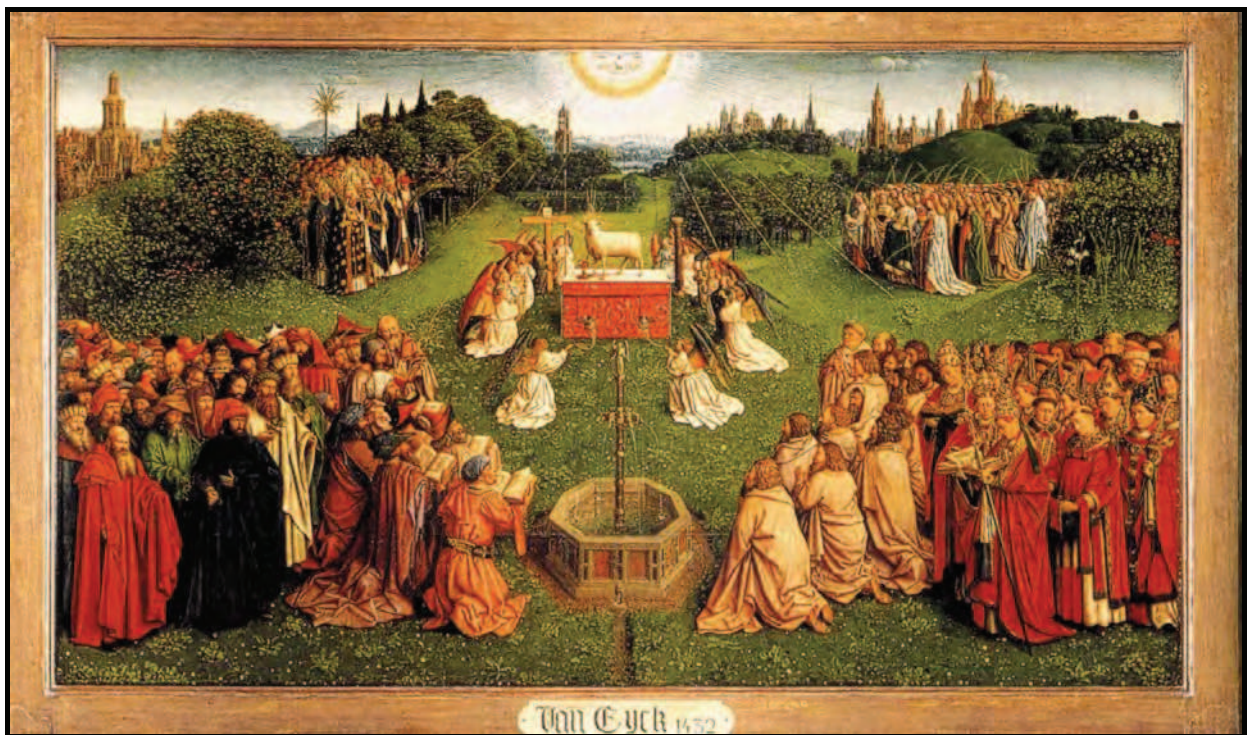


**“The Feast of the Passover” by Dieric Bouts
from the Last Supper Altar Triptych of the Church
of St. Pierre in Louvain, Belgium**

flock.

“If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.” - Given the propitiatory nature of this sacrifice - that is, the lamb sheds its blood, gives it life, as a substitute to turn away God’s judgement and spare the lives of the members of the household from the angel of death - the text places particular emphasis on the fact that no portion of this most precious offering is to be wasted. One lamb was to be sacrificed per household and if the household did not include enough people to completely consume the entire lamb then two neighboring households were to join together in the ceremony. Josephus reports that in his day (1st Century A.D.) a minimum quorum of ten was required. All of this was carefully designed to stress the unique importance of this offering and that which it foreshadowed.

“The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take



“Christ the Lamb of God” by Hubert and Jan Van Eyck - Central Panel of the Altarpiece of the Church of St. Bavo in Ghent, Netherlands

them from the sheep or the goats.” - The sacrificial animal was ordinarily to be a one year old male lamb although the use of a kid, that is a young goat, was also allowed. The text literally describes the animal’s age as *“the son of a year.”* The rabbis interpreted this to mean an animal from eight days old up to one full year. Whether the sacrifice was a lamb or a kid, in either case, the animal was to be perfect - *“without defect.”* The same physical perfection was required of the other sacrificial animals of Israel (cf. Leviticus 1:3; 22:18-25) The prophet Malachi castigated the people of Israel for despising God by offering Him worthless, damaged animals as sacrifices: *“When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?...When you bring crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?’ says the Lord. Cursed is the cheat who has an*

acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord.” (Malachi 1:8,13-14) The specifications of the Passover sacrifice are most precise. In this remarkable manner every detail of the selection and function of the Passover lamb pointed directly forward to the sacrificial death of the Son of God upon the cross. The deliberate juxtaposition of these events, with the Last Supper, Christ’s final Passover Meal, just a few hours prior to His crucifixion, was designed to identify Jesus as the fulfillment of the ancient ceremony, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The day Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem was the day were driven into the city to reserved within the Temple. The New Testament specifically applies the language of the Passover sacrifice to Jesus



*“A Lamb Without Defect”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

and His sacrificial death for the sins of the world. Peter declares: ***“For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you by your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”*** (1 Peter 1:18-19) The apostolic writer to the Hebrews contrasts the sacrificial rituals of the Old Testament with the once for all sacrifice of Christ in this way:

“The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.” (Hebrews 9:13-14)

“Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.” - The lambs were to be carefully kept and guarded for four days. The purpose of this interval is unexplained, most suggesting that it provided the opportunity to observe any imperfection which

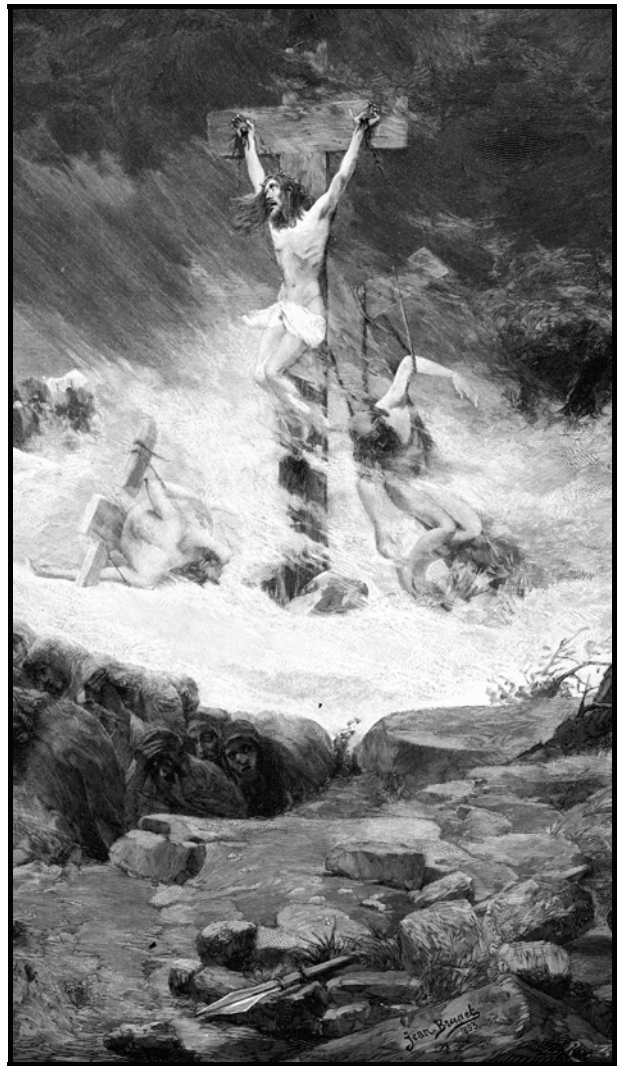


“The Feast of the Passover” - Luther Bible Illustration by Matthäus Merian

had not been obvious in the initial inspection. The slaughter of the lambs was to take place **“at twilight”** - literally **“between the two evenings.”** The rabbis understood this phrase to refer to the three hours from when the sun began its daily decline in the sky (around 3:00 PM) until its setting (around 6:00 PM) during the month of Nisan. During the New Testament era, the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple in lots of thirty, throughout that time frame. Thus, at the moment when Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:45), the killing of the Passover lambs began in the Temple. This was, of course, no coincidence - just one more poignant way to designate Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the thousands of unblemished male lambs which had served as the Passover sacrifice across the generations.

“Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.” - The blood of the Passover lambs was to be carefully reserved for a

unique role in the deliverance of the Children of Israel on the grim night when the Angel of Death moved through the land of Egypt. Throughout the sacrificial system of the Old Testament blood represents life. In this way, the blood of the lamb smeared on the lintel and the doorposts of each Israelite home indicated that the life of the lamb had been given in place of the members of that household. Therefore, the Angel of death would not enter that blood-marked doorway but would pass over the house as it followed its fatal path throughout the land. **“The action of slaying the lamb is clearly substitutionary. The lamb died in place of the firstborn. This points forward to the way in which ‘Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.’ (1 Peter 3:18)”** (Mackey, p. 210)



“About the Ninth Hour He cried, ‘It is Finished!’” by Jean Brunet



“The Passover” by J. James Tissot

“That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw, or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire - head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning you must burn it.” - God’s instruction specified the manner of preparation in great detail. The meat was not to be eaten raw or par-boiled as was the custom in the pagan Spring festivals of other nomadic tribesmen in the region. The Passover was to be an entirely new and unique observance, the commemoration of God’s deliverance of His people in Egypt. Nahum Sarna points out that roasting was also the quickest way to prepare the lamb, which would have been consistent with the Passover’s theme of urgency and that it would also serve to remove all traces of blood from the lamb. The body was to remain intact - *“roast it over the fire - head, legs and inner parts”* and it was to be completely consumed. Any leftovers were to be

destroyed - *Do not leave any of it till morning, if some is left till morning you must burn it.*” In the ordinary ritual of Hebrew sacrifice the head, shanks and innards were removed and burned, reserved for God (cf. Exodus 29:17; Leviticus 1:8-9, 12-13; 4:11-12; 8:20-21; 9:13-14). The special emphasis on the inclusion of these parts in the roasting of the Passover lamb may be an indication that on this one momentous occasion, Israel was invited to eat the food of Yahweh. Propp argues that the roasting of the animal completely intact was designed to stress its role as the substitute for the firstborn of the household in a manner consistent with the sense of unity which pervades the Passover regulations: *“The comports with the theme of unity which pervades the paschal legislation; the animal must be eaten in one night; and in one house; its bones may not be broken. And if the paschal sacrifice was originally*

vicarious, perhaps it was roasted whole in order to resemble a living being as much as possible.” (Propp, p. 396)

The roasted lamb was to be accompanied by **“bitter herbs.”** Scholars identify the plant in question as a form of wild lettuce or chicory. Most often contemporary Passover celebrations utilize horseradish in this capacity. Jeremiah uses the same term in Lamentations to describe torment and humiliation:

“I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs, and sated me with gall. He has broken my teeth with gravel; He had trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.”
(Lamentations 3:14-18)



***“Jeremiah - The Weeping Prophet”
by Eduard Bendemann***



“The Slaughter of the Passover Lambs in the Temple Court”

Within the traditions of Judaism, the rabbis link the bitter herbs to the bitterness of Israel’s suffering and slavery in Egypt. This connection is based on the language of Exodus 1:14 - **“They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.”** Within the Passover *“Haggadah,”* the ritual narration which accompanies the *“Seder”* meal today, the mother of the household explains the eating of the bitter herbs in this way:

“We eat especially bitter herbs tonight to taste again the bitterness of slavery. As we read in the Torah, ‘Egypt made the Children of Israel to slave oppressively by making their lives bitter with hard work fashioning clay bricks with all kinds of work in the field. (Exodus 1:14) We dip our food twice this evening, once in salt water to recall the tears shed in cruel slavery and bitter bondage, and we dip the harsh tasting horseradish into the sweet Charoset to remind us to keep our faith in God, because He changes our cries of sorrow into shouts of joy.”
(Stallings, p. 75)

It is further specified that the roasted lamb and bitter herbs are to be eaten with “**bread made without yeast.**” The Hebrew noun in this phrase is “*matsot.*” It is used here for the first time without definition or explanation. The term evidently was familiar as a form of flat cakes that could be speedily prepared for unexpected guests, as in the instance of Lot’s angelic visitors of the eve of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Genesis 19:3; also Judges 6:19-22; 1 Samuel 28:24) The crucial role of unleavened bread in the Passover celebration will be further spelled out in vss. 14-20.



“The Roasting of the Passover Lamb”

The emphatic prohibition of leftovers and instruction for their disposal - “***Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.***” - reflect standard sacrificial practice. Sarna explains the principle involved:

“A sacrificial animal is devoted in its entirety to a sacred purpose. This is so even when the offering is of the kind that it is eaten by the worshipers and not wholly burnt on the altar. The intentional act of eating at the designated time is an indispensable part of the ritual. Any leftovers (Heb. ‘notar’) retain their sacred status but can no longer be consumed and must therefore be burnt. In rabbinic terminology sacrificial flesh that the officiant even intended to eat beyond the allotted time is called ‘piggul,’ repugnant, offensive, that is, to God.” (Sarna, p. 56)

“This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste: it is the Lord’s Passover.”

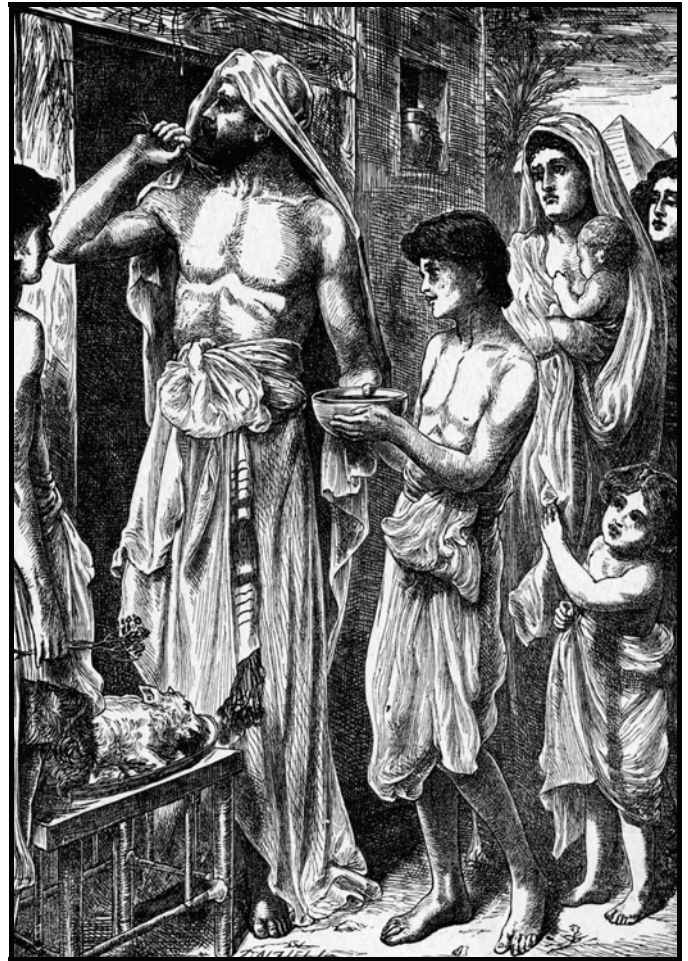
- However, in this case beyond the ordinary principles of sacrifice the prohibition more directly signals the urgency of the Passover as a meal eaten on the eve of an abrupt and permanent departure from Egypt. The standard dress in the region consisted of a flowing shirt-like garment held in place by a sash around the waist when more strenuous activity or maneuverability was called for. Here, ***“your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand”*** indicates a readiness for instant departure since the summons to gather your family, pick up your essential possessions and leave Egypt could come at any moment during the night. This could not be a leisurely dinner. God bluntly commands - ***“Eat it in haste.”*** The Hebrew word *“hippazon”* expresses a combination of fear, anxiety and haste. Propp captures the intensity of the adverb in his translation: *“Eat it frantically.”* The Old Testament reserves the use of this term for the Exodus. Thus, Deuteronomy 16:3 commands: ***“Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste - so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt.”*** The night of the Passover must surely have been a night of desperation and fear as the anguished wail of devastated households spread throughout the land and the Israelites waited to see if Pharaoh’s response would be bloody vengeance or deliverance. The specification of the manner in which the meal was to eaten further



“The First Passover” 16th Century Luther Bible Woodcut

emphasized the unique nature of this night's events. *"Those consuming the meat were not to be in the relaxed dress of home, but in traveling attire; not at ease around a table, but with walking stick in hand; not a calm security, but in haste, with anxiety."* (Durham, p. 154) Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah deliberately used the same word to describe the contrast between the final deliverance of the people of God on Judgement Day when all fear and uncertainty would be gone forever and the anxious haste of the Israelites on the first Passover: *"But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard."* (Isaiah 52: 12)

Here, the text simply explains the reason for the haste which is to characterize the event by saying: *"it is the Lord's Passover."* This will be an awesome night for the Lord will demonstrate His power on behalf of His people. He will strike down mighty Egypt and accomplish the deliverance which He had promised His people. When this night was over they would be slaves no more. The Hebrew word in this phrase is *"pesah"* from which the English adjective *"pascal"* is derived. The English word is used of both the Old Testament Passover and the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God prefigured in these events. St. Paul asserts: *"Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed."* (1 Corinthians 5:7) The Hebrew term *"pesah"* is derived from a verb which means *"to pass over"* or *"to skip"* in reference to the fact that on this night the angel of death did not enter the households whose doorways were marked with the blood of the lambs, but passed over them instead. The Himself defines the terminology in this sense later on in the Chapter: *"And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians."* (Exodus 12:26-27)



"The Passover" by S. Solomon Delt



“Passover Night” by Arnold Friberg

Furthermore, this is *“the Lord’s”* Passover, that is to say, it commemorates the personal intervention of God on His people’s behalf, it was instituted by Him, and has been set apart as holy at His command. This is not merely a national holiday or an historic commemoration. It is an occasion intimately and personally linked to God and that which He has done.

“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn - both men and animals - and I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord.” - Verse 12 precisely defines the significance of these momentous events. By that which He will accomplish on this night of terror and death God will decisively demonstrate the impotent helplessness of the idols, the non-gods, of Egypt. By His ability to pass with impunity throughout the land and strike down the firstborn of men and animals, all those who had foolishly relied upon the non-gods for protection, the Lord would irrefutably prove that there is one God and one God alone. This is exactly the sense of the majestic phrase - ***“I am the Lord.”*** The Hebrew uses the sacred name *“Yahweh”* and thus literally reads *“I am the I AM.”* God, by Biblical definition, is the only independent existence - the being without source or beginning which owes its existence to nothing else. God cannot have a source. He is the source of everything

else that is. Accordingly, by Biblical definition, there can be no more than one God. All other so-called gods are either figments of human imagination or manifestations of demonic falsehood. ***“I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt.”*** Rabbinic midrashim, reported by Josephus in the first century A.D., imagined that on this night Pharaoh placed all of Egypt’s idols in protective concealment and spirited the sacred animals away to Ethiopia for safe keeping and that every temple in the land was brought down by storm and earthquake. But these fanciful speculations trivialize the profundity of these words. By this awesome exercise of His divine power God irrefutably proved that all the venerated deities of this most ancient culture were nothing more than a pretense and a lie. Their statues and their temples remained but the non-gods which they glorified could now be seen for what they truly were.

“The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.” - Having described the dreadful peril which Pharaoh and his kingdom would experience, the Lord concludes this segment with a word of personal assurance to His people. Israel will remain safe and secure within the homes which have been marked



“Pharaoh and His Heir Under the Protection of Horus and Anubis” by Gennady Spirin

with the blood of the Passover lamb. Verse 13 is the first in a series of instances through the remainder of Chapter 12 (cf. vss. 23, 27) in which God defined “*pesah*” in terms of His action in passing over the homes marked with the blood. Here God



“The Angel of Death” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

promises, once again, to honor the sign of the blood which He had Himself established. At the same time, the blood on the doorways would be a visible means of comfort and encouragement to the Israelites themselves - **“The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are.”** As they struggle to cope with their fears in the midst of the terror and death which will surround them, they will be able to look to the blood which marks their doorways and call to mind the promise of God. The Passover lamb had taken their place. His blood had been shed to spare their lives. The Angel of Death would pass them by because of the blood. The NIV’s translation **“no destructive plague will touch you”** fails to reflect the personal focus of the Hebrew noun “*mashit.*” This word typically refers to a personal, supernatural agent of destruction and death (cf. 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:

12,15). A more accurate translation in this instance might be - **“no blow from the destroyer will fall upon you.”** This view is fully consistent with Verse 23 which identifies **“the Destroyer”** as the specific agent which brought about the death of the firstborn.

“This is a day you are to com-memorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord - a lasting ordinance.” -



“17th Century Haggadah Depicting the Cleansing of the Leaven the Preparation of the Matzo”

This section emphasizes the establishment of the Feast of the Passover as a permanent institution. The festival is to serve as an on-going observance *“for the generations to come...a lasting ordinance”* of that which the Lord had done in Egypt to bring the Israelite nation into existence. The *“commemoration”* of the day was not to be a mere recollection but an actual re-enactment of the essential components of first Passover meal on the night of deliverance. The ritual actions of the *“seder”* would serve to link the subsequent generations to that which had taken place in the lives of their forefathers. To make this point, the phrase uses the Hebrew noun *“zikkaron”* which involves action in the process of remembrance. The celebration of the Feast of the



“The Preparation of Matzo for Passover”

Passover has remained one of the defining activities of the Jewish people throughout the millennia which have passed since the first Passover.

“For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel.” - The focus of the on-going celebration of the Passover shifts from the Passover lamb and its blood upon the doorposts to the use of unleavened bread and the meticulous removal of all traces of yeast. The duration of the festival is extended. The original Passover was, of necessity, a hasty, one night event. Thereafter, the event was to be extended to a full seven days, seven being the Biblical number for completion or perfection.

In the rituals of the Passover, bread, the staff of life, came to represent life itself. The fermentation of the leaven which causes bread to rise came to be associated with decomposition and decay and was taken figuratively to symbolize moral and spiritual corruption. Thus, the unleavened bread of the feast became the symbol of new life, cleansed of the corruption of sin, cleansed of the leaven of the sinful nature. This is exactly the manner in which St. Paul utilized Passover imagery in his admonition to the Christians of Corinth to avoid the corruption of sin:

“Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast - as you really are. For Christ, our

Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the festival not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

In the original Passover, the requirement of unleavened bread was merely one in a series of ritual indications of the necessity for a speedy departure from Egypt when the Lord miraculously accomplished the deliverance of His people. The Israelites were to remember that their freedom was a gift from God, not the result of their own planning or preparation. As Deuteronomy 16:3 reminds the nation: ***“Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste - so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt.”*** However, in subsequent Passover celebrations, the symbolic significance of the unleavened bread was expanded and enhanced. In his classic study ***The Temple - Its Ministries and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ***, Hebrew Christian Alfred Edersheim explained the transition in this way:

“The bread which had originally been that of affliction, and because that of haste, now became, as it were, the bread of a new state of



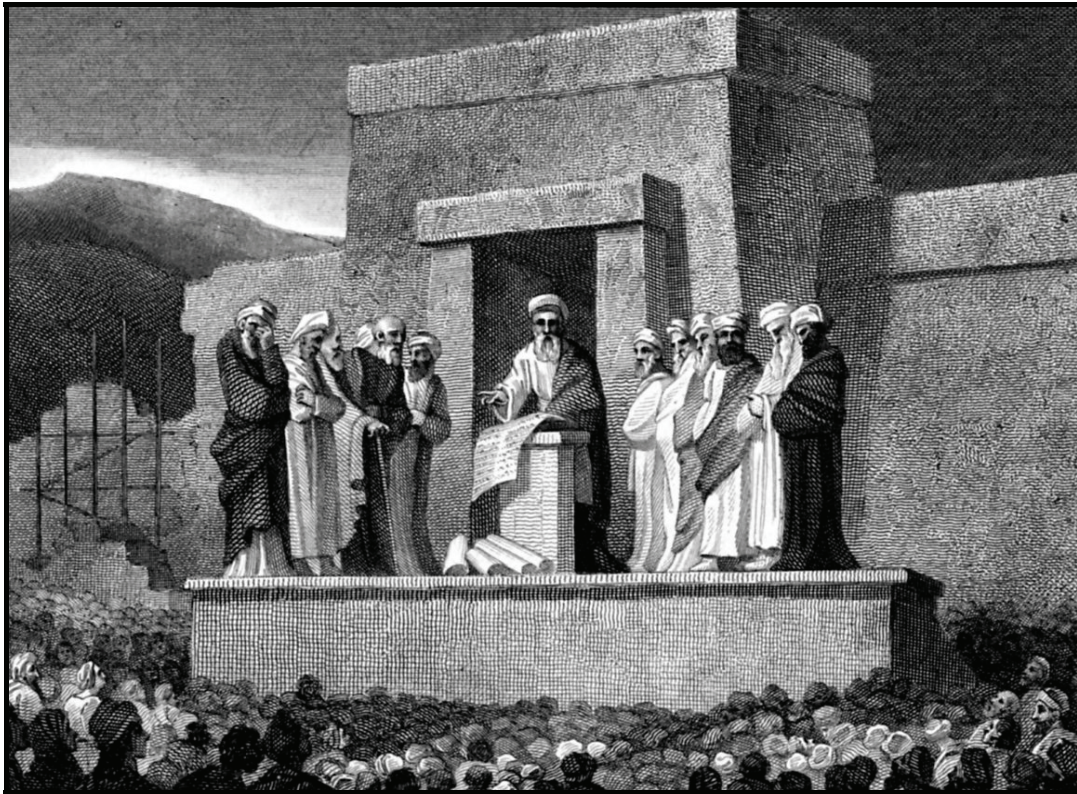
“The Passover Meal” -19th Century Bible Engraving

existence. None of Egypt's leaven was to pervade it; nay, all the old leaven, which served as the symbol of corruption and death, was to be wholly banished from their homes. They were to be a 'new lump,' as they were unleavened (1 Corinthians 5:7)." (Edersheim, p. 166)

In this context, the severe punishment specified for those who were guilty of eating yeast during the seven days becomes intelligible. To be ***“cut off from Israel”*** is a profoundly serious matter. The phrase occurs thirty-six times in the Torah. Nahum Sarna describes its significance in this way: *“Certainly the general idea is that one who deliberately excludes himself from the religious community of Israel cannot be the beneficiary of the covenantal blessings and thereby dooms himself and his line to extinction.”* (Sarna, p. 58) The concept would thus appear to very similar to the Christian concept of excommunication - permanent exclusion from the religious community with the implication of eternal damnation in the absence of repentance.



“We Also Have A Passover Lamb Which Has Been Sacrificed” - Hans Bocksberger - 1543



“Ezra Reading the Book of the Law” by Boydell

“On the first day hold a sacred assembly, another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat. - that is all you may do.” - The first and the last of the seven days of Passover are given particular sanctity. Work was prohibited on these days, but not to the extent of the Sabbath or the Day of Atonement, since certain exemptions were allowed - ***“except to prepare food for everyone to eat.”*** The nature of the ***“sacred assembly”*** established here is not defined. These convocations are also mentioned in the specification of the seven days of Passover in Leviticus (23:4-7) and Numbers (28:16-25) but the activity which was to take place during the assembly is not mentioned. Cassutto suggests that the purpose of these mass gatherings was to supplement the individual family observance of the Passover seder with *“holy worship”* which involved the entire community together (Cassutto, p. 141). The book of Nehemiah later used the same term to identify the assemblies in post-exilic Jerusalem during which Ezra the Scribe would read the Torah to the people who would then respond with songs of thanksgiving and praise (Nehemiah 8:1-6).

“So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and

all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and other who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law...Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground."



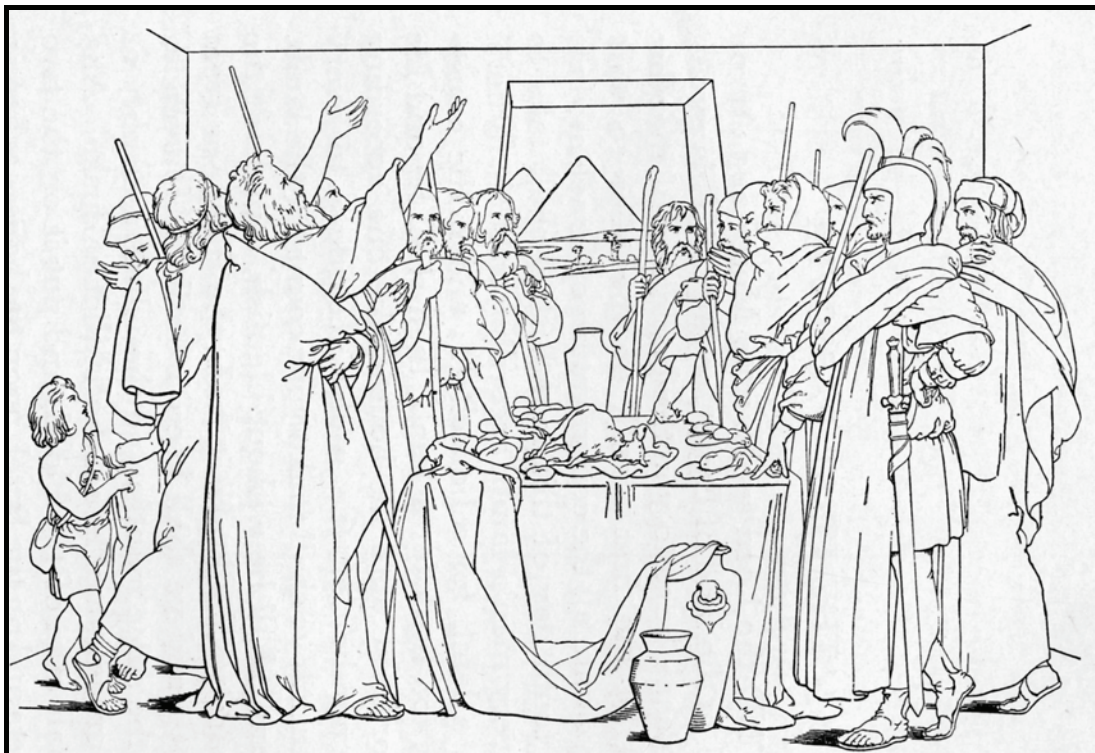
"Ezra Reading the Torah to the Assembly" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

"Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come." - The ongoing celebration of "the Feast of Unleavened Bread" would forever be inseparably linked to the commemoration of God's gift of deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Once again, the text utilizes military terminology "your divisions" to describe the nation of Israel as if it were an army on the move (cf. Exodus 6:26). The language here reiterates that Verse 14 - "for the generations to

come you shall celebrate it...a lasting ordinance” - in emphasizing the permanence of the festival as an ongoing feature of the life of Israel throughout the Old Testament covenant.

“In the first month you are to eat bread without yeast from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day.” - The timing and duration of the festival is fixed more precisely here in terms of the Hebrew reckoning of the day from evening to evening (cf. Leviticus 23:32) This perspective would become critically important in the events of Good Friday and the completion of the execution and burial of Christ prior to sunset on Friday afternoon which marked the beginning of the first day of Passover. Keil/Delitsch notes the repetition of the seven day duration for the Feast here as an indication of the spiritual significance of the unleavened bread:

“Of course, it was not merely a commemoration of this event, but the exodus formed the groundwork of the seven days’ feast, because it was by this that Israel had been introduced into a vital new element. For this reason, the Israelites were to put away all the leaven of their



“The Passover in Egypt” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

Egyptian nature (1 Cor. 5:8), and by eating pure and holy bread, and meeting for the worship of God, to show that they were walking in newness of life. This aspect of the Feast will serve to explain the repeated emphasis laid upon the instructions given concerning it and the repeated threat of extermination against either native or foreigner, in case the law should be disobeyed (vss. 18-20).” (Keil/Delitsch, p. 394)

“For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.”

- The instructions for the ongoing celebration of the festival conclude with a final reiteration of the importance of removing any trace of leaven from Israelite homes during the seven days of the feast. These regulations will apply not only to the **“native-born”** but also to the **“alien”** who dwells within the community. The **“alien”** is someone who has taken up permanent residence with the Israelites but has not submitted to circumcision and become one of them. Such people will be required to put away any form of leaven but will not be permitted to participate in the actual eating of matzo without circumcision and conversion (cf. vss. 43-49) Dr. Sarna details the strict rules which apply to the production of the unleavened bread for

Passover:



***“The Preparation of Matsot” - 17th Century
Dutch Woodcut***

“Extraordinarily stringent regulations govern the manufacture of matsot. Their sole ingredients are flour and water...The water to be mixed with the flour is first left standing overnight. ‘Matsot shemurah,’ ‘carefully guarded matsah,’ which many Jews use to fulfill the obligation to eat matsah on the first night of Passover, is made from flour milled from wheat that has been scrupulously supervised from the time of harvesting on. Regular matsah is baked from flour that has been specially milled for the purpose



“The Preparation of Matsot for Passover” - 17th Century German Woodcut

and has been carefully supervised from the time of milling through the baking. The entire manufacturing process from the kneading to completion must take no longer than eighteen minutes, during which period the dough is continuously manipulated in order to retard fermentation. As a further precaution, perforation is applied to allow any air bubbles to escape.” (Sarna, p. 58)

On the evening of the day before the first day of Passover a diligent search takes place in every Jewish home. The object of that search is the slightest trace of leaven. Based on the command of this text - **“For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses”** - the dwelling is searched from top to bottom. As the search begins, the family prays together - *“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast commanded us concerning the removal of leaven.”* A small bag of yeast is traditionally concealed somewhere in the house for the children to discover. The *“hametz,”* is then taken outside and ceremonially burned. When the search is finished

and the “hametz” has been burned, the family prays: “May all leaven in my possession, both that which I have seen and that which I have not seen or not removed be annulled and deemed as the dust of the earth.” The same prayer will be prayed on the following morning as the family continues its preparations for the Passover seder.

“Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, ‘Go at once and select the animals for your families and select the Passover lamb.’” - When God had completed the details for the institution of the Passover for the generations to come, the narrative returned to the events of the first Passover. Moses hastened to implement the instructions which he had received from the Lord. The long awaited

day of deliverance was at hand and a terrible force was about to be unleashed upon the land. There was a need to act quickly. The tribal leaders were called together and instructed to immediately go out to the flocks and procure all of the animals that would be needed. There were to be no exceptions or omissions. *“There is a concern that each family of each clan of each tribe be accounted for and protected.”* (Durham, p. 162)



“19th Century Italian Haggadah Depicting Moses and Aaron”

“Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out of his house until morning.” - In this summary restatement particular attention is given to the method by which is blood of the lamb is to be applied to the

doorway of each home. The **“hyssop”** plant cited here is most probably **“Syrian hyssop,”** a small bushy plant which would have been ideal to catch the blood and smear it upon the doorposts and the lintel. The multiple stalks of the hyssop bush would also catch the fibrin in the blood and thereby serve as an anti-coagulant. Hyssop would come to be used commonly in ceremonies of purification and protection which involved the sprinkling of blood (cf. Leviticus 14:51; Numbers 19:18). Thus the Psalmist declared: **“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow.”** (Psalm 51:5) The New Testament Letter to the Hebrews notes: **“When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people...In the same way, he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies...and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”** (Hebrews 9:19-22) The **“bunch of hyssop”** was to be dipped into the **“basin”** which had caught the blood of the slaughtered lamb and then copiously brushed around the doorway. The text carefully specifies **“put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe.”** Every member of the family was to remain within the sanctuary created by the blood of the lamb throughout the hours of the night: **“Not one of you shall go out of his house until morning.”**



“Syrian Hyssop”
19th Century Bible Engraving

“When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the top and the sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and



“The Destroyer Passing Through the Land of Egypt” by Arthur Hacker

He will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.” - The assurance of deliverance through the blood of the Passover lambs was restated on the eve of the night of terror. A terrible judgement was about to be inflicted upon the land of Egypt because of the stubborn defiance of her king. But the Children of Israel, those whose doorways were marked with the blood of the lamb, would be spared that judgement. The blood represented the fact that the life of the lamb had been sacrificed in place of the life of the firstborn of that household. Because of the blood, God would ***“not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.”*** Hebrews 11:28 uses the same language in lauding the steadfast faith of Moses: ***“By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.”***

The specific identity of ***“the destroyer”*** which served as the agent of God’s judgement upon Egypt has been the topic of considerable debate among Bible scholars. Exodus refers both to God Himself and to the destroyer as the agent through whom the firstborn of Egypt were struck down. So, for instance in Verse 12 God declared: ***“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first born - both men and animals.”*** In the same way, Verse 29 indicated that it was God Himself who

killed the firstborn: ***“At midnight, the Lord struck down the firstborn of Egypt.*** However, here in Verse 23 - and later in Hebrews 11:28 cited above - it is ***“the destroyer”*** who actually entered the homes and struck down the firstborn. Historically, these interchangeable references to God and the destroyer have led many Bible scholars to conclude that it was actually ***“the Angel of the Lord”*** which carried out the implementation of the Tenth Plague. Throughout the Old Testament, the Angel of the Lord (Hebrew - *“Malakh Jahweh”* - literally - *“the messenger of the Lord”* - is the pre-incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. The angel of the Lord often served as the instrument of God’s judgement. 2 Samuel 24 uses language very similar to that of Exodus 12 in describing the punishment inflicted upon Israel in the days of King David through the Angel of the Lord:

“So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, ‘Enough! Withdraw your hand.’ The Angel of the Lord was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” (2 Samuel 24:13-16)

It was also the Angel of the Lord who brought down God’s judgement upon the host of the Assyrian King Sennacherib when he besieged the city of Jerusalem:



“The Angel of the Lord Destroying the Host of Assyria” by Tissot

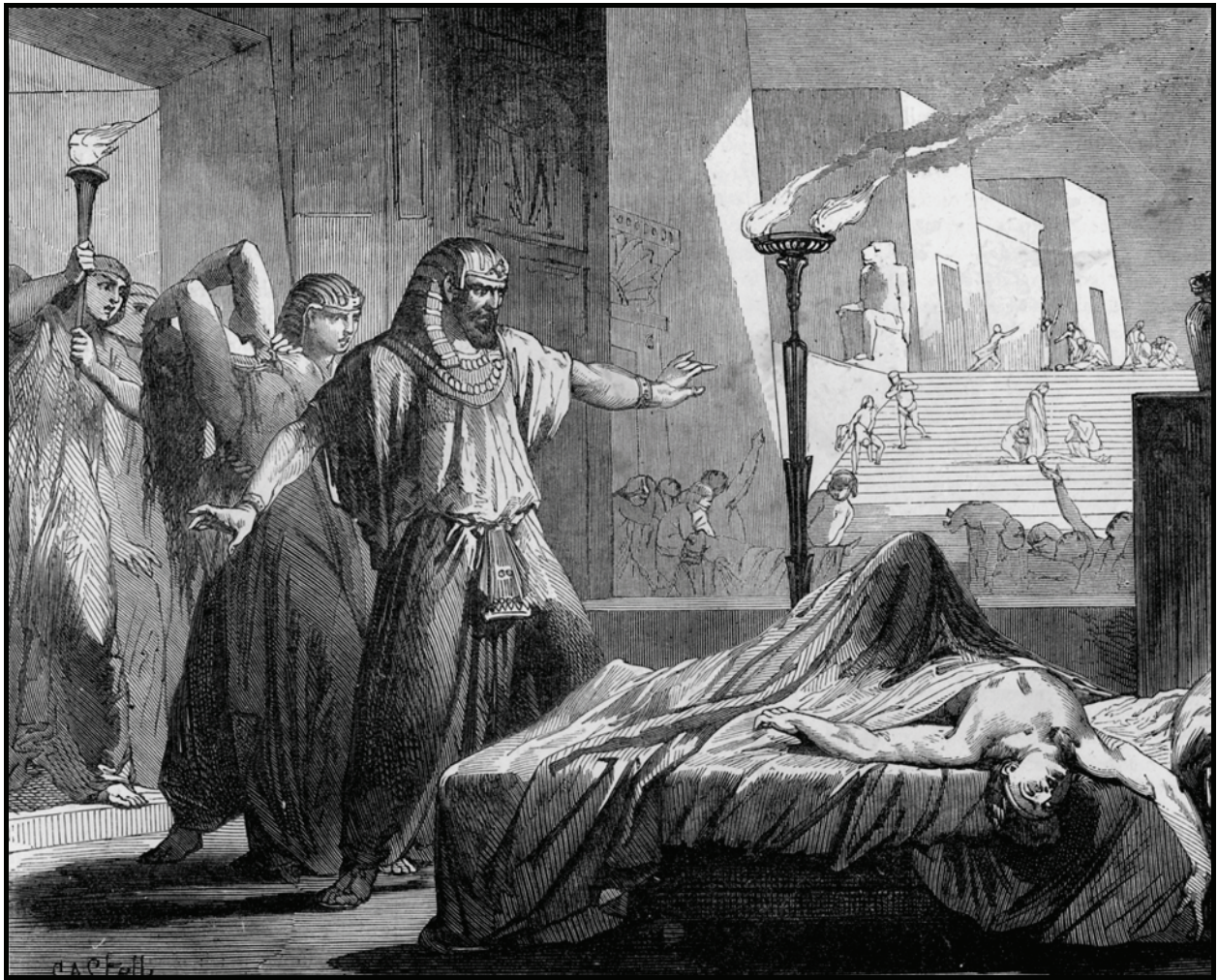


“The Death of Pharaoh’s Firstborn Son and Heir” by Ernest Normand

“That night the Angel of the Lord went out and put to death one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning - there were all the dead bodies. So Sennacherib, King of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.” (2 Kings 19:35-36)

David called down the wrath of God in the person of the Angel of the Lord upon his foes: *“May they be like chaff before the wind, with the Angel of the Lord driving them away; may their path be dark and slippery, with the Angel of the Lord pursuing them.”* (Psalm 35:5-6) The view that the destroyer of Egypt’s firstborn was the Angel of the Lord receives further confirmation from Psalm 78 which ascribes the devastation of all of the plagues to *“a band of destroying angels:”*

“He unleashed against them His hot anger, His wrath, indignation and hostility - a band of destroying angels. He prepared a path for His anger; He did not spare them from death but gave them over to the plague. He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham.” (Psalm 78:49-51)



“The Death of the Firstborn” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.” - Once more the text emphasizes the nature of the Passover as an ongoing institution in the life of the Children of Israel. Those features of the event which did not specifically pertain to the night of deliverance and departure - i.e. the marking of the doorways with blood and the confinement within the homes which had been marked - were to continue *“When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised.”* It would appear that the observance of the Passover did not take place during the years of wandering in the wilderness. There is no mention of Passover festivities in Scripture until after Israel had settled in the Promised Land.

