

(1) Isaiah 51:9-10 refers to Rahab, a *monster*, that was destroyed, apparently when the Red Sea dried up. *Rahab* seems here to be a poetic name for Egypt. See Ps. 87:4; 89:10. (2) Ezek. 29:3 figuratively refers to Egypt as "the great *monster*." (3) Psalm 74:13-14 pictures the division of the Red Sea waters as killing numerous sea-monsters (which it surely did). These monsters became "food for the people, for inhabitants<sup>19</sup> of the desert," probably referring to wild beasts that ate their carcasses. (4) Ps. 93:3-4 says that the floods have lifted up their voices (roaring waves), but God is high above even these. There is no clear indication here that the sea was in conflict with God. It says only that God's voice was greater than the sound of the roaring sea. (5) Habakkuk 3:13-15 alludes to God's acts in punishing the enemies of His people, without any reference to a mythological battle: At the sea "Thou didst tread the sea with thy horses" (probably angelic horses; Compare II Kings 6:17).

In none of the references suggested is there clear and certain statement about an ancient battle between the LORD and the sea. It seems to us that this idea has little or no support from the holy scriptures.

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THE TEXT OF EXODUS  
TRANSLATION

**15** Then sang Mo-ses and the children of Is-ra-el this song unto Je-ho-vah, and spake, saying,

I will sing unto Je-ho-vah, for he hath triumphed gloriously:  
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

(2) Je-ho-vah is my strength and song, And he is become my salvation: This is my God, and I will praise him; My father's God, and I will exalt him.

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<sup>19</sup>The Hebrew words in Ps. 74:14 translated "people inhabiting the wilderness" (*tsiyim*) refer to wild beasts in Isa. 13:21; 34:14. Probably they also do so in Ps. 74:14. The RSV translation "creatures of the wilderness" probably gives the correct meaning.

- (3) Je-ho-vah is a man of war: Je-ho-vah is his name.
- (4) Pha-raoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea;  
And his chosen captains are sunk in the Red Sea.
- (5) The deeps cover them: They went down into the depths like a stone.
- (6) Thy right hand, O Je-ho-vah, is glorious in power, Thy right hand, O Je-ho-vah, dasheth in pieces the enemy.
- (7) And in the greatness of thine excellency thou overthrowest them that rise up against thee: thou sendest forth thy wrath, it consumeth them as stubble.
- (8) And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were piled up, The floods stood upright as a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea.
- (9) The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.
- (10) Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: They sank as lead in the mighty waters.
- (11) Who is like unto thee, O Je-ho-vah, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
- (12) Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, The earth swallowed them.
- (13) Thou in thy lovingkindness hast led the people that thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in thy strength to thy holy habitation.
- (14) The peoples have heard, they tremble: Pangs have taken hold on the inhabitants of Phi-lis-ti-a.
- (15) Then were the chiefs of E-dom dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, trembling taketh hold upon them: All the inhabitants of Ca-naan are melted away.
- (16) Terror and dread falleth upon them; By the greatness of thine arm they are as still as a stone; Till thy people pass over, O Je-ho-vah, Till the people pass over that thou hast purchased.
- (17) Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, The Place, O Je-ho-vah, which thou hast

made for thee to dwell in, The sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

(18) Je-ho-vah shall reign for ever and ever.

(19) For the horses of Pha-raoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and Je-ho-vah brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Is-ra-el walked on dry land in the midst of the sea. (20) And Mir-i-am the prophetess, the sister of Aar-on, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. (21)

And Mir-i-am answered them,  
Sing ye to Je-ho-vah, for he  
hath triumphed gloriously;  
The horse and his rider hath he  
thrown into the sea.

(22) And Mo-ses led Is-ra-el onward from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. (23) And when they came to Ma-rah, they could not drink of the waters of Ma-rah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Ma-rah. (24) And the people murmured against Mo-ses, saying, What shall we drink? (25) And he cried unto Je-ho-vah; and Je-ho-vah showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet. There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them; (26) and he said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Je-ho-vah thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his eyes, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon thee, which I have put upon the E-gyp-tians: for I am Je-ho-vah that healeth thee.

