

## Bible Study # 26 Exodus 15.19–27 03–09–2021

The narrative is resumed at this point with a short summary statement of what happened to the Egyptians and the Israelites, followed by a note concerning Miriam and other women singing and dancing.

As in the fuller account (14:26-31), note is taken of the contrasting situations of the Egyptians and the Israelites at the Red Sea. By divine action the waters were brought back on the Egyptians – horses, chariots, and horsemen – while Israel went through on dry land.

This verse draws on the language of 14:23, 28-29. Miriam, Moses' sister, led the women in song with tambourines and dancing. She is called 'a prophetess', one of a number of women in the Old Testament who are so designated (see for other examples Judg. 4:4-6; 2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28).

The same term is used of a prophet's wife (Isa. 8:3). The song they sang was the first line of the Song of Moses. The song exalting the victory over the Egyptians was fittingly taken up and utilized by the women in this outpouring of gratitude and praise.

Moses' role is set in its correct perspective by the opening words of this verse. He 'led Israel from the Red Sea', using the causative form of the verb 'to journey' or 'to travel'. He was the appointed leader who had the responsibility of being 'a servant in all God's house' (Heb. 3:5), and part of that role was to bring Israel to the land of God's choice.

He led Israel into the desert of Shur, probably an area to the east of where the people crossed the Red Sea. The word in Hebrew means 'a wall', and it may have been used to denote an area of Egyptian fortifications built to keep out Bedouin tribes. It is referred to in connection with Abraham (Gen. 20:1), and much later in David's time it was land occupied by Amalekites (1 Sam. 27:8). Seemingly it is identified with Etham (Num. 33:6-7).

When after three days they reached Marah, the water there was bitter, which gave the place its name. Just as the Israelites had earlier grumbled against Moses while they were still in Egypt (5:19-20), so again they complained specifically about the lack of water to drink. They had taken unleavened bread with them (12:39), and presumably some water, but once that water failed they had to search for alternative sources.

After appeal to the Lord, Moses was shown a piece of wood that he threw into the water, and so purified it for drinking. No good purpose is served in trying to discover what sort of wood this was because the incident is another instance of divine provision for Israel. In the MT a gap occurs in the middle of this verse, indicating that the Massoretes considered that a break in the narrative occurred here.

The new paragraph commences in Hebrew with the words, 'there he put', with this and the following two verses having many other words with the s/sh sounds, at least seventeen of them. This phenomenon simply draws the attention of the reader of the MT and fixes the content even more definitely in the mind.

What the text says is that God was testing his people in this experience, the verb 'to test' being used again of God's relationship with Israel in 16:4, 17:2, and 20:20. Consequently God established a decree/law for Israel stemming from it, with no distinction to be made between these two words for a divinely given law, nor with 'commands' in the next verse.

The pledge was given that if obedience were shown in doing what was right in the Lord's eyes (as expressed in his decrees/laws/commands), then he would not bring on his people all the diseases he had afflicted on the Egyptians.

While other passages refer to the 'diseases of Egypt' (Deut. 7:12-15; 28:60-61), yet in the context it is better to assume that this is a reference to the signs that had been performed, rather than some diseases specific to the

Egyptians. Nowhere in Exodus are the signs called diseases, but in 1 Kings 8:37, 2 Chronicles 6:28 it does occur as the parallel of ‘plague, sign’.

They had earlier experienced the sign in Egypt when God so changed the water in the Nile into blood that the people could not drink it (Exod. 7:18, 21, 24). As they set out on their journey to Sinai, the Israelites experienced another divine intervention, this time on their behalf, when again water was made potable. The statement that concludes the promise, ‘For I am the Lord your healer’, was not an assertion of personal medical care for every Israelite.

Rather, it was an assurance to the nation that he was Israel’s physician. God’s desire for his people was that they would act in such a way that judgments like those inflicted on Egypt would not be put on them. This passage should be considered alongside the assurance given after the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem: if the people sought the Lord and turned from their wicked ways, then He would heal the land (2 Chron. 7:14).

27 No mention is made of them leaving Marah (but cf. Num. 33:9, which also confirms the details given here) but only of their arrival at Elim, whose location cannot now be determined. The important point is made that in contrast with Marah, there was both abundant water (twelve springs) and food (seventy palm trees).

On this occasion no miracle was required to satisfy the people as God’s provision was already in evidence. Most probably additional food was available there, sufficient to provide sustenance for all the people.

We will continue with Exodus 16.1–21 tomorrow.