The NIV's translation of the Hebrew word "*aboda*" as "*ceremony*" ("*observe this ceremony*") - while technically correct - obscures the parallelism of the original text. The term connotes both servitude and worship. The use of this term here serves to contrast the Hebrews' bitter slavery to Pharaoh with the willing service to God which would commence with their liberation and be commemorated in the Passover. By these words, God was reminding them that up to this moment they had been slaves of Pharaoh. Now they would serve Him rather than Pharaoh. The Passover service would celebrate their liberation from that slavery.



"19th Century German Seder"

Moses emphasized the unique character of the Passover as a family celebration which was observed in the context of the home rather than the more formal setting of the Tabernacle or the Temple by suggesting that the children of the household would be curious about the origin of this ritual meal. "*And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.'*" The children's questions have since become a core component in the Passover Haggadah. The "*mah nishtanah*" (from their opening phrase in Hebrew) are traditionally four in number and are posed by the youngest child present at the Passover seder.

"How different is this night from all other nights? (1.) For on all other nights we may eat hamez and mazzah; on this night only mazzah. (2.) For on all other nights we may eat all kinds of vegetables; on this night we must eat bitter herbs. (3.) For on all other nights we do not dip our vegetables even once; on this night we dip twice (the karpas into salt

water, and the bitter herbs in haroset); (4.) For on all other nights we may eat either sitting up straight or reclining: on this night we all recline.” (Klein, p. 68)

These questions become the outline by which the head of the household retells the events of the first Passover and the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

“Then the people bowed down and worshiped. And the Israelites did just what God had commanded Moses and Aaron.” - The response of the tribal elders, representing the entire nation of Israel, is one of awe and gratitude. Before they dispersed to hastily implement every detail of the divine instruction, they fell down upon their knees to worship God and offer Him their thanks and praise. The long awaited day of deliverance had finally come!

“At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, from the firstborn of



“Pharaoh and His Dead Son” by James J. Tissot

Pharaoh who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the cattle as well. Pharaoh and all his officials

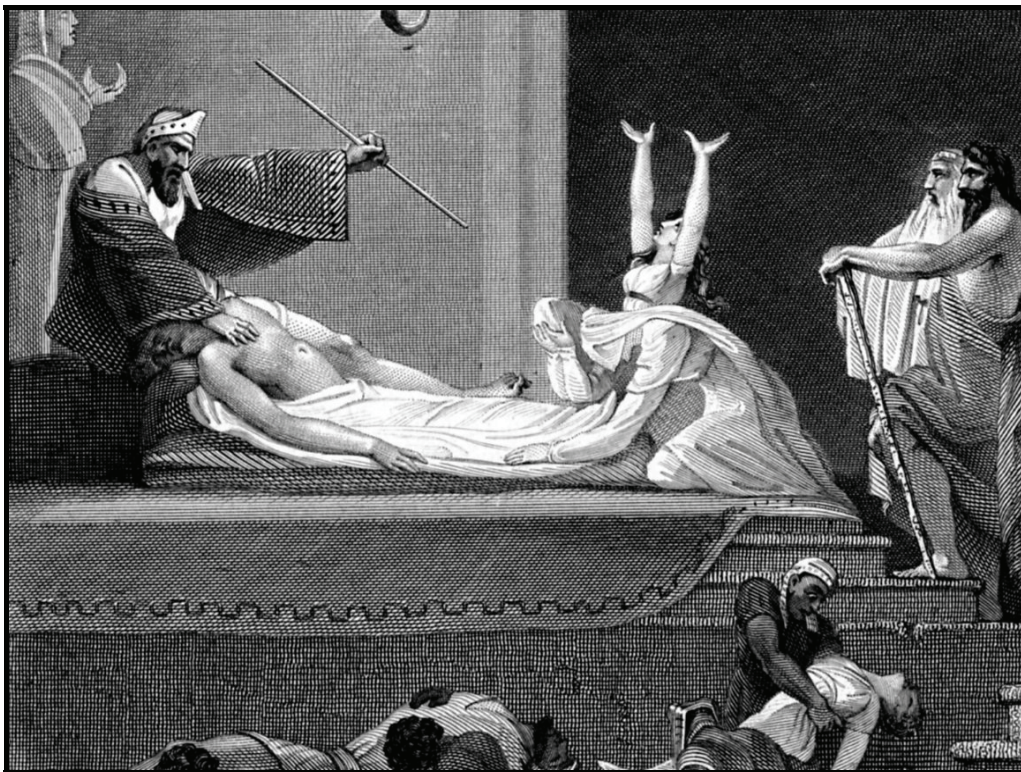


“The Firstborn Slain” by Gustav Dore

and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.” - Everything transpired exactly as Moses had foretold. Once again, as in the preceding warnings, the text stresses the comprehensive nature of the disaster which fell upon the Egyptians. Every firstborn son throughout the land perished as the Destroyer passed through Egypt - *“all the firstborn of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat upon the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well.”* From the highest to the lowest, not one was spared. The language shifts slightly as in the previous warning the bottom of society was represented by the slave girl grinding corn at her mill (cf. Exodus 11:5). In this case, it is *“the prisoner in the dungeon”* (literally - *“the captive in the house of the pit”*). In any case, the point remains the same. No one escaped. All of the firstborn, of men and animals, died everywhere, all across the land of Egypt - *“there was not a house without*

someone dead.” The result of the slaughter was an unprecedented outcry of dread and despair - *“there was loud wailing in Egypt.”* Once more this was precisely as God’s prophet Moses had predicted: *“There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt - worse than there has ever been or ever will be again.”* (Exodus 11:6)

“During the night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds as you have said, and go. And also bless me.’” - Like the rest of Egypt, Pharaoh was roused from his bed in the middle of the night by shrieks of fear and cries of grief. In this midst of that terrible darkness, he staggered to the bed chamber of the crown prince only to find that the non-gods of Egypt had been unable to protect the future king of Egypt. His own son and heir lay dead. In an absolute monarchy like ancient Egypt the crown prince was the guarantee of stability and continuity, the assurance that even if the king were to die the kingdom would continue - safe and secure. No doubt Pharaoh bitterly regretted his own stubbornness and pride as he cradled the cold stiff body of his firstborn son in his trembling arms. The Hebrew text literally indicates - *“By night, Pharaoh called to Moses and Aaron.”* This would suggest that in the midst of his terror and sorrow, particularly in view of the circumstances of their last meeting at the royal palace, that Pharaoh did not

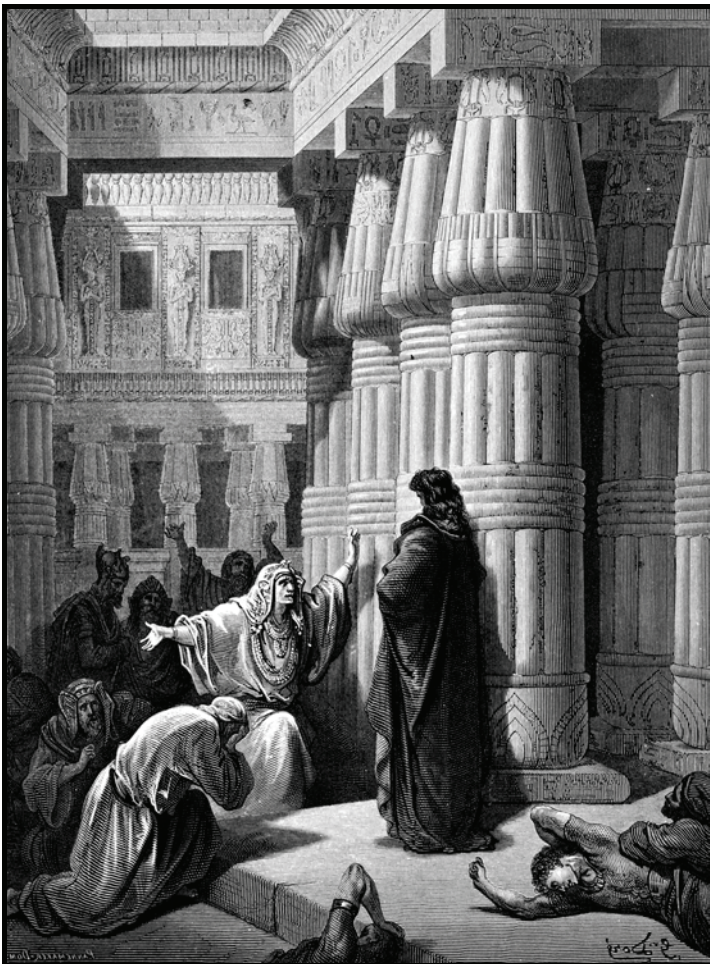


“The Death of Pharaoh’s Firstborn” by Boydell

presume to summon Moses and Aaron. Instead, he left his palace and sought them out in Goshen. Rabbinic tradition reports the pathetic picture of a terrified, grief-stricken king, meandering hopelessly through the streets of Goshen in search of the home of Moses so that he might beg the prophet to depart from his kingdom:

“Pharaoh rose up in the night of the smiting of the firstborn. He waited not for the third hour of the morning, when kings usually arise, nor did he wait to be awakened, but he himself roused his slaves from their slumber, and all the other Egyptians, and together they went forth to seek Moses and Aaron. He knew that Moses had never spoken an untruth, and as he had said, ‘I will see thy face again no more,’ he could not count upon Moses coming to him. There remained nothing for him to do but to go in search of the Israelite leader. He did not know where

Moses lived, and he had great difficulty and lost much time in looking for his house, for the Hebrew lads of whom he had made inquiries when he met them in the street played practical jokes on him, misdirected him, and led him astray. Thus, he wandered about a long time, all the while weeping and crying out, ‘O my friend Moses, pray for me to God.’” (Ginzberg, II, p. 368)



*“Pharaoh Pleading with Moses to Leave Egypt”
by Gustav Dore*

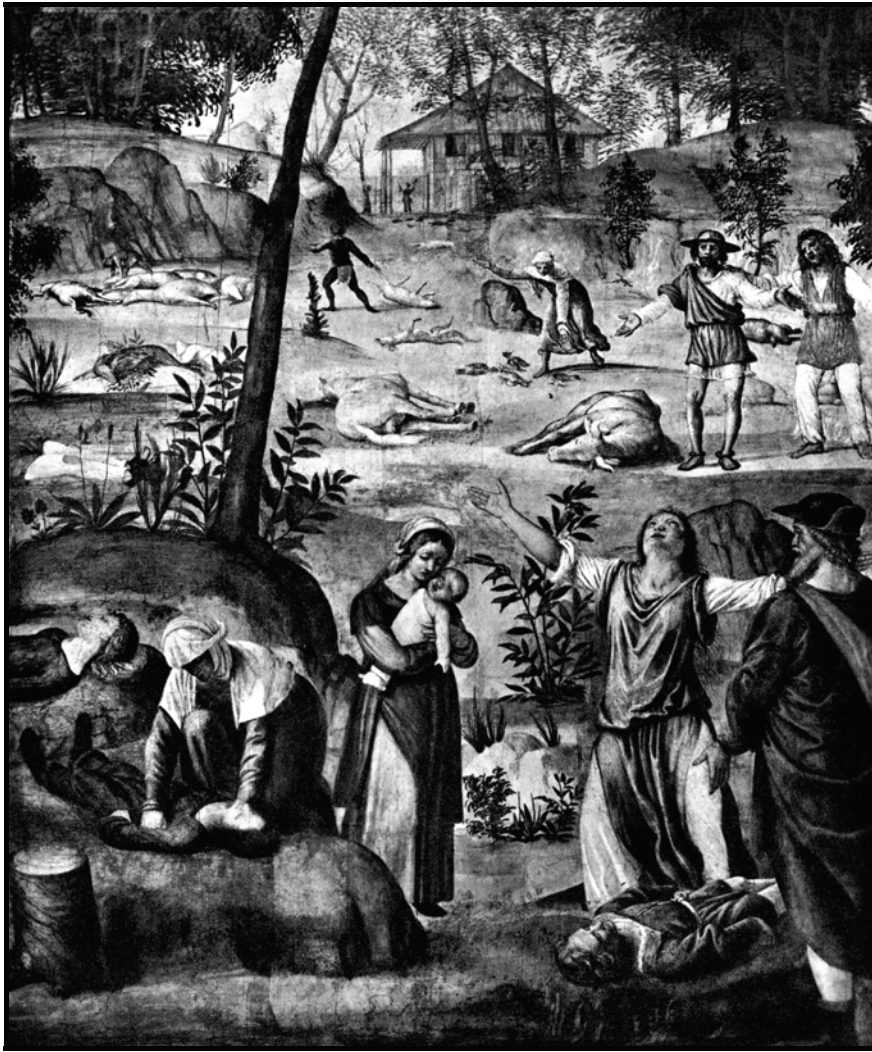
Pharaoh's determination to resist had been utterly destroyed by the tenth plague. All he wanted now was for these people to get out of Egypt immediately. He retracted all of the conditions and stipulations upon which he had previously insisted. ***“Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as***



“Pharaoh’s Mourning” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

*you have requested. Take your flocks and herds as you have said, and go!” - The grammar and vocabulary of the King’s words are broken and abrupt, as though they were spoken in breathless haste which, no doubt, they were. The extent to which Pharaoh’s will has been broken is most dramatically illustrated by his final plea - **“And also bless me.”** “And realizing that only from Israel’s God, and through the merit of Israel’s prayer, can blessing come on him after his capitulation, just as punishment came upon him on account of his sins, he concludes: and bless me also.” (Cassutto, p. 145)*

“The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. ‘For otherwise,’ they said, ‘we shall all die!’ So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses had instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for. So they



“The Death of the Firstborn” by Bernardino Luini - 1522

plundered the Egyptians.” - Moses had forewarned Pharaoh - *“All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all the people who follow you.’”* (Exodus 11:8) No doubt, at the time Pharaoh had scoffed at these words. But now, in the aftermath of the tenth plague, they too come true. The people of Egypt are gripped with a desperate urgency to be rid of the Hebrews before further disasters sent by Yahweh descended upon them. They not only permitted them to leave; they pleaded with them to leave and showered the wealth of Egypt upon them in order to speed them on their way - *“The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for. So they plundered the Egyptians.”* No price was too high to be delivered from the desperate peril in which the Egyptians found themselves because the resistance of their ruler to the God of the Hebrews. Ginzberg colorfully reports the Midrash that the Egyptians were actually more eager for the exodus than the Hebrews themselves:

“Great as the joy of the Hebrews was at their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, it was exceeded by that of Pharaoh’s people at seeing their slaves depart, for with them went the dread of death that had obsessed them. They were like the portly gentleman riding an ass. The rider feels uncomfortable and longs for the moment of alighting, but his longing cannot compare in intensity with that of the ass groaning under the corpulent burden, and when their journey’s end is reached, the ass rejoices more than his master. So the Egyptians were happier to be rid of the Hebrews than these were to be free.” (Ginzberg, II, p. 374

In the perfect justice of a righteous God the proper wages which Israel had been denied throughout the centuries of their bondage were now eagerly paid as the Egyptians desperately hurried the Hebrews out of their country.

“They left Egypt like a victorious army that had stripped the vanquished of their spoils and were departing laden with booty. This accorded with the promise that the Lord had made long before to Abraham that his descendants would come out of the land of their enslavement ‘with great possessions.’” (McCay, p. 224)



“The Exodus” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

The text's emphasis upon the necessity of carrying off the dough in its kneading pans serves to illustrate the urgency of Israel's departure. Many English translations misrepresent the sense of the Hebrew text which says "*so the people took their dough before it could rise, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing.*" This was not deliberately unleavened bread, left over from the previous night's Passover celebration. The seven day feast of unleavened bread was intended for the Promised Land and had not yet been put into effect. This bread may well have already been leavened - which is why it would have been in kneading troughs - but there was not enough time to knead it and allow it to rise. They could not wait. Under desperate pressure from the panicked Egyptians they had to leave. So, in an attempt to salvage the half-made bread, the bread dough - leavened but not yet risen - was hastily wrapped up so that it would not dry out. It was carried off in the kneading pans where it would have been completed if there had been time to do so.



"The Departure from Egypt" by Calisto Tanzi



“The Children of Israel Prepare to Leave Egypt” by Bernardino Luini - 1522

“The urgency of the Egyptians compelled the Israelites to take the dough, which they were probably about to bake for their journey, before it was leavened, and also their kneading troughs bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders...The Israelites had intended to leaven the dough, as the command to eat unleavened bread for seven days had not yet been given to them. But under the pressure of necessity, they were obliged to content themselves with unleavened bread, or, as it was called in Deuteronomy 16:3, ‘the bread of affliction,’ during the first days of their journey. But as the troubles connected with their departure from Egypt were merely the introduction to the new life of liberty and grace, so, according to the counsel of God the bread of affliction was to become a holy food to Israel.” (Keil/Delitsch, pp. 397-398)



“The Exodus” by Arnold Friberg

“The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds.” - At the Lord’s command, Moses maintained a written record of the stages of the Israelites’ journey from Egypt to Canaan. That record began with these stirring words:

“The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after Passover. They marched out boldly in full view of the Egyptians, who were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them; for the Lord had brought judgement on their gods. The Israelites left Ramses and camped at Succoth.”
(Numbers 33:3-5)

The joyful chaos and confusion which this scene must have presented in stark contrast to the stunned silence of the grief-stricken Egyptians is mind boggling. The Exodus account is somewhat more succinct and matter-of-fact. The journey began, appropriately from **“Rameses”** on the eastern edge of the Nile delta. This was the last of the treasure cities which the Hebrew slaves had been forced to build for Pharaoh (cf. Exodus 1:11) The city’s formal title in the Egyptian records is *“House of*

Rameses, Beloved of Amun, Great in Victorious Might.” The irony of this grandiose title in the present context is evident. The destination for the first stage of the journey was “**Succoth**,” a Hebrew name which most scholars agree is to be associated with Tell el-Maskhuta in the Wadi Tumalit on the western edge of the Sinai Desert.

The text specifically identifies the size of the Israelite host with the unequivocal words: “**There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.**” Modern Bible critics are virtually unanimous in rejecting this figure as a ridiculous exaggeration. So, for example, in his 2004 study *The Five Books of Moses - A Translation with Commentary*, Dr. Robert Alter of the University of California, Berkley, condescendingly concludes:

“The total figure of Israelites thus would be considerably more than two million. This is scarcely credible as a historical datum, but ancient literature (Greek as well as Hebrew) has little notion of numerical accuracy in the way it conjures with numbers.” (Alter, p. 382)



“The Departure From Egypt” by John Martin - 1828

The audacity of Bible critics, both ancient and modern, is staggering. To presumptuously assume the inaccuracy and unreliability of the Biblical record because of our own notions of what God could or could not have done indicates a degree of arrogance that is beyond belief. The Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, what the Bible says carries the full authority and veracity of God Himself. There is no ambiguity in this text - ***“There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides men and women.”*** This figure is confirmed by numerous other Biblical texts:

“The silver obtained from those of the community who were counted in the census was one hundred talents and one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel - one beka per person, that is, half a shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel from everyone who had crossed over to those who counted, twenty years old or more, 603,550 men.” (Exodus 38: 25-26)

“These are the Israelites counted according to their families. All those in the camps by their divisions, number 603,550. The Levites, however, were not counted among the other Israelites as the Lord had commanded.” (Numbers 2:32-33)

“But Moses said, ‘Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and You say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’



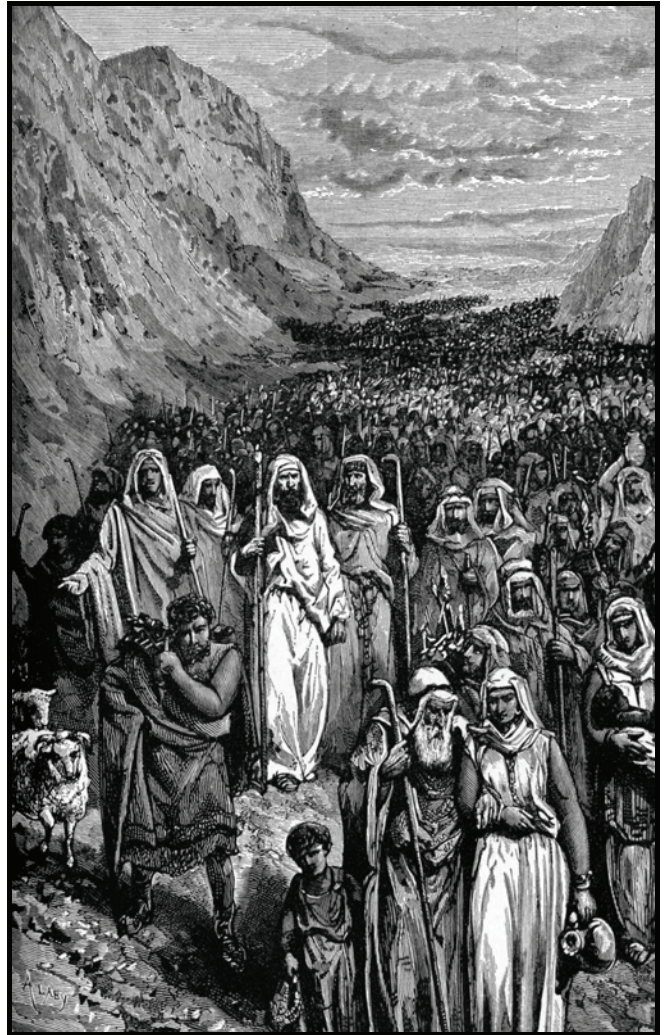
“Israel’s Departure from Egypt” by T. Dalziel

***Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them?
Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?’’***
(Numbers 11:21-22)

When estimated numbers of women and children are added to the six hundred thousand fighting men the total count of the Israelites grows to between two and three million people. In response to those who presume to argue that these numbers cannot be accurate since it would not have been possible for such a vast multitude to make its way through the desert wastes of the Sinai we need only repeat God’s answer to Moses’ question as to how he was to feed all these people: ***“The Lord answered Moses, ‘Is the Lord’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.’”*** (Numbers 11:23)

“Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. With the dough they had brought from Egypt, they made cakes of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.” -

The Israel of God in the Old Testament was never primarily a matter ethnicity. Non-Jews who shared Israel’s faith in the true God and His promise of the Messiah and who were prepared to submit to the stipulations of the covenant were always admitted into the covenant community. By the same token, blood descendants of Abraham who did not share the faith of the patriarch were not true Jews. This is the clear testimony of Scripture: ***“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the***



“The Exodus” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

heart by the Spirit, not by the written code.” (Romans 2:28-29) In his Epistle to the Philippians St. Paul, despite his own pristine ethnic qualifications, declared that faith not ethnic descent was the basis for a saving relationship with God:

“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh - though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the Tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the Law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” (Philippians 3:3-6)

In this instance, however, the ***“many other people”*** who joined Israel may have done

so for more opportunistic reasons. The Hebrew phrase carries a negative connotation in describing these folks which has led so translators to render the phrase *“a motley throng”* or *“riffraff.”* Some of these people will become the focus of discontent and disorder later in the wilderness wandering (cf. Numbers 11:4).



“Abraham at Mamre” by J. James Tissot

The repeated references to the fact that they were eating bread which was not allowed to rise reiterate the urgent haste which the circumstances of Israel’s departure from Egypt necessitated. This was not a humanly planned event. God alone accomplished the exodus from bondage and His deliverance came overnight.

“Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord’s divisions left Egypt. Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the Lord for the generations to come.” - God had forewarned Abraham - ***“Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.”*** (Genesis 15:13-14; cf. Acts 7:6) This verse indicates the fulfillment of that prophecy as it specifies the duration of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt. This prolonged period of bondage also easily allows for the expansion of the Israelite population over ten or eleven generations to the numbers cited in the preceding paragraph. The phrase - ***“to the very day”*** might better be translated ***“on that very day”*** referring to the day of the Passover (vs. 14), not the day of Israel’s arrival in Egypt as the English translation suggests.



***“On This Night All the Israelites Are to Keep Vigil”
by Rudolf Schäfer***

“Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the Lord for generations to come.” - On the night of the first Passover God kept watch over His people, delivering them from the Destroyer by the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, Israel was to observe the Feast, keeping watch through the hours of the night as a commemoration of that which God had done for them. James Moffat offers this fine translation of the Verse: ***“It was a night when the Eternal was on watch to bring them out of Egypt, a night when all Israelites must keep watch for the Eternal, age after age.”***

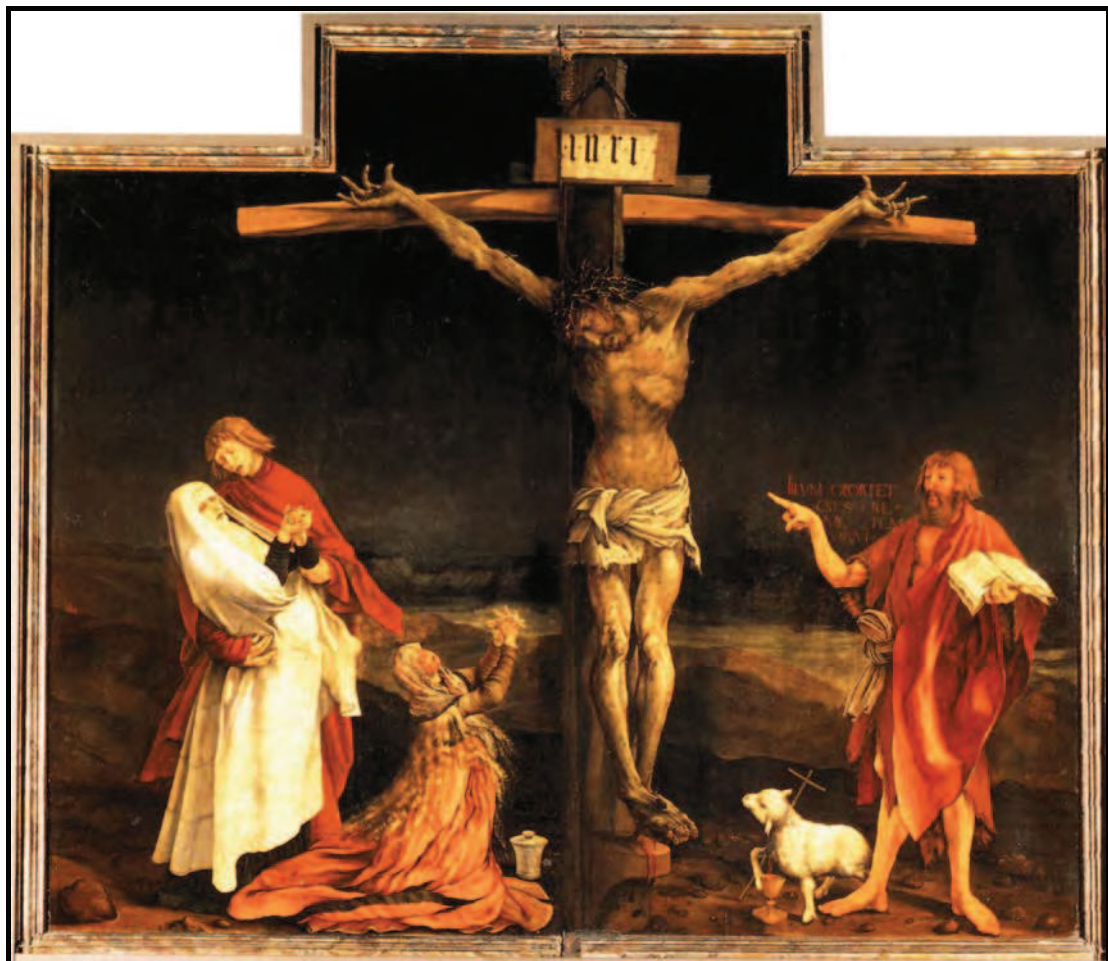


*“The Night of Passover” - 15th Century Luther Bible Woodcut
“God Summoned His People to Feast Upon the Easter-Lamb,
And to Place the Lamb’s Blood as a Guardian Upon their Doors.
Jesus, the Lamb Which Was Sacrificed,
Gives Himself to His Congregation and His Blood Cleanses them from All Sin”*

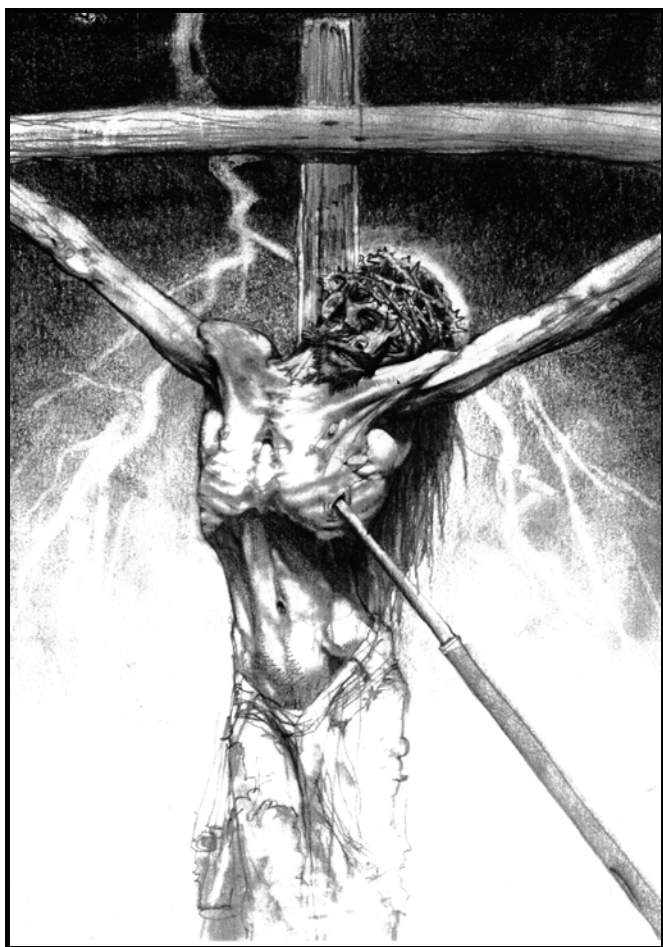
“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘These are the regulations for the Passover: No foreigner is to eat of it. Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, but a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it.’” - Having indicated the presence of the significant number of foreigners which accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt, the text now provided additional regulations for the Passover which reassert the nature of the Feast as the commemoration of the founding of the Israelite nation and govern the participation of non-Israelites in the observance. *“No foreigner may eat of it...a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it.”* - Non-Israelites who lived among the Jews but had not become a part of the covenant community were not to be admitted to the Passover meal. However, as previously noted, this was not a matter of ethnicity. Those who were prepared to undergo circumcision as an indication of their faith in Yahweh and their desire to be a part of the community of believers could be admitted - *“Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him.”* *“The practice of*

circumcision, being the physical token of God's covenant and a symbol of consecration and commitment to a life lived in consciousness of that covenant, is the indispensable prerequisite for those who participate in the paschal offering. (Sarna, p. 63) Foreign birth or blood did not exclude anyone from the assembly of the Israel of God.

“It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones. The whole community of Israel must celebrate it.” - The requirement that the seder was to be eaten ***“inside one house”*** and that the roasted lamb was not to be taken outside of that house emphasized the character of the Passover as a private celebrate, reserved for members of the covenant community. The stipulation that no bones of the Passover sacrifice appears to reflect the traditional middle-eastern practice of leisurely prolonged feasts at which the bones of the roasted animals were broken open so that the tasty marrow inside could be



***“Behold the Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World”
by Matthias Grünewald - 1512***



“One of the Soldiers Pierced Jesus’ Side with a Spear” by Simon Bishley

sucked out. On the night of Passover there was no time for such self-indulgence (cf. Numbers 9:12). This particular Passover requirement takes on poignant significance for Christians in that it was cited in the New Testament in reference to the crucifixion of Jesus. The Jewish authorities had requested that the legs of the crucified be broken so that the executions could be concluded before the beginning of the Passover Sabbath at dusk. John’s Gospel reports the sequence of events:

“The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water...These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled; ‘Not one of His bones will be broken,’

and, as another Scripture says, ‘They will look on the One they have pierced.’”
(John 19:32-36)

In his classic commentary on the Gospel of John, R.C.H. Lenski marveled at the precise manner in which the regulations governing the slaughter of the Passover Lamb were to be fulfilled in the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, upon the cross:

“This remarkable fulfillment of Scripture is to lend abiding support to our faith. ‘A bone of him shall not be shattered,’ Exodus 12:46; also Numbers 9:12. In the case of the prophetic pascal lamb no bone was to be broken. It was not to be treated as an ordinary animal that was slaughtered for ordinary food and thus cut up and portioned out. No part of it was to be carried from one house to another, nor was any

portion that might be left over to be eaten later like other meat; it was to be burnt before morning. All these directions, in particular the one to leave the lamb entire, and thus to roast it on a spit, and not to cut, boil or prepare it in ways that required sundering, disjuncting, or breaking the bones, and this was done in order that it might in a special manner serve as a prophecy of Jesus. How strikingly the prophecy matched the fulfillment, appears at the critical moment when all ordinary expectations would lead us to expect the legs of Jesus to be broken - but they are left unbroken. John places the prophecy and the fulfillment side by side, in order that seeing what he saw, we, too, may believe.” (Lenski, pp. 1320-1321)

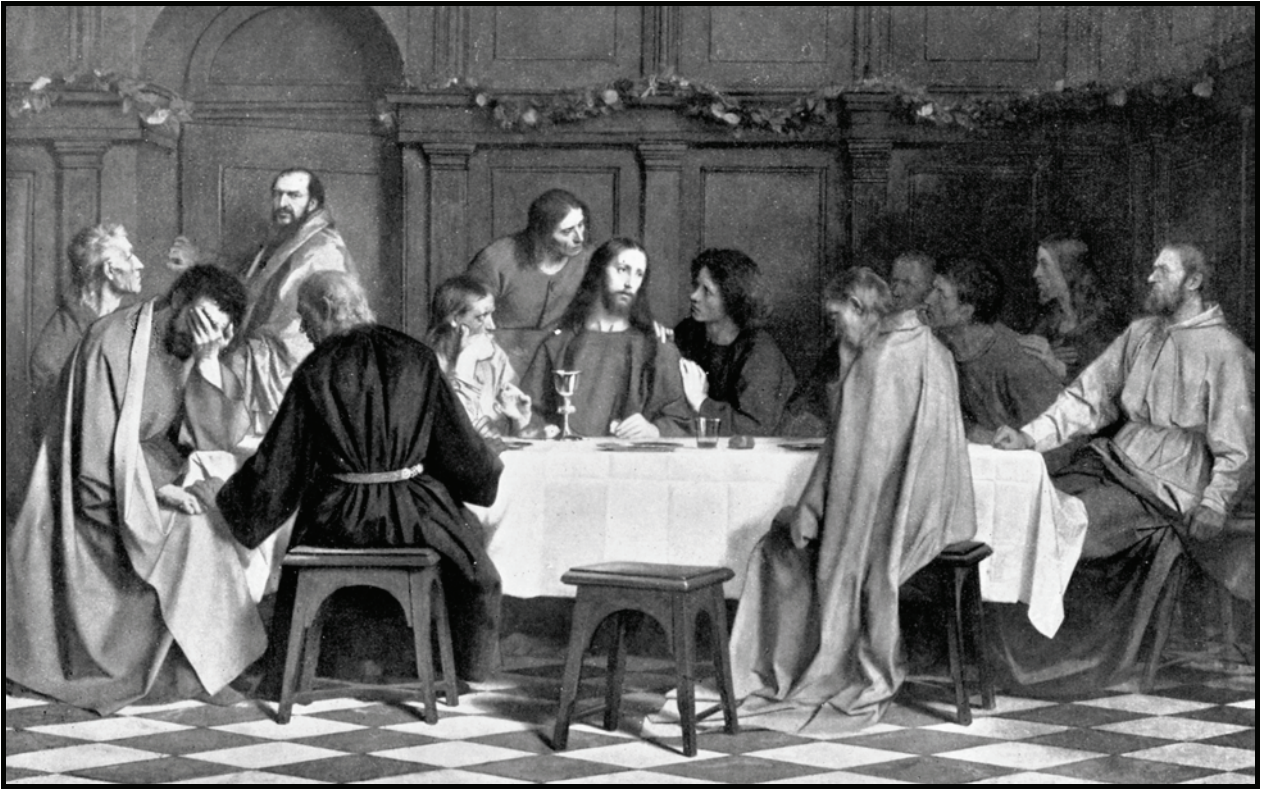
“All the congregation of Israel shall eat it.” - The celebration of the Passover meal was required for all of the Children of Israel. *“The obligation to remember how the Lord had saved His people permitted no exemptions.”* (MacKay, p. 230) As the regulations defined those who were to be excluded, so also they defined the crucial role which the Passover was to play in the community of God’s people. *“The deeper ground for this was, that in this meal Israel was to preserve and celebrate its unity and fellowship with Jehovah.”* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 402) The Exodus from Egypt is the foremost Old Testament paradigm of divine salvation. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is the majesty of God’s grace more powerfully presented. Accordingly, it was no co-incidence that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the Israel of God, took place in the context of the Passover and that He celebrated the Seder with His disciples on the eve of His death. The Passover was consummated in the self-sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Every detail of the ancient festival was



“The Slaughter of the Passover Lamb”

designed to point forward to Jesus and finds its perfect fulfillment in Him.