(27) And they came to E-lim, where were twelve springs of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees: and they encamped there by the waters.

EXPLORING EXODUS: CHAPTER FIFTEEN  
QUESTIONS ANSWERABLE FROM THE BIBLE

1. After careful reading, propose a topic for Exodus chapter 15.
2. Specifically, who sang the song in Exodus 15? (15:1)
3. Why did Israel sing to the LORD? (15:1)
4. What had the LORD become unto Israel? (15:2)
5. What significance was there in God's name being the LORD? (15:3; Compare 6:2, 7)
6. Exactly who drowned in the Red Sea? (15:4)
7. How had the waters reacted at the "blast of God's nostrils"? (15:8)
8. What had Israel's enemies said they would do to Israel? (15:9)
9. What had the Egyptians sank like? (15:10)
10. According to 15:13, what three things had God done for His people?
11. How did the various nearby nations react to Israel's crossing the Red Sea? (15:14-16)
12. What confidence did the song express about Israel's future occupation of the land? (15:16-17)
13. How does 15:18 relate to the verse immediately preceding it?
14. What office did Miriam have? (15:20)
15. What did Miriam take into her hand? (15:20)
16. In what act did Miriam lead the women? (15:20-21)
17. Into what wilderness (or desert) did Israel come after crossing the Red Sea? (15:22; Compare Numbers 33:8)
18. How long did they journey without finding water? (15:22)
19. What was the water at Marah like? (15:23)
20. What does the name *Marah* mean? (15:23; Ruth 1:20)
21. By what means were the bitter waters sweetened? (15:25)
22. What statute did God make at Marah? (15:25-26)
23. What conditional promise did God make at Marah? (15:26)
24. By what title did God call himself at Marah? (15:26)
25. What was found at Elim? (15:27)

## EXODUS FIFTEEN: FROM TRIUMPH TO TESTING

1. Songs of triumph; 15:1-21.
2. Situations of testing; 15:22-26.  
(Often God's children experience severe testing shortly after times of spiritual triumph. Even Jesus went from His baptism to his temptations in the wilderness.)

## EXODUS FIFTEEN: FROM SONG TO BITTERNESS

1. Songs by the Red Sea; 15:1-21.
2. Bitterness at Marah; 15:22-26.

## THE SONG OF MOSES (Ex. 15:1-17)

1. Triumph of the LORD; (15:1-3)
2. Tragedy of Egypt; (15:4-12)
3. Terror of the Canaanites; (15:13-16)
4. Transition (and transfer) of the Israelites; (15:17-18)

## THE SONG OF REDEMPTION (Ex. 15:1-17)

1. The LORD's part: Divinity and decisive action: (15:1-3)
2. The enemies' part: Destruction (15:4-13) and dismay (15:14-16)
3. Israel's part: Direction and destination; (15:17-18)

## MY LORD AND I (15:2-3)

1. My strength.
2. My song.
3. My salvation.
4. My God.

## THE LORD'S RIGHT HAND (15:6)

1. Glorious in saving Israel.
2. Fearsome in destroying the enemy.

## THE PRIDE OF PERSECUTORS (15:9-10)

1. Makes them cruel.
2. Makes them boastful.
3. Brings them to destruction.

FROM TRIUMPH TO TESTING 15:1-27

GOD'S WORK FOR HIS PEOPLE (Ex. 15:13)

1. Redeeming.
2. Leading.

THE LORD'S ETERNAL REIGN (15:18)

1. His past triumphs guarantee it.
2. His promises declare it.

EXPERIENCES SHARED BY GOD'S PEOPLE (15:22-26)

1. Lack of life's necessities; 15:22-23.
2. Temptations to murmur; 15:24.
3. Opportunity to pray; 15:25.
4. The Lord's help and healing; 15:25-26.

GOD'S TEST FOR HIS PEOPLE (15:25)

(Check your score on this examination!)

1. Do you trust me during hardships? (15:22-23)
2. Do you pray? (15:25)
3. Do you hearken to my commandments? (15:26)

THE LORD OUR HEALER (15:26)

1. Heals those that hearken.
2. Heals those who keep His statutes.

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EXPLORING EXODUS: NOTES ON CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. *What is in chapter fifteen?*

The chapter contains the following sections:

- (1) The song of Moses and the children of Israel (15:1-18). (They sang this after they crossed the Red Sea.) One verse of prose connects this song to the song that follows it (15:19).
- (2) The song of Miriam and the women (15:20-21). (This was probably a response to the song of Moses.)
- (3) The record of Israel's travels from the Red Sea, through Marah, to Elim (15:22-27).

We entitle this chapter FROM TRIUMPH TO TESTING. It starts with the song of God's triumph and closes with bitter complaining because of the *testing* they endured at the bitter Marah waters. This transition from triumph to testing is a common experience in the lives of many of God's people.

2. *How is the song of Moses divided?*

The song is not divided so clearly that interpreters agree about its divisions. Some interpreters divide it up into stanzas (strophes) on the basis of the repeated phrases in 15:6 and 15:11. Using these verses as dividing points, we could outline the strophes thus:

- (1) The triumph of the Lord; 15:1-6.
- (2) The tragedy of the Egyptians; 15:7-11 (or 12)
- (3) The transfer (or transition) of Israel; 15:13-17.

We prefer to divide the song into sections on the basis of its thought divisions, somewhat as follows:

- (1) What the LORD *IS*; 15:1-3.
- (2) What the LORD *DID*; 15:4-16a.
- (3) What the LORD *WILL DO*; 15:16b-18.

3. *What is the purpose of the Song in Exodus 15?*

It is to declare the greatness of the Lord Jehovah in bringing Israel across the Red Sea. In times of great emotions - joy or sorrow - men turn to poetry and music. Ordinary prose cannot convey the volume of feeling. Redemption and salvation set the heart to singing.

In pagan songs of triumph the glory of victory is ascribed to the conquering king. But here there is not a word of praise or glory given to Moses. These are rendered to the LORD alone.<sup>1</sup>

Exodus fifteen is so highly esteemed by the Jews that Jewish literature speaks of it as The Song, and the Sabbath on which it is read as the Sabbath of the Song. Many other passages in the scriptures contain poetic sections about Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea. See Neh. 9:9ff; Ps. 78:11ff; 77:16ff; Ps. 105; 106:7ff; Habakkuk 3:8ff. Probably in our Christian

<sup>1</sup>Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

hymn singing we should incorporate more allusions to God's victory at the Red Sea than we generally use.

As Moses and Miriam led in praise, ministers of God should still lead the church in praise.

From Ex. 15:20-21 it appears that there was musical accompaniment to this song. Male and female choruses sang antiphonally. Note that 15:21 is almost identical to 15:1. The women may have repeated the words of 15:21 after each line or stanza of Moses's song, or just after the whole song.

The song is full of brief, bold, strong thoughts. Its language contains very archaic Hebrew expressions. The English translations cannot reflect the majestic rhythm and dramatic diction of the original poem.

4. *What sort of triumph had the Lord had? (15:1)*

He had triumphed triumphantly! The Hebrew quite literally reads, "I shall sing to Jehovah, Because triumphing he has triumphed." The word *triumph* means to *rise up* (like a river; Ezek. 47:5), to swell, increase, be great, exalted. God's triumph on this occasion was His work of casting Egypt's "horse and his chariot" into the sea. This brought honor to God, as God had predicted (14:4, 17).