“An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in



“The Last Supper” by Eduard Gebhardt

the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. The same applies to the native born and to the alien living among you.” - The previous instructions regarding the participation of non-ethnic Israelites in the Passover are here repeated and detailed. Sarna points out that this policy was not limited to Passover but applied throughout the religious practice of the Hebrews:

“The stranger in Israel enjoyed numerous rights and privileges, such as the benefits of the Sabbath rest, the protection afforded by the cities of refuge, and access to certain tithes and to the produce of the Sabbatical year. He could offer sacrifices if he so pleased and could even participate in religious festivals. He was also obligated to refrain from certain actions that undermined the social, moral and spiritual well-being of the dominant society, such as immorality, idolatry, blasphemy,

and the consumption of blood. He was not required to celebrate the Passover, but if he desired to do so, and thus identify himself and his family with the national experience of Israel, he had first to submit to circumcision. Having done so, no discrimination between him and the citizen was allowed. Just like an uncircumcised non-Israelite, so an uncircumcised Israelite was excluded.” (Sarna, p. 64)

All of this point out again the fundamental truth that Israel’s relationship with Yahweh was not a matter of ethnicity but of faith. The distortion of this truth would later have grave implications for the Jewish nation.

“All the Israelites did just what the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.”

- The amplification of the Passover regulations concludes with the report that the people fully complied with ***“what the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron”*** in reference to the observance of the Feast. The final verse of the chapter repeats the previous assertion which links the Passover to the deliverance from bondage in Egypt. ***“On that very day”*** namely the day of the first Passover ***“the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.”*** The language of the text refers to the ranks of a military formation marching in a systematic, orderly fashion. Israel’s departure from Egypt was not a rout or a retreat. The host of God was advancing at His command in accordance with His plan for their future.



“The Passover Lamb”
15th Century Swiss Bible Woodcut



“The Passover” - 16th Century Bible Woodcut by Han Holbein

The Consecration of the Firstborn ***Exodus 13: 1-16***

The Lord said to Moses, “Consecrate to Me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.” Then Moses said to the people, “Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast. Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving. When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites - the land He swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey - you are to observe this ceremony in this month; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, and on the seventh day hold a festival to the Lord. Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, not shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. On that day tell your son, “I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.” This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the Law of the Lord is to be on

your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with His mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year. After the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as He promised on oath to you and your forefathers, you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons. In the days to come, when your son asks you, “What does this mean?” say to him, “With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.” And it will be a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Consecrate to Me every firstborn male...’” - The commemorative nature of the Passover was reinforced by the ongoing consecration of every firstborn male within the covenant community of Israel. As the firstborn of Israel had been delivered from the angel of death in Egypt by the sacrifice of the lamb and the marking of the doorways with the blood of that sacrifice, so all of the



“The Departure from Egypt” by Ted Larson

firstborn sons of Israel were to be redeemed with the sacrifice of a lamb. The Lord had delivered Israel's firstborn and so now they were to be consecrated to Him. *"If the Israelites completed their communion with Jehovah in the Passover, and celebrated the commencement of their divine standing in the feast of unleavened bread, they gave uninterrupted effect to their divine sonship in the sanctification of the firstborn."* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 403) The segment begins with the standard formula which introduces specific instruction given to Moses personally by the Lord - ***"The Lord said to Moses..."*** In this case the divine command requires Moses to instruct the people about the consecration of the firstborn and to initiate the ritual actions connected to that consecration. ***"Consecrate to Me"*** - The Hebrew verb *"qaddes"* means to dedicate something to God, to set it apart as holy. That which is consecrated to God should not be profaned by trivial or ordinary usage for it belongs to God in a unique sense. The firstborn became the spiritual representatives of the family, thus serving as priests. So Numbers asserts that the establishment of the Levitical priesthood replaced this dimension of the role of the firstborn and specifically connects the consecration of the firstborn to the Tenth Plague in Egypt:



"The Death of Egypt's Firstborn" by Ted Larson

“I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine, for all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set up”The Departure of Israel with the Treasures of Egypt”art for Myself every firstborn in Israel, whether male or animal. They are mine. I am the Lord.” (Numbers 3:12-13)



*“The Departure of Israel with the Treasures of Egypt”
15th Century Bible Engraving*

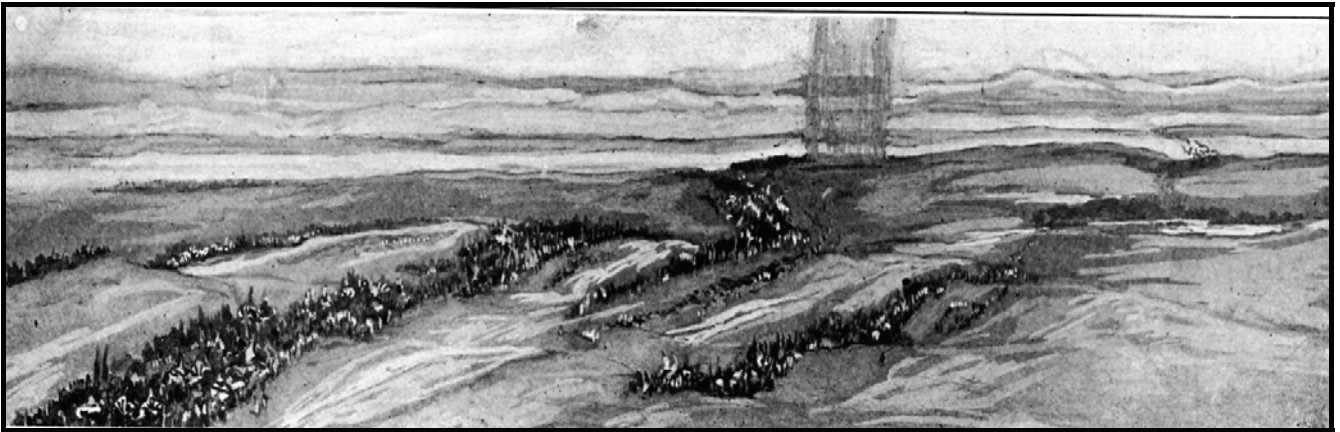
The Mishnah observes: *“Before the creation of the Tabernacle, shrines were permitted and the worship was performed by the first-born; once the Tabernacle was erected, the shrines were prohibited, and the worship was performed by the priests of the tribe of Levi.”* (Sarna, p. 65) The role of the firstborn as the spiritual representatives of their families and the subsequent role of the Levitical priesthood as the representatives of the nation before God are profound indicators of the Biblical concept of priesthood. In his classic study *Old Testament Institutions - Their Origins and Development*, U.Z. Rule argues that this concept foreshadowed *“the priestly character of the Christian Church:”*

*“It was an important principle; because the firstborn were naturally the representatives of the entire community. It was part of God’s covenant that ‘ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation’ (Exodus 19:6). This, we know, was a foreshadowing of the priestly character of the Christian Church, as a body. It was, therefore, important to keep up the idea that the priesthood was a **representative** priesthood; and the rule as to the firstborn emphasized this. When soon afterwards the **Levitical** priesthood was formally established, the fact that the Levites were accepted as substitutes for the firstborn, showed that they in their turn were representatives of the nation (Numbers 3:12-13; 8:13-18).” (Rule, p. 158)*

The “**firstborn**” in this phrase are literally designated as “*the loosening of the womb.*” Sarna suggests “*the first issue of every womb*” as a more precise translation. In this way, the child is linked directly to his mother rather than to his father, thus signifying the unique physical bond which united the two. At the same time, the language stresses the importance of motherhood for the future of the people.



“The Search for the ‘Hametz.’” by Bernard Picart



“The Exodus” by J. James Tissot

“Then Moses said to the people, ‘Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast.’” - The *“commemorate”* carried the connotation of action. This was to be more than mere recollection. Through a deliberate series of activities and rituals Israel was to call to mind and celebrate that which God had accomplished on their behalf in delivering them from bondage in Egypt. The Hebrew describes Israel’s condition in Egypt as *“the house of slavery.”* This may be derived from the Egyptian practice of settling labor gangs in workman’s villages near the site of the building project to which they had been assigned. These villages were surrounded by high walls to contain and control the slaves. When a particular project was finished its inhabitants were relocated to the next work site. These slave village were, in many ways, similar to the concentration camps of the modern era, In this way the identity of the workers as slaves with no rights or possessions of their own was clearly expressed. They lived only as the property of the Pharaoh to be shifted about and manipulated as he wished. At the core of this commemoration was the recognition and celebration of the fact that *“the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand.”* Israel’s deliverance from these wretched conditions was a gift of God, an unmistakable demonstration of His power and His love. That reality would remain the solid foundation of their faith for generations yet to come.

“The Lord had decisively intervened on their behalf, and they were to continue to remember that display of His power (“with a mighty hand” - literally, ‘with the might of hand’ a phrase closely related to that found in 3:19). It was that once for all deliverance, brought about by divine



“The Angel of Death” by Barry Moser

power that would underpin their faith.” (MacKay, p. 235)

The key component in the commanded commemoration is the avoidance of yeast - **“Eat nothing containing yeast.”** As noted in the previous chapter’s instructions concerning the strict removal of all leaven from the household during the seven days of Passover (cf. Notes pp. 409-415) the yeast representing the spiritual corruption and worldliness of Egypt which was to be totally abandoned as the people of God began their journey to the Promised Land. The repeated emphasis on the avoidance of yeast here may have been designed to address any last minute reluctance or anxiety as the nation actually set out into the desert wilderness.

“One wonders if this emphasis at that particular juncture in the people’s experience was to counter all too human feelings of reluctance at being uprooted from homes and farms where they had lived for several centuries. Despite the brutality of the Egyptian regime, they would have memories and fond associations regarding the places they were leaving. But it was the land of rebellion against the Lord, and it was the land of oppression for His people. The way out was the way forward. There was no future for them there.” (McKay, p. 234)

“Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving. When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the

Amorites, the Hivites and the Jebusites - the land He swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey - you are to observe this ceremony in this month.” - The month of “*Abib*” was the first month of the Hebrew calendar. After the Babylonian captivity, the Jews shifted to the use of a Babylonian/Persian calendar and “*Abib*” became the month of “*Nisan*.” The Hebrew word “*Abib*” refers to the appearance of the first tender ears of grain on the green stalks of the field in early Spring. “*Abib*” is the month of new beginnings, the month of new life and thus the most appropriate time for the departure from Egypt toward the Promised Land. The language of Verse 5 which describes the Land of Canaan closely reflects that of Exodus 3:8 when God outlined His mission to Moses at the Burning Bush. Both the representative listing of Canaanite tribes and the assertion of the verdant abundance of the land - “***flowing with milk and honey***” - appeared in the previous text. That which now occurs is the fulfillment of the ancient promises made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - “***He swore to your forefathers to give you.***” The ongoing observance of the Feast of the Passover, commemorating God’s deliverance of the Children of Israel from bondage in Egypt, would be the celebration of God’s fulfillment of His promises.

“For seven days eat bread without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the Lord. Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders.” - The stringent prohibition of any leaven which had previously been declared (Exodus 12:17-22) is reasserted and re-emphasized in these verses. Every form of yeast is to be banished not only within the individual homes of the Israelites but everywhere “***within your borders***” - a phrase which



“The Night of Liberation” by Gennady Spirin



“The Rabbi” by Marc Chagall

anticipates the Israelite settlement in the Promised Land.

“On that day tell your son, ‘I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” - The act of commemoration is to be passed down across the generations from father to son. The catechetical method of communicating the significance of the Passover and its link to the deliverance which God accomplished in Egypt is reiterated through the texts which institute the Feast (cf. Exodus 12:25-27; 13:8, 14) On the basis of these texts, the children’s question and the responses of the head of the household have become a prominent feature of the Seder ritual (cf. Notes, pp 422-423).

“This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the Law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with His mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year.” - The commemoration of these crucial events was intended to become a core component in the religious life of Israel throughout the years to come. The Judaic practice of binding leather capsules containing verses from the Torah (Hebrew - *“tefillin”* also known as *“phylacteries”*) upon their foreheads and their left hands during prayer is based upon a literal interpretation of this verse and Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18 - *“Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads...Fix these words of Mine on your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”* It is, however more likely that in this instance the language is figurative like that of Proverbs 6:20-21 - *“My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck.”* In any case,

the point is that the Children of Israel were never to forget that which has taken place on the day upon which God set them from four hundred years of bitter slavery in the land of Egypt. They were to cherish ***“the Law of the Lord”*** (Hebrew - *“torah Yahweh.”*) This is the first time that this crucial phrase occurs in Scripture. Jesus would later condemn the pre-occupation of the Pharisees’ with outward show and ostentatious religious piety with a reference to the practice of wearing phylacteries:

“Everything you do is done for men to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their prayer shawls long; they love the place of honor at the banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have men call them ‘Rabbi.’” (Matthew 23:5-7)

“After the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as He promised on oath to your and your forefathers, you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.” - The Lord had promised Israel ***“the land of the Canaanites.”*** God’s promises always come true. The text therefore anticipates Israel’s presence in Canaan as if it were already a fact. This approach should have been a great comfort and assurance to the Israelites as they proceeded into an immediate future which appeared to be most uncertain. The calling of Israel as the firstborn among the nations was reemphasized by the consecration of all of Israel’s firstborn to the Lord. The prominence of the idea of redemption in all of this helped to prepare the way for a comprehension of the role of the Messiah



“A Jerusalemite Shepherd Winding the Phylacteries for the Hand” by Carl Haag

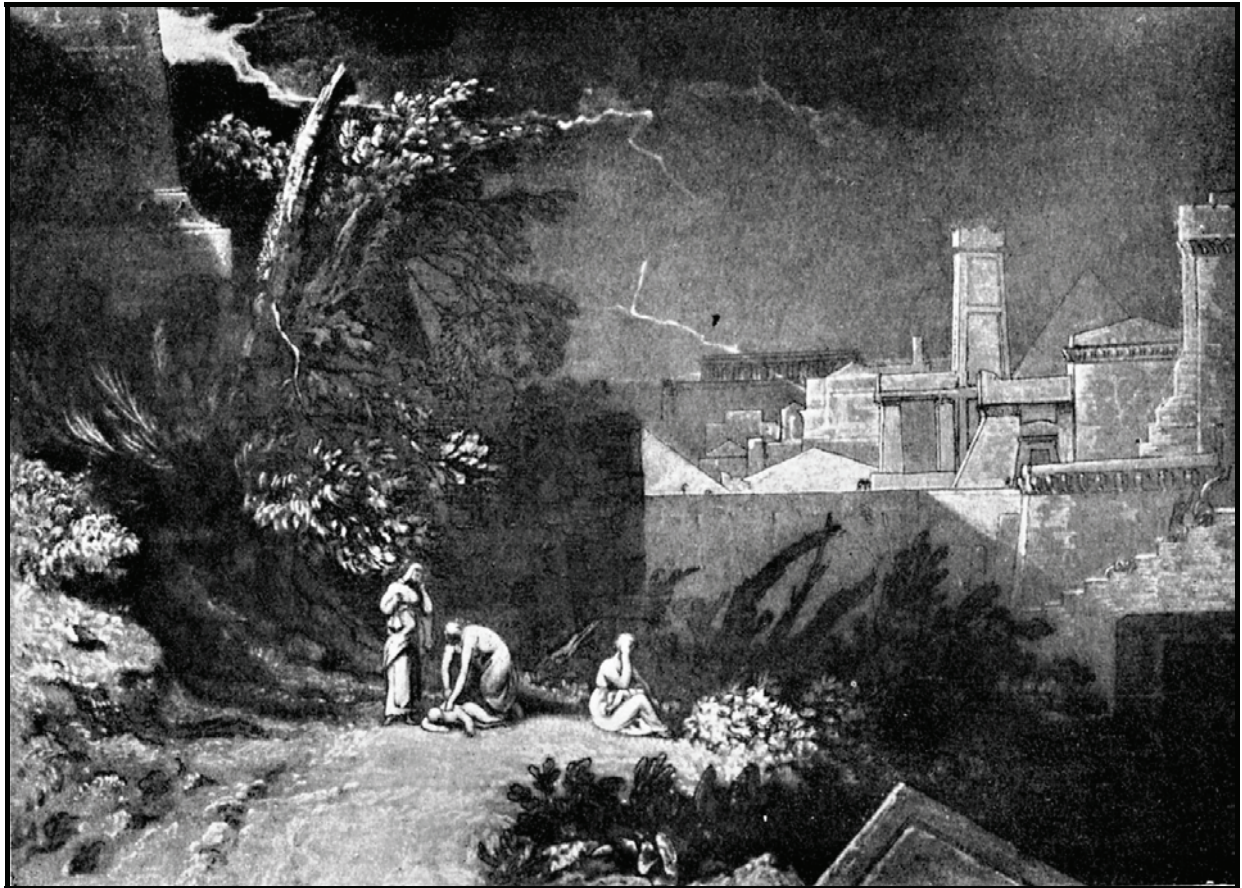
as the ultimate Redeemer, the Savior who would redeem mankind with His own precious blood. Nahum Sarna explains the inclusion of this second paragraph on the consecration of the firstborn as a more detailed explanation of how to deal with the issue after the arrival in Canaan and the establishment of the Levitical priesthood:

“Verse 2 ordained the immediate consecration of the firstborn. This section deals with the treatment of the firstborn following the settlement in the Promised Land. The animal firstling is to retain its status and so belong to God, but the priestly status of the human firstborn is to be revoked and their functions taken over by the tribe of Levi. Hence, the firstborn sons are to be desacralized by ‘redemption’ which explains why this section does not immediately follow verse 2.” (Sarna, p. 67)

The redemption of the firstborn son is still practiced in contemporary Judaism. The current redemption price is \$5 using special coins minted for that purpose in Israel.



“Grieving The Death of the Firstborn” by Charles Sprague Pearce



“The Death of the Firstborn” by J.M.W. Turner

“In the days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean? Say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. That is why I sacrifice to the Lord, the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.’ And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.” - The consecration of the firstborn remains firmly anchored in the historical reality of the death of the firstborn of Egypt. Because of the persistent obstinacy of Pharaoh, the price of Israel’s liberation from bondage was the death of every firstborn son throughout the land of Egypt. The firstborn of the Hebrews were spared because of the blood of the sacrificial lamb of God who blood on the doorways caused the destroyer to pass over the homes of Goshen. The repetitive insertion of these ceremonial instruction within the narrative of the Exodus serves to heighten the dramatic impact of the surrounding story and remind the reader that these events would be of permanent, ongoing significance for the people of God in the years to come. The experiences of the past became the guarantee of the future.



“The Encampment by the Sea” by C. W. Eckersberg

The Journey to the Red Sea Exodus 13:17 - 14:4

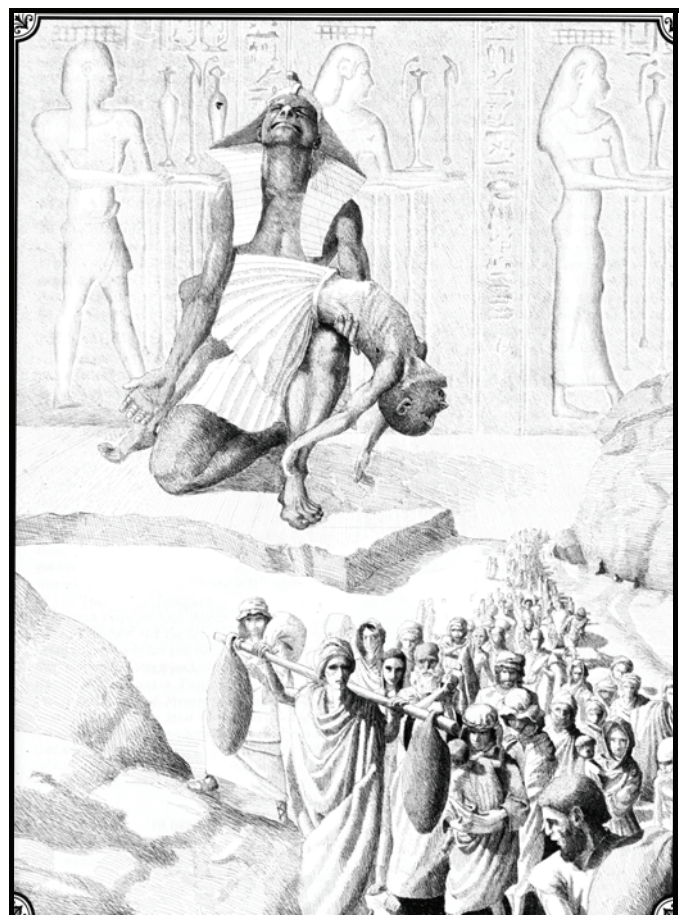
When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites when up out of Egypt armed for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.” After leaving Succoth, they encamped at Etham on the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them by a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi-Hahiroth,

between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal-Zephon. Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around in the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." So the Israelites did this.

"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter..." - The description of Israel's journey out of Egypt resumes with a deliberate reference to Pharaoh, most probably designed to highlight the intransigence of the stubborn King in anticipation of his reversion to hostility and in order to set the stage for the events to follow at the Red Sea. With this in mind the phrase might more aptly be translated - *"When Pharaoh finally let the people go."* The Hebrew verb, *"shillah,"* refers specifically to the emancipation of a slave. God had used the same verb in each of His three promises to Moses that the Israelites would be released. Its repetition here signals the fulfillment of those promises.

The text explains God's decision not to utilize the shortest most direct route from Egypt to Canaan - *"the road through the Philistine country."* This coastal highway was part of a heavily traveled trade route which linked Egypt with Asia Minor and the nations of the Fertile Crescent.

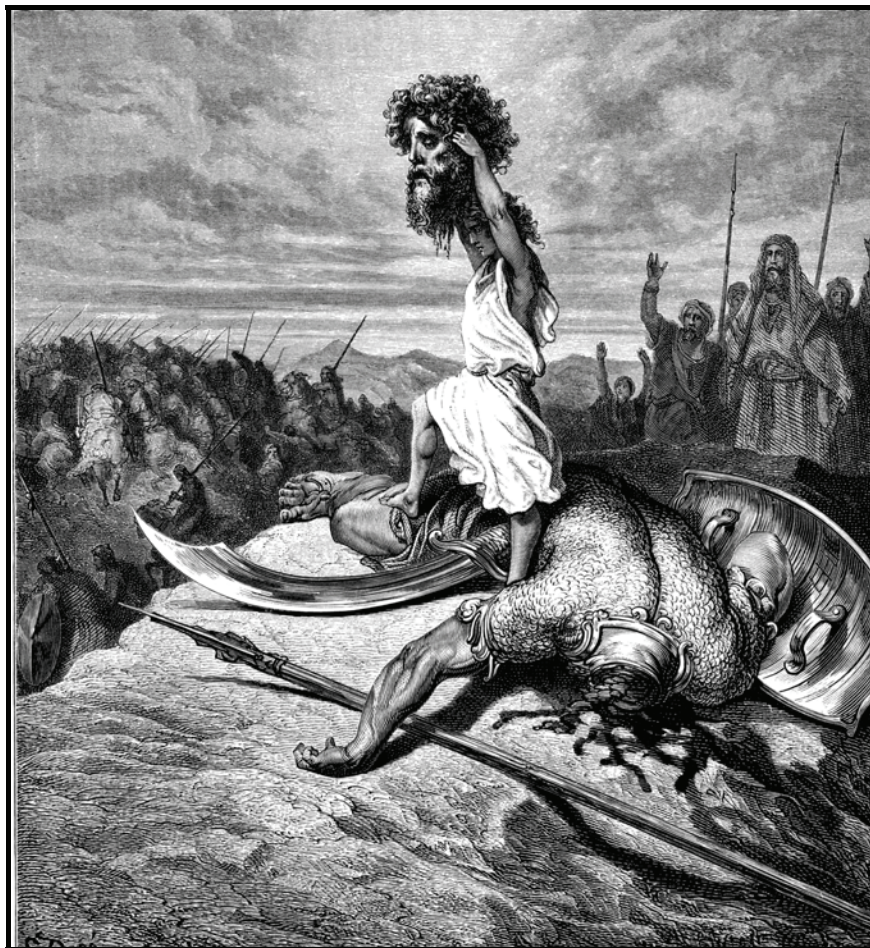
"It was the southern segment of a 1,000 mile international artery of transportation that led up to Megiddo, into Asia Minor, and then on to Mesopotamia. Beginning at the Egyptian fortress city of Tjaru, the highway followed the shoreline fairly closely, except where the shifting sand dunes and the land formation dictated otherwise. The army of Thutmose III took only ten days to cover the 150 mile distance to



"The Departure from Egypt"

Gaza. The Egyptian name for this part of the road was ‘the Way of Horus’; it was the standard route followed by the pharaohs for incursions into Asia and the pharaohs were considered to be the living embodiment on earth of the falcon god Horus.” (Sarna, p. 68)

The use of this roadway would have meant almost constant contact with heavily armed trading caravans and fortified Egyptian garrisons. At the same time, after arriving in Canaan, Israel would have been confronted with the powerful and militarily sophisticated Philistine confederation. The Philistines figure prominently in Old Testament history. Only after generations of on-going conflict, during the early monarchy, were the Israelites finally able to neutralize the threat which they posed to the existence of the Jewish nation. The Philistines were part of a wave of invaders who swept into the southeastern Mediterranean world late in the second millennium



“David Slaying the Philistine Champion Goliath” by Dore

B.C. In Egyptian history these fierce warriors were known as the “*sea peoples*.” The pharaohs barely managed to drive them away and they settled just outside of Egypt along the southern coast of Canaan. The Israelites were neither spiritually nor militarily prepared to confront such a foe. In the face of opposition of this caliber, the Hebrews might well have been tempted to give up and return to Egypt.



“Egyptian Relief of a Philistine Warrior”

The text uses a literary technique common to the Old Testament known as “*divine deliberation*.” God, in effect, thinks out loud, so that the reader can learn His thoughts and recognize the divine rationale which determines the action to come - “*For God said, ‘If they face war they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’*” The people had been set free, but the nation had not yet

been forged. The accuracy of the Lord’s assessment was later demonstrated by the fearful grumbling which followed the report of the majority of the spies as to the formidable nature of the Canaanites. The people immediately concluded that they would be better off in Egypt and should turn back:

“If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us die by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” (Numbers 14:3)

“So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.” - The NIV’s translation of the chosen route as “*the desert road*” suggests a specific identifiable roadway. “*The desert road*” or “*the Way of the Wilderness*” as it was also called, was a less traveled trade route which skirted the mountains of the Sinai as it passed from Egypt to the



19th Century Bible Map of the Sinai Peninsula With the Traditional Locations of the Exodus Sites

Gulf of Aqaba. God's design appears to have been to deliberately avoid further contact with the Egyptians. The text is unmistakably clear, however, in indicating that the people did not choose their own way, they were "**led**" by God. The verses which follow will specify the pillars of cloud and fire as the agencies by which that divine direction was accomplished. This was not to be a leisurely jaunt, but a military march through hostile territory surrounded by danger on every hand. Thus - "***The Israelites went out of Egypt armed for battle.***" This was not a mob in flight, but an orderly, organized movement, each tribe marching behind its tribal standard, ready to defend themselves should the need have arisen.

The distance which this great host would have been able to travel each day is not specified. A Roman legion in full battle armor and weaponry could consistently march 20 miles a day. Under normal circumstances, this multitude - with their families, possessions and herds - could not be expected to nearly equal or surpass that number. Those who discount the accuracy of the Exodus account and dismiss the supernatural, miraculous elements of the narrative as unreliable folklore, insist - on the basis of the contemporary experience of pastoral bedouin in the Sinai - that herdsmen traveling with their flocks in harsh desert conditions can journey no more than 6 to 10 miles in the course of a day.

"Itinerary texts from the Mosaic period stipulate that caravans were able to cover no more than about 20-23 miles per day. With the Exodus, however, the size and background of the group, when combined with the factors of accompanying women and children and flocks and herds eliminate any possibility of such distances. The average daily distance maintained by modern bedouin moving from camp to camp is about six miles." (De la Tore, p. 7)

Other scholars - who are willing to accept the reliability of text of Exodus - contend that God blessed the Israelites with unique endurance. They also note the text's repeated emphasis on the presence of the divine pillar of cloud/fire by day and night. This, they assert, signals that the people traveled not only by day but throughout much of the night. It would thus have been possible to cover greater distances that would ordinarily have been the case. In this way, Israel could have avoided the stress and discomfort of the hot desert sun, resting through mid-day and marching in the early morning, the late afternoon/evening and on into the night. Traveling for 10-12 hours daily would have left ample time for rest while covering significant distances. The need for rapid progress would have been particularly urgent during the first few

weeks out of Egypt when it was not yet clear what Pharaoh's final response to the departure of his slaves would be. The Sinai Peninsula is roughly 143 miles across at its widest point. Archaeologist/Historian Lennard Möller concludes that averaging 1.5 miles per hour the Israelites "Could have reached anywhere they chose within the area we call the Sinai Peninsula today." (Möller, p. 183) Obviously, the implications of this issue for the identification of the locations of the major events in the Book of Exodus are most significant. Nonetheless, our conclusions about the distances traveled must remain speculative in the absence of more specific information in the text.



"The Host of Egypt in the Sea of Reeds" by Tom Beecham

"Toward the Red Sea" - The nature and location of **"the Red Sea"** (Hebrew - "yam suph") has been the subject of intense debate among scholars. It has become fashionable among Bible critics in recent years to argue that the title should be translated as *"the sea of reeds"* thereby reducing the deliverance at the sea to a meandering thru a marsh somewhere in the isthmus of Suez . Proposed sites for the crossing include Lake Sirbonis, Lake Menzaleh, Lake Ballah, Lake Timsah, or the northern or southern Bitter Lakes. So, for example, Dr. Donald Redford confidently concludes: *"The themes of the sojourn and the exodus, as embellished in the*



“The Deliverance at the Red Sea” by Lucas Cranach

Pentateuch , belong in the realm of folklore to a large extent.” (Overstreet, p. 63) While this view is convenient for those who reject the historicity of the Biblical accounts and scoff at the possibility of miraculous supernatural intervention by God, it is clearly contrary to the witness of Scripture itself and the preponderance of linguistic and historical evidence. The unprovable assumption of the swamp advocates is that the Hebrew word “*suph*” is an Egyptian loan word which applies to reeds or sea weed. Other linguistics contend that “*yam suph*” is derived, not for Egyptian sources, but from a Hebrew verb which means “*to terminate*” or “*to end.*” Dr. Bernard Batto, writing in *The by the ancients as the sea at the end of the world. Interestingly enough, the Greeks applied the name Red Sea not only to our Red Sea but also to the Indian Ocean and, later when they discovered it, even to the Persian Gulf...Yam Suph came to refer to the Red Sea because, like other ancient peoples, the Israelites did not distinguish the Red Sea from oceans further to* *Biblical Archaeology Review*, explained the application of the term to the Red Sea:

“What we call the Red Sea was regarded the south. To their way of thinking, the Red Sea - the yam suph - was the sea at the end of the earth.” (Batto, p. 59)

Twenty Old Testament texts refer specifically to *“the Red Sea.”* (Exodus 10:19; 13:18; 15:4;15:22; 23:31; Numbers 14:25; 21:4; 33:10-11; Deuteronomy 1:40; 2:1; 11:4; Joshua 2:10; 4:23; 24:6-7; Judges 11:16; 1 Kings 9:21; Nehemiah 9:9,11; Psalm 106:7,9,22; 136:13,15; Jeremiah 49:21). Another fourteen texts describe the deliverance at the sea without using the specific term (Numbers 33:8; Psalm 66:6; 74:13; 77:16-21; 78:13,53; 114:3; Isaiah 10:26;11:15; 43:16; 51:10; 63:11-13; Nahum 1:3-4; Habbakuk 3:8,15; Zechariah 10:11). Additionally, there are three New Testament texts which refer to *“the Red Sea:”* (Acts 7:36; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2; Hebrews 11:29).

A number of the Old Testament references are helpful in identifying the biblical *“yam suph”*. Numbers 33 summarizes the stages of the Israelites journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The miraculous crossing of the sea is cited in 33:8. After that event Israel journeyed for three days and camped at Marah. Thereafter they journeyed on to Elim. From Elim the next encampment was *“by the Red Sea.”* Thereupon, they turned eastward into the Wilderness of Sin. Thus, for at least five days after the destruction of Pharaoh’s army they were traveling along the shore of *“the Red Sea”* (cf. vss. 10,11). While the individual place name remain impossible to precisely locate, this five day journey along the sea shore would seem to preclude the possibility of identifying the *“Red Sea”* with one of the small marshy lakes east of the Nile Delta. The *“Red Sea”* was clearly a very large body of water.

The prophet Isaiah also verified one of the two projections on the northern end of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Suez or the Gulf of Aqaba - *“the Gulf of the Egyptian Sea”* - as the site of God’s deliverance of His people. The prophet foretold the



*“Pharaoh and His Host Lost in the Red Sea”
by Benjamin West*

final messianic deliverance of the Israel of God with a comparison to Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea:

“The Lord will dry up the Gulf of the Egyptian Sea; with a scorching wind He will sweep His hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that men can cross over in sandals. There will be a highway for the remnant of His people that is left from Assyria as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.” (Isaiah 11:15-16)

Commentator John Oswalt explained the prophet's language in this way: *“In concluding the promise of the Return, Isaiah recalls the Exodus. As He did once before, the Lord will strike the ‘tongue,’ any bay or gulf, of the Egyptian or Red Sea.”* (Oswalt, p. 289) Jeffrey Grogan stresses the amazing detail of Isaiah's analogy:



“The Plague of Locusts” by Gennady Spirin

“He had dried up the water of the Red Sea before. He would act again to dry it up - for the same liberating purpose. He had used a great wind (Exodus 14:21) at the Exodus; He would do so again to bring the people back from Mesopotamia, for the wind would produce a delta not unlike that at the mouth of the Nile. The highway promised may contain an allusion to Exodus 14:26-29, the dry road through the Red Sea.” (Grogan, p. 91)

The Red Sea played in role in the conclusion of the 8th plague, the plague of locusts. Exodus 10:19 indicates - ***“And the Lord changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up***



“The Deliverance at the Red Sea” - Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Sebald Benham

the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea. Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt.” The biblical account makes it clear that massive swarms of locust covered the entire land of Egypt, darkening the ground and devouring all of the vegetation throughout the country. No marshy lake could have been equal to this overwhelming task. The *“west wind,”* or, as the Hebrew more literally says the *“sea wind”* came blasting down from the northwest off the Mediterranean Sea, blowing the huge locust swarms out of the Nile valley to the south east into the Gulf of Suez, which is twenty miles wide, or perhaps even farther south, in to the Red Sea itself, which is one hundred miles wide. No other explanation is feasible, given the magnitude of the plague of locusts.

There are also a significant number of passages which identify the Gulf of Aqaba, the northeastern projection of the Red Sea, with the Hebrew title *“Yam Suph.”* These include Exodus 23:31; Numbers 14:25 and 21:4; Deuteronomy 1:1,40; 2:1, and Judge 11:6. In 1 Kings 9:26, the launching of a maritime fleet *“at Ezion-geber which is near Elath in Edom, on the shore of the Red Sea* (Hebrew *“yam suph”*) is included among the accomplishments of King Solomon.

The New Testament passages which describe the rescue of Israel from the army of Pharaoh all identify the location of that crucial event as ***“the Red Sea”*** (Greek - *“erythre thalassa”*). In his magnificent sermon before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Stephan proclaimed: ***“He led them out of Egypt and did miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and for forty years in the desert.”*** (Acts 7:36). St. Paul used the passage of Israel through the sea as an image of Christian baptism in his letter to the Corinthians: ***“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:1-2) The crossing of the Red Sea is also recalled in the great heroes of faith chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews: ***“By faith, the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.”*** (Hebrews 11:29)

The *“Sea of Reeds”* theory for the meaning of the Hebrew term *“yam suph”* is directly contradicted by all of the Biblical evidence. Professor R. Larry Overstreet correctly summarized that evidence in this way:

“The Hebrew term for Red Sea, yam suph, is invariably used in Scripture passages not specifically referring to the exodus to identify either the Gulf of Suez (and probably the Red Sea itself in one instance) or the Gulf of Aqaba. In no instance does the term refer to any other body of water, especially not a lake in Egypt. A study of ancient Greek writers verifies that the Greek translation of yam suph, erythra thalassa, consistently refers to the Red Sea and to larger bodies of water with which it connects - the Gulf of Aqaba, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea. NT references to the Red Sea continue that consistent identification.” (Overstreet, p. 86)



“The Crossing of the Red Sea” by Santi di Tito



*“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh”
by Simon Bishley*

The Exodus account of the event itself requires the same conclusion. In Exodus chapters 14 and 15 it is inescapably clear that the deliverance at the Red Sea was a supernatural event of awesome proportion. The Israelites passed between **“a wall of water on their right and on their left”** (Exodus 14:22) which had been miraculously produced by God. That passage was wide enough to accommodate two or three million people in the course of just one night. If the opening in the sea had been a mile wide, it is estimated that the Israelite host would still have been two miles long.

The magnificent host of Pharaoh was not merely mired, confused or slowed down. It was drowned, destroyed to the last man - ***“Not one of them survived.”*** (Exodus 14:28) None of these Biblical assertions can be accommodated by the *“Sea of Reeds”* scenario. Either Scripture’s version of this event is a fairy tale exaggeration of a minor romp through the swamp - which may or may not have actually happened - or we must take the text on its own terms as an accurate description of a miraculous passage through the Red Sea. Our conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God requires nothing less.

“Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath...” - Yet another indication of the calm, orderly character of Israel’s departure comes from Moses’ care in fulfilling the commitment that had been made centuries before to Joseph that his body would not be left behind in Egypt. At the same time, the retelling of Joseph’s prophecy of Israel’s return to the land of Canaan - ***“God will surely come to your aid and then you must carry my bones up***



“Joseph Presenting His Father Jacob to Pharaoh” by E.J. Poynter



“The Embalming of Joseph”

with you from this place.” (cf. Genesis 50:25) - serves to reinforce the identity of these events as part of a divine plan which had been promised and prophesied centuries earlier to the patriarchs. The rabbis note that a great deal is indicated about the character of Moses by the fact that while Israel was plundering the treasures of Egypt Moses was preoccupied with disinterring the body of Joseph and keeping faith with him. The account of the reburial of Joseph at Shechem in the Promised Land is recorded in Joshua 24:12.

“After leaving Succoth, they camped at Etham at the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” - The first encampment after departing the

Egyptian border fortress at *“Succoth”* is *“Etham at the edge of the desert.”* The nature and location of *“Etham,”* like that of many of the place names mentioned in the biblical account cannot be reliably identified today. Nor does the text inform us of the distance between *“Succoth”* and *“Etham”* or the amount of time that it took for Israel to make the journey. All that we are told is that Etham was *“at the edge of the desert.”* *“Etham”* is also cited in Numbers 33:6-8 -

“They left Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the desert. They left Etham, turned back to Pi Hahiroth, to the east of Baal Zephon, and camped near Migdol. They left Pi Hahiroth and passed through the sea into the desert, and when they had traveled for three

days in the Desert of Etham, they camped at Marah.”