5. *What had God become to Israel? (15:2-3)*

a. He was their *strength* and *song*. (This expression recurs in Ps. 118:14 and Isa. 12:2.)

b. "He has become to me (for) a *salvation*." (This word *salvation* has strong spiritual overtones.)

c. "This is my *God*," "and I will praise (adore) Him."

d. "My father's God and I will exalt him."

e. "Jehovah is a *man of war*." (15:3)

The Hebrew word for LORD (Jehovah) in 15:2 is YAH (or Jah), which is a shortened form of the name Jehovah (Yahweh), here used for the first time in the Bible, but found later in poetic passages (Ps. 77:11; 89:8; 94:7). *Yah* is the last syllable in *Hallelujah*, meaning "Praise ye JAH!" The name carries the idea of *being*. See notes on 4:14-15.

How powerful and beautiful it is to read that "Yahweh (the LORD) is His name!" God had declared (in 3:15) that



this name was His name forever. God had desired that Israel know His name. Now they do know it, and know the meaning associated with the name. Compare Ps. 83:18.

Note the continuity of faith implied in the phrase "my father's God." The word *father's* is singular. See notes on 3:6 and 18:4.

The King James translation (of 15:2) "I will prepare him an habitation" is probably not as good a translation as the A.S.V., which has "I will praise him." The KJV reading does not correspond to the parallel thought of the next line ("I will praise him"). Hebrew poetry often has successive lines parallel in thought in some way. The reading "I will build thee a sanctuary" first appeared in the Targum of Onkelos, and then in later rabbis.<sup>2</sup>

God had promised that He would fight for Israel (14:4), and now He is praised as a man of war.

6. *What had happened to Pharaoh's host?* (15:4-5, 10)

God cast Pharaoh's chariots and army into the sea. He "cast" them into the sea by impelling them to enter the sea bed (14:17). His chosen captains (R.S.V. "picked officers") were sunk (or drowned; the verb is passive) in the Red Sea (*Yam Suph*, the Sea of Weeds). See Introductory Study VII and notes on 3:18 concerning the Red Sea. Note that the stormy wind contributed to the Egyptians' destruction (15:10; Ps. 77:16-18).

The "deeps" (KJV "depths") "are covering them."<sup>3</sup> The word *deeps* suggest the deep sea waters, not a swampy marshy reedy area. *Deeps* is the plural of the *deep* referred to

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<sup>2</sup>The reason for the translation "I will build him a sanctuary" lies in the double meaning of the Hebrew verb *nawah*, which may mean to  *dwell*, abide, or rest; its cognate noun *naweh* means dwelling or habitation, and refers to the temple in I Sam. 15:25. However, *nawah* (in Hiphil, as here) also means to make beautiful, or adorn. This is something that can be done to God only by *praising* Him. This seems to be its correct meaning here.

<sup>3</sup>The Hebrew verb translated above "are covering them" is in the imperfect tense, as if indicating incomplete action, as if the event were taking place before the eyes of the singers. Mentally they were reliving this victorious experience.

in Gen. 1:2.

The Egyptian host went down into the depths like a stone. Perhaps their armor weighted them down. More probably the moving currents made swimming impossible, even without armor. At any rate, they sank like lead. Compare Neh. 9:10-11; Ex. 14:28.

7. *What is stated about God's right hand? (15:6-7)*

God's right hand is glorious in power, and dashes the enemy in pieces. Compare Ex. 15: 12; 14:31; 3:20. (The Hebrew word for *hand* is translated *work* in 14:31.) The phrase "right hand" (of God) is common in Psalms, where it occurs over twenty times. Ps. 20:6; 118:15-16; 48:10. Inasmuch as the scripture uses such expressions in referring to God, we should not hesitate to use them, even though we know that God is spirit (John 4:24), and fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:23-24), and does not necessarily have hands like ours.

The word *excellency* (or *majesty*) in 15:7 is from the same root as *triumphed* in 15:1, and refers to God's splendor, highness, and glory. Note the reference to God's *wrath* in 15:7. God's wrath consumes (or eats up) his enemies, like fire consumes stubble.