The Numbers references to a departure from “**Etham**” and then a three day journey through “**the Desert of Etham**” would seem to suggest that “**Etham**” was a region rather than a particular town or village. The name “**Etham**” appears to be derived from an Egyptian word which describes a “*coast*” or “*sea shore.*” Whether the coastal region of “**Etham**” was around the northern end of the Gulf of Suez - west of Sinai - or the Gulf of Aqaba - east of Sinai - depends on one’s theory as to which of these two projections from the Red Sea was the site of the miraculous crossing. If the Gulf of Suez is their immediate destination, then “**Etham**” would be located along Egypt’s eastern border. However, if the deliverance at the Sea took place at the Gulf of Aqaba, then “**Etham**” would be all the way across the Sinai on the edge of the Arabian Desert. The text itself allows for both possibilities. Nor is the duration of Israel’s stay at Succoth specified. “*It is not stated how long they stayed at Succoth; it may have been a day, or possibly more.*” (Cassutto, p. 157) This would have been a critically important time to prepare and organize people for the long journey ahead. With Egypt reeling in the immediate aftermath of the death of the firstborn, there could have been a window of safety during which Moses did not have to be concerned about opposition or pursuit. Succoth served as a staging area which prove to be crucially significant in making ready for the difficult days ahead. The fortified garrison village had traditionally served this purpose for the armies of Egypt as they prepared to move northeast into Palestine and Mesopotamia.

Although the circumstances of this journey were fraught with danger and the territory completely unfamiliar God provided His people with the visible guidance and direction which enabled them to proceed confidently. “**By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.**” The expressions “**by day**” and “**by night**” recur three times in this short paragraph to emphasize the continuous, unfailing nature of God’s presence before His people. There would never be a time when they were alone in the desert. God would go with them and show them the way. This image would remain the source of comfort and encouragement for the people of God throughout the Old Testament. The prophet Micah recalled the wilderness experience of Israel when he promised the final deliverance of the faithful:

“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob: I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel...One who breaks open the way will go up before



16th Century Luther Bible Woodcut of the Pillar of Cloud in the Wilderness
“God Marched Before His People in a Pillar of Cloud, by which He Guarded Them from the Heat throughout their Days. God will Receive you as His own every Day, so that you may not be Harmed by the Power of the Sun.”

them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their King will pass thru before them, the Lord at their head.” (Micah 2:12-14)

Isaiah sounded the same theme in his promise of deliverance for Zion: *“But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.” (Isaiah 52:12)*

Many commentators prefer to refer to this miraculous manifestation of the presence of God as the pillar of cloud/fire to emphasize the fact that the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire were not two separate entities. Keil/Delitsch comments:

“We are not to regard the phenomenon as consisting of two different pillars, that appeared alternately, one of cloud, and the other of fire. There was but one pillar of both cloud and fire (14:24); for even when shining in the dark, it is still called the pillar of cloud (14:19), or the cloud (Numbers 19:21); so that it was cloud with a dark side and bright one, causing darkness and also lighting the night (14:20), or ‘a cloud

and fire in it by night (40:38). Consequently, we have to imagine the cloud as the covering of the fire, so that by day it appeared as a dark cloud in contrast with the light of the sun, but by night as fiery splendor, 'a fire look' (Numbers 9:15-16). When this cloud went before the army of Israel, it assumed the form of a column; so that even by day it resembled a dark column of smoke rising up toward heaven, and by night a column of fire to show the whole army the direction to go. But when it stood still above the Tabernacle, or came down upon it, it most probably took the form of a round globe of cloud; and when it seperated the Israelites and the Egyptians at the Red Sea, we have to imagine it spread out like a bank of cloud, forming, as it were, a dividing wall. "
 (Keil/Delitsch, p. 409)

But far more significant than the configuration or appearance of the pillar of cloud/fire is its nature. The text informs us that the pillar of cloud/fire was God Himself - **"By**



*16th Century Luther Bible Woodcut of the Pillar of Fire in the Wilderness
 "By Night the Light of the Pillar of Fire Showed the People that they Would Easily Find the Way to Their Goal. The Lord is our Light. The Lord is our Salvation, so that we Need Have no Fear in the Valley of Darkness"*

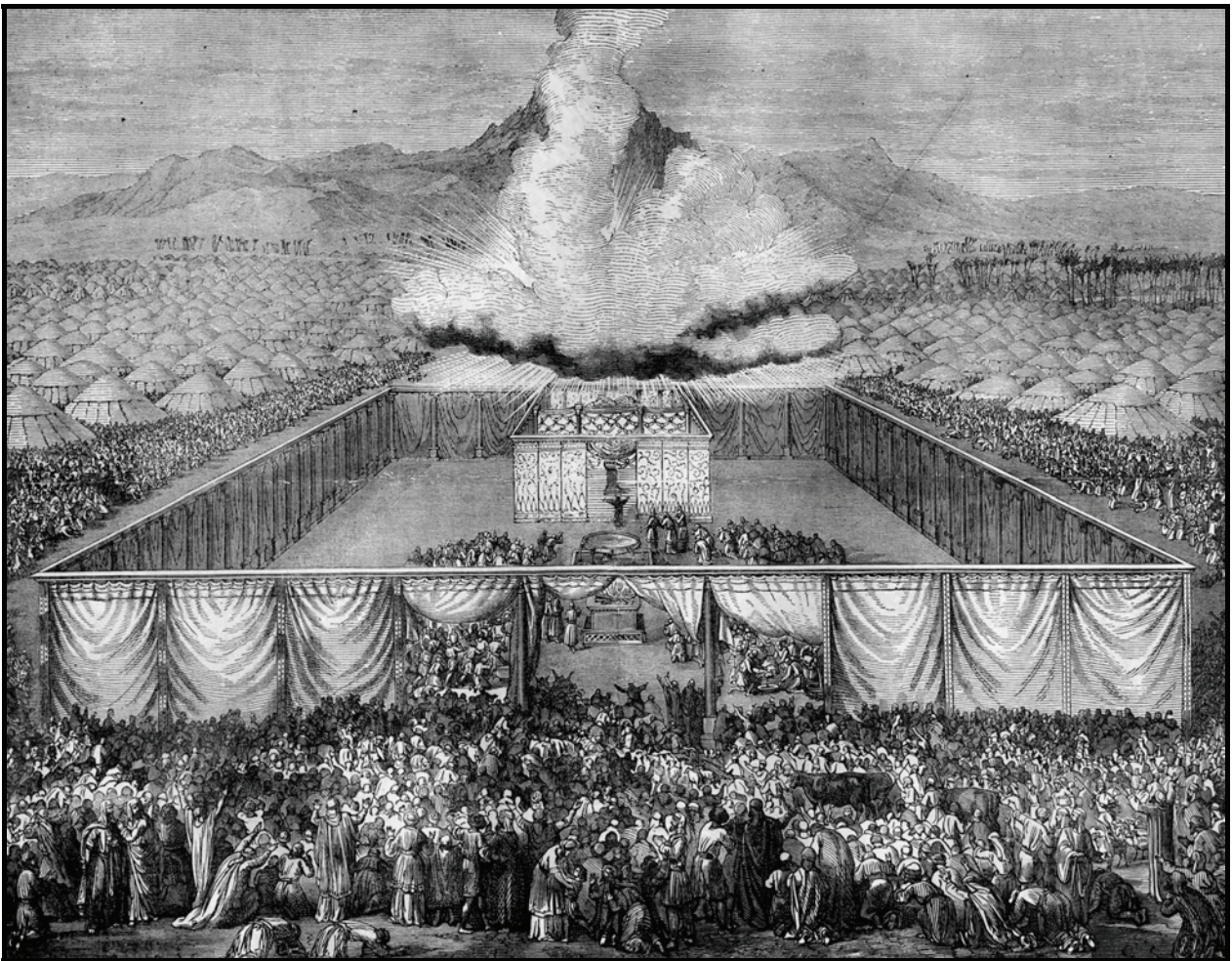


“The Glory of the Lord Resting Over the Tabernacle Before Mt. Sinai”

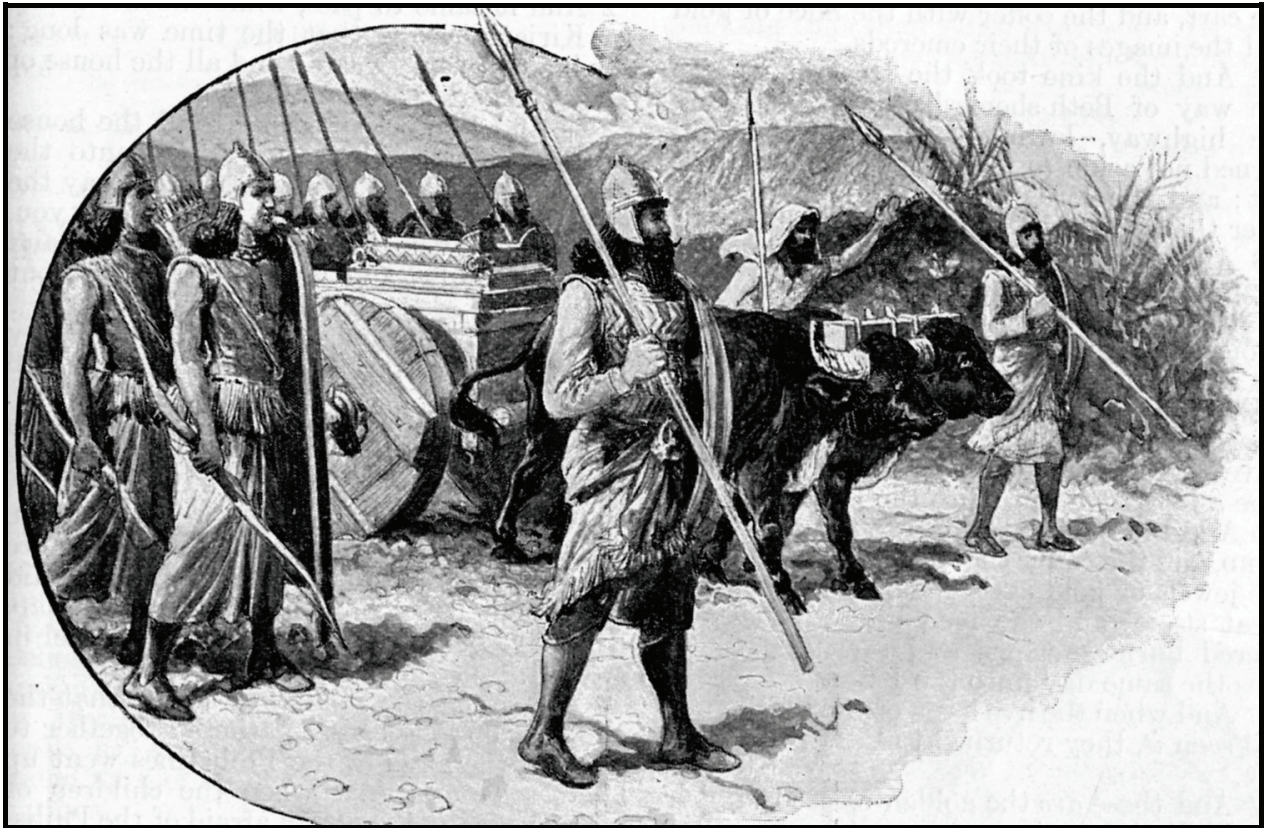
day the Lord went ahead of them...”. (Exodus 13:21) More specifically God Himself was present in the pillar in the person of *“the Angel of the Lord”* (Hebrew - *“Malach Yahweh”*) (Exodus 14:19). The Angel of the Lord is the pre-incarnate Christ, the second member of the divine Trinity. Jesus appears throughout the Old Testament as the *“Angel of the Lord,”* the *“Face of the Lord,”* or the *“Glory of the Lord.”* The rabbis coined the Hebrew title *“Shekinah”* - literally *“That Which Dwells”* - to describe these unique ways in which God deigned to dwell among His people. It was the Angel of the Lord who had appeared on Mount Moriah to prevent the death of Isaac (Genesis 22:11-18) and who spoke to Moses at the burning bush on Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:24). As now in the wilderness, these divine appearances were accompanied by smoke, cloud and fire. The identification of the Angel, the Face, and the Glory of the Lord with God Himself is consistent and clear. So in Exodus 16:10, as God provided manna and quail for the grumbling Israelites, the text speaks of the pillar of cloud/fire and says - *“They looked toward the desert and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.”* With the construction of the Tabernacle, the Glory of

the Lord rested over the Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies to assure the people of the presence of God among them. This visible manifestation continued throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle, they would set out, but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out - until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the Tabernacle by day, and the fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the House of Israel during all their travels.”
(Exodus 40:36-38; cf. Numbers 9:16-17)



19th Century Bible Engraving of the Shekinah Over the Tabernacle in the Midst of the Encampment at Sinai



19th Century Bible Illustration of the Philistines Returning the Ark of the Covenant To Israel After the Desecration of the Temple of Dagon

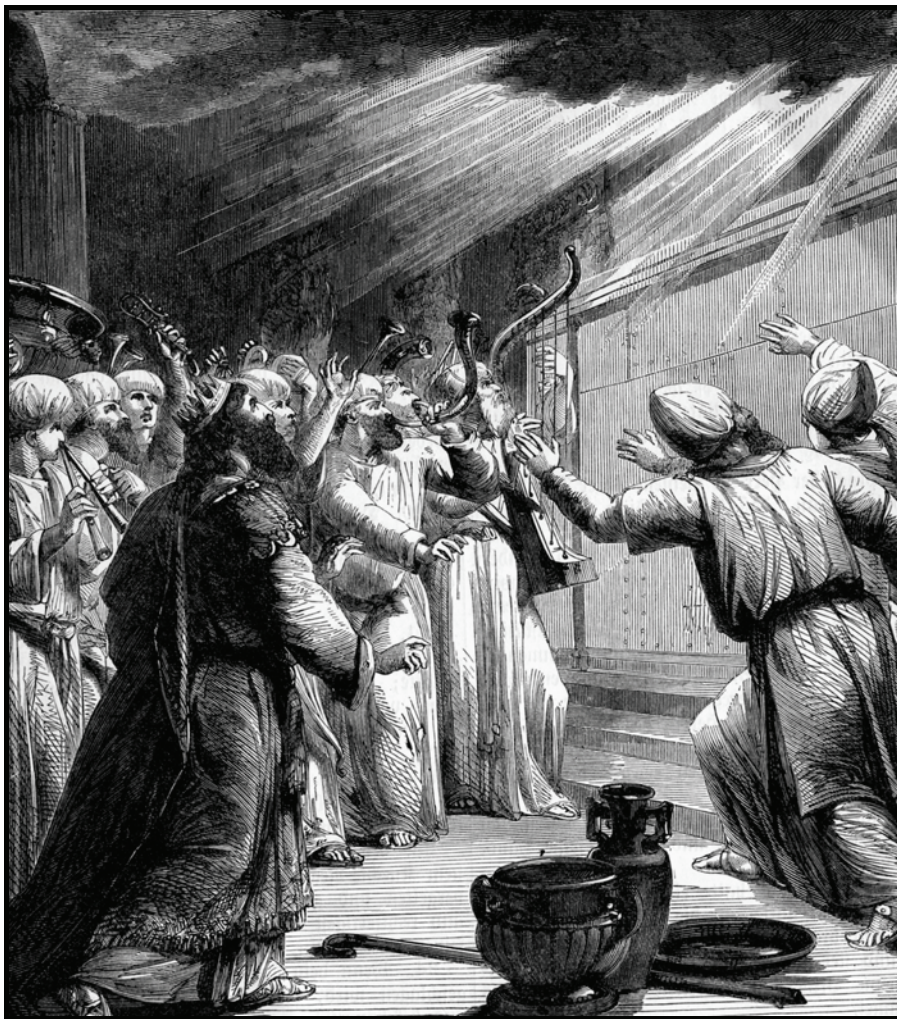
The presence of God continued to be associated with the Ark after the occupation of the Promised Land although the visible “*shekinah*” was no longer evident over the Ark within the Tabernacle. Thus when the Ark was captured by the Philistines after the reckless action of Hophni and Phineas, the sons of Eli, 1 Samuel 4:19-21 reports:

“His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phineas was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the Ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. As she was dying, the women attending her said, ‘Don’t despair, you have given birth to a son.’ But she did not respond or pay any attention. She named the boy, Ichabod, saying, ‘The glory has departed from Israel - because of the capture of the Ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and husband. She said, ‘The glory has departed from Israel for the Ark of God has been captured.’”

After the Philistines returned the Ark to Israel, it remained separate from the Tabernacle, first at Kiriath Jearim and later at the House of Obed-Edom near

Jerusalem. When David made Jerusalem his capital city, he brought the Ark there in anticipation of the building of the Temple. The visible manifestation of the “*Shekinah*” dramatically recurred during the dedication of Solomon’s Temple when the Ark was placed within the Holy of Holies.

“The priests brought the ark of the Lord’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles...When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled His temple.” (1 Kings 8:6-11)



“The Glory of the Lord Fills the Temple of Solomon”

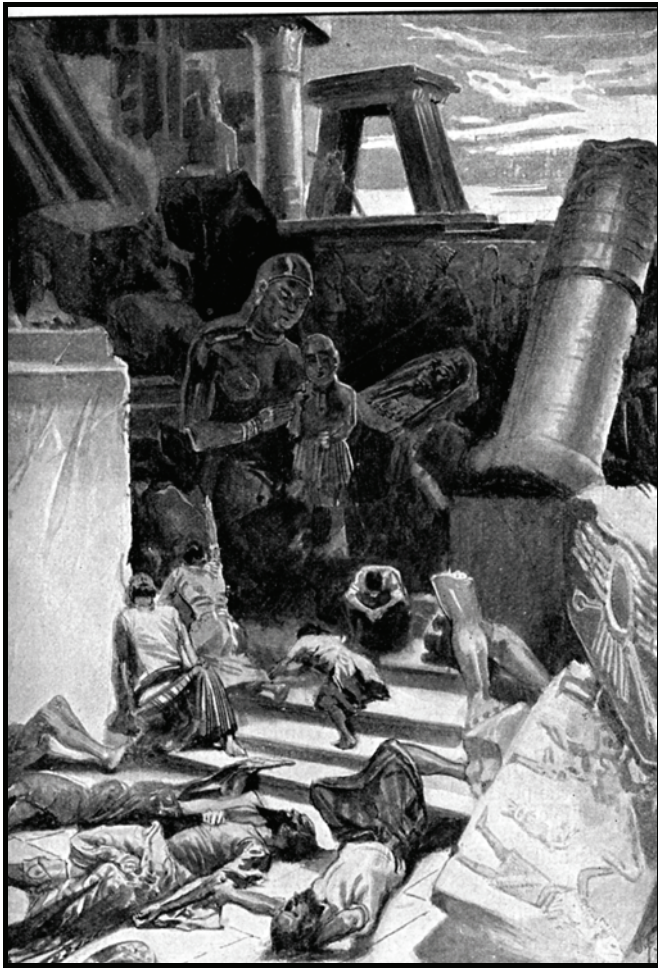
Evidently the visible manifestation of the “*shekinah*” in Solomon’s was limited to the dedication celebration. Nonetheless, like the tabernacle before it, the first Temple, as the shelter of the sacred Ark, was perceived by Israel to be the dwelling place of God’s presence on earth. God had promised Solomon;

“As for this temple you are building, if you follow My decrees, carry out My regulations and keep all My commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. And I will dwell among the Israelites and will not abandon My people Israel. So Solomon built the temple and completed it.” (1 Kings 6:12-14)



“The Babylonian Destruction of the Temple” by James Tissot

Solomon and his heirs did not remain faithful to the Lord. Over the generations to come the Temple was to be polluted with human sacrifice, sacred prostitution and the most vile and corrupt pagan rituals and sexual orgies. Finally the longsuffering patience of God was exhausted and the full force of His judgement came crashing down upon Jerusalem and its Temple. In 586 B.C. the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar leveled Jerusalem after looting and burning the Temple. Twelve years earlier the Prophet Ezekiel had forewarned that the destruction of the Temple would be preceded by the departure of God’s Glory. The prophet graphically



*“Ezekiel’s Prophecy of the Destruction of the Temple and the Idols Worshipped Therein”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

portrayed the impending abandonment of Temple by the Glory of the Lord using language drawn from Israel’s long history of encounters with the “*shekinah*” which had begun in the Book of Exodus:

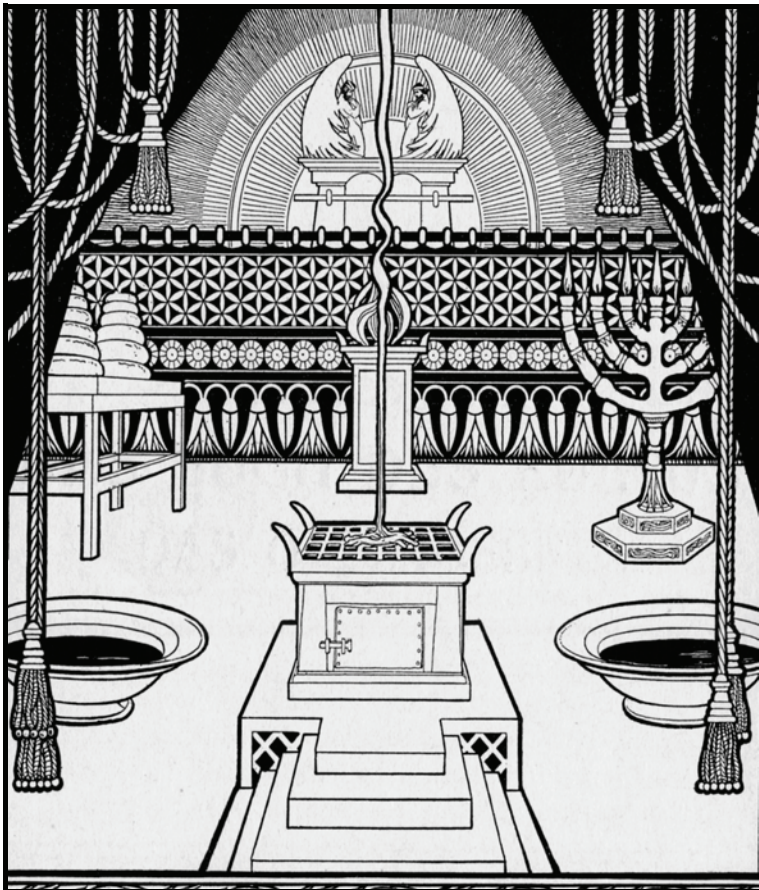
“Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the Temple when the man went in and a cloud filled the inner court. Then the Glory of the Lord rose above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the Temple. The cloud filled the Temple and the court was full of the radiance of the Glory of the Lord. The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks...Then the Glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the Temple and stopped above the cherubim. While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the Lord’s house, and the Glory of the God of Israel was above

them...Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings and the Glory of the God of Israel was above them. The Glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.” (Ezekiel 10:3-5,18-20; 11:22-23)

Dr. Horace Hummel described these grim words as a death knell for Jerusalem as the unique dwelling place of God on earth. That which had begun during the wilderness wandering and persisted across the centuries in the Tabernacle and the Temple now came to a tragic conclusion.

“The last scene of the vision in chapters 8-11 represents the fulfillment of all the predictions of impending doom upon the city, Yahweh’s Glory,

that is, His ‘incarnational’ presence on earth in the midst of His people, now abandons His earthly ‘house,’ the Holy of Holies in the Temple, and also the entire city as well. It is no longer Zion, the elect Holy City, inviolable because of the divine presence...It is now only another human construction, as vulnerable to the invading Babylonians as any other.”
(Hummel, p. 325)



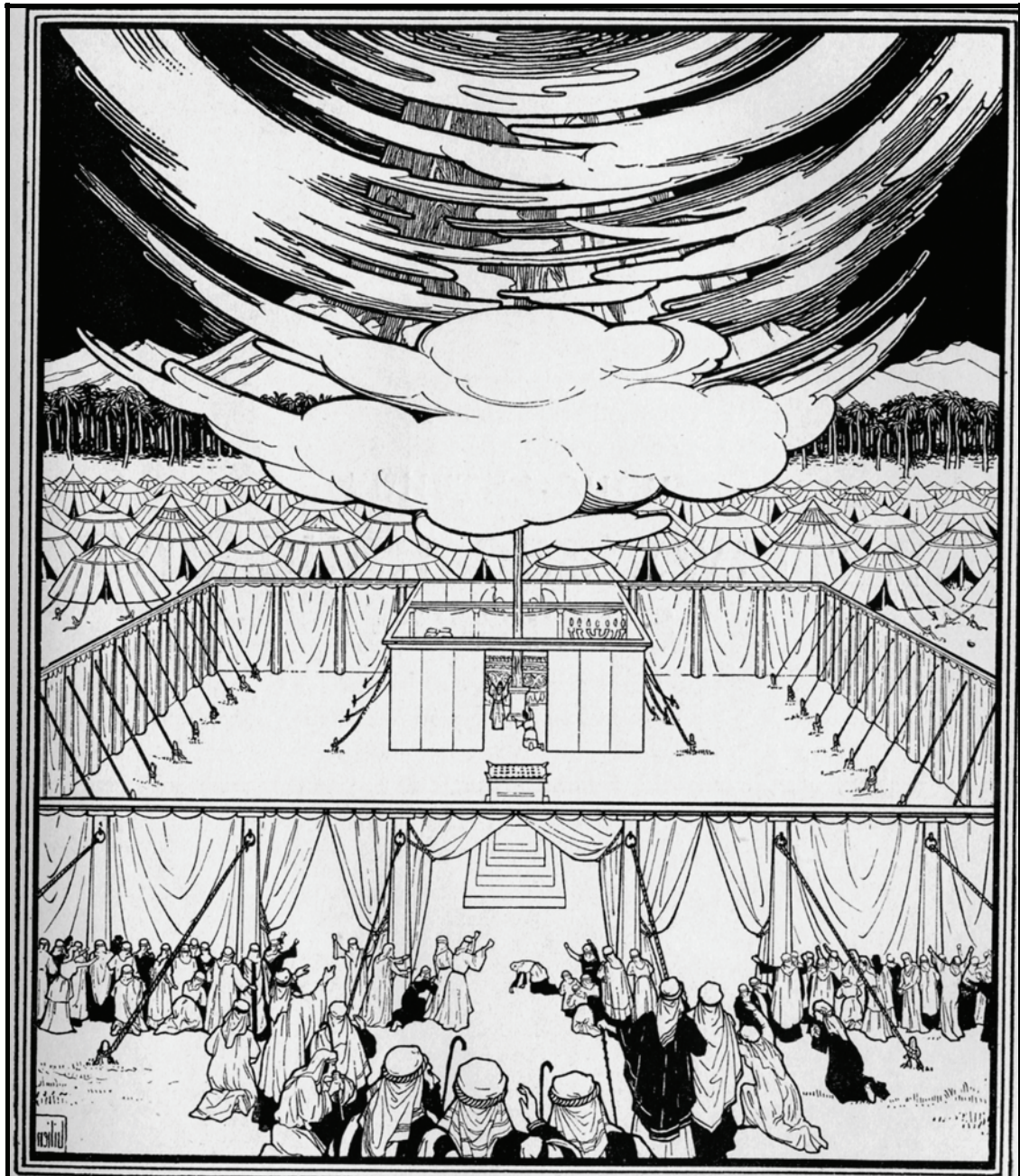
“The Interior of the Tabernacle” by E.M. Lilien

But as always in Scripture Ezekiel’s stern message of Law was carefully balanced with a magnificent Gospel promise. God would dwell among men again, not in a building but in the God/man, Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John alludes to this truth when it uses a form of the word “*tabernacle*” in conjunction with the “*glory*” of God to introduce the concept of the incarnation in John Chapter 1: ***“The Word became flesh and lived (literally “tabernacled”) among us for a while. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** (John 1:14) It is unfortunate that English translations do not literally translate the Greek text of this phrase so that modern readers might catch the connection John intends to the magnificent events of the Old

Testament. The role of the “*shekinah*” in the life of Israel foreshadowed God’s entry into the world in the Person of His Son, the God/Man Jesus Christ. The assurance of God’s presence among them and the comfort which the “*shekinah*” conveyed is fulfilled for all of humanity in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

“Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of cloud by night left it place in front of the people.” - The introduction of the “*shekinah*” concludes with yet another assertion of its reliability. This is the third time in the paragraph that the phrase “***by***

day” and *“by night”* occurs. The people needed to be reassured as they began their journey into the unknown wilderness. There would never be a time when they were without the care and protection of God. *“Furthermore this provision was not intermittent, but constant. The covenant King unremittingly saw to the needs of those He had redeemed and taken as His own people.”* (Mackay, p. 244)



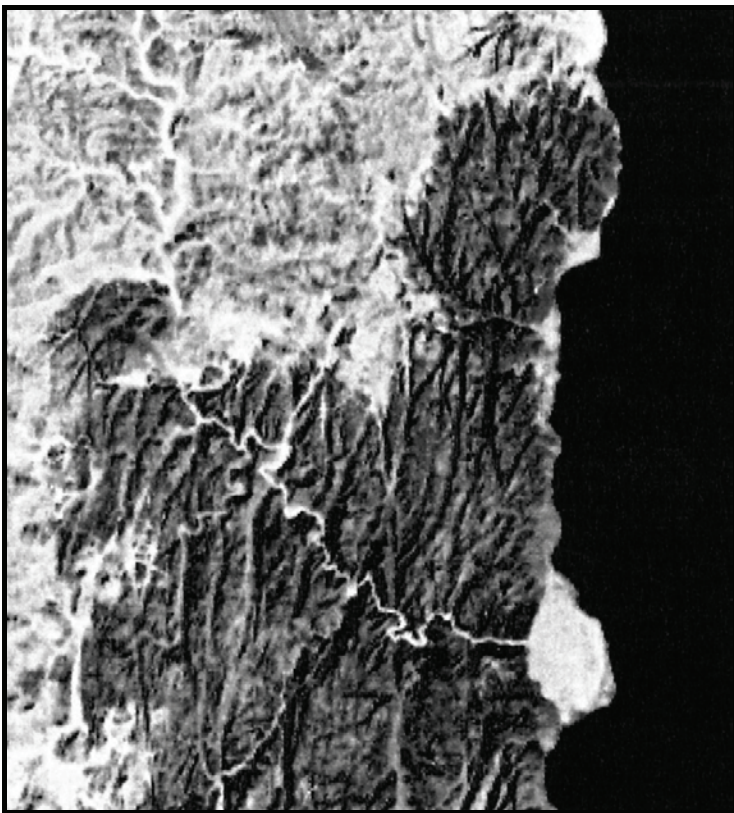
“The Shekinah Resting Over the Holy of Holies” by E.M. Lilien

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp near Pi Harhiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea directly opposite Baal Zephron.’” - One again, the geographic specificity of the text clearly indicates the historical nature of this account. If the text is to be taken on its own terms this is unmistakably history, not legend or folklore. Having led the Children of Israel out of Egypt on a direct deliberate course, the Lord now commands Moses to reverse himself and meander about as though lost or confused. ***“Tell the Israelites to turn back.”*** The Hebrew verb does not merely signify a change of direction. It means to reverse course, to retrace steps which have already been taken. The NIV reflects this

meaning with its apt translation ***“turn back.”*** The intent, as subsequent verses will indicate, was to signal a loss of resolve on the part of Israel, or, at very least, confusion and hesitation. Three geographic designations are cited to locate the events which will follow - ***“Pi Hahiroth,” “Migdol”*** and ***“by the sea directly opposite Baal Zephron.”*** ***“Pi Hahiroth”*** is evidently an Egyptian name which means *“at the mouth of the river”* or *“at the mouth of the gorge.”* This perspective is consistent with the detailed account of the Red Sea crossing provided by Josephus in his 1st Century *Antiquities of the Jews*:

“Now when the Egyptians had overtaken the Hebrews they prepared to fight them, and by their multitude they drove them into a narrow place...They also seized on the

passages by which they imagined that the Hebrews might fly, shutting them up between inaccessible precipices and the sea; for there was on each side a ridge of mountains that terminated at the sea, which were impassible by reason of their roughness, and obstructed their flight; whereupon they pressed upon the Hebrews with their armies; which they placed at the tops of the mountains, that so they might deprive them of any



“Satellite Photo of The Western Shore of the Gulf of Aqaba at the Village of Nuwaiba”



The Nuwaiba Peninsula at the Mouth of the Mountain Gorge

passage into the plain.” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, XV, pp. 62-63) Dr. Lennart Möller, a supporter of a crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba, observes that the small peninsula of Nuwaiba, at the mouth of a mountain gorge on the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba matches this description perfectly. At Nuwaiba, Israel would have appeared to be trapped against the sea with no escape route. The site, which is now an Egyptian seaside resort, would have seemed to Pharaoh as the perfect place to massacre the nation which had humiliated him and devastated his nation. **“Migdol”** on the other hand, is a Semitic word which refers to a watchtower or a fortress. Perhaps the most intriguing of the three is the Semitic title **“Baal Zephron.”** **“Baal”** is the Canaanite storm God who, along with his consort **“Asherah”** - a fertility goddess - would exert a baleful influence upon Israel throughout the balance of the Old Testament. **“Zephron”** appears to refer to a mountain or a temple of Baal built upon a mountain. The translation of these names is not nearly so difficult as their location. Sarna accurately concludes: *“None of the place names mentioned here, and repeated in Numbers 33:7-8, can be identified with certainty.”* (Sarna, p. 70) Advocates of the Gulf of Aqaba as the site of the miraculous crossing contend that the prominence of these Semitic place names suggests an area closer to Canaan on the eastern side of the

Sinai while proponents of the Gulf of Suez explain that the names are consistent with the widespread Semitic presence and influence during this period along Egypt's eastern border.

“Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around in the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’” - God's design in commanding Israel to retrace their steps and then pitch camp at a militarily indefensible site which trapped them against the sea was to lure Pharaoh into the disastrous attack which would culminate the Lord's righteous judgement upon Egypt and her king. The Lord entices Pharaoh toward two dangerously erroneous conclusions. First - ***“the Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion.”*** The suggestion of the text is either that the people have simply lost their way and don't know where to go, or that they have lost their resolve and are having second thoughts and no longer wish to leave Egypt to return to their homeland in Canaan. *“In the present context the term has the sense of ‘disoriented’ or ‘hopelessly confused.’”* (Sarna, p. 71) Secondly, the location of the encampment on a seashore at the mouth of a narrow mountain gorge was designed to convey a strategic blunder which left Israel vulnerable and trapped - ***“hemmed in by the desert.”***



“Deliverance at the Sea” - 19th Century Bible Engraving



Tomb Painting of Pharaoh Triumphantly Crushing the Enemies of Egypt Beneath the Wheels of His Chariot

“And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and he will pursue them. And I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.’ So the Israelites did this.” - Pharaoh’s will to resist the Lord had been broken by the death of the firstborn. God now informs Moses that His punishment of this proud, stubborn man was not yet complete. Once more the Lord would harden Pharaoh’s sinful heart and his determination to resist the will of God and destroy the people of God would be renewed. As previously noted, the *“hardening of the heart”* is God’s righteous punishment upon the persistently impenitent sinner by confirming his in his sin and condemning him to endure the consequences of that sin. Pharaoh was a vain and a vicious man. When circumstances appeared to present him with an opportunity to strike out against those who had humbled him and to brutally destroy them, he would be unable to resist. This is a just judgement which Pharaoh had brought upon himself and upon his nation. He had been given numerous opportunities to repent and turn from the way of death and he had contemptuously spurned them all. By His deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea Pharaoh would receive the punishment which he fully deserved and the righteousness of God would be displayed before Egypt and all the world - ***“And I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and***

all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.” The language of the text emphasizes that this is not an arbitrary or isolated act of judgement. It recalls the extended pattern of defiance and disobedience which had led to this sad moment as it echoes the King’s disdainful dismissal of God when Moses first appeared before him - *“Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go!”* (Exodus 5:2) When the bodies of Egypt’s bravest sons are washed up upon the shores of the Red Sea, that refusal to know and acknowledge the Lord as the one true God will have been decisively corrected.



“Relief of Pharaoh Seti I in His Chariot Invincibly Defeating the Enemies of Sacred Egypt at the Temple of Amun Ra at Karnak”

“So the Israelites did this.” - In deliberate contrast to the stubborn disobedience of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the Children of Israel are presented as humbly submitting to the will and command of God. Without question or challenge they obey God’s instruction and thereby become the bait which God will use to entice Egypt into His deadly trap.



“The Deliverance at the Sea” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

The Deliverance at the Red Sea

Exodus 14:5-31

When the King of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh the King of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. The Egyptians - all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops - pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the Sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone! Let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than

to die in the desert!” Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.” Then the Angel of God who had been traveling in front of Israel army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right

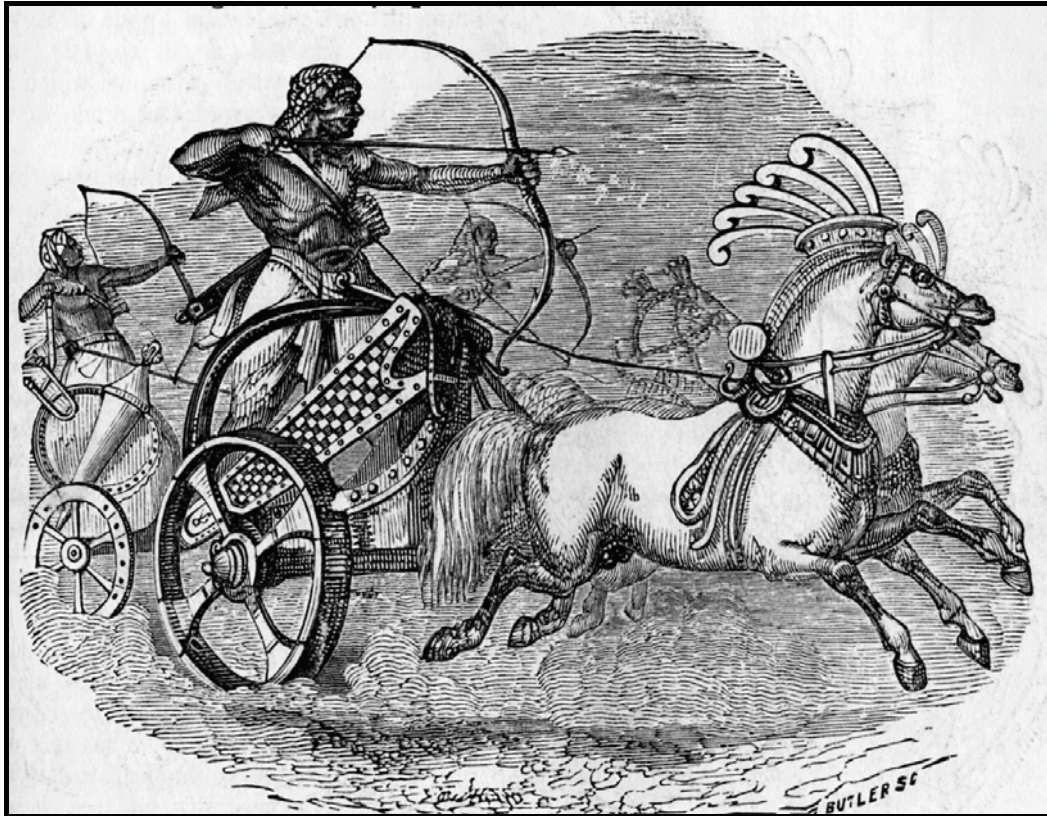


“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh” - 18th Century Bible Engraving by Matthias Merian



“The Pillar of Fire Halts the Army of Egypt” by Arnold Friberg

and on their left. The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. In the morning watch the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and their horsemen.” Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen - the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.