8. *What position had the sea waters taken? (15:8)*

They were "piled up" in a "heap" and were "congealed." (*Congeval* means to thicken, or condense.) They were a "wall" (14:22). The term *heap* is a word chiefly limited to descriptions of the Red Sea crossing and the crossing of Jordan (Psalm 78:13; 33:7; Joshua 3:13, 16). We agree with Cassuto that the word *heap* plainly suggests a miraculous piling up of the waters. We should not try to weaken its force by calling it a poetic anthropomorphism.<sup>4</sup> See notes on 14:21-22.

9. *What had the enemy planned to do to Israel? (15:9)*

To pursue. To overtake. To divide the spoil. To destroy.

In the Hebrew reading the threats of 15:9 are short, crisp words, expressing the eagerness of the exultant foe and his

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Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

assurance of complete victory. His threat "My hand shall *destroy* them" uses a word (*yarash*) often used later to refer to Israel's expulsion of the Canaanites (See Ex. 34:24). It has a strong irony when applied here to Israel.

On 15:10, see notes on 15:4-5.

10. *Who is like unto the LORD? (15:11)*

No one! Not even any among the gods. The "gods" (or mighty ones) are probably the idols and false gods of the heathen. Whether the word *gods* (Hebrew, *elim*, plural of *el*) refers to mighty men (as in Ezek. 32:21), or to mighty angels (as probably in Ps. 29:1), or to other supposedly-existing mighty gods, **NO ONE** is like the LORD.

Many Biblical references assert that there is no one like the LORD. See Deut. 3:24; Ps. 71:19; 86:8; 89:6, 8; Jer. 10:6; Micah 7:18; II Sam. 7:22; I Kings 8:23. Let us learn this truth for ourselves.

The LORD is glorious in holiness. *Holiness* means uniqueness, separation, distinction, and moral perfection. See Lev. 19:2.<sup>5</sup>

The Lord is fearsome, or wonderful, in praises. Probably this means that the praises justly given to the LORD are such as to create reverent fear in the beholder. See Rev. 4:8-11; 5:11-14; Isa. 6:2-3.

11. *Did the earth swallow the Egyptians, or the sea? (15:12)*

"The earth swallowed them." Certainly they were swallowed up in the sea, but the sea is part of the earth.

The word *earth* in the literature of Semitic peoples living around the Israelites sometimes served as a designation for Sheol, the underworld.<sup>6</sup> This meaning makes good sense here.

Concerning God's right hand, see notes on 15:6.

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<sup>5</sup>The idea set forth in *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 (1969) that moral perfection and righteousness were applications of the term *holiness* used only in centuries later than Moses is contradicted by its use in *Leviticus*, a book written by Moses. See Lev. 19:15. Of course, the skeptical critics affirm (without proof) that *Leviticus* was written during or after the Babylonian exile!

<sup>6</sup>Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

Ex. 15:12 probably is the end of stanza two (15:7-12) of the song, a stanza dealing with the destruction of the Egyptians.

12. *What had God done for His redeemed people?* (15:13)

He had LED the people whom he had redeemed. Ps. 77: 15, 20). He GUIDED them to his holy habitation. This verse could well be called the KEY VERSE in Exodus, because it sums up much of what is related in the book.

Concerning *redeemed*, see notes on Ex. 6:6.

God's leading His redeemed people was an act of "loving-kindness" (or "steadfast love"; Heb. *hesed*). See Ex. 34:7. *Hesed* is the great covenant word of the O.T. to describe God's unailing attitude of love toward His people. In turn, this is what God expects from His people. See Hosea 6:6. *Hesed* has no exact equivalent in Greek or in English. It combines the ideas of loyalty, steadfastness, mercy and love. For uses of *hesed* see Psalm 5:1; 6:5; Gen. 19:19; Deut. 7:9, 12. The term generally refers to a covenantal type of love, an unailing love based on pledged commitment.