“Egyptian Chariots in Battle” - 19th Century Engraving

“When the King of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, ‘What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!’” - The departure of the Israelites should have come as no surprise to Egypt’s king, he himself having commanded them to leave the country. The rabbis, therefore, understand the opening phrase of this verse - *“When the King of Egypt was told that the people had fled”* - to refer to Pharaoh’s belated recognition that Israel had left his country for good and did not plan to return. This was not the three day religious pilgrimage in the wilderness adjacent to Egypt’s borders which he and Moses had originally discussed but a permanent return to the distant homeland from which their forefathers had journeyed centuries earlier. This understanding of the text is also signaled by the verb *“had fled”* which carries the connotation of moving from one sphere of influence, or one country, to another. It is surprising that Pharaoh’s change of heart was also shared by the members of his court - *“Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them.”* During the plagues themselves Pharaoh had stood alone in his obstinate resistance to the demands of Moses and his God. The leaders of Egypt’s government had repeatedly pleaded with their king to accede to the God of the Hebrews and release His people from bondage. (Cf. Exodus 8:19; 9:20; 10:7; 12:33) But now, as the

economic and political impact of the Israelites' permanent departure becomes apparent to them, the officials of Pharaoh also begin to have second thoughts about allowing this massive host of free labor escape them - ***“What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!”*** John Durham suggests that Egypt's change of heart is a typical human response in the course of an ongoing crisis. He further observes that an angry desire for revenge may well have been a major factor in Pharaoh's choice of a military alternative:

“The reaction of Pharaoh and the members of his cabinet to the result of what they had permitted in the panic of catastrophe is entirely logical. Fear and the shock of grief are now replaced by practical considerations. An important source of cheap labor is rapidly getting beyond reach. Perhaps even anger is implicit in the response of Pharaoh and his court to a flight that cannot be any surprise to them. Knowing something will come and actually experiencing it are quite different to us, and this important difference is skillfully represented by this narrative.” (Durham, p. 191)

Rabbinic *“midrashim”* perceptively recognize the political dynamic at work here in their observation that rebellions among Egypt's other subject peoples had immediately broken out after the successful departure of the Hebrews and that to a major extent Pharaoh was compelled to act in order to demonstrate that he remained in control of the situation.

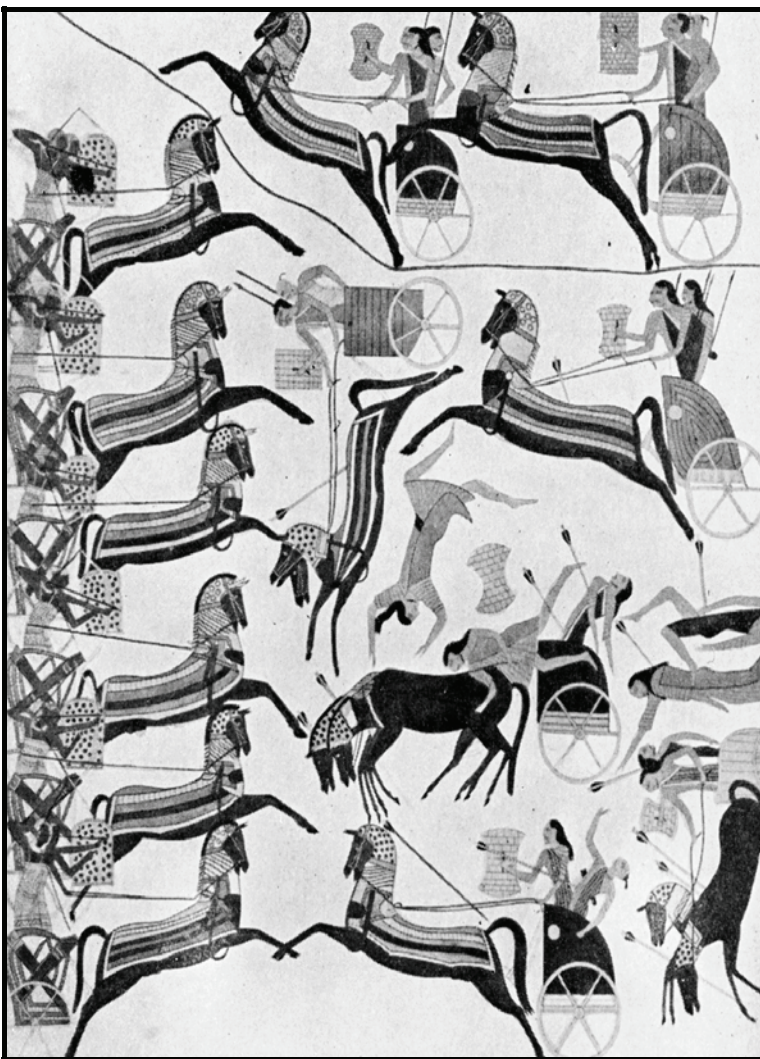
“So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of his best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.”



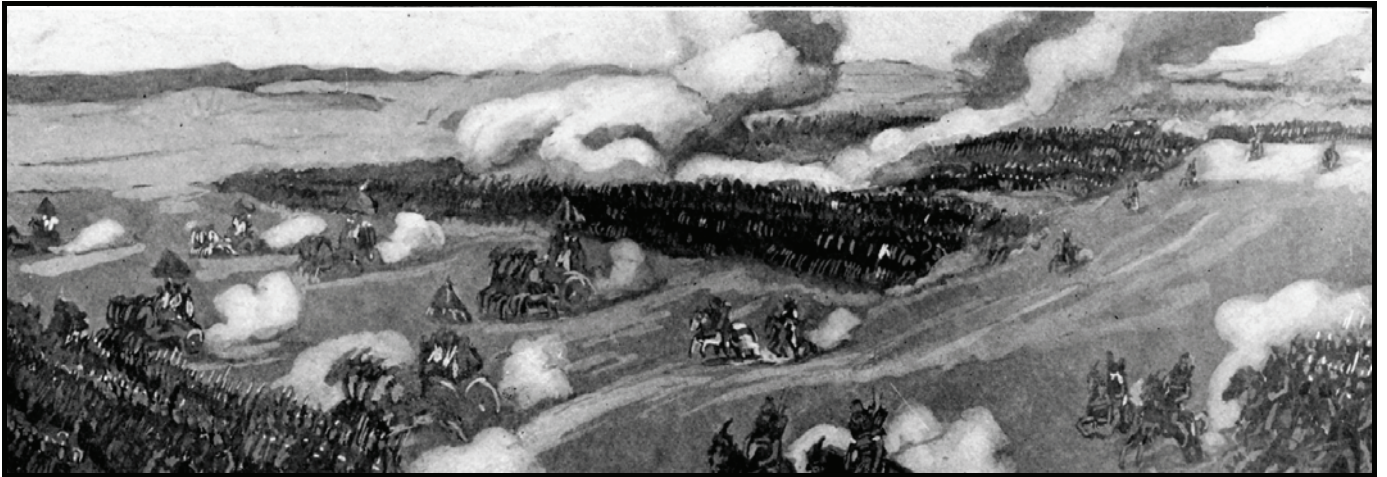
***“The Hosts of Egypt”
19th Century Engraving***

The text stresses both the urgency and the magnitude of Egypt's military mobilization. Pharaoh was evidently concerned that Israel would move beyond his grasp before he could gather his army and pursue them. The Hebrew text literally says - *"he harnessed his chariot."* The Hebrew commentaries dramatically describe the scene as a demonstration of the king's desperate haste to be on his way: *"In his zeal Pharaoh did not wait to have his chariot made ready for him, he did it with his own hands and his nobles followed his example."* (Ginzberg, p. 12) While the text allows for this remarkable departure from custom, it certainly does not require it. The NIV's version - ***"He had his chariot made ready"*** - is an accurate rendering of the phrase. The vanguard of Egypt's army was the Pharaoh's elite personal guard, the finest warriors on the face of the earth -

"He took six hundred of his best chariots." ***"Six hundred"*** appears to have been the standard military unit in the ancient Near East (cf. Judges 18:11; 1 Samuel 13:15; 23:13; 2 Samuel 15:18). The Hebrew designates the six hundred as *"those who have been chosen."* These are hand picked charioteers, selected for their special skills to be the agents of Pharaoh's vengeance. In addition to this special corps, the entirety of Egypt's army also participates in this expedition - literally *"every chariot."* Sarna suggests the translation - *"all the chariotry of Egypt"*. It is particularly noted that each of the chariots that make up this great host is commanded by ***"officers over all of them."*** The term in this phrase is actually *"a third,"* reflecting the fact that each chariot had three occupants;



"Tomb Painting of a Well Disciplined Line of Egyptian Chariots Destroying an Opposing Army"



“The Host of Pharaoh in Pursuit of Israel” by J. James Tissot

the driver, a bowman, and a shield bearer.

“The chariot was a revolutionary and powerful innovation in the art of warfare. It was introduced into Egypt from Canaan. Drawn by two horses, the weapon was used for massed charges; it required a crew with a high degree of skill and training. The charioteers enjoyed high social standing and became a military aristocracy.” (Sarna, p. 71)

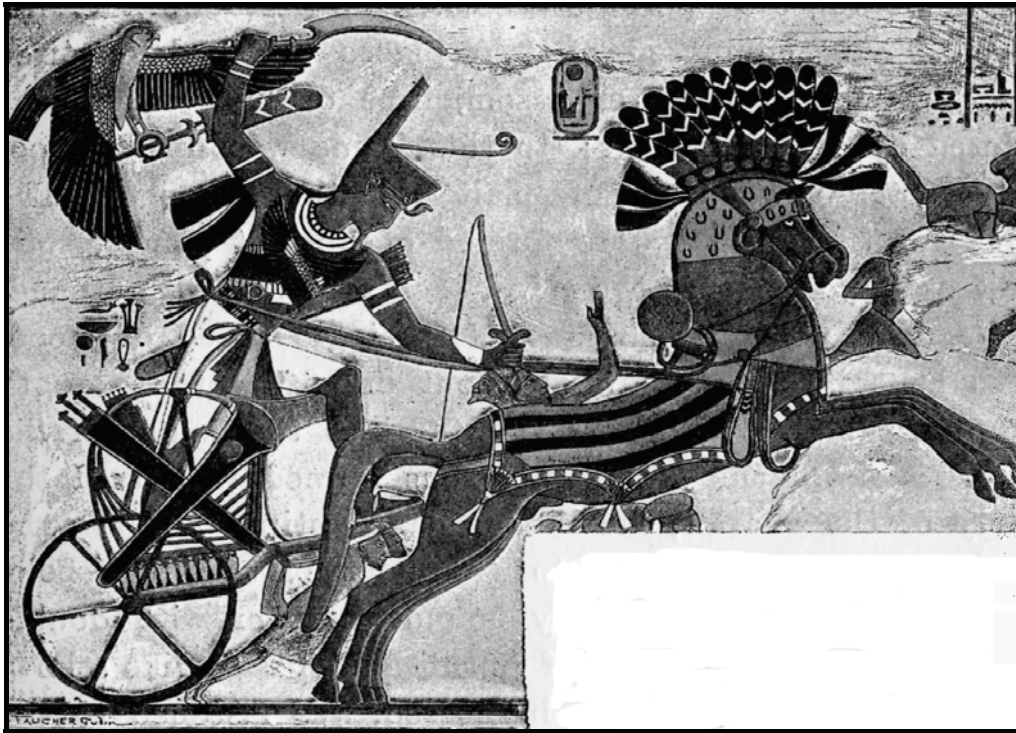
“The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh the king of Egypt so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly.” - As the narrative proceeds we are reminded that the hand of God is at work in this matter. Pharaoh’s ruthless determination to exterminate the Children of Israel is the culmination of an extended pattern of impenitent sin building upon and reinforcing itself. God’s judgement upon that patten of sin is to strengthen its deadly hold upon Egypt’s monarch so that he will relentlessly pursue the self-destructive choices he has made to the bitter end. The great host of Egypt marched forth in all of great panoply and power supremely confident of its ability to destroy a rag-tag mob of run-away slaves. No one could have imagined that within only a few days this great host itself would be utterly destroyed. In contrast, the Children of Israel were not scurrying off like frightened fugitives. They were ***“marching out boldly.”*** The Hebrew metaphor literally says *“with an outstretched arm.”* The same phrase occurs in Numbers 33:3 - ***“They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, who were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them; for the Lord had brought judgement on their gods.”*** The outstretched arm, typically brandishing a weapon, represents confidence and power. (cf. Psalm 89:13; Isaiah 26:11) At this point, of

course, the Israelites are completely oblivious to the fact that the army of Pharaoh is in hot pursuit. Their confidence would quickly turn to consternation when the rumbling chariots of Egypt are sighted behind them.

“The Egyptians - all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops - pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hairoth opposite Baal Zephon.” - The time interval between the departure of the Israelites and that of the Egypt army is not specified. Nor is the distance which the Israelites had managed to cover. The emphasis on the urgency of Pharaoh’s mobilization in the preceding verses would appear to suggest that a considerable distance had been covered and that Pharaoh was concerned that his former slaves were on the verge of escape. In any case, it would not have been difficult for an army of professional soldiers, made up largely of chariots and cavalry, to move much more quickly than the Israelites. As previously noted, a Roman legion in full armor with its various support groups was capable of maintaining a consistent pace of twenty miles daily. The repetition of the various components of the Egyptians - ***“all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops”*** - serves to emphasize the magnitude of



“Rameses II at the Head of His Army” - 19th Century Engraving



“Tomb Painting of Pharaoh in His Chariot Striking Down the Enemies of Egypt Under the Protection of the God Horus”

the attacking force and the dire threat which it posed to the Israelites. The Israelites have encamped exactly where the Lord had instructed - ***“by the sea near Pi Hahiroth opposite Baal Zephon.”*** The spirited debate over possible locations of this site has already been outlined in the notes (cf. pp. 480-482). Whether it was on the Red Sea’s Gulf of Suez or Aqaba the strategic significance of the site was the same. Israel was trapped with their backs to the sea. There was no possibility of escape, exactly as the Lord had intended.

“As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord.” - The text personalizes the impending confrontation with the individual reference ***“as Pharaoh approached.”*** This is fully consistent with the Egyptian view of the monarch as the divine personification of the nation. In their view Pharaoh was Egypt.

“The entire scene is dominated by Pharaoh - only he is mentioned as drawing near to the Hebrews. Pharaoh is commonly depicted as the central figure of battle scenes in Egyptian representations and designs. The Egyptians believed that in war the ‘acts of the king alone count; he is invincible, nay, unassailable; no man can hope to resist the divine ruler and survive,’ and ‘it is no mere assertion that so many are

powerless against the single figure of Pharaoh.’” (Currid, p. 293)

The sudden appearance of the Egyptian army may be explained by the rugged mountainous terrain surrounding the Israelite encampment. Evidently scouts had not been posted and the Egyptians came without warning. Israel was trapped before they realized they were being pursued. Moses had been forewarned of the impending destruction of Pharaoh and his army (Exodus 14:4) so their abrupt arrival at the seashore would have come as no surprise to him. The Hebrew verb which describes the advance of the army - **“the Egyptians, marching after them”** - is singular where a plural would ordinarily be expected. The rabbis understood this to signal the single-mindedness of the entire Egyptian host. They were not being driven reluctantly forward by a fanatic monarch. Instead they shared his desire for revenge and were eager to destroy the Israelites.

In the aftermath of all of the plagues, the Israelite response is sadly typical of mankind’s fickle nature. We have an amazing ability to quickly forget the blessings and the promises of God. No matter how often he acts to save us, we forget His willingness to exert His power on behalf of His people: **“They were terrified and cried out to the Lord.”** Their cry was not a confident prayer for deliverance. It was a whining lament of complaint and despair as their subsequent comments to Moses will illustrate. The Psalmist later used this episode as the perfect illustration of the fickle faithlessness of men: **“When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to Your miracles; they did not remember Your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Yet He saved them for His Name’s sake, to make His mighty power known.”** (Psalm 106:7-8) Sadly, this pattern was to recur over and over again throughout the wilderness wandering.

“They said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt; ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?’ It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.’” Moses, as the representative of God before the people, bears the brunt of their panicked resentment. They appear not to recognize that by attacking Moses they are, in fact, attacking the God for whom he has spoken. They blame Moses for their plight in a series of three bitterly sarcastic questions. **“Was it because there were no**



“Egyptian Priests Prepare a Body for the Grave” - 19th Century Engraving

graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?” The bitter irony of the peoples’ challenge to Moses is evident. The Egyptians were a people obsessed with death. Egypt was a nation famous for its graves. From the great pyramids at Giza to the magnificent tombs of the Valley of the Kings, the country abounded in graves. Egypt expended more of its wealth and its energy on burying the dead than any other civilization in the long history of mankind. Accordingly, the peoples’ sarcastic question to Moses is - *“Why did you lead us out of a country that was full of graves only to die in this desert wilderness?”* Their second and third questions continue in the same accusatory manner - *“What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?”* They are the innocent victims of Moses deception. If only they had not succumb to his beguiling advice they would still be safe in Egypt. They had been happy and content in Egypt. *“Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone. Let us serve the Egyptians.’ It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than*



"The Mummy of Pharaoh Sethos I

to die in the desert." Mankind has always had an amazingly selective memory. We recall only that which serves our immediate need. These same people who are now looking back to the good old days of comfort and security in Egypt had cried out to God for deliverance from their bitter bondage. At the burning bush God had informed Moses: *"I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians."* (Exodus 3:7-8) But all of that is forgotten now in the moment of crisis. The *"slave mentality"* which is prepared to give up liberty in return for the care and protection of the master is clearly in evidence here. These people

were not yet prepared to face the challenges and responsibilities of free men. John Mackey observes that this pattern recurs throughout the Book of Exodus:

"The rebellious complaints of the Israelites are a recurring theme in the book (5:21; 15:24; 16:3; 17:2; 32:1). Whenever difficulties arose in their new life, they hankered after the certainties of their former life in Egypt, even though they were slaves there." (Mackey, p. 251)

Unfortunately, this *"recurring theme"* will continue not only throughout Exodus but the entire Torah (cf. Numbers 11:1-6; 14:2-4; 16:13-14; 20:2-13; 21:4-5; Deuteronomy 1:26-28). The Psalmist describes their faithlessness and ingratitude in graphic detail and warns the Israelites of his own day:

"Do not harden you hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried Me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation. I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they

have not know My ways.’” (Psalm 95:8-10; cf. also 78:17-42; Ezekiel 20)

“Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still.’” - In the face of this onslaught of criticism Moses remains completely calm and unruffled. He clearly recognizes that the peoples’ attacks are not directed at him but at the God who he represents and he has no doubt whatsoever in the ability of God to deal with this crisis. He ignores their censure and seeks to calm and reassure them that God will intervene on their behalf. The prophet’s admonition to *“Stand firm”* is in contrast to their desperate desire to escape. Their deliverance will come as the result of their own skill or power - *“You will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today.”* They need only to trust in God - *“The Lord will fight for you, you need only be still.”* This is the quiet confidence of the believer, the assurance that God will accomplish His will on our behalf. As the psalmist declares: *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.”* (Psalm 46:10-11) The grim observation -



“The Passage at the Red Sea” by Albert Goodwin

“The Egyptians you see today you will never see again” ominously foreshadows the utter destruction of the Egyptian host in the waters of the sea. Israel is a passive observer in this matter, nothing more than spectators. Salvation is by God’s power, by his undeserved grace alone.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your hand and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.’” - Some commentators suggest that the Lord’s opening words to Moses may imply that he had doubts of his own as to the predicament in which Israel found itself. However, given the serene confidence of his response to the people this seems unlikely. Although Moses has wavered before, in this instance he appears to be completely confident. It is more probable that God addressed Moses as the representative of the people and that the ***“crying out”*** to which he refers is the complaint which they had raised. This understanding is consistent with Moses’ identification as the representative of the nation who is punished along with them in Deuteronomy 1:37 - ***“Because of you the Lord became angry with me also and said, ‘You shall not enter it either.’”*** (cf. Deuteronomy 3:26; 4:21) This is a moment for action, not for talk. Despite their lack



“The Night of Terror” by C.W. Eckersberg



“Moses at the Red Sea” by Rudolf Schäfer

of faith in His ability to resolve the crisis, God is prepared to do what must be done. “Yahweh’s basic message to Moses is ‘Stop talking and get moving.’” (Propp, p. 497)

“Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.” - The shepherd’s staff of Moses which had been the physical instrument of God’s power throughout the ten plagues continues to serve that function on the day of deliverance. Neither Moses nor his staff possess any inherent supernatural (magical) power. God chooses to accomplish His miracles in this manner as a condescension to time/space limitations of Israelite comprehension and a validation of the role of Moses as His chosen representative. In other words, God works through the staff and the outstretched arm of Moses to enable the Israelites to understand what is happening and to recognize that Moses is the leader whom God has sent to bring them out of bondage. The prophet



*“The Deliverance at the Red Sea”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien*

Isaiah makes the point unmistakably explicit in his commemoration of the deliverance at the Red Sea:

“Then His people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people - where is He who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of His flock? Where is He who set His Holy Spirit among them, who sent His glorious arm of power to be at Moses’ right hand, Who divided the waters before them, to gain for Himself everlasting renown?” (Isaiah 63:11-13)

The same perspective is expressed in the Song of Moses as the prophet declares that it was God’s *“right hand”* which struck down the host of Egypt: *“Who among the gods is like You, O Lord? Who is like You - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You*

stretched out Your right hand and the earth swallowed them.” (Exodus 15:11-12)

Moses is not unique in this role. God has used other prophets and apostles across the centuries. For example, the Lord declares His empowerment of David in language which may be an allusion to the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea: *“My hand will sustain him; surely My arm will strengthen him...I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries...I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers.”* (Psalm 89:21,23,25)

The effect of Moses’ staff and outstretched arm is the division of the sea and the creation of a path for Israel through its midst on dry ground - *“to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.”* The verb *“divide”* means to be separated or split apart. It is used in both violent and non-violent contexts. The term recalls the creation of the universe in Genesis 1 where the Creator God separated the water from the dry land. Solomon uses the same word in this context in Proverbs

- ***“By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding He set the heavens in place; by His knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.”*** (Proverbs 3:19-20) This language clearly indicates the distinct separation of a single body of water into two parts in order to create a pathway between them. The verb also precludes any attempt to explain the miracle as a mere tidal shift exaggerated by strong winds as suggested by some commentators. *“What happened is consistently described in terms of language that is inapplicable to any naturally occurring phenomenon. Only the Lord Himself, ruler of heaven and earth could have done this.”* (Mackay, p. 254)

This truth is further emphasized by the description of the surface which God fashioned for Israel’s path through the sea as ***“dry ground.”*** There was no need for God’s people to struggle through the mud or clamber over the rocks. They were provided an ideal surface to ease their passage: ***“This is what the Lord says, He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters.”*** (Isaiah 43:16) The allusion to creation is clear and direct . This emphasis is consistent throughout the dozens of other Old Testament texts which refer to the event.

“The term for ‘dry ground’ refers to something that is ‘dry, withered, without moisture, drained.’ In Scripture it is the exact opposite of, or contrast to, the sea. In the creation account, for instance, the separation of ‘the dry ground’ on the third day (Genesis 1:9) is the antithesis of the waters that were gathered into one place.” (Currid, p. 298)

“I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them.” - There



“Israel Crossing the Sea” by J. James Tissot

can be no rational explanation for the willingness of Pharaoh and his entire army to follow the Israelites down into the sea bed with towering walls of water standing on either side of them. Only the judgmental hardening of the heart could explain such folly. In this instance, the text notes that not only the heart of Pharaoh, but also the hearts of the entire Egyptian army were hardened. They had become a mob crazed with blood lust and the desire for revenge. Like Viking “berserkers” nothing could stand in their way and no threat could dissuade them from their course of destruction and death.

“And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.” - These verses repeat the language and themes of the preceding verses. God’s righteous judgement of Pharaoh and his army will vindicate and glorify Him before Egypt and all the world. Once again the impotence of the false gods of Egypt will be demonstrated so that all may know that there is one God and one God alone. The repetition of ***“Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen”*** serves to emphasize the contrast between helpless Israel and mighty Egypt so that the miraculous nature of the event may be clearly perceived. ***“Then the Angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army withdrew***



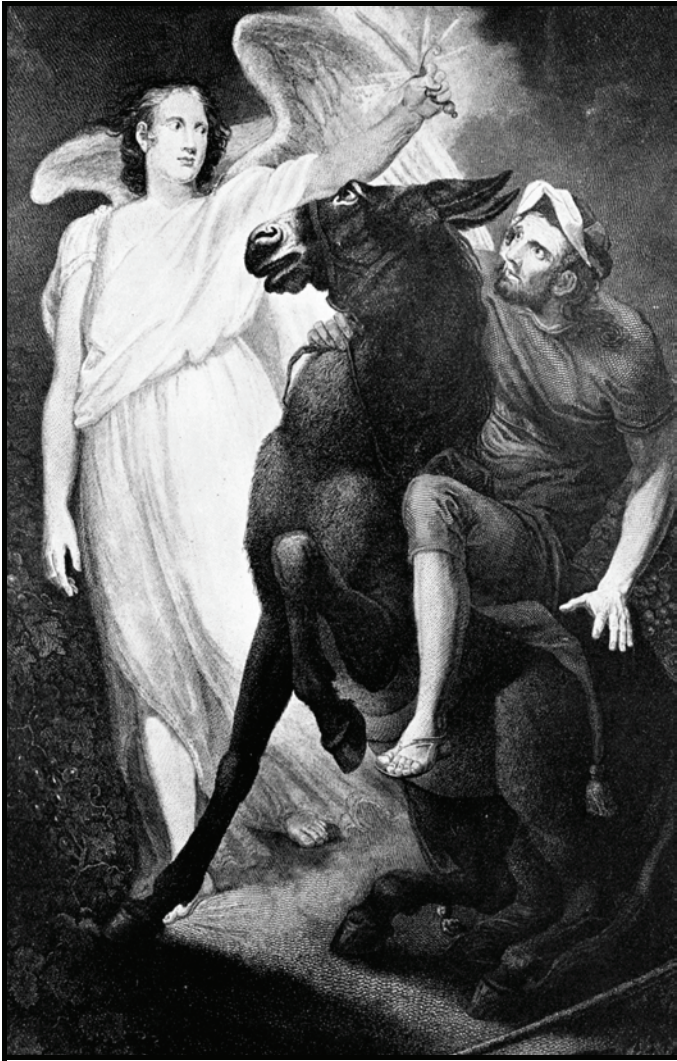
“The Destruction of Egypt” by J. James Tissot

and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also went from in front and stood behind them coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel.” - The physical



“The Destruction of Pharaoh and His Army” by T. Milton

manifestation of the divine presence in the pillar of cloud/fire which has up to this point guided and led them through the wilderness now shifts to a position behind the Israelite host to serve as a barrier separating them from the Egyptians. This change in position would delay the Egyptian assault and provide sufficient time for the Hebrews to complete their crossing of the sea. The text specifically associates the divine presence in the pillar of cloud/fire with *“the angel of God”* - the pre-incarnate Son of God as He is commonly designated in the Old Testament. Commentators speculate that the specific distinction between the Angel of the Lord and the cloud/fire pillar is made here to indicate that the Angel of the Lord visibly appeared before the Egyptians in the same menacing warrior-like mode in which he would later halt the progress of the false prophet Balaam on his way to pronounce a curse upon the Children of Israel. Balaam’s encounter is described in Numbers Chapter 22. *“But*



*“Balaam Before the Angel of the Lord”
by James Northcoate*

God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field...Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell face down.” (Numbers 22:21-41) This would certainly have been appropriate under the circumstances and is an intriguing speculation but must remain only that. In any case, the Angel of the Lord and the Pillar of Cloud/Fire became an impenetrable barrier which halted the Egyptian advance and protected the Hebrews as they prepared to cross the Red Sea - *“coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel.”*

“Throughout the night, the cloud brought darkness to the one side, and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.” - The effect of the Pillar is miraculously

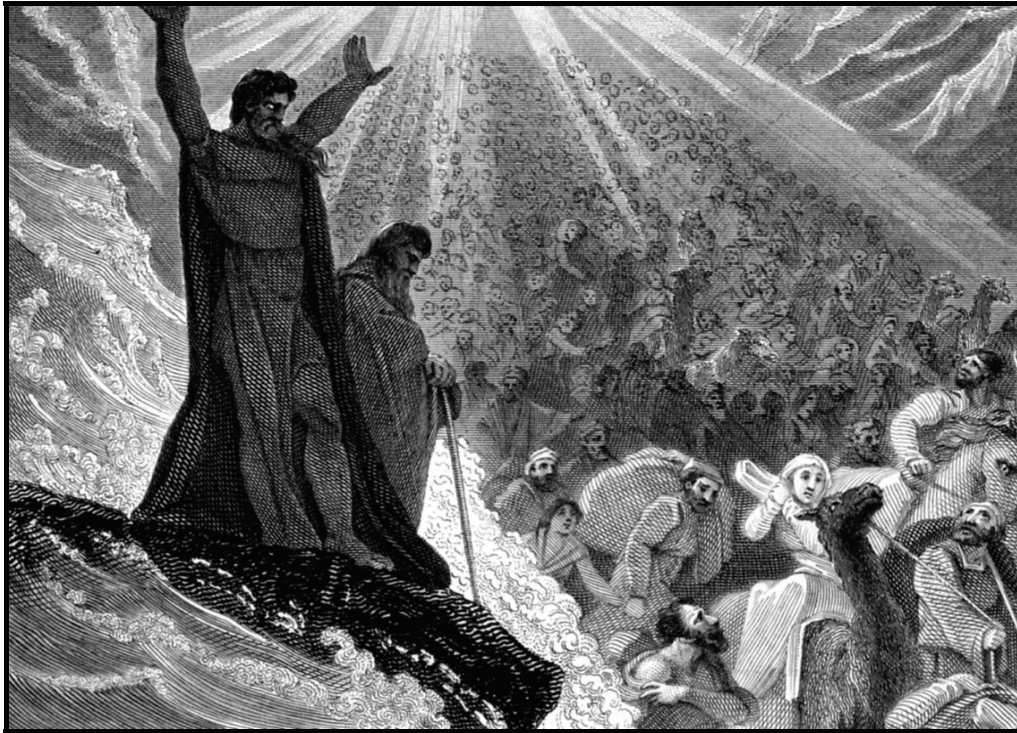
differentiated. On the Egyptian’s side the cloud deepened the darkness of night to create consternation and confusion within the ranks of Pharaoh, who was thought to be the incarnation of the Sun God , Amun-Re. But while the army of Egypt stumbled blindly in the darkness, the fire on the other side of the Pillar provided a guiding light for the people of God. The marvelous barrier of darkness and light persisted throughout the hours of the night.

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land.” - The instrument by which God accomplishes the division of the sea is *“a strong east wind.”* The

Hebrew phrase actually says “*a forward wind, (“ruach qadim”)* that is, a mighty wind blowing off the desert, most probably from the south-east. The emphasis is on the intensity or strength of this wind rather than the direction from which it comes. Once again, the language recalls the creation of the universe and the “*ruach elohim*” - the breath or Spirit of God which moved across the face of the primeval waters (Genesis 1:2). The “*wind of God*” is a popular image for divine power at work on behalf of His people throughout the Old Testament - most often in the context of judgement. Isaiah describes the Lord’s chastening of Israel - “***By warfare and exile You contend with her - with His fierce blast He drives her out, as on the day the east wind blows.***” (Isaiah 27:8) Jeremiah makes use of the same image: “***Like a wind from the east I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them My back and not My face in the day of their disaster.***” (Jeremiah 18:17) The prophet Hosea Israel warned of God’s impending judgement: “***I will have no compassion even though he thrives among his brothers. An east wind from the Lord will come, blowing in from the desert, his spring will fail and his well dry up.***” (Hosea 13:15; cf. also Psalm 48:8). As long as this mighty wind from God continues to blow, the pathway through the sea remains open so that Israel may pass through the sea in safety. When the wind ceased, the sea would immediately return to its place.



“The Pathway Through the Sea” by Arnold Friberg



*“Israel Passing Through the Red Sea”
18th Century Bible Engraving by Boydell*

“The waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.” - The words which describe this great miracle are simple and matter of fact. That which God had promised occurs exactly as He had said it would. No other outcome is possible. No extravagant language is necessary. God said it - that settles it.

The forceful language of the preceding verses is reiterated here to describe the miracle which God performs. *“The waters were divided,”* as previously noted, means to split apart or to separate. The water of sea is supernaturally parted, creating a dry pathway to facilitate the passage of the Children of Israel. The nature of that parting is defined by the text as it notes *“with a wall of water on their right and on their left.”* The language deliberately stresses the magnitude of the event. These were walls that towered above those who passed through the division in the sea which the Lord created. *“‘Wall’ is an architectural term in Hebrew often employed for the fortifications surrounding a city - walls which are high and strong for protection and security.”* (Currid, p. 302) In this instance, the water walls provided protection and security for God’s people as they escaped the army of Egypt by passing through the Red Sea. Phillip Ryken narrates an amusing episode which illustrates the dilemma

of modern Bible critics who seek to deny or minimize the miraculous nature of these events:

“Donald Bridge tells the story of a liberal minister preaching in an old, Bible-believing African-American church. At a certain point in his sermon the minister referred to the crossing of the Red Sea. ‘Praise the Lord!’ someone shouted. ‘Tak’in all them children through the deep waters. What a mighty miracle!’ However, the minister did not happen to believe in miracles. So he said, rather condescendingly, ‘It was not a miracle. They were in marsh land, the tide was ebbing, and the Children of Israel picked their way across in six inches of water. ‘Praise the Lord!’ the man shouted again. ‘Drownin’ all them Egyptians in six inches of water! What a mighty miracle!’” (Ryken, pp. 395-396)

The narrative text here and the poetic celebrations of the deliverance at the sea which recur throughout the rest of Scripture leave no room for doubt as to the miraculous nature of that which the Lord accomplished for Israel at the Red Sea. Those who deny this miracle do so - not because of ambiguities in the text - but because of their own misguided opinions about the nature of God and of His Word. A sampling of the scores of Old Testament texts which celebrate God’s deliverance of Israel at the Sea



“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh in the Red Sea” by Francis Danby 1825

as the paradigm of God’s ability to overturn ordinary limitations of nature on behalf of His people will serve to make the Bible’s perspective on this miracle unmistakably clear. The Psalmist reminds Israel that God accomplished this great miracle on their behalf in spite of their ingratitude and unfaithfulness:

“When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to Your miracles, they did not remember Your many kindnesses and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Yet He saved them for His Name’s sake, to make His mighty power known. He rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up: He led them through the depths as through a desert. He saved them from the hand of the foe, from the hand of the enemy He redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries, not one of them survived. Then they believed His promises and sang His praise.”
(Psalm 106:7-12)

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, as the people repented of their sins after their return to Jerusalem, the Levites led the congregation in a song of praise which recalled the wondrous miracle which God had accomplished for their fathers at the Red Sea:



“The Deliverance at the Red Sea” - 19th Century Bible Engraving



“The Parting of the Red Sea” by Margaret Irvine

“You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; You heard their cry at the Red Sea. You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for You knew how arrogantly the Egyptians had treated them. You made a name for Yourself which remains to this day. You divided the sea before them so they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters.”
(Nehemiah 9:9-11)

It is significant to note that both of these texts utilize the Hebrew noun “*tehom*” (“*the depths*”) to refer the waters of the Red Sea which were parted before Israel and consumed the hosts of Egypt. This term is particularly important because of its use in Genesis 1 to describe the primeval waters of the “*great deep*” upon which the wind of God’s Spirit moved at the time of Creation (Genesis 1:2). Whenever this term is used (35 times throughout the OT) its original occurrence lends it unique power in describing waters of the most remarkable magnitude and depth, typically either the

great oceans or the subterranean aquifers deep below the ground. The usage of this most significant word here eliminates any possibility that the Red Sea crossing involved nothing more than meandering across a marsh or mud-flat.



“The Overthrow of Pharaoh and His Army in the Red Sea” by Timmons

What may well be the Old Testament’s most dramatic reference to the crossing of the Red Sea occurs in the prophet Isaiah’s description of the ingathering of all the people of God on the Last Day. The prophet foretells that every geographic barrier, including the great seas and the rivers will be removed as God gathers His people together for eternity:

“He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth...The Lord will dry up the Gulf of the Egyptian Sea; with a scorching wind He will sweep His hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that men may cross over in sandals. There will be a highway for the remnant of His people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.” (Isaiah 11:12,15-16)

While modern Bible critics whose self-focused world view does not allow for miracles of any kind desperately seek to minimize the scope of the Red Sea crossing, Hebrew tradition moved in the opposite direction by embellishing and expanding the

miracle in the most fanciful manner. One miracle grew to ten in the retelling. In his classic study *The Legends of the Jews* rabbinic scholar Dr. Louis Ginzberg summarizes the traditions in this way:

“The dividing of the sea was but the first of ten miracles connected with the passage of the Israelites through it. The others were that the waters united in a vault above their heads; twelve paths opened up, one for each of the tribes; the water became as transparent as glass, and each tribe could see the others; the soil underfoot was dry but it changed into clay when the Egyptians stepped upon it; the walls of water were transformed into rocks against which the Egyptians were thrown and dashed to death, while before the Israelites they crumbled away into bits. Through the brackish sea flowed a stream of soft water, at which the Israelites could slake their thirst; and finally, the tenth wonder was, that this



“The Death of Pharaoh in the Sea” -16th Century Fresco by Piero di Cosimo

drinking water was congealed in the heart of the sea as soon as they had satisfied their need.” (Ginzberg, 3, p. 22)

Such imaginative embellishment does as much to discredit the authenticity of the Biblical text as its liberal counter-part for to do so implies that the events of the text were not sufficiently miraculous by themselves. The Word of God must be allowed to stand on its own without addition or subtraction.



“The Destruction of Pharaoh’s Host at the Red Sea” - 18th Century English Bible engraving by T. M. Milton

“The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea.” - It is difficult to imagine the Egyptians’ willingness to pursue the Israelites down into the sea. John Mackay does not exaggerate when he describes the *“collective madness”* of the Egyptian army. (Mackay, p. 256) Most commentators specifically link this action to the hardening of heart which was God’s judgement upon Pharaoh and his leaders. For example, Dr. Nahum Sarna marvels: *“Impelled by evil purposes, their judgement deranged by their brutal obstinacy, the Egyptians plunge headlong into the turbulent waters.”* (Sarna, p. 73) The text is not content to merely state that ***“the Egyptians”*** participated in this insanity. Instead, like the ringing blows of the hammer which drives home the coffin’s nails, the deliberately repetitive language -

“all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen” - drives home the awful truth that every one of the most elite units of the finest military force on the face of the earth -

heedlessly hurled themselves over the brink down onto the path which Israel had followed through the depths of the sea. The language is designed to emphasize that this is not reasonably considered military strategy, but the madness of men crazed by grief and rage:

“The Egyptians, their judgement blunted by Jahweh’s infliction upon them of a further wave of obstinacy, follow headlong with all their armament into this most unlikely place. The clear impression given in the contrast between a large and disciplined strike force strategically arrayed and a path strangely opened into ground always covered before with seawater is that the Egyptians were acting without reason. So, of course, they are, by divine cause, and the effect of their madness is heightened by the repetition of their ranks: Pharaoh, horses, chariots, riders, they all went.” (Durham, p.196)



*Pharaoh Neferhotep I
Possible Pharaoh of the Exodus*

John Calvin seeks to mitigate the irrationality of their action by suggesting that they had been confused by the swirling darkness of the pillar of cloud and did not realize that they had descended into the sea bed until it was too late. This would indeed have made more sense, but it contradicts the insistence of the text that Egypt’s king and his army acted deliberately and defiantly in a manner that defies any reasonable explanation.

This text does not specify whether Pharaoh himself accompanied his army to destruction. Parallel passages, however, inform us that the proud monarch perished alongside his hapless host. Thus, Psalm 136:15 rejoices in God’s mighty deliverance of His people in these words: ***“To Him who divided the red Sea asunder - His love endures forever - and brought Israel through the midst of it, - His love endures***

forever - but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea; - His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136: 13-15) In their recent study *Unwrapping the Pharaohs - How Egyptian Archaeology Confirms the Bible Timeline*, scholars John Ashton and David Down argue that a glimpse of this catastrophe for Egypt can be found in the chaos which followed the disappearance of Pharaoh Neferhotep I (c. 1479 B.C.). This 13th



**“Moses Parts the Red Sea”
by Colijn Coter - 1480**

Dynasty monarch was not succeeded by his son Wahnferhotep, who had evidently preceded him in death (as the result of the 10th plague?), but by his brother Sobkhotep IV, whom the Egyptian records discretely report “*occupied the throne which his brother had recently vacated.*” (Ashton, p. 103) Shortly thereafter, the Hyksos, fierce Asiatic horsemen from the East, swept into Egypt across the Sinai, conquered the land and prevailed there for centuries. Perhaps the Hyksos invasion was facilitated by the fact that Pharaoh and his army, who would ordinarily have been guarding the eastern frontier, lay dead beneath the waters of the Red Sea. A papyrus document recorded about the same time by an Egyptian temple scribe named Ipuwer in the holy city of Memphis may be the most direct documentary evidence of the plagues of Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. The papyrus, currently at the Leiden Museum in Holland, laments the calamities which had befallen the land of Egypt:

“Nay, but the heart is violent. Plague stalks through the land and blood is everywhere...Nay, but the river is blood. Does a man drink from it? As a human he rejects it. He thirsts for water...Nay, but gates, columns and walls are consumed with fire...Nay, but men are few. He that lays his

brother in the ground is everywhere...Nay, but the son of the high-born man is no longer to be recognized...The stranger people from outside are come into Egypt...Nay, but corn has perished everywhere. People are stripped of clothing, perfume and oil. Everyone says, 'there is no more.' The storehouse is bare...It has come to this. The King has been taken away by poor men." (Ashton, p. 102)

"In the morning watch, the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion."

- In the Hebrew reckoning of time the night was divided into three four hour segments. The first watch extended from 6:00 to 10:00 PM (cf. Lamentations 2:19); the second from 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM (cf. Judges 7:19; and the third or ***"the morning watch"*** from 2:00 to 6:00 AM.

It would appear that the Israelites were afforded the eight hours of first two watches of the night, from 6:00 PM until 2:00 AM to accomplish their crossing. Verse 21 had indicated that the strong east wind sent by God had held back the sea ***"all that night."*** It would appear that the divine pillar of cloud/fire continued to move behind the Israelites, lighting their way as they crossed the sea, while remaining between the two forces. The host of Egypt had recklessly continued their pursuit, advancing as far as the barrier of Israel's Protector would allow. In the pre-dawn hours of darkness the Israelites had moved up out of the sea bed onto the safety of the eastern shore. At that point, God struck out at the Egyptian army ***"and threw it into confusion."*** This phrase occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to the infliction of panic and consternation which renders a fighting force incapable of coherent military effort on the battlefield. God used the same language latter in Exodus to assure Israel that He will incapacitate every foe they will encounter on their journey to the Promised Land: ***"I will send My terror in front of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will***



"The Destruction of Pharaoh"
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer

make all your enemies turn their backs and run.” (Exodus 23:27) Joshua attributed his victory over the five kings of the Amorites to the fact that ***“The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon.”*** (Joshua 10:10) The same phrase occurs in 1 Samuel 7 to describe the terror which God inflicted upon the Philistines at Mizpah in the days of the judges: ***“But that day the Lord thundered with a loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.”*** (1Samuel 7:10)



“The Crossing of the Red Sea” by Cosimo Rosselli

“He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving.” The Hebrew text in this colorful phrase literally indicates that the wheels of the Egyptian chariots jammed or locked. The language suggests that this was not the result of natural causes - rocks on the sea bed or mud as suggested by many commentators - but the consequence of direct supernatural intervention. Whatever



“The Destruction of Pharaoh’s Host” by Bernedetto Luini - 1522

the specific means of immobilization may have been, the language here clearly reflects and ridicules that of 14:6-7 - ***“So he had his chariots made ready and he took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them.”*** The allusion mocks *“the delicious irony that Egypt’s super weapon becomes their undoing.”* (Propp, p. 500) Perhaps, as panic swept through the ranks of Egypt’s finest, jammed together within the intimidating confines of walls of sea water, the chariots began to swerve and collide with one another in an escalating chaos of terror and death. The Septuagint uses the Greek verb *“sunadysen”* in this phrase which means to become mired, to sink into the mud, or to be bogged down. This reading is also supported by a number of Hebrew

manuscripts, most notably the Samaritan Pentateuch. If this is a correct rendering of the original, it may be that God caused the sea bed - which had provided a dry road for the Israelites - to begin to liquify and return to its natural state, thereby halting the advance of the Egyptians and creating an inescapable trap in which they would perish to the last man.

“And the Egyptians said, ‘Let’s get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt!’” - Once again - with bitter irony - the words of the Egyptians echo the very words of God. Previously in Verse 14 Moses had promised the Israelites: ***“The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still.”*** Now, as destruction comes crashing down upon them the Egyptians belatedly acknowledge the fulfillment of God’s promise. In this moment of supreme crisis the language of the Egyptians is desperately dramatic. The Hebrew actually says: *“I must flee from Israel’s face for Yahweh is the fighter against Egypt.”* From the beginning, this conflict had been perceived by both sides as a contest between the pantheon of Egypt and the God of Israel. Now, as they die, Egypt’s finest sons acknowledge the superiority of the God of their former slaves.



“The Crossing of the Red Sea” by Ted Larson



19th Century Persian Islamic Depiction of the Deliverance at the Red Sea

Verse 26

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.’” - The Egyptians’ belated recognition of the irresistible divine power which confronts them notwithstanding, the time for escape is past. The moment of destruction is at hand. *“Too late, the Egyptians stopped in their headlong pursuit, come to their senses and attempt to fall back.”* (Durham , p. 196) An almost amusing 19th century Persian depiction of this critical moment provides an Islamic perspective on Pharaoh’s final thoughts. The archangel Gabriel on horseback astride *“a mighty mare”* is placed next to Pharaoh, confronting him with *“the writing of the judgement.”* As he dies in despair, Pharaoh cries out *“Indeed I have sinned! There is no God besides Allah, and Moussa is verily His messenger, his brother Aaron is his prophet and his spokesman.”* (Broash, p. 90) Unlike this imaginative embellishment, the Bible text provides no indication of contrition or repentance. As always the divine punishment fits the crime. As the infant sons of Israel had been cruelly cast into the waters of the Nile (cf. Exodus 1:22) so Egypt’s finest sons will drown in the waters of the Red Sea. *“The Egyptians had drowned the male children of the Israelites in the river; and now the righteous Lord took vengeance on them for those cruel and multiple murders, by drowning all the strength and flower of the nation in the Red Sea!”* (Rushdooney, p. 195) At the command of Moses by the power of God the water of the sea, which had

miraculously divided before the Children of Israel, return to their natural state and “rush back” to fill the opening in their midst and totally engulf the host of Egypt.



“Moses Stretched Out His Hand Over the Sea” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

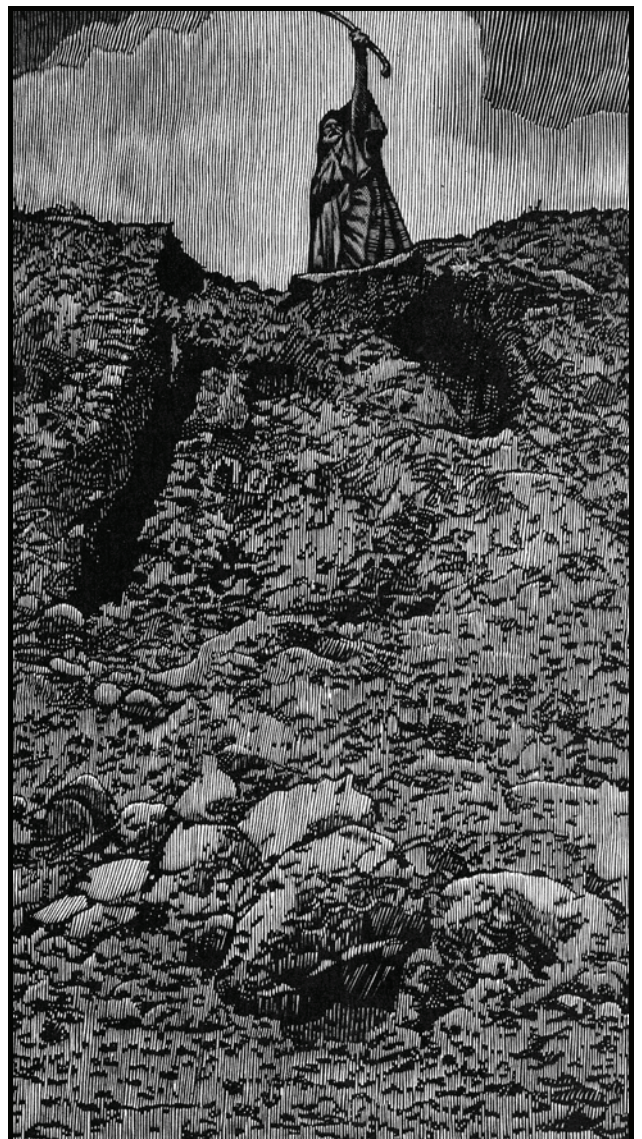
VERSE 27

“Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it and the Lord swept them into the sea.” - Moses obeys the command of God without hesitation or question. The text describes the time of these events as “*at morning’s turning*” - that is, at the first appearance of light in the eastern sky. The NIV’s “***daybreak***” captures the sense of the Hebrew. The phrase “***the sea went back to its place***” serves to emphasize the miraculous interruption of the ordinary laws of nature by which God had divided the waters and enabled the Israelites to pass through the sea. Now the normal laws of nature are reasserted and the massive walls of water which had been suspended on either side of the passage come crashing down upon the hapless Egyptians. The language of the text suggests a violent collision between the fleeing army and the thundering sea water. John Durham accurately renders these words: “*The Egyptians, taking flight, met it head-on.*” There could only be one possible result to such a collision - “***And the Lord swept them into the sea.***” The Hebrew verb in this phrase literally

means to shake loose or to shake off. It serves well to emphasize the majesty of God's awesome power as this great army is swept aside like insignificant specks of dust before Him. Isaiah 52:2 uses the word in exactly this sense (***“Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem.”***) while Psalm 109:23 uses the same verb in reference to brushing away an annoying insect (***“I am shaken off like a locust.”***). These fools had presumed to challenge the Almighty God and now they must be the penalty for their stubborn arrogance. The language of the text clearly conveys the incredible violence involved in Egypt's destruction. William Propp translates the verb as *“tumbled”* in reference to the *“head over heels motion”* of the Egyptian corpses within the swirling, surging waters of the sea.

VERSE 28

“The water flowed back and covered the chariots and the horsemen - the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.” - The terminology of the preceding verse is repeated to summarize the destruction of the entire ***“army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea.”*** The language is unmistakably emphatic. The host of Egypt was completely destroyed - down to the very last man - ***“Not one of them survived.”*** The scope of the destruction serves to heighten the supernatural, divine, nature of the event. Under ordinary circumstances, with a catastrophe involving such large numbers one would expect there to have been at least a few survivors. Here, not one single soldier escaped the justice of God's punishment. The Psalmist repeats this verse virtually word for word in his celebration of God's providential action on behalf of the Children of Israel - ***“The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.”*** (Psalm 106:12)



“Moses at the Red Sea” by Barry Moser



“Medieval Greek Orthodox Fresco of the Deliverance at the Red Sea”

VERSE 29

“But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.” - God’s complete destruction of Egypt stands in stark contrast to His perfect deliverance of Israel. The very place which brought death and devastation to the Egyptians was a haven of refuge to the Children of Israel. Where the sea bed became a trap to ensnare Pharaoh’s horsemen and his chariots and the sea water came crashing down upon them to kill them all, the Israelites walked safely ***“through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.”*** The glaring contrast of destruction and deliverance is introduced with the adversative conjunction ***“but.”***

VERSE 30

“That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore.” - This triumphant summary statement concludes the entire account of the deliverance at the Red Sea, attributing everything which took place to the miraculous intervention of the Lord on behalf of His people in fulfillment of His promise. All those critics, modern and ancient, who seek to explain these events naturally or psychologically have missed the repeated point of the inspired text:

“Yahweh rescued Israel that day from the power of the Egyptians. The manner of His doing it is incidental to the fact that Yahweh is the one who made the rescue. Not tides, not storms, not bad planning, not tactical error, not bad luck, or good luck, but Yahweh. This repeated declaration of the narrative is made still again in this resounding summary.” (Durham, p. 197)

Israel’s rescue from ***“the hands of the Egyptians”*** is designed to parallel the use of the same Hebrew noun in the following verse which describes ***“the great power”*** which God exerted on behalf of His people. The noun is commonly used in reference



“The Death of Pharaoh in the Sea’ - 19th Century Bible Illustration

to strength and power throughout the Old Testament. *“Here, Egypt’s worldly might is implicitly contrasted with the supernatural ‘hand’ of God.”* (Propp, p. 502) The inconsistent translation of the two identical words in the NIV blurs the intended contrast.

The totality of Egypt’s destruction is revealed as the sun rose and ***“Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore.”*** Josephus attributes the fact the bodies of the Egyptian dead floated to the sea shore despite their heavy armor and the weapons of war which they carried to divine intervention on behalf of Israel. In his *“Antiquities of the Jews”* the famous 1st Century historian writes:

“On the next day Moses gathered together the weapons of the Egyptians, which were brought to the camp of the Hebrews by the currents of the sea and the force of the winds assisting it; and he conjectured that this also happened by Divine Providence, so that they might not be destitute of weapons. So when he had ordered the Hebrews to arm themselves with them, he led them to Mt. Sinai.” (Josephus, Bk. II, Chapter XVI, 6)



“The Waters Returned to Their Place” by John Martin

When Israel had been terrified by the unexpected appearance of the mighty Egyptian host. Moses had promised his people that they would never see these fearsome warriors again - ***“The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.”*** (Exodus 14:14) The literal fulfillment of that promise is indicated by the repetition of its language - ***“And Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore.”*** The repetition of the identical Hebrew verb is not a coincidence. The fearsome warriors are gone forever. Now only their dead bodies remain, no longer the cause for fear but for celebration.



“The Destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea” - Vatican Fresco

Verse 31

And when Israel saw the great power the Lord had displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.”

As previously noted, the original text of this phrase literally reads ***“And when Israel saw the great hand which the Lord had displayed,”*** The natural and appropriated result of the wondrous deliverance which God had accomplished was that ***“the people feared the Lord.”*** The fear of the Lord is the reverent awe of the believer which humbly acknowledges the unique power and authority of God and give thanks and

praise to Him for His willingness to use that power on behalf of His people. This attribute is a key foundational component in all faith. As King Solomon will later declare: ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”*** (Proverbs 1:7) Martin Luther reflects this truth in the Small Catechism as he begins each of his explanations to the Ten Commandments with the phrase *“We should fear and love God.”* The text signals the nature of this reverent fear in that its immediate result is that they ***“Put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.”*** It is most significant to note that - *“The Hebrews were not saved from Egypt because they believed, but they believed because they were saved.”* (Propp, p. 502) God delivered the Children of Israel because of who He was, not because of who they were. Their rescue was not a reward for some quality or characteristic within them. God rescued them from Pharaoh despite their doubts and fears as an expression of His own unconditional love. Now, for a short time, they will fear and trust in Him, because of that which He has done for them. Human beings are fickle and unreliable, the opposite of God’s love for us which is unfailing, constant, and sure.

The miraculous events at the Red Sea also vindicated the leadership of Moses, at least for the time being. While clearly recognizing that Yahweh has been the active agent in everything which transpired, the people have correctly perceived that these events have validated the role of Moses as the authoritative spokesman of God. Throughout the balance of the forty years in the wilderness the people’s confidence in Moses will rise and fall with the level of their faith in God. When that faith falters, complaining and rebellion against Moses will inevitably follow.

The phrase ***“Moses His servant”*** designates the role of the prophet. This title will become most significant throughout the rest of the Old Testament. It will become the characteristic designation of Moses himself (cf. Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 1:1-2; 1 Kings 8:53,56; 1 Chronicles 6:49; 2 Chronicles 1;3; 24:6,9). The same title will be used to designate other pre-eminent leaders of Israel - i.e. Joshua (Joshua 24:29); Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10); David (2 Samuel 3:18); and Elijah (2 Kings 9:36). Most importantly, in the writings of the prophet Isaiah the servant title will be applied to the covenant mediator par excellence, namely the promised Messiah:

“See, My Servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted...By His knowledge my righteous Servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great, and He will divide the spoils with the strong, because He poured out His life unto death.” (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)



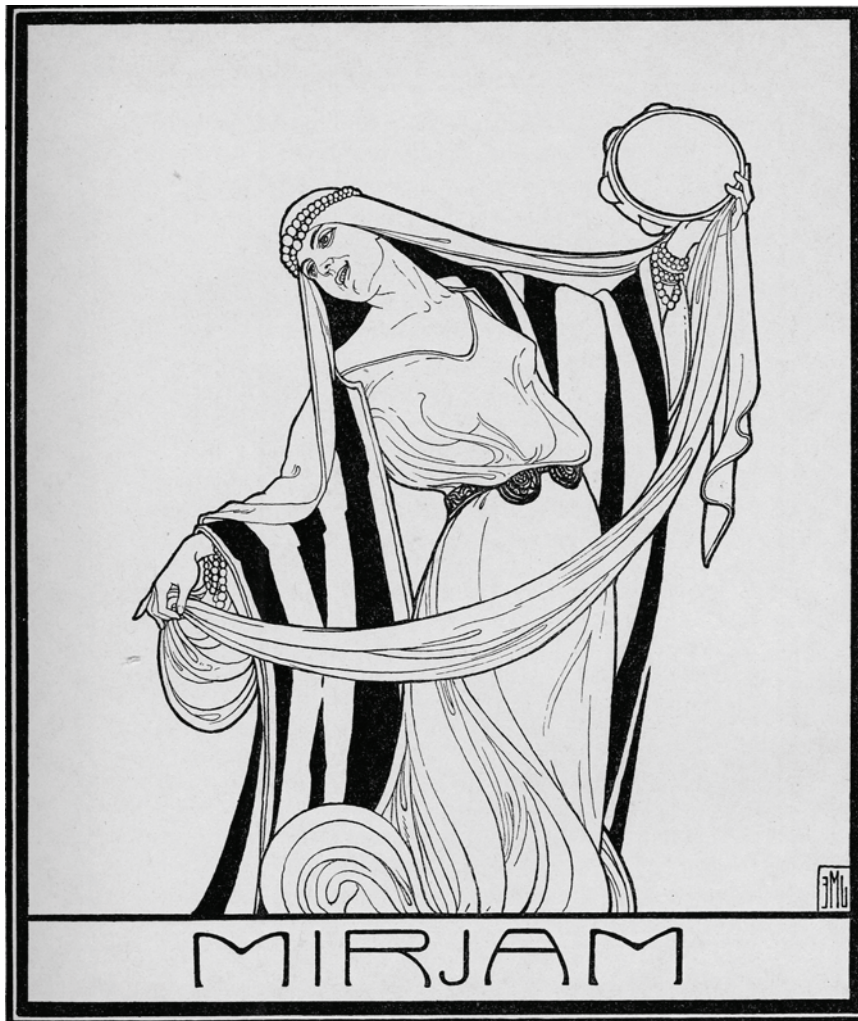
“The Celebration of Israel at the Red Sea” by William Gale

The Celebration of Israel at the Red Sea

Exodus 15:1-21

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: “I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father’s God and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a warrior, the Lord is His Name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty You threw down those who opposed You. You unleashed Your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble. By the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’ But You blew Your breath and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who among the gods is like You, O Lord? Who is like You - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You stretched out Your right hand and the earth swallowed them. In Your unfailing

love you will lead the people You have redeemed. In Your strength You will guide them to Your holy dwelling. The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of Your arm they will be as still as stone - until Your people pass by. You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of Your inheritance - the place, O Lord, You made for Your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, Your hands established. The Lord will reign forever and ever.” When Pharaoh’s horses and chariots went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters of the sea, back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.”



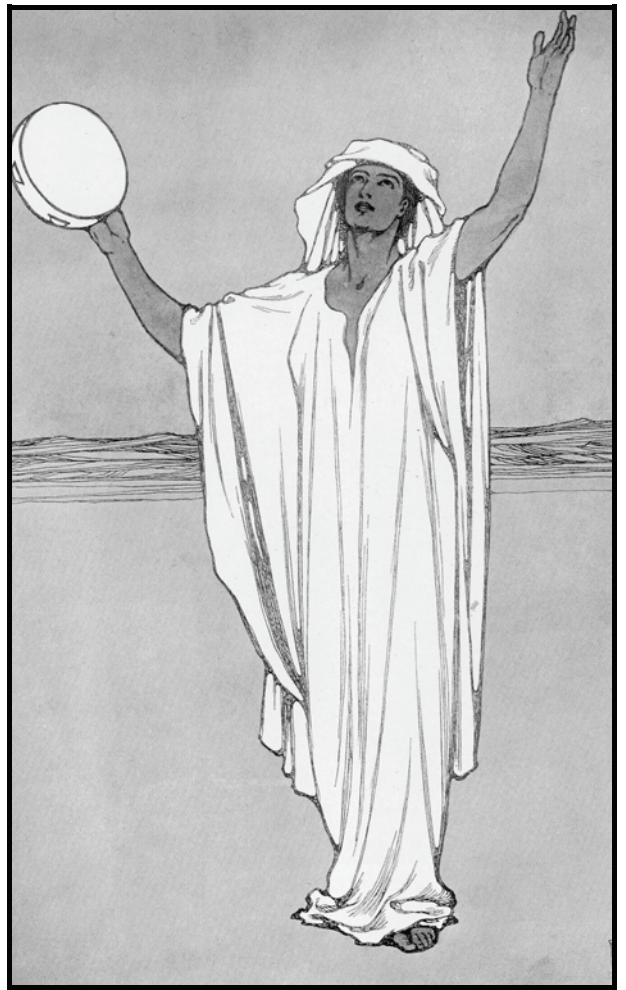
VERSE 1

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: ‘I will sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.’” - There are

times when the only appropriate response to that which God has accomplished on our behalf is a spontaneous song of thanksgiving and praise. This is most certainly one such time, and that is exactly the manner in which Israel responds to the deliverance which God has bestowed upon them. Based on the heading of this Chapter - ***“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord”*** - this magnificent composition is traditionally called ***“The Song of Moses.”*** This usage is reinforced by Revelation 15's vision of ***“those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.”*** This great host was arrayed beside ***“what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire.”***

These obvious allusions to the deliverance of the Children of Israel at the Red Sea concludes with the observation: ***“They held harps given to them by God and sang the Song of Moses, the Servant of God and the Song of the Lamb.”*** (Revelation 15:2-3) In Hebrew tradition, however, this magnificent composition is simply designated as ***“the Song of the Sea,”*** perhaps because there is another ***“Song of Moses”*** recorded in Deuteronomy 32:1-43 as a part of the Prophet's farewell. That Song of Moses is presented to the Israelites in this way:

“And Moses recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel...Moses came to Joshua, son of Nun, and spoke all the words of this song in the hearing of the people. When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, ‘Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully



“Miriam’s Song of Praise and Thanksgiving”
by Jennie Wylie

all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.” (Deuteronomy 31:30; 32:44-47)

This most notable feature of Moses’ lyrical celebration of victory is the fact that God is given full and exclusive credit for that which has been achieved. In fact, there is no mention of Moses whatsoever. John Mackay marvels at this remarkable demonstration of authentic humility:

“However, one of the most remarkable features of the Song at the Sea is that there is no mention made of Moses at all. This sets it apart from Judges 5 and also typical pagan victory hymns which focus on the exploits of their king or hero. The absence of references to Moses’ role is all the more remarkable after the conclusion of the previous chapter,



“The Thanksgiving of the Israelites” by N. Poussin



“The Crossing of the Red Sea” by Antonio Tempesta

“the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant” (14:31). Guided by Moses himself, they sing of hymn of praise that focuses exclusively on the Lord (who is named ten times) and what He has done.” (Mackay, p. 262)

This emphasis is already clear in the introduction to the song itself - **“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.”** Thus, *“Yahweh is both the subject and the object of this psalm; the hymn is about Him and to Him.”* (Durham, p. 205)

“I will sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted.” This magnificent song of praise begins with the first person singular verb **“I will sing”** which, under the circumstances, can only refer to Moses. The faithful prophet who had extended his hand over the passage through the sea to send its mighty waters crashing down upon



“The Song of Miriam” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

the great host of Egypt now bursts forth into jubilant song, praising **“the Lord”** (“Yah” - the characteristic abbreviation of “Yahweh” used in poetic compositions. This usage survives in the English transliteration - “Hallelujah” - literally “hallelu - jah” that is, “Praise the Lord!”) by whose power this mighty act of deliverance has been accomplished. The following phrase explains the reason for this outburst of praise. It is introduced with the preposition **“for”** (Hebrew “ki”). The NIV translates the balance of the phrase **“He is highly exalted”** - namely by His crushing victory over His foes. Cassutto offers the more explicit translation - *“For He has triumphed gloriously.”* This rendering certainly does a more effective job of conveying the sense of the text.

“The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.” - The language of the text expresses the cataclysmic violence of the destruction which God inflicted upon the Egyptians. They did not merely drown, nor sink slowly into the rising waters. They were **“hurled into the sea.”** As the massive walls of water which had guarded the passage of Israel came crashing down upon the Egyptians it swept them away into the

deepest depths of the Red Sea. The reference in this phrase is not to cavalry men, riding on horseback, as the English might suggest, but to the drivers of Pharaoh's elite chariot corps who were snatched out of their proud golden chariots and carried off to a horrible death far below the churning surface of the sea.

VERSES 2-3

“The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, my father’s God and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name.” - Using the poetic abbreviation “Yah” once again, Moses acknowledges the Lord as the sole source of his strength. That divine strength at work on behalf of Moses and of Israel now enables them to sing the song of joy and celebrate that which God has done for them. The Lord alone is the cause of their deliverance as they rejoice - ***“He has become my salvation.”*** These words become a standard expression of Israel’s gratitude to God and an acknowledgment of their absolute dependence upon Him throughout the balance of the Old Testament. They are repeated, virtually verbatim in Psalms and in Isaiah: ***“The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation.”*** (Psalm 118:14); ***“The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”*** (Isaiah 12:2)

“He is my God and I will praise Him, my father’s God and I will exalt Him.” - The



“Rejoicing in the Deliverance at the Sea” by J. James Tissot



“Moses” by Michealangelo

prophet does not hesitate to offer his own very personal confession of faith in God - ***“He is my God.”*** Intellectual knowledge of the truth about God and factual acceptance of that which God can do is no substitute for the personal trust relationship which binds the believer to God. That trust, and that trust alone, constitutes saving faith. The inevitable result of such a personal relationship with God is the irrepressible desire to praise and glorify Him. Those who claim to be believers but who are not animated by that yearning to praise and glorify Him are either deluding themselves or have been deceived by the devil. True faith and joyful praise necessarily go hand in hand with one another - ***“He is my God and I will praise Him.”***

“My father’s God and I will exalt Him.” - Little is known of Amram, the father of Moses beyond the fact that he was a member of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 2:1). Rabbinic tradition, as is so often the case, provided an

abundance of extra-biblical detail. Louis Ginzberg reports the teaching of the rabbis’ in this way:

“As for Amram, not only did he belong to the tribe of Levi, distinguished for its piety, but by reason of his extraordinary piety he was prominent even among the pious of the tribe. He was one of the four who were immaculate, untainted by sin, over whom death would have had not power had not death been decreed against every single human being on account of the fall of the first man and woman...Amram’s sagacity kept pace with his piety and his learning. The Egyptians had succeeded in enslaving the Hebrews by seductive promises. At first they gave them a shekel for every brick they made, tempting them to superhuman efforts by the prospect of earning much money. Later, when the Egyptians forced them to work without wages, they insisted upon having as many

bricks as the Hebrews had made when their labor was being paid for, but they could demand only a single brick daily from Amram, for he had been the only one whom they had not led astray by their artifice. He had been satisfied with a single shekel daily, and had therefore made only a single brick daily, which they had to accept afterwards as the measure of his daily work.” (Ginzberg, II, p.259)

The rabbis further declared that Amram was the President of the Sanhedrin at that time and that God came to him in a vision to foretell the birth of the deliverer from the womb of his 126 year old wife, as a reward for his piety. Fanciful traditions notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that Amram was a faithful believer for this was indicated by God Himself as He identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush: **“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the god of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”** (Exodus 3:6). Moses recalls that heritage, and implicitly all of the blessings which God had bestowed upon the patriarchs in his recognition of the Lord as **“my father’s God.”** Israel was the beneficiary of the covenant commitments which God had graciously made to their forefathers. Moses acknowledges that their deliverance at the sea was, in a very real sense, the fulfillment of those ancient promises.



“Moses Destroying the Host of Pharaoh” - 9th Century Ethiopian Bible Illustration

Moses' response to the fulfillment of the promises which God had made to the patriarchs of Israel is the fervent desire to ***“exalt”*** Him. The root meaning of this Hebrew verb refers to the raising or elevation of an objection of worship so that all may humble themselves in adoration before it. The word also carries the connotation of building so that Moses' words here may imply the resolve to construct a temple or shrine in which the systematic worship of God could occur. In this way, the song anticipates the building of the Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem. Hebrew scholar Dr. Nahum Sarna reflects this understanding of the term in his translation - *“This is my God and I will enshrine Him.”*



“The Deliverance at the Sea” - Italian Renaissance Fresco

“The Lord is warrior...” - On the eve of the sea crossing, Moses had promised the Children of Israel - ***“The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still.”*** (Exodus 14:14) In the midst of their distress the Egyptians had fearfully confessed: ***“Let’s get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt!”*** (Exodus 14:25) The prophet now rejoices as he affirms the perfect fulfillment of that promise and the accuracy of the enemy’s fears. God’s people may face their foes without fear,

no matter how overwhelming the earthly odds may appear to be. Before the mighty Philistine giant Goliath, young David would fearlessly proclaim the confidence which is God's gift to every believer: ***"All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give all of you into our hands."*** (1 Samuel 17:47) The Hebrew text literally reads *"a man of battle."* The closest parallel to this specific language in the Old Testament is Isaiah 42:14 where the prophet rejoices: ***"The Lord will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior He will stir up His zeal; with a shout He will raise the battle cry and will triumph over His enemies."*** It must be noted that this concept bears no resemblance to the various forms of holy war advocated across the centuries, most particularly to the unique Islamic ideal of *"jihad"* as a religious duty. In this instance, it is God who does the fighting, not thru His people but for His people. Israel is the passive observer of a victory achieved solely by the power of God. In the same sense the Old Testament frequently refers to God as ***"the Lord of Hosts"*** (literally - *"the Lord of Armies"*). So, for example, Zechariah declares that the Lord of Hosts achieves His victories without resorting to the puny means of men: ***"Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts."*** (Zechariah 4:6)



"Miriam at the Red Sea"

"The Lord is His Name!" - The very name of God is vibrant with power. This is the sacred name which God had revealed to Moses at the burning bush, the name which expresses the essence of God's nature. God is the only independent existence, the only reality which does not owe its existence to another. God does not have a source. He is the source of everything else that exists. That is what it means to be God and thus there can be only one God. He is and must be *"sui generis"* - in a category or class unique to Himself. The prophet Hosea uses virtually the same language as he

identifies the plaintiff in God’s complaint against the wickedness and ingratitude of His people: *“the Lord God of Hosts, the Lord is His Name of renown.”* (Hosea 12:5)



“The Crossing of the Red Sea’ by Arnold Friberg

VERSES 4-5

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He had hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank into the depths like a stone.”

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has hurled into the sea.” - The finest military force ever devised by man posed no threat to the Lord of Hosts. The language of violent destruction and devastation mirrors that of Verse 1 - *“The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.”* The Hebrew verb *“hurled”* is actually a different term in this verse, but if there is any difference in meaning, the latter is more violent than the former. This verb is also used at times to describe the launching of an arrow from the bow. Particular emphasis is placed upon the fact that these were the elite units among all of the vast hosts of mighty Egypt. *“The best of Pharaoh’s officers were drowned in the Red Sea.”* These are not conscript border garrisons whose defeat

might be attributed to their own incompetence. These are Egypt's finest sons.

“The deep waters have covered them; they sank into the depths like a stone.” - Once again the Hebrew text uses the powerful word *“tehom”* which occurs in the creation account of Genesis to describe the bottomless depths across which the Spirit of God had moved in the beginning and from which God caused the dry land to appear. The language serves as a reminder of the truth the Pharaoh and his host had presumed to challenge the divine Creator of all things. It further serves as a warning of the high price which must be paid when the creature dares to defy the Creator. The sea is mentioned four times in these two verses as the massive agent of God's destruction. The most magnificent and powerful force in all of nature is nothing more than a tool to be used to carry out the judgement of Almighty God. The utter destruction of these unfortunate warriors is expressed with the metaphor of a heavy stone sinking quickly into the dark waters never to be seen again. As it is impossible to cause a stone to float, so it would have been impossible for the soldiers of Egypt to escape the judgement of God.



“Pharaoh's Horsemen and His Chariots He Has Hurlled Into the Sea” by Samuel Colman

VERSES 6-8

“Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of Your majesty You threw down those who opposed You. You unleashed Your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble. By the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.”

“Your right hand, O Lord was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.” - The ***“right hand”*** of God is a verbal image which describes God’s almighty power and strength throughout the Old Testament. The image occurs with particular frequency in the poetry of the Book of Psalms. So, for example, in Psalm 17, David prays that God might exercise His power in defense of His people:

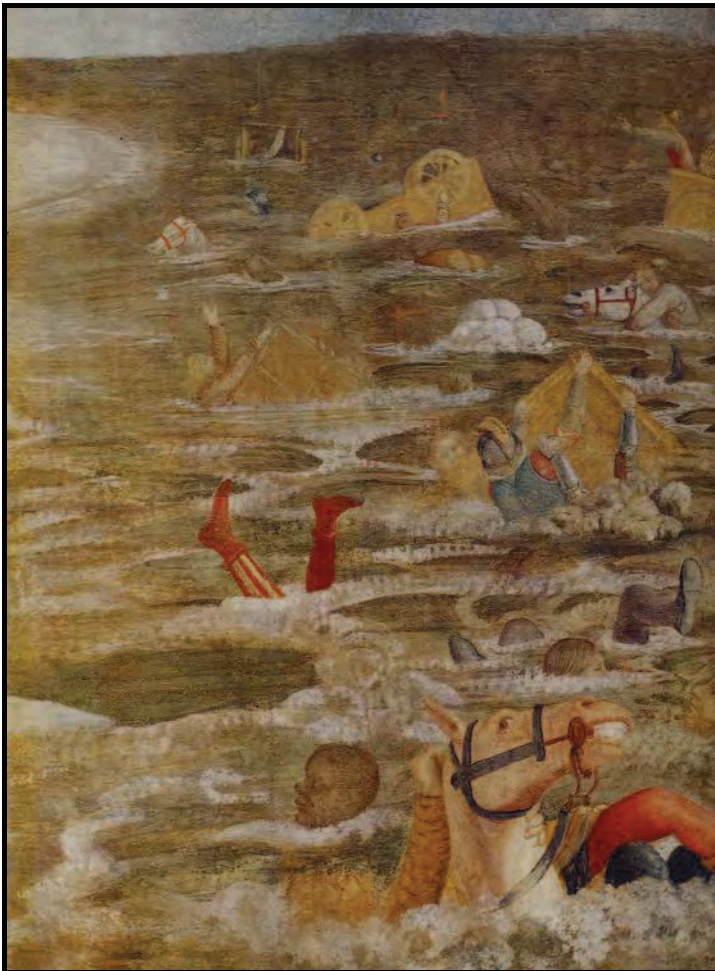
“Show the wonder of Your great love, You who save by Your right hand those who take refuge in You from their foes...O Lord, by Your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life.”

(Psalm 17:7,14). Later, in Psalm 60, David affirms the absolute dependance of God’s people upon His deliverance:

“Save and help us with Your right hand, that those You love may be delivered...Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless.” (Psalm 60:5,11). One of the most dramatic uses of this phrase in the Book of Psalms is included in the magnificent song of praise contained in Psalm 118:

“Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: The Lord’s right hand has done mighty things! The Lord’s right hand is lifted high; the Lord’s right hand has done mighty things!” (Psalm 118:15-16)

Moses addresses the Lord directly to praise Him for the wonder of



“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh”
15th Century Italian fresco

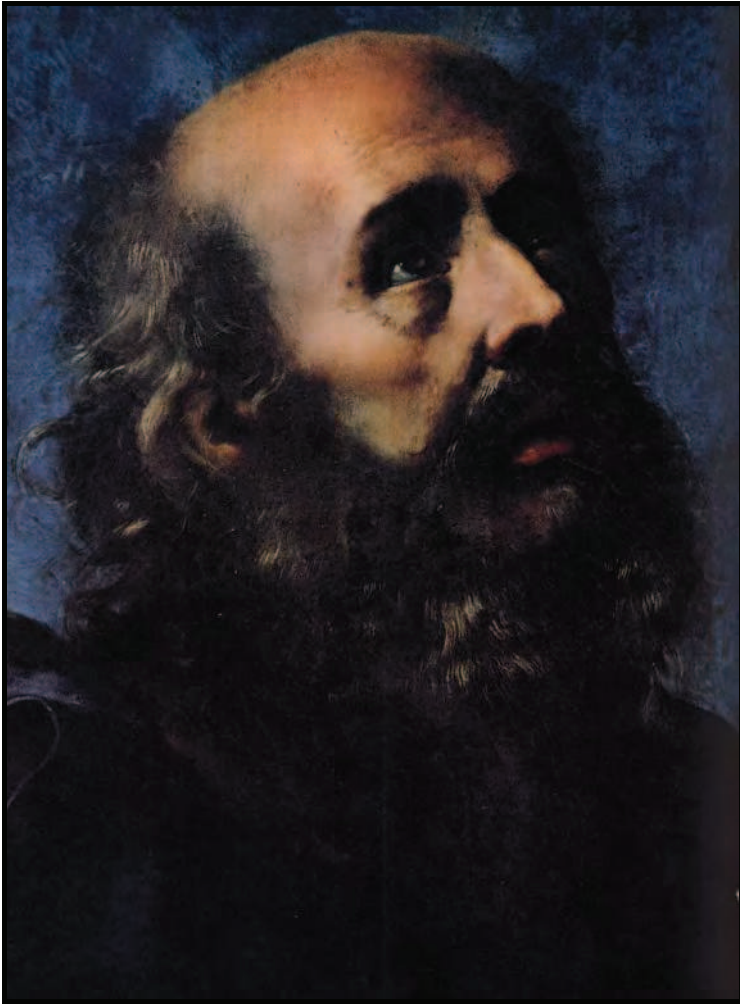
that which He has done. The **“right hand”** of God **“was majestic in power.”** The Hebrew adjective here translated as **“majestic”** means **“awe inspiring”** or **“glorious.”** The power which God demonstrated in the deliverance of His people at the Red Sea was nothing less than awe-inspiring. Seldom - if ever - throughout the long history of mankind has the divine power of the Lord been seen on a scale comparable to that which Israel had witnessed in this magnificent event. As previously noted, this event became the paradigm for God’s ability to rescue His own throughout the balance of Scripture. At the same time, what happened at the Sea served as a source of intimidation and consternation for Israel’s enemies throughout the rest of the wilderness wandering and the conquest of the land of Canaan. It was indeed **“majestic.”**



**“Israel’s Celebration at the Sea”
by Bernardo Luini**

This most effective image continues in the phrase which follows. Still addressing God directly, Moses dramatically describes the effect of God’s power upon the host of Egypt - **“Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.”** The impact of God’s power on the Egyptians was not ambiguous or inconclusive. They were totally destroyed. The verb **“shattered”** refers to nothing less than utter annihilation, reasserting the earlier narrative description in Verse 28 - **“Not one of them survived.”** Some commentators insist that the language implies that in this instance the hand of God held a weapon. As one loftily declares: **“God is a soldier, not a brawler.”** (Propp, p. 519) Such quibbling misses the point of the metaphor altogether.

“In the greatness of Your majesty You threw down those who opposed You.” - The noun **“greatness”** carries the negative connotation of arrogance when it is applied to



“The Song of Moses” by Carlo Dolci

a human being in Scripture. Applied to God, the word is perfectly appropriate, for his greatness is absolute and indisputable. As the simple children’s table prayer matter-of-factly declares: *“God is great, God is good; let us thank Him for our food. Amen.”*

“You threw down those who opposed You.” - The language in the second phrase of this couplet (combination of two lines) reflects that of its counterpart in the preceding couplet - ***Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.*** The meaning in both phrases is basically the same, referring to the catastrophic destruction of the entire Egyptian army (***“those who opposed you.”***). In the Hebrew text the language is beautifully alliterative as it narrates the utter devastation brought about by the power of God.

The totality of that judgement indicates the futility and the folly of those who would set themselves against the power of the Almighty Creator.

“You unleashed Your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.” - The verbal image shifts to another common word picture for the wrath of God, as the Lord’s right hand gives way to a blazing fire which completely consumes those who have brazenly provoked God’s righteous anger. The Hebrew noun *“haron”* (NIV - ***“burning anger”***) is used exclusively in reference to God in Scripture. It is drawn from a root which refers to the searing white hot flames of the fire which consumes everything in its path. So also the fury of God just judgement is irrepressible. No man - not even the proud monarch of the earth’s mightiest nation - can stand before Him. The all-consuming power of this judgement fire is compared to the racing flames that surge across a field of dry stubble in a flash after the completion of the harvest.

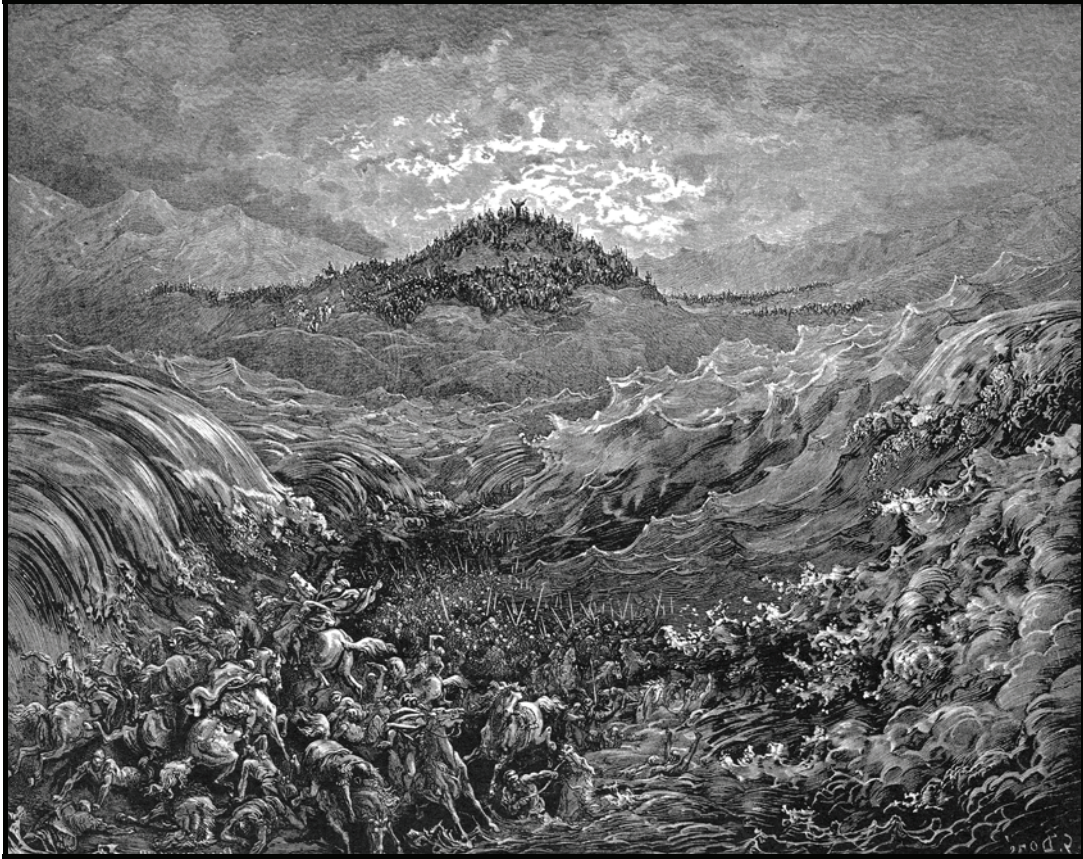


“The Surging Waters Stood Still Like a Wall” by Simon Bisley

“By the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up.” - The imagery shifts yet again as the winds which parted the sea are depicted as a mighty blast from the ***“nostrils”*** of God. David uses the same image in his song of praise celebrating the manner in which God had delivered him from the Philistines: ***“The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth were laid bare at the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of breath from His nostrils.”*** (2 Samuel 22:16) The King’s language is clearly an allusion to the Song of Moses and the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea. This terminology is typically associated with anger in Hebrew idiom and a number of contemporary translators render this opening words of this phrase - ***“the wind of your anger.”*** That understanding of the text would certainly be appropriate in this context. The result of ***“the blast of Your nostrils”*** is that ***“the waters piled up.”*** The natural fluid state of the sea water was transformed to become firm as the waters were heaped up upon one another to facilitate the safe passage of the Israelites between them. Within the lyric parallelism of the song the phrase which follows describes the miracle yet again.



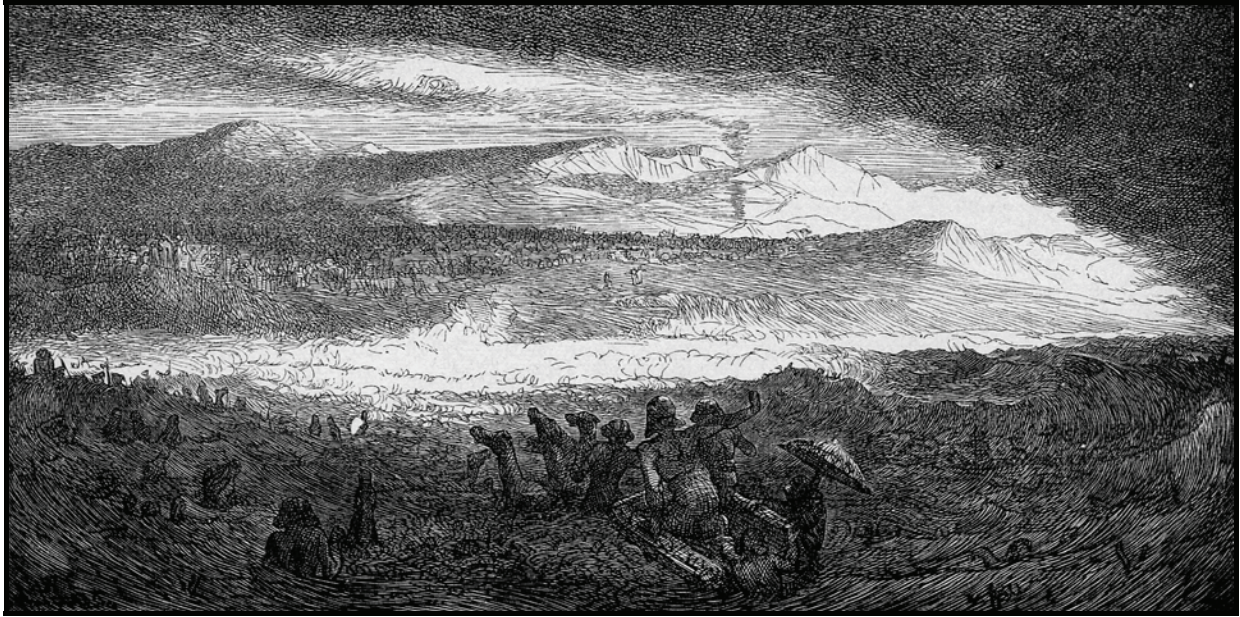
“Deliverance at the Red Sea’ by Raphael



“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh” by Gustav Dore

“The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.” - Moses draws the vivid contrast between the natural condition of *“the surging waters”* of the sea and their miraculous transformation by the power of God into a solid immovable substance that *“stood firm like a wall.”* *“Surging”* refers to the constant motion which ordinarily characterizes sea water with its swirling currents and endless waves. A solid wall which is carefully designed to stand firm and strong is the exact opposite of that fluid motion. The second phrase in the couplet reiterates and amplifies the contrast - *“the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.”* This is language which describes the formation of solids from liquids, most commonly to the formation of ice as water freezes.

“The poet has been developing a progressively paradoxical and miraculous image; the waters are first piled up, not unusual in a storm, but then they actually stand upright! How? Because some of the waters, the ‘deeps,’ have congealed, presumably into ice. To heighten the miracle, the ice does not float to the surface but remains vertical ‘in the Sea’s heart’ until melted by Yahweh’s second blast.” (Propp, p. 523)



“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

VERSE 9

“The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’”

“The enemy boasted...” - Moses personifies Pharaoh and his army as one hostile entity - ***“the enemy.”*** His evil intentions toward the people of Israel are expressed in a rapid-fire series of five verbs which are not separated by conjunctions as would ordinarily have been the case. ***“The staccato alliterative*** (the Hebrew verbs all begin with the letter aleph.) ***conveys haste as well as confidence that conquest will be easy. Perhaps the effect is that of panting.”*** (Propp, p. 524) With this clever use of words Moses mimics and mocks ***“the arrogant self-confidence and vainglorious boasting of the foe.”*** (Sarna, p. 79) Of course, all of this was to turn out much differently than mighty Pharaoh had anticipated!

“I will pursue, I will overtake them.” - The first two verbs recall the historical narrative of the preceding Chapter 14: ***“The Egyptians - all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops - pursued the Israelites and overtook them.”*** (Exodus 14:9). The chase had begun exactly as Pharaoh anticipated. Chariots and horsemen had no difficulty at all overtaking the slowly moving host of Israelites. No doubt, it never ever occurred to the haughty Egyptians that this was precisely what God had planned and that the Israelite meandering in the desert was specifically designed to draw them into the deathtrap.

“I will divide the spoils.” - The division of the plunder is the result of absolute and total victory. The promise of abundant booty was often used in the ancient world as an inducement to bring reluctant warriors into battle. In this instance, the subtle inference may be that Pharaoh had some difficulty motivating his army to go after the Israelites. At the same time the language mockingly recalls the riches of Egypt which had been bestowed upon the Israelites after the tenth plague as a panicked Egyptian nation wanted only to be rid of their former slaves - ***“The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.”*** (Exodus 12:36)

“I will gorge myself on them.” - The image of that of a vicious beast of prey devouring the carcass of its helpless victim, ripping and tearing until it is completely stuffed and can eat no more. The emphasis of the language is on the inability of the victim to prevent or limit this feast. The Hebrew text literally reads - *“my soul shall have its fill of them.”* The enemy believed that Egypt’s desire for blood vengeance would be fully satiated.

“I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.” - The image of the wild beast passes to be replaced by the more literal picture of the mighty warrior. The



“The Pursuit of the Hebrews” by Frederic Bridgman

elegant language of the poem contrasts the full jaws of the predator in the preceding line with the empty sheath of the warrior. This phrase reads *“I will empty my sword”* - that is, withdraw it from its scabbard while its counterpart had said *“my gullet will be full of them.”* The word play makes the glee of the enemy at the prospect of Israel’s destruction all the more evident. In a stunning display of arrogance and self-destructive pride Egypt boasts *“my hand will destroy them.”* In Hebrew idiom, the hand, the arm or the right arm all represent power. The major theme of the Song of the Sea is the effortless ease with which the power (hand - arm) of God destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the waters of the sea. The Song is introduced by Exodus 14:31 which reports - *“And Israel saw the great arm that Yahweh made in Egypt, and the people feared Yahweh and trusted in Yahweh and in Moses His slave.”* In these empty words Egypt directly pits itself against the power of God and asserts its ability to overcome and defeat that power. God’s response will be asserted in Verse 12 - *“You stretched out Your right hand and the earth swallowed them.”* William Propp aptly describes this phrase as *“the ultimate hybris.”* (Propp, p. 525)



“They Sank Like lead” - 19th Century Illustration by Robert Leinweber



“The Deliverance at the Sea” by Carolsfeld

VERSES 10-11

But You blew Your breath and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who among the gods is like You, O Lord? Who is like You - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

“But You blew Your breath and the sea covered them.” - The Lord’s response to the boastful assertion of Egypt’s power is signaled by the adversative conjunction ***“but.”*** Once again, the words are straightforward and matter of fact. The outcome in this matter was never in doubt, all of the enemy’s proud pretensions notwithstanding. There is an almost serene confidence in these words. God had the situation completely under control from the very beginning. The imagery of the ***“breath”*** of God as the agency which accomplished the movement of the sea water recalls the earlier language of Verse 8 - ***“By the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up.”*** The disappearance of Pharaoh and his host ***“like lead in the mighty waters”*** also re-iterates the previous ***“The deep waters have covered them. They sank to the depths like a stone.”*** (Verse 5) The Hebrew in this phrase is particularly intense. Nahum Sarna suggests the English translation ***“they plummeted”*** to convey the full sense of the original text.

“Who among the gods is like You, O Lord?” - Moses celebrates the uniqueness of

God's almighty power as he dismisses the so-called gods of the pagans. All of the heathen idols of other nations are false, either in the sense that they do not exist or that they are demonic spirits whose powers are strictly limited by the one God who alone controls all things. The vast pantheon of Egypt is the particular target of scorn in this verse. If they were what the Egyptians claimed them to be they should have protected



"Egypt's Destruction at the Sea" by Maestrienni

their devotees, but they could not and did not, thus revealing themselves to be false gods. Only the divine Creator could have controlled the wind and waves of the sea in the manner which had occurred here. Three successive phrases describe the unique characteristics of the one true God. God is **"majestic in holiness."** **"Holiness"** means to be set apart or distinct. The glory of God is that there is none other like Him. *"This points to all that separates Him off from the created realm."* (MacKay, p. 269) God is not a part of creation. He is necessarily *"sui generis"* in a category or class by Himself. He does not have a source, He is the Source of everything else that exists. By Biblical definition that is the very essence of divinity. The one true God is **"awesome in glory."** The only appropriate response of the creature to the divine Creator is to fall down before Him in adoration and awe. Anything else would be blasphemy. **"Working wonders"** - That which took place at the Red Sea was but a glimpse His glorious power, power which is beyond our comprehension and

expression. The Hebrew word translated *"wonders"* refers to supernatural interventions in the normal course of events which evoke awe in those who witness them. *"This is the essence of Yahweh's incomparability; He alone performs miracles."* (Propp, p. 528) Moses explicitly declared this to be the case in Deuteronomy 4:34-35 with the assertion that the wonders which God performed for Israel in Egypt proved that He is the one and the only God -

“Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides Him there is no other.”

VERSE 12

“You stretched out Your right hand and the earth swallowed them.”

“You stretched out Your hand...” - This succinct summary statement concludes Moses’ description of God’s total destruction of Pharaoh and the host of Egypt. The image of God’s outstretched hand - through the outstretched hand of His servant Moses - as the agency through which the miracle at the sea was accomplished is pervasive throughout the Old Testament. The Deuteronomy text previously cited celebrates what God did ***“by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”*** (Deuteronomy 4:34) Deuteronomy’s restatement of the Ten Commandments uses the same language in its expansion of the Third Commandment: ***“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”*** (Deuteronomy 5:15) Moses pleaded with the people to remember what God had accomplished on their behalf when they reached the Promised Land: ***“So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders.”*** (Deuteronomy 26:8) In his prophetic warning of impending doom to the King of Tyre Isaiah recalled that which God had done at the Red Sea: ***“Go through your land; the Daughter of Tarshish, like the Nile, will no longer be a haven for you. The Lord stretched out His hand over the sea and made its kingdoms tremble.”*** (Isaiah 23:10-11)

“And the earth swallowed them” - This phrase is most probably a figurative expression which means that the Egyptians were overtaken by death. The verb ***“swallowed”*** refers to the action of a hungry predator gulping down the flesh of its prey. The Hebrew word ***“eretz”*** is frequently used to describe death or the grave, the place of the dead. A most dramatic example of this usage is provided by Isaiah’s vision of the destruction of Jerusalem beneath the hand of God’s judgement: ***“Brought low you will speak from the ground (“eretz”); your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will come ghostlike from the earth (“eretz”); out of the dust your speech will whisper.”*** (Isaiah 29:4; cf. Also 1 Samuel 28:13)



“The deliverance at the Sea” - Illustration from a 19th Century Children’s Bible Story Book

VERSE 13

“In Your unfailing love You will lead the people You have redeemed. In Your strength You will guide them to Your holy dwelling.”

“In Your unfailing love...” - Having dealt with God’s almighty power and His perfect justice, Moses now turns to the all important subject of His ***“unfailing love.”*** The Hebrew word is *“hesed.”* This most significant noun speaks of God’s covenant love. Its counterpart in the New Testament is *“grace”* (Greek - *“charis”*). God loves because it is His nature to love. We cannot earn or deserve that love. God loves us because of who He is, not because of who we are. As the expression of His love God puts forward the promises of the Gospel, the good news of that which He will do (OT) or has done (NT) to accomplish our salvation. He gives to us the gift of faith, to trust in those promises and believe His Word. In the Old Testament, this love was expressed in the covenant which God established with Israel. *“By ‘unfailing love’ Moses meant God’s covenant keeping love, His absolute loyalty to His people, and His faithfulness to His promise. God had proved His love to Israel over and over.*

Everything that had happened to this point in the Book of Exodus was motivated by God's love. He had kept all of his love promises to Israel." (Ryken, p. 409) The nation of Israel was **"the people You have redeemed."** This fascinating word refers to the payment of a ransom price to buy back a hostage or a slave and thereby restore his freedom. In this context the term most naturally describes the liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. In the broader context of Scripture *"redemption"* becomes one of the most significant words to describe God's plan for the salvation of humanity as the divine Father pays the ransom price for the liberation of mankind from bondage to sin and death in the precious blood of His only Son.

"In Your strength You will guide them to Your holy dwelling." - As the only God the Lord possesses the **"strength"** to accomplish His purpose on behalf of those whom He has redeemed. Moses here returns to a theme which he has mentioned at the beginning of his song of praise - ***"The Lord is my strength and has become my song."*** (Exodus 15:2) In this instance God's purpose for His people is defined in terms of guiding them ***"to Your holy dwelling."*** The verb **"guide"** carries the



"The Departure of Israel from Egypt" by Jonathon Heiss

connotation of a shepherd leading his flock (cf. Psalm 23:2). The identification of ***“Your holy dwelling”*** has been the subject of considerable controversy among the commentators. Mt. Sinai, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, or the entire Promised Land have been suggested as the intended location. The best interpretation may be all of the above. The emphasis of the text does not appear to be upon a particular location, but on the reality that God graciously dwells there in the midst of His people. Wherever that divine indwelling occurs the miraculous purpose of God has been accomplished. It is not the sacred nature of the place but the condescension of God which brings about the miracle of His presence in the midst of His people.



“Who Among the Gods Is Like You, O Lord?”

VERSES 14-16

“The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of Your arm they will be as still as stone -until Your people pass by, O Lord, until the people You bought pass by.”

“The nations will hear and tremble” - That which god has done to liberate His people from Egyptian bondage, the ten plagues and the destruction of the army of Pharaoh will strike terror into the hearts of Israel’s potential enemies. The news of the miracles which God performed in Egypt will quickly spread throughout the region intimidating and immobilizing those who might otherwise consider opposing the



“Pharaoh’s Army Engulfed in the Red Sea” by Frederic Arthur Bridgman

Israelite advance toward the Promised Land. The words of Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, reflect the precise accuracy of this expectation:

“I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt.” (Joshua 2: 9-10)

“The nations will hear” includes all of the peoples on the southern and western approaches to the land and the inhabitants of Canaan itself. *“And tremble”* is the first in a series of seven Hebrew verbs - each growing more intense than its predecessors - which convey a growing sense of dread and panic. *“Tremble”* describes the physical shudders which are the expression of intense fear. The prophet Habakkuk used the same physical terminology to describe man’s fear before the judgement of God: *“I heard and my heart pounded; my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled.”* (Habakkuk 3:16)



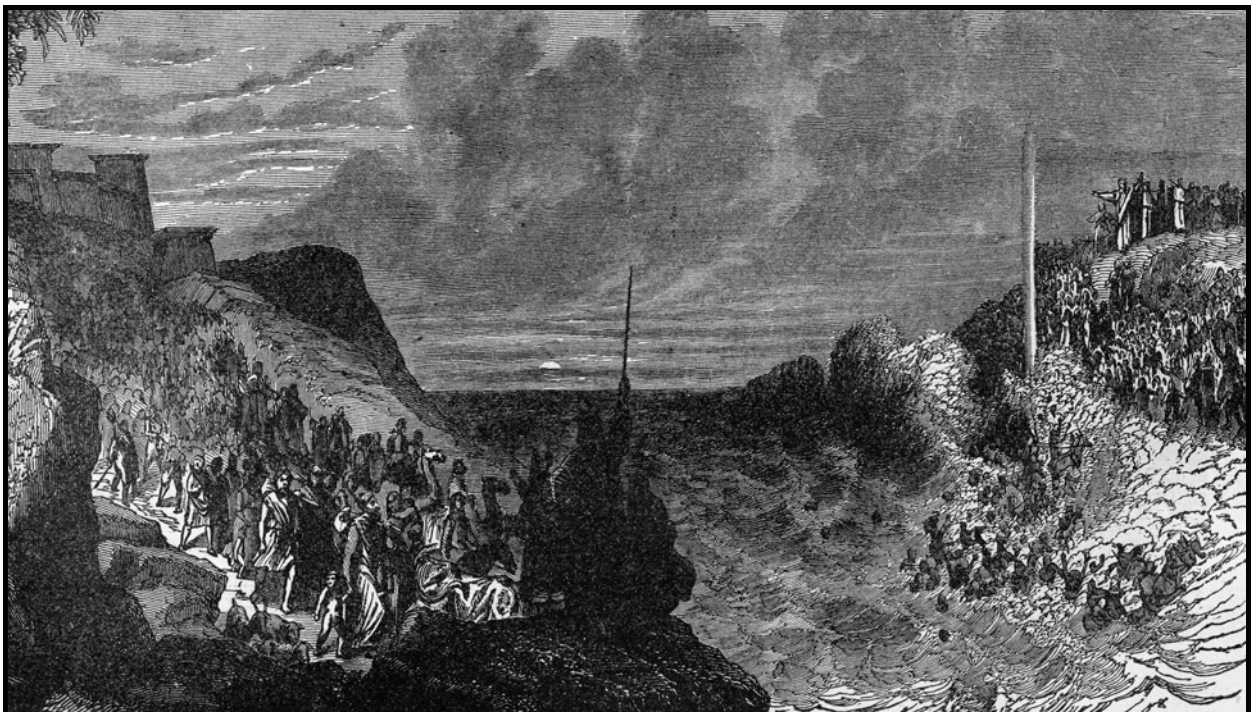
*“The Death of Pharaoh in the Red Sea” - 17th Century Luther Bible Woodcut
 “Because Pharaoh Wanted to Capture the People in the Depths, So He and His Might Were
 Destroyed Therein. What a Marvel! That the Punishment of Death Came Upon the One
 Who, With a Hardened Heart, had Lost All Self-Control!”*

“Anguish will grip the people of Philistia” - The nations are listed in roughly the order that Israel would have encounter them on a journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan. The Philistine Confederation was the guardian of Canaan’s southwestern coast, the most direct route from Egypt toward Fertile Crescent. The Philistines were sea people, raiders and traders who remained a threat to the Hebrews well into the days of the monarchy. These formidable foes are literally described as *“seized by convulsions.”* This is very strong language characteristically used in reference to one who is physically incapacitated by utter terror.

“The chiefs of Edom will be terrified.” - The nation of Edom was located on the east side of the rift valley which extends from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Dead Sea. The Edomites were descendants of Esau. Their name in Hebrew is derived from a root which means *“red,”* most probably derived from the red sandstone which characterized the high plateau upon which they lived. Esau was also called red because of the red color of the porridge for which he sold his birthright to his devious brother Jacob. The text uses the appropriate title *“chiefs”* for the rulers of Edom. (Cf.

Genesis 36). The term literally refers to a “*bull*.” These were non-hereditary tribal chieftains, similar to the later judges of Israel. The Israelites later skirted around the land of Edom, rather than confront this powerful foe. The Edomites remained active enemies of Israel throughout the days of Saul and David. At this point, their leader recognize the threat posed by Israel and are gravely concerned about that threat. The verb which describes them here is variously translated “*perturbed*” or ‘*dismayed*.” Unlike its counterparts in the list, this verb describes an emotional state rather than a physical reaction.

“*The leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling.*” - The rulers of the Moabites are identified with a title which literally means “*rams*” or “*mighty men.*” The Kingdom of Moab was located north of Edom on the east side of the the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. It was a prosperous realm well situated for trade and suited for successful agriculture. Genesis informs us that Moab was the son of Lot and his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:37). Balak the King of Moab hired the sorcerer Balaam in an unsuccessful effort to curse the Israelites and thus neutralize their divine advantage in battle. The Moabites were defeated by Israel (cf. Numbers 21:10-35; Numbers 22-24) The Moabites ultimately lured Israel into fornication and corruption (cf. Numbers 25). “***Trembling***” is the same verb which had previously been used in reference to the nations.



“The Destruction of Egypt at the Red Sea’ - 19th Century German Bible Engraving

“The people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of Your arm they will be as still as stone - until Your people pass by, O Lord, until the people You bought pass by.” - The name ***“Canaan”*** is derived from that of the grandson of Noah through his son Ham. The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 lists eleven tribes and nations which were descended from Canaan: ***“Canaan was the***

father of Sidon, his firstborn, and of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.”

(Genesis 10:15) Joshua lists thirty one kingdoms at the time of the conquest (cf. Joshua 12) The geographical boundaries of Canaan are not precisely defined in Scripture. God broadly identified Canaan for Abraham in this way: ***“To your descendants I give this land, from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the River Euphrates - the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perissites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”*** (Genesis 15:18-21) The region is usually considered to stretch from the mountains of Lebanon in the north to the Negev Desert in the south. It was bordered by the Mediterranean seacoast in the west to the high plateaus along the Jordan River valley in the east.

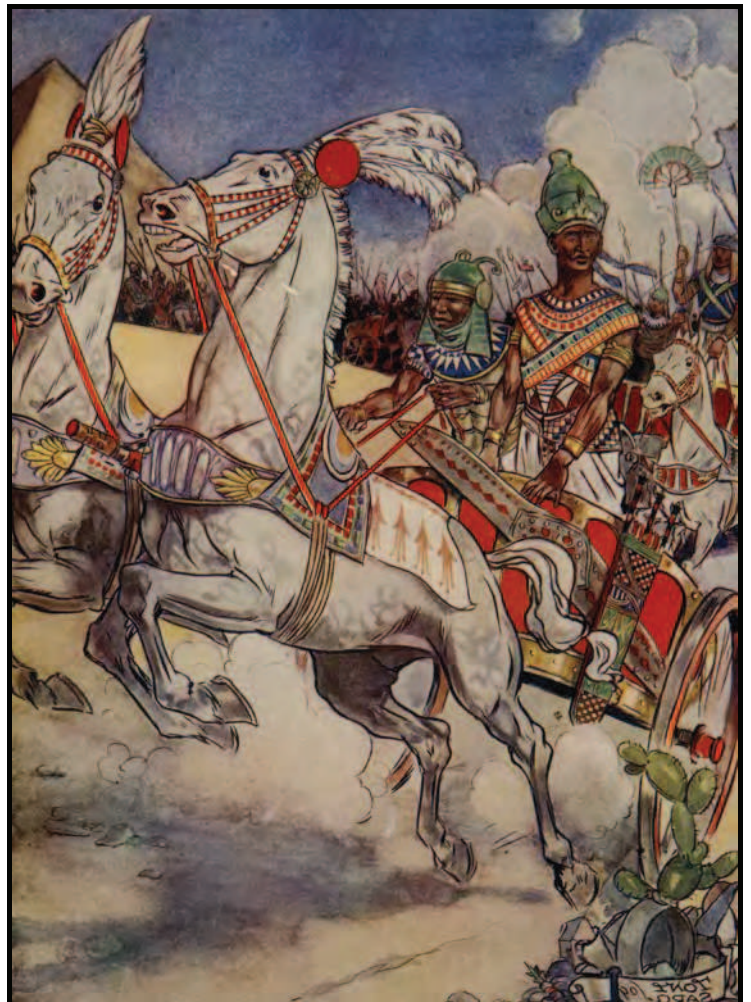
“The people of Canaan” would have been the nations most directly affected by Israel’s deliverance from Egypt for theirs was the land which had been promised by God to the descendants of

Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:6-7; 13:14-17). God informed Abraham that the Canaanite nations would be dispossessed because of their immorality and corruption (Genesis 15:16). The land was notorious for its grotesque religious practices, including widespread infant sacrifice, and the most extreme sexual excesses (i.e. Sodom and



“Canaanite Child Sacrifice to Baal”
19th Century Engraving

Gomorrah). The verb that is used to describe their response to the miracles which God performed to humble and defeat the Egyptians - **“will melt away”** is unusual in this context. It also occurs in the report of the spies to Joshua in reference to the Canaanites: **“The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.”** (Joshua 2:24) The Joshua reference may be an allusion to the Song at the Sea. The phrase literally describes the process by which a solid is transformed into a liquid. Here the image is that of a person who collapses or wilts as the result of his fear. Nahum Sarna suggests the translation **“are aghast.”** Their ability to resist or to stand against the Israelites is destroyed by terror. The verbal image continues in the next phrase - **“terror and dread will fall upon them”** - which depicts someone who is being crushed beneath an unbearable burden. This concept of liquidization balances the petrification of the following verse - **“By the power of Your arm they will be as still as stone until Your people pass by.”** Fear will rob them of their strength. It will completely immobilize them. They will stand as helplessly as stone statues while Israel takes the land which God has promised them. Given the use of animal names for military or political titles among the Edomites and the Moabites, and the pastoral imagery of Verse 13, the metaphor of German commentator N. Lohfink becomes most powerful indeed: **“The other flocks are struck still when the great and good Shepherd passes by with His flock. They stand alongside the processional route like stone sphinxes.”** (Propp, p. 534) The image recalls the stone avenues of ram headed gods which were common in the temple compounds of ancient Egypt. The safe passage of the Israelites is emphasized by the repetition of the phrase **“until Your people pass by, until the people You bought pass**



Pharaoh Sets Out After Israel” by Tony Slag

by.” This is the second reference to God’s redemption of His people in this segment (cf. Vs. 13).

VERSES 17-18

“You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of Your inheritance - the place, O Lord, You made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, Your hands established. The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

“You will bring them in...” - The concluding verses of Moses’ song look beyond the journey and the conquest to the settlement of Israel in the Promised Land. This is not a possibility but a certainty. That can be true because this outcome does not depend upon Israel, but upon the Lord. The text is completely unambiguous - God is the active agent: ***“You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of Your inheritance.”*** The repetitive phrases drive home the message that God will accomplish it all by His almighty power.

“And plant them on the mountain of Your inheritance.” - The image of Israel as a plant brought forth from Egypt to be planted and cared for in the promised land is developed further in Psalm 80 where it serves to convey a message both of law and gospel:

“You brought a vine out of Egypt; You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. Why have You broken down its walls, so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it. Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root Your right hand has planted, the son You raised up for Yourself. Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at Your rebuke Your people perish.” (Psalm 80:8-16)

Once again, the identity of ***“the mountain of Your inheritance”*** is the subject of considerable debate among the commentators. The parallel language of Psalm 78 would seem to suggest that the reference is both to the Promised Land as a whole and specifically to the Temple mount in Jerusalem. The Psalmist writes:

“Bur He brought His people out like a flock; He led them like sheep through the desert. He guided them safely so that they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies. Thus He brought them to the border of His holy land, to the hill country His right hand had taken. He drove out nations before them and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance, He settled the tribes of Israel in their homes...Then He rejected the tents of Joseph, He did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but He chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. He built His sanctuary like the high mountains, like the earth that He established forever.” (Psalm 78:53-55, 67-69)

King Solomon cleared recalled the *“mountain of Your inheritance”* language from the Song at the Sea in his dedicatory prayer at the temple:

“And forgive Your people who have sinned against You; forgive all the offenses they have committed against You, and cause their conquerors to show them mercy, for they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace. May Your eyes be open to Your servant’s plea, and to the plea of Your people Israel, and may You listen to them whenever they cry to You. For You singled them out of all the nations of the world to be Your own inheritance, just as You declared through Your servant Moses when You, O Sovereign Lord, brought our fathers out of Egypt.” (1 Kings 8:50-53)

“The place, O Lord, You made for Your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, Your hands established” - The language of this

final couplet is clearly designed to anticipate the construction of a temple in Jerusalem. However, even here it is God who is the instigator and enabler. Man does



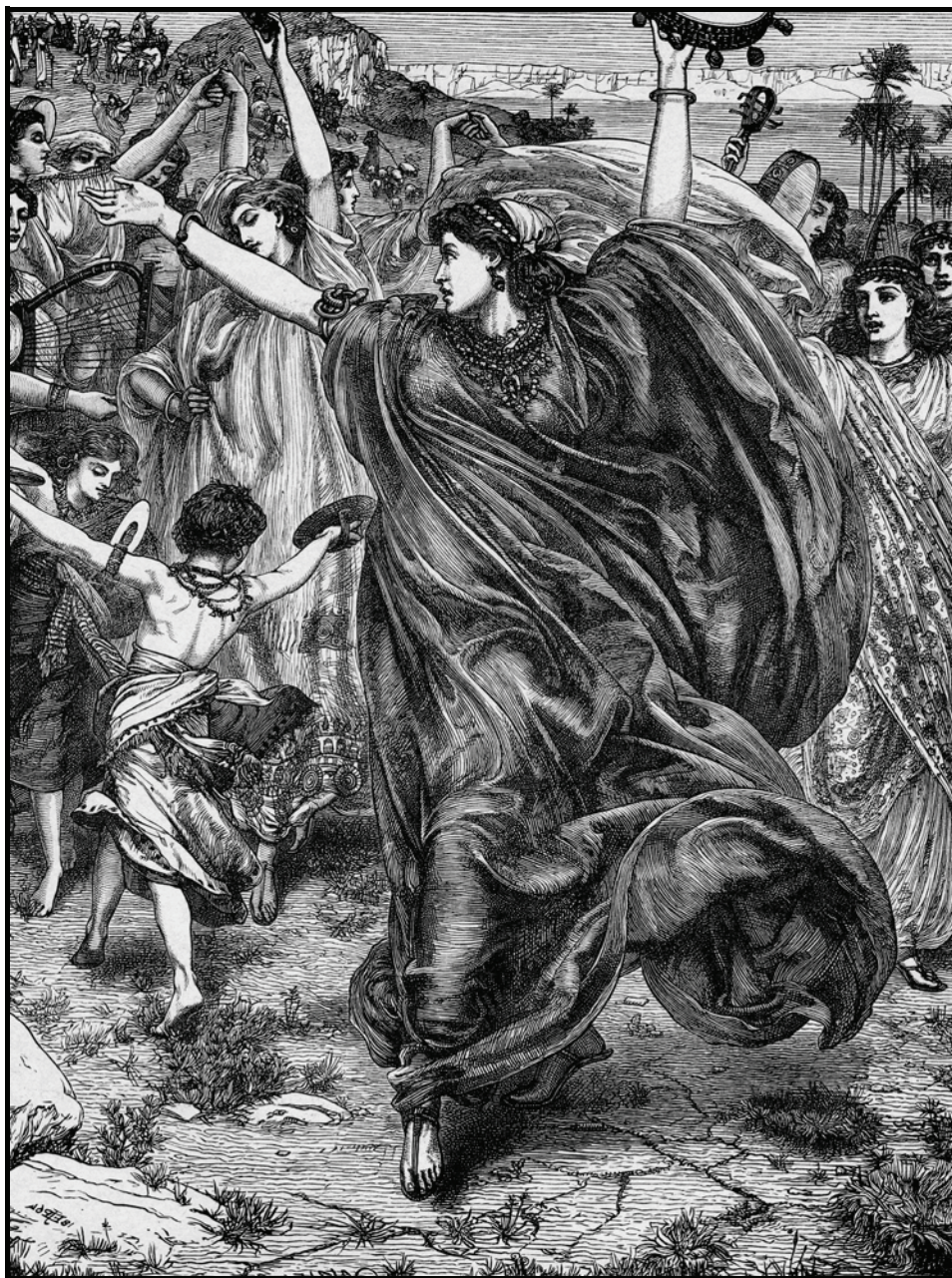
*“The Construction of Solomon’s Temple
by Jean Fouquet -15th Century*

not decide to build God a temple at his own initiative. That would be blasphemous presumption! God deigns to dwell among His people on earth. An authentic temple of God must be *“the sanctuary, O Lord, Your hands established.”*

“The Lord will reign forever and ever!” - The Song at the Sea concludes with a triumphant affirmation of God’s universal rule as a joyful song of praise and thanksgiving. *“The Song at the Sea ends with a joyful outburst of praise to the Lord who has won such a victory over His enemies and provided so bountifully for His people.”* (Mackay, p. 274) That which God accomplished here on behalf of His people has demonstrated Him to be the undisputed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. No earthly monarch would dare to stand against Him after this masterful manifestation of His divine power. The rule of paltry human kings is bound by the limitations of time. They rise and fall, the kingship of God is *“forever and ever.”*

“Unlike man, He does not grow old or feeble in power. The power manifested against Egypt will mark God’s justice in all of history. There can be no true vision of history without first knowing God. The blindness of contemporary rulers and peoples to God is comparable to the blindness of Pharaoh, and, too often, the blindness of the church is comparable to that of Israel.” (Rushdooney, p. 200)





“The Song of Miriam” by E.J. Poynter

Verses 19-21

“When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters of sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.’”



“The Demise of Pharaoh’s Chariots” by Ted Larson

“When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea...” - The Song at the Sea is followed by a prose summary which explains the miraculous events summarized in the poetry of the song and sets the stage for the Song of Miriam in the verses which follow. The language here reflects that of the opening couplet of the Song from Verse 1.

“Then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron’s sister...” - Miriam has appeared previously in the Biblical narrative as the older sister who watched over the infant Moses floating in his basket refuge amid the rushes of the Nile (cf. Exodus 2:4). This is the first time that she is identified by name. Miriam is designated with the formal title **“the prophetess”** that is, she was one of the select group through whom God spoke to his people by verbal inspiration. Three other women are so designated in the Old Testament: Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). Rabbinic tradition reports that three other Biblical women, Hannah (the mother of Samuel - 1 Samuel 1-2), Abigail (the wife of David - 1 Samuel 25) and Esther (the Hebrew wife of the Persian Emperor Xerxes - Esther 1-10) also received the gift of prophecy, although there is no such indication in Scripture. Miriam is further identified as **“Aaron’s sister”** in keeping with the Hebrew custom of identifying a female sibling in connection with her oldest brother.

“Took a tambourine in hand and all the women followed her.” - The ***“tambourine”*** or timbrel was a shallow frame drum consisting of membranes stretched tightly over a pair of wooden hoops. Small bells or chimes were often attached to the outer perimeter to a jingling sound to the beat of the drum. Typically the tambourine was held aloft in one hand and played by the other. The instrument tends to be associated with female musicians in Scripture. It was customary among the Hebrews for the conquering warrior to be greeted by the young women of the tribe, singing his victory anthem to the beat of the tambourine as he returned from the battlefield. Thus, Psalm 68:25 celebrates the victorious power of God with a description of His victory procession: ***“Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. In front are the singers, after them the musicians;***



“The Song of Miriam” - 17th Century Luther Bible Woodcut

“As Miriam Played and Sang of that which the Hand of God had Achieved, All of the Women Joined with her to Praise the LORD! This is a Fine Example, Indeed a Beautiful Thing Which We Would do Well to Follow!”

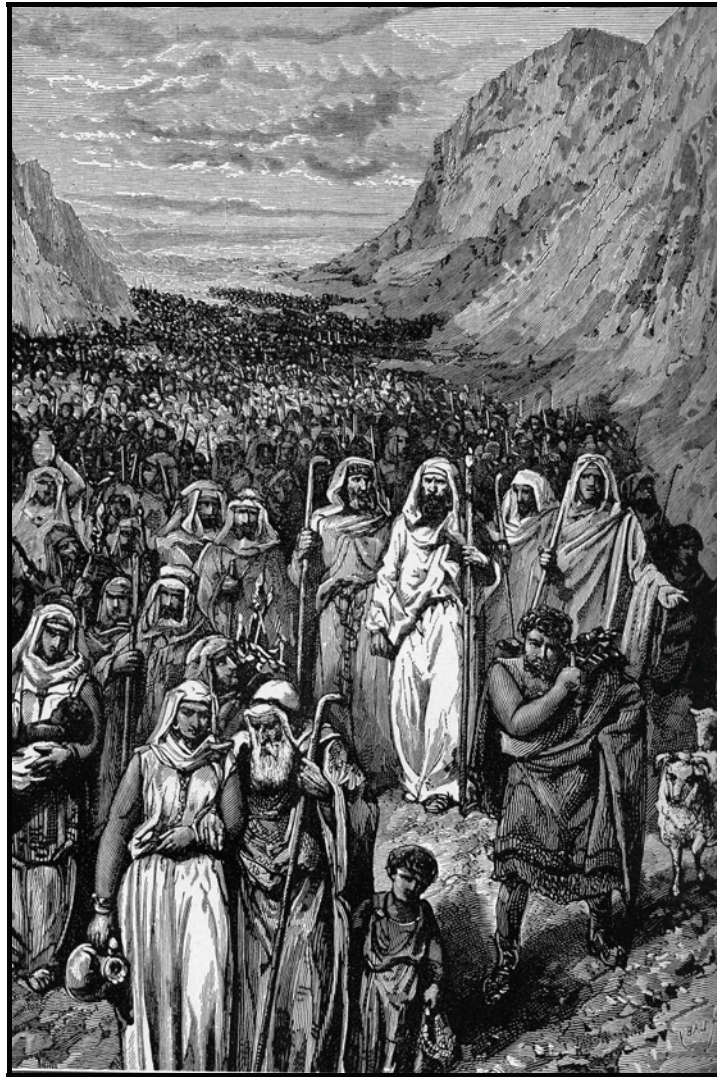


*“The Song of Miriam” - 18th Century Bible
Illustration*

with them are the maidens playing tambourines.” Through His faithful prophet Jeremiah, God promised that the celebration of victory would again be heard among the Children of Israel with the joyful song of the maidens and their tambourines: *“I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.”* (Jeremiah 31:4) In this context, the celebration of Miriam and the maidens of Israel on the shores of the Red Sea can be recognized as the traditional manner in which great victories were celebrated among the Israelites, as in this instance the Lord Himself is hailed as the mighty Champion returning triumphant from the battlefield.

“Sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.” - The language of Miriam’s song closely parallels that of the words sung by Moses. Hebrew scholars contend that these words are merely the opening excerpt of the Song of Miriam and that

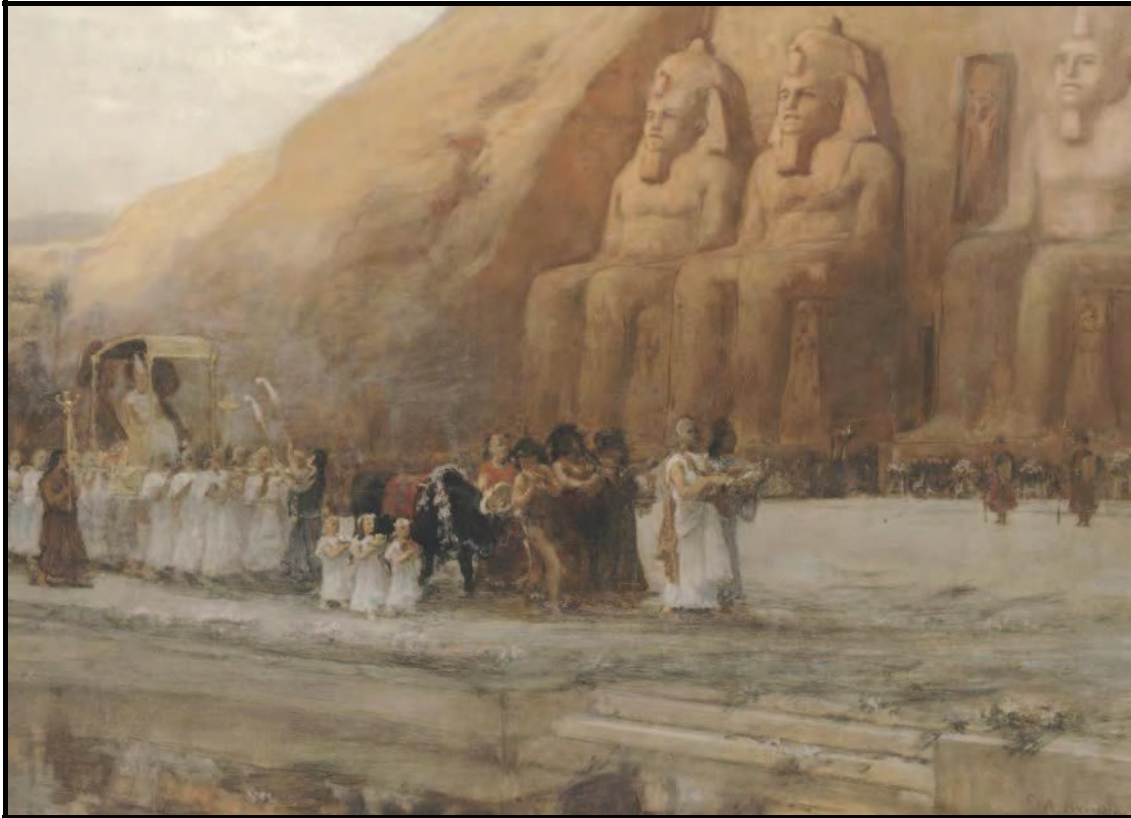
she and the maidens responded antiphonally to the entire Song of Moses - that is to say, Moses would sing a couplet and then the women would respond by repeating that line accompanied by the music of their instruments. When they had completed their response Moses would have continued with the next line of his hymn of praise. This pattern would recur all the way through the anthem. Imagine the magnificent scene, involving thousands of singers, responding back and forth to one another upon the shores of the Sea as the bodies of Pharaoh’s great host slowly sank beneath the waves.



“Israel Enters the Wilderness”

Exodus 15:22-27

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What do we drink?” Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there He tested them. He said, “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.” Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.



“Royal Procession Before the Temple at Abu Simbel” by Bridgman

“Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and into the Desert of Shur.” - With the Egyptian threat behind them, the Children of Israel now begin their long trek through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. The opening phrase ***“then Moses led Israel”*** literally reads *“then Moses caused Israel to set out.”* This unusual wording appears to suggest that it was necessary for Moses to compel a reluctant Israel to set forth on their wilderness journey. Rabbinic commentary (*“midrashim”*) suggested that Moses had to confront two problems. First, with the destruction of the Egyptian army, many of the Israelites concluded that it would now be safe for them to return to the familiar comfort of their life in Egypt rather than venturing forth into the unknown dangers of the harsh wilderness.

“Still the people remained headstrong, and without giving heed to Moses they set out on the road to Egypt under the guidance of an idol that they had brought with them out of Egypt, and even retained during their passage through the sea. Only through sheer force was Moses able to restrain them from their sinful transgression.” (Ginzburg III, pp. 36-37)

The second hurdle which Moses had to overcome, the rabbis suggested, was the Israelites' greedy desire to continue plundering the corpses of the Egyptian dead as

they were washed up onto the shore of the sea.

“There was one other difficulty with the people that Moses had to overcome: the sea cast up many jewels, pearls and other treasures that had belonged to the Egyptians, drowned in its waves, and Israel found it hard to tear themselves away from the spot that brought them such riches. Moses, however, said, ‘Do you really believe that the sea will continue to yield you pearls and jewels?’” (Ginzburg III, p. 37)

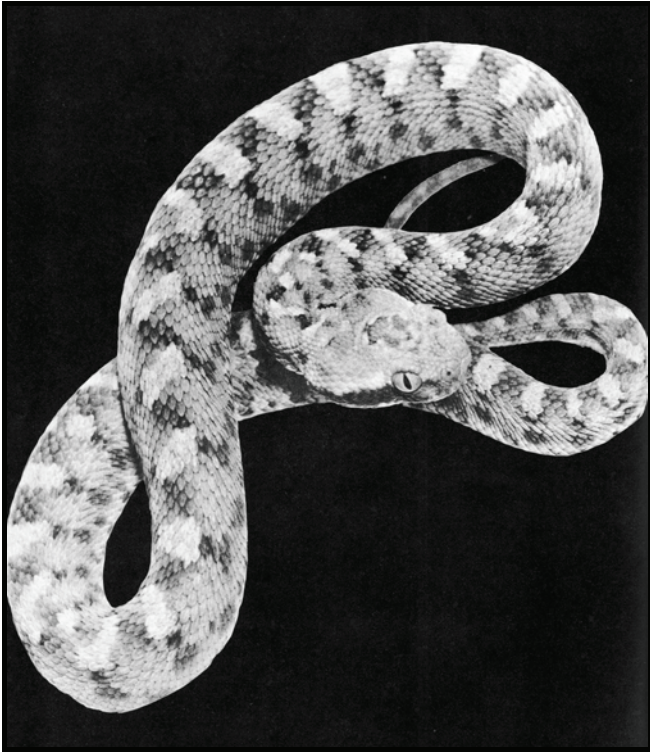
While the wording of the phrase is indeed unusual, it hardly justifies such imaginative embellishment of the text. At most, the phrase may suggest some understandable reluctance to set forth on what would most certainly be an arduous journey through unfamiliar dangerous territory.

The *“Desert of Shur”* was the wilderness region in the northwestern Sinai. Its title



“The Ruins of the Wall of the Ruler in Northwestern Sinai”

was most probably derived from an Egyptian word for a wall or fortification in reference to the series of fortifications which the Pharaohs had constructed along the



“The Pit Viper - Deadly Serpent of the Desert”

eastern edge of the Nile delta on the isthmus of Suez to prevent incursions by the nomadic desert tribes. Thus, for example, *“The Song of Sinuhe,”* an Egyptian epic composed around 2,000 B.C., refers to *“the Wall of the Ruler”* which had been built by Pharaoh in order to *“crush the sand-crossers.”* (Sarna, p. 84) Genesis 25:18 reports that this was the region in which the warlike tribes which descended from Abraham and Hagar’s son Ishmael settled - ***“His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.”*** (Cf. 1 Samuel 15:7; 27:8)

The harsh wilderness before them would have presented Israel with an intimidating prospect. Their nomadic roots from the age of the patriarchs were four centuries in the past. Freedom, and the responsibility to provide for and defend themselves which came with it, may not have seemed all that attractive at this moment as they prepared to leave civilization behind them. Again, the ancient commentary of the rabbis provide us with fantastic descriptions of a terrible wilderness filled with monsters which had swallowed up entire armies in the past:

“From the sea they passed to the desert Shur, a horrible and dreadful wilderness, full of snakes, lizards and scorpions, extending over hundreds of miles. So deadly is the nature of the snakes that dwell in this desert, that if one of them merely glides over the shadow of a flying bird, the bird falls into pieces.” (Ginzberg III, p.37)

These fanciful exaggerations serve either to explain Israel’s implied reluctance to move forward or amplify their courage for proceeding into the desert: *“It was then a proof of Israel’s great faith in their God, that they obeyed Moses and without murmur or delay followed him into this frightful wilderness.”* (Ibid) Given the subsequent events at Marah and thereafter it might be easier to accept serpents whose poison was so potent that it caused birds to disintegrate in the sky than an image of the Children

of Israel as trusting pilgrims whose faith never wavered. Incidentally, the rabbis concluded their imaginative observations on this episode with the observation that God delivered the Israelites from the dreadful serpents as a reward for their remarkable faith in Him:

“Therefore did God reward them for their trust in Him in that not only were they not harmed by the snakes and scorpions during their many years in the desert, but they were even relieved of the fear of the reptiles, for as soon as the snakes saw the Israelites they meekly lay down upon the sand.” (Ginzberg III, p. 38)

“For three days they traveled in the desert without finding any water.” -

Three day intervals occur regularly in ancient Near Eastern descriptions of long wilderness journeys. This may have been perceived to be the typical time span between rest stops for desert travel. Dr. Sarna estimates that the distance involved in a three day journey on foot in the desert could have been as much as 45 miles. The paramount concern of desert travelers in any age is the availability of water. The observation that no water was found on the first stage of their journey sets the stage for the events which follow. *“Water is, of course, a matter of*

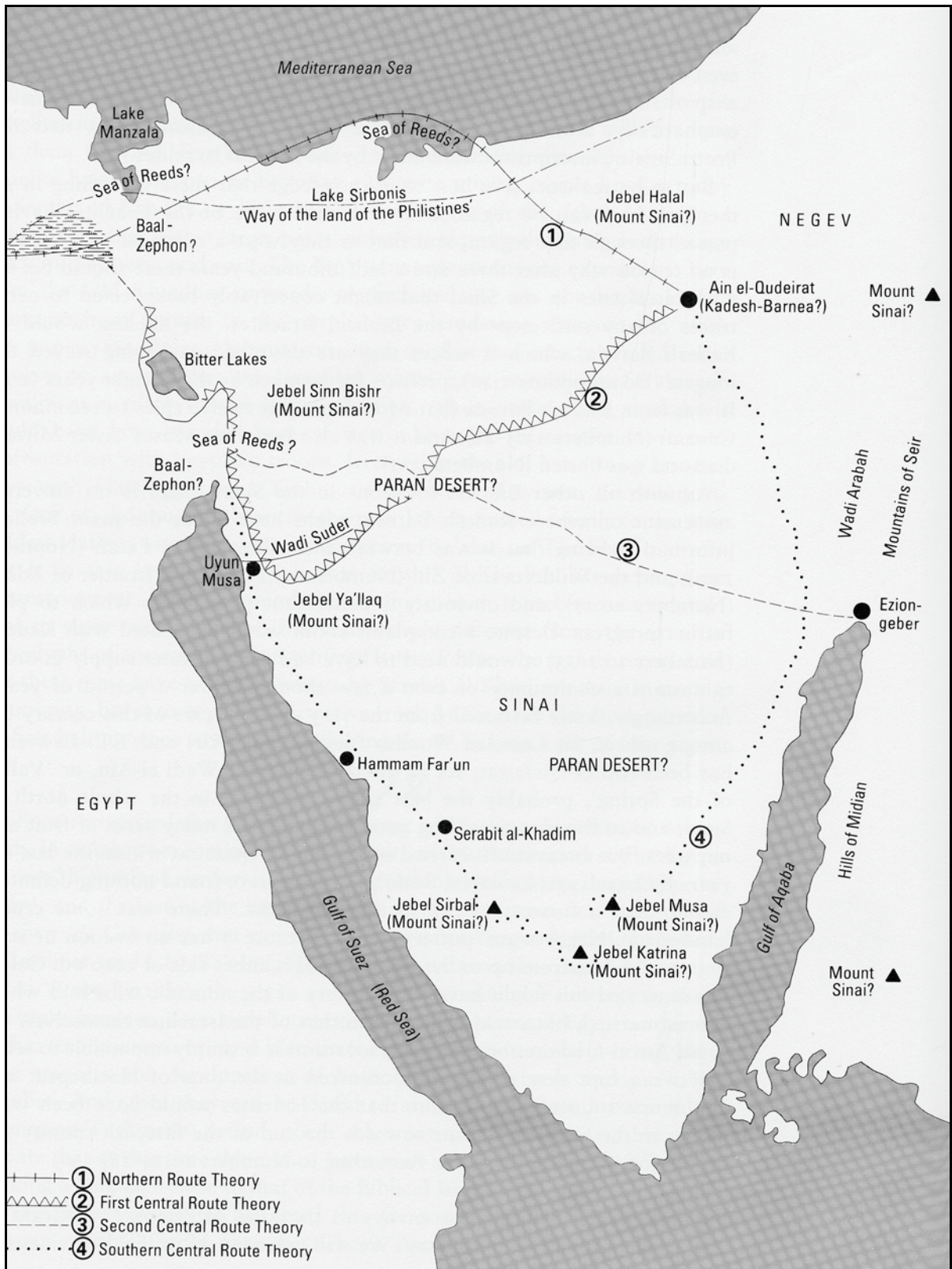


“A Desert Scorpion”

life and death, nowhere more so than in the dehydrating heat of the desert. The anxiety of the people would, of course, have been mounting by the hour.” (Durham, p. 213)

“When they came to Marah they could not drink its water because it was bitter.” -

After a difficult three day march through the desert without water Israel finally arrives at the springs of Marah only to find their water undrinkable evidently because of its high salt content - ***“because it was bitter.”*** *“Tormented by thirst, the people find only undrinkable water.”* (Sarna, p. 84) The triple repetition of the Hebrew word *“marah”* - ***They came to Marah...it was bitter...is called Marah*** - serves to



Alternative Routes Through Sinai

emphasize the bitterness of the water and the urgency of the crisis by reflecting the three days which they had traveled through the desert without finding water. The bitterness of Marah reflected not only the taste of its water but the hearts of the Children of Israel as they camped there.

“We can only imagine the bitterness of Israel’s disappointment. By the third day the people must have been getting desperate. It is hard to go much more than three days without water, especially in the desert. ‘If we don’t find water soon,’ they must have said, ‘we will all die of thirst.’ Then, just when they were on the point of dehydration - Praise God! - they saw an oasis on the horizon. They hurried to reach it, but when they bent down to take a drink, the water tasted brackish, and they had to spit it out. It was more than simply distasteful; it was unfit for human consumption!” (Ryken, p. 415)

Drinking the waters of Marah’s bitter springs not only did not soothe their parched throats, it actually intensified their thirst.

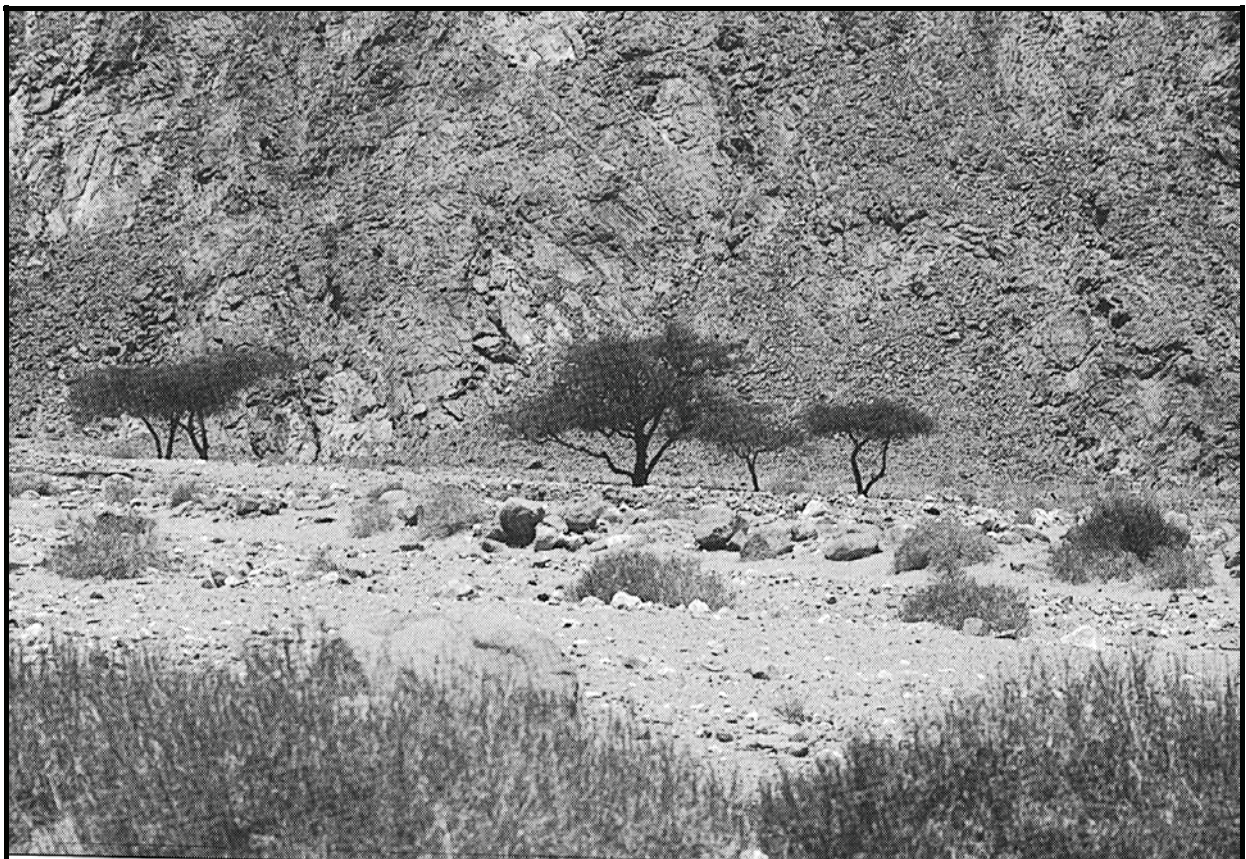
The location of Marah is the subject of considerable debate. The outcome of that debate ultimately depends on which one of the half-dozen or so proposed sites for Mount Sinai one prefers. Cassutto mildly observes: *“The determination of the site of Marah is in dispute and uncertain.”* (Cassutto, p. 183) Salt springs are common throughout the desert. Nothing unique is cited in the text about this particular spring which could facilitate its identification.

Commentators note that the first test of Israel in the wilderness is appropriately similar to the first of Egypt’s ten plagues: *“The Israelites then experienced something similar to that which befell the Egyptians during the period of the first plague, when ‘they could not drink the water of the Nile’ (vii,24); and thereby the Lord taught them a lesson, as we shall see further on.”*(Cassutto, p. 184)

“So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What are we to drink?’” - Israel’s response to the problem is predictable and prompt. They do not call upon the Lord or pray for His help based upon the consistent record of His aide and assistance in the past. Instead, as always, they whine and complain, directing their frustration and anxiety toward the leadership of Moses, God’s chosen representative. This is a tragic pattern which will be endlessly repeated throughout the wandering in the wilderness (cf. Exodus 16; 17:1-7,32; Numbers 11:1-14; 16; 20:2-13;; 21:4-9; etc.). St Paul

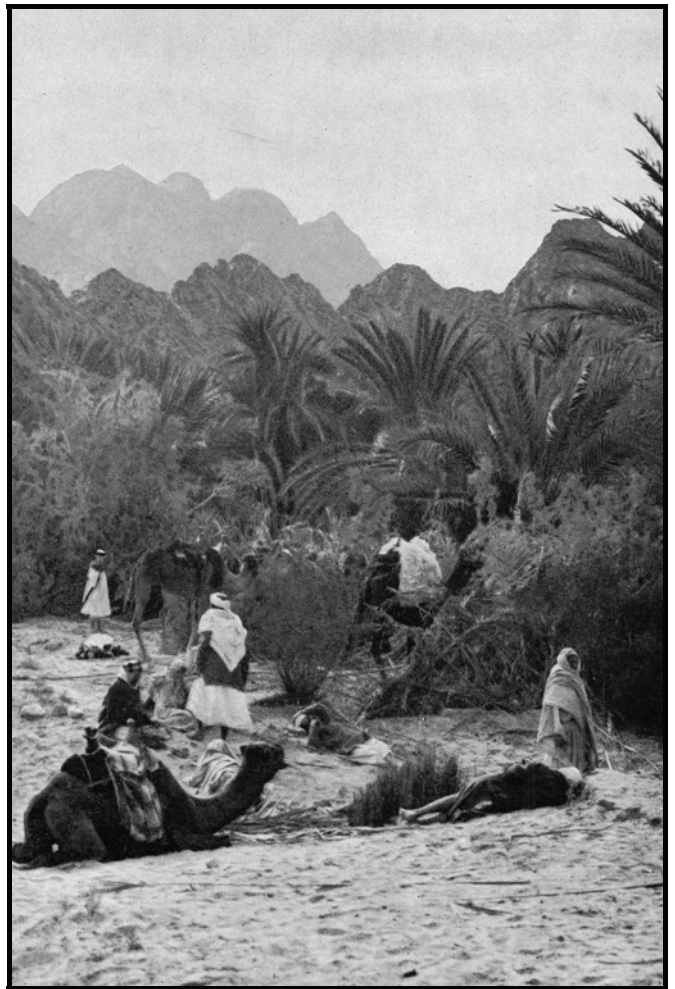
would later warn the Corinthians not to indulge in this spiritually destructive behavior lest they experience the same consequences which the Israelites did in Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16): ***“And do not grumble as some of them did - and were killed by the destroying angel.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:10) No matter how often it occurs, Israel never seems to learn from the experience. Their doubts and fear always predominate over their faith. Phillip Ryken describes their perplexing failure with these well-chosen words:

“At this point Israel should have cried out to God for help, asking Him to give them the water of life. Remember, they had every reason to believe that God would save them. They knew that God answered prayer because it was in response to their cries that He had rescued them from Egypt. They knew that He had power over creation because they had witnessed the plagues. In particular, they knew that God controlled the water supply. They had seen Him turn the Nile to blood.”



“An Oasis with Acacia Trees Around a Spring in the Sinai Desert”

They had also witnessed His wonders at the Red Sea, His mastery over the wind and the waves. The Israelites had witnessed God's mighty saving acts in history. Furthermore, God Himself had led the Israelites to this place. Even the bitter oasis was part of His providential plan. To be reminded of this, all they had to do was look up and see the Pillar of Cloud that had brought them to Marah. God was in the cloud to guard them and guide them. If necessary, He could send down rain to water their parched lips and thirsty throats. Thus, they had nothing to complain about, and every reason to believe that God would save them. All they had to do was ask. Instead, at the first sign of difficulty, the Israelites complained.” (Ryken, p. 416)



19th Century Image of Bedouin Tribesmen at a Sinai Oasis”

This grumbling did not take the form of open rebellion. The complainers lacked the courage to confront Moses openly or directly. Instead they murmured to one another and to all who would listen behind his back creating dissension and dissatisfaction among the people. The same verb is used in Psalm 59 where David describes his enemies as cur dogs that whine and growl at his heels: ***“They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied.”*** (Psalm 59:14-15) Thus, the word takes on a very negative connotation suggesting cowardice and duplicity on the part of the grumblers.

“Then Moses cried out to the Lord...” - The prophet's response demonstrates his complete dependance upon the power of God. He recognizes that the people's complaint is not against him but against God and that only God has the ability to solve the problem. Moses is fully aware that he himself is nothing more than an instrument



“Moses at the Bitter Springs of Marah” by Ted Larson

in the hand of God. This commendable humility can be the source of great comfort in time of trouble. The solution of our problems ultimately does not depend upon us but rests in the hands of our all powerful God.

Scripture contends: ***“We know that in all things Gods works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.”*** (Romans 8:28) That basic principle is also at work in the journey to Marah. The Lord had deliberately led the people to Marah, knowing full well that the water there was undrinkable. This was not an accident. There are no accidents in the lives of the people of God. The people’s grumbling against Moses was actually a challenge to God’s divine purpose in bringing them to Marah. God’s solution to the problem and the comments which followed explain His careful design and reassert their dependance upon Him.

“And God showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water and the water became sweet.” -The Hebrew verb (“hora”) which describes God’s action in resolving the bitter water crisis is drawn from a root which refers to teaching or

instruction. This is the same root from which the crucial title “*Torah*” is drawn. Cassuto argues that the use of this particular word with its unique connotation of teaching and instruction is critical for it served to set the stage for all of the momentous events are yet to follow:

“The expression, ‘and the Lord showed him’ indicates the intention of the narrative. It was desirable that immediately after their liberation the Children of Israel should learn the great truth that they need instruction and guidance from heaven...The realization of the need for instruction from the Lord prepares the people spiritually for the acceptance of the yoke of the Torah and precepts.” (Casutto, p. 184)

The “**piece of wood**” (or literally “*the log of a tree*”) which Moses was instructed to cast into the bitter water is not identified. It would appear that the tree trunk itself is

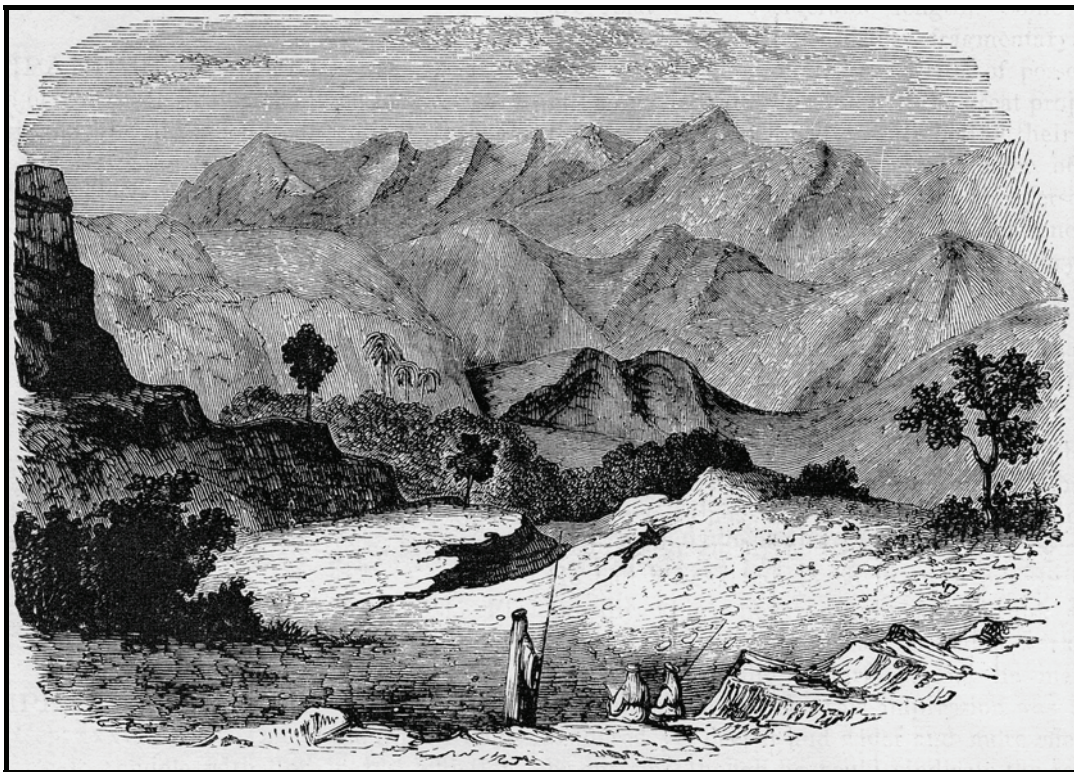


“19th Century Bible Illustration of the Waters of the River of Life Flowing From the Temple in Ezekiel’s Vision”

not a natural agent through which, by some chemical property present in the wood, the bitterness of the water was removed. The text merely says - ***“He threw it into the water and the water became sweet.”*** Instead, the tree trunk, like the staff of Moses, served as a symbol of the power of God which miraculously transforms the bitter water into sweet water which quenches the thirst of the desperate multitudes. The abundance of trees growing along the banks of the river which flowed from the temple in the vision of Ezekiel served the same symbolic purpose. There too, the waters of the river of life were able to convert salt water into fresh water:

“When it empties into the sea, the water there becomes fresh...There will be large numbers of fish because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh, so where the river flows, everything will live...Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them.” (Ezekiel 47:1-13 *passim*; cf. Revelation 22:1-3)

The prophet Elisha performed a similar miracle for the city of Jericho, sweetening the bitter water of their wells with a bowl of salt (cf. 2 Kings 2:19-22).



“19th Century Engraving of a Sinai Oasis”



“The Word of God as the Water of Life Springing from Beneath the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden” by Rudolf Schüfer

“There the Lord made a decree and a law for them...” - The didactic episode at Marah serves as an introduction to the giving of the Torah at Sinai which will follow shortly. At the spring of bitter water God demonstrated once again that He was capable of delivering His people from danger of all sorts and that obedience to His Word was the only path to genuine security and life. The language of the phrase - *“a decree and a law”* is typically used in the Old Testament in reference to specific ordinances and statutes. Hebrew tradition suggests that the pre-Sinaitic law revealed at Marah pertained to the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest. This view is supported by the prominent role of the Sabbath observance in conjunction with the gathering of the manna and quail in Chapter 16 which also preceded the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 16:21-30).

“And there He tested them.” - By leading Israel through the barren desert to the bitter springs of Marah God provided the people with the opportunity to demonstrate their



“The Wilderness of Shur” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

trust in Him and in His faithfulness. They obviously failed that test. Despite all of the miracles and wonders which they had seen, all of which had been performed on their behalf, they remained spiritually immature, unwilling and unable to trust in God and His provision for their needs. Could these people actually have believed that God would have brought them into the wilderness to die?

“The wilderness was Israel’s teacher. Charles Spurgeon described it as ‘the Oxford and Cambridge for God’s students. There they went to University and He taught and trained them, and they took their degree before they entered into the Promised Land.’ Like most institutions of higher learning, Wilderness U. had an examination system. God tested His people Israel. At Marah He schooled them by making a small covenant in which He set out the terms of their relationship. God gave His people a command with blessings and promises, warnings and curses.” (Ryken, p. 419)

“He said, ‘If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His eyes...’” - All the lies of the devil to the contrary notwithstanding, conformity to the Word of God is the only path to genuine happiness and fulfillment. God’s law is not oppressive it is liberating. God’s law is not the arbitrary dictate of a deity whose goal is domination. It is, instead, an expression of His love and concern

for us, designed to enable us to avoid the pitfalls of sin and their painful consequences. In the immediate aftermath of the faithlessness of Marah, while the bitterness of the water before its divine transformation still lingered on their tongues and the refreshing sweetness of the water which God had provided was still fresh in their minds, God set before His people the fundamental alternative which every descendant of fallen Adam must confront. Hear and heed the Word of God and you will live under the sweetness of His divine blessing. Choose the way of disobedience and death and the consequences of sin will embitter every moment of life on earth and doom you to the pangs of eternal death in hell. The bondage of the human will to sin means that only by the power of the Holy Spirit can the way of life open before us. We can continue to deny and defy by our own choice, but if we are to accept God's gift of life it can only be by His grace at work within us.

“Listen carefully to the voice of your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees.”

The careful, repetitive language of the text emphasizes the importance of the choice. In the Hebrew text the phrases meticulously balance one another. God's will alone must be decisive for the Christian. The life of the believer must be lived by faith not by sight, trusting not in my own eyes or ears, doing that which seems best to me or to the world around me - but rather submitting to the Word of God and accepting that He alone knows what is best for me, and that He alone can guide me to my journey's end. The old hymn *“Savior I Follow On,”* composed by Charles Robinson in 1862, expresses this truth most effectively in the context of this episode in the wilderness wandering:

*“Savior I follow on, guided by Thee,
seeing not yet the hand that leadeth me.
Hushed be my heart and still, fear I no*

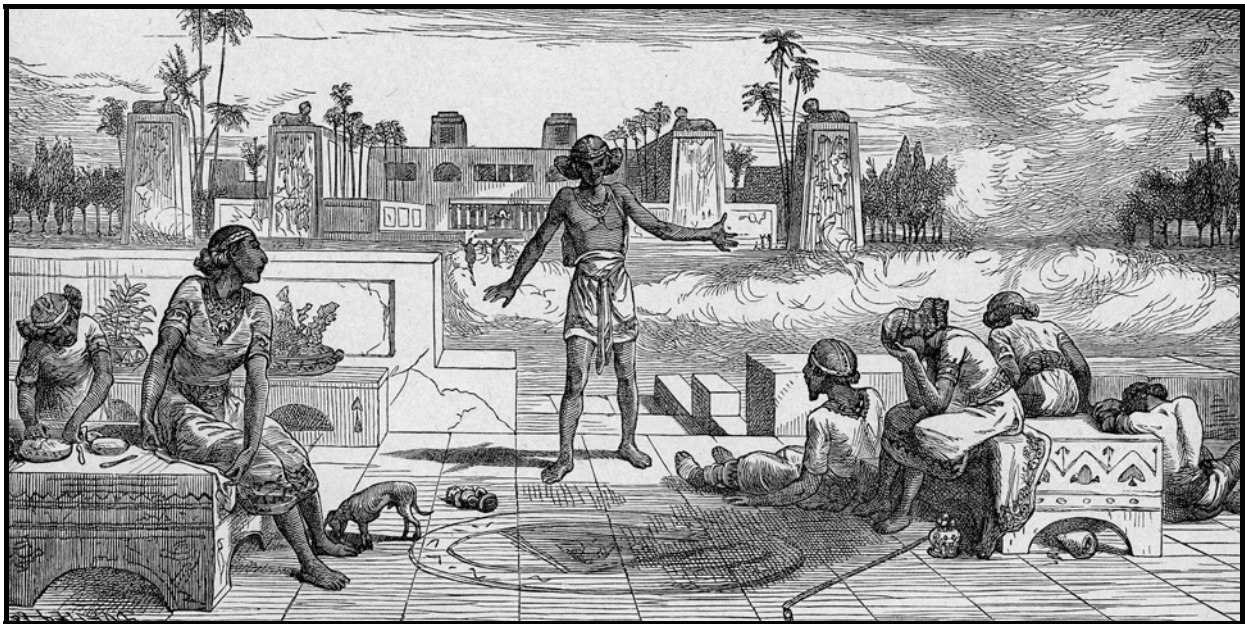


***“O That the Lord Would Guide My Ways”
by Rudolf Schäfer***

*further ill, only to meet Thy will, my will shall be.
Riven the rock for me, thirst to relieve, manna from heaven falls, fresh every eve.
Never a want severe causes my eye a tear, but Thou dost whisper near, "Only
believe."*

*Often to Marah's brink I have been brought; shrinking the cup to drink, help
have I sought;
And with the prayer's ascent, Jesus the branch hath rent, quickly relief hath sent,
sweet'ning the draught. (TLH # 422)*

"I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you." - The Lord used the healing of the water, its conversion from bitter to sweet, as an image of His protection and care of His people. However, the warning of the text is explicit - ***"If you listen carefully...If you pay attention...I will not."*** But if you do not listen carefully or pay attention then punishment will most surely follow. Sin always has its consequences. Let no one believe that they can escape the judgement of God. Genuine faith is demonstrated by willing obedience to God's command. If that obedience is not forthcoming then punishment will surely follow. Sin is inherently malignant. Ultimately, ***"the wages of sin is death"*** (Romans 6:23), in the meantime sin produces pain, sorrow and destruction during earthly life. The reference to ***"any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians"*** may be a specific allusion to the plague of boils or a more general references to the diseases endemic in the land of Egypt. Deuteronomy 7:15 makes



"The Plague of Boils" - 19th Century Bible Illustration



“The Plague of Boils” by J. James Tissot

a similar promise: ***“The Lord will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but He will inflict them on all who hate you.”*** The same point is made more graphically in the blessings and warning which conclude Deuteronomy:

“However, if you do not obey the Lord your God, and do not carefully follow all His commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...The Lord will plague you with diseases until He has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew which will plague you until you perish...The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured.” (Deuteronomy 28:15,21-22,27; cf. Amos 4:10)

The protection of Egypt’s gods had failed as plague after plague was visited upon the people of that accused land. God promised Israel that if they remained faithful to His ***“decree and law”*** His protection of them would not fail. As the failure of Egypt’s God’s had proved them to be nothing more than impotent idols, so the blessing of Israel’s God would demonstrate His identity as the one true God.