God's "holy habitation" referred to in 15:13 probably refers to the promised land of Canaan, as in Jeremiah 25:30. The term *habitation* in later literature frequently refers to the temple sanctuary at Jerusalem. See II Sam. 15:25. Ex. 15:17 refers to the promised land as "the mountain of thine inheritance." Since God's people had not actually entered and "inherited" this land in Moses' time, some scholars assume that 15:13-18 was written AFTER Israel's occupation of Canaan. (For an example, see *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 [1969], p. 392.) But this is an unnecessary assumption. After all of God's triumphs in Egypt and at the sea, why should not Moses speak of God's promise to bring them into the land (see 6:8) as being "as good as done"? Faith gives substance to things hoped for.

The verb tenses in 15:13-15 shift back and forth, between perfect (indicating completed action) and imperfect (incomplete action). "Led," "guided," "heard" are in the perfect tense. However, "tremble" (KJV "be afraid") in

15:14, and “take hold” in verse 15, and “shall fall” and “be still” in verse 16 are imperfect.

This shifting of the tenses when all of the verbs refer to the same series of events, shows that the time of the events was partly in the past, partly in process, and partly future. The past (or perfect) tenses also may be “predictive perfects,” which are used to refer to predicted future events as if they had already taken place. Faith in God’s promises and predictions can lead us to view the promises as already fulfilled.

13. *What effect did the crossing of the Red Sea have on nearby nations? (15:14-16)*

They had heard about it, and had become very fearful, realizing that if the Israelites and their God could overcome the mighty Egyptians, they could overcome them also. For similar thoughts, see Habakkuk 3:7; Joshua 2:9, 11, 24; Num. 22:3; 1 Sam. 4:6-8.

Philistia was the area along the southern coast of the Mediterranean in Canaan. The major immigration of the Philistines into this area occurred about 1200 B.C., about 250 years after the exodus date. However, there had been groups of Philistines (or similar peoples) settle there from Crete and other Mediterranean islands as far back as Abraham’s time (2000 B.C.). See Gen. 21:35. It is untrue to say, as many writers have, that the reference here to the Philistines is a historical error, or indicates that this verse in Exodus was written long after the time of the exodus, even after their settlement into Canaan. There is some archaeological evidence of Philistine presence in this area before 1200 B.C., as well as the Biblical testimony. See notes on 13:17.

Edom lay just SW of the Dead Sea, east of the Arabah valley joining the Dead Sea and the Red Sea gulf of Akabah, in a mountainous area called Mt. Seir. The title *chiefs* (or dukes; Heb. *’aluphim*) of Edom seems to be a technical title for Edomite rulers. It is used in Gen. 36:15-19.

The phrase “melt away” in 15:15 is explained in the next line to mean that the people were in terror and dread of the approaching Israelites. Their courage and will to resist

melted away. See Ex. 23:27.

The "passing over" of the people (15:16) is explained to mean the entry of the people into the land of Canaan. Certainly they had to "pass over" Jordan to enter this land. (Joshua 3:17). Moses may not have been referring to passing over the Jordan, but he knew they would pass over the territory between Egypt and the promised land (Ex. 3:8; Num. 32:20-21, 27).

The word *purchased* in 15:16 means to procure, buy, acquire, get, obtain. Truly God had obtained Israel as a people by His wondrous deeds. A participial form of the word translated *purchase* (*qanah*) is used in Gen. 14:22 as a title ("possessor" or "maker") for God. Possibly therefore the meaning is that God "created" the people Israel, as well as "purchased" them.

14. *By what terms is Israel's promised homeland called? (15:17)*

(1) "The mountain of thine inheritance." (2) "The place of thy dwelling." (3) The "sanctuary." It is striking that each of these three titles asserts that this land was GOD'S land in a special way; it was *God's inheritance*, *God's dwelling-place*, and *God's sanctuary* (or holy place). Why the land of Israel should be a place that God specially favored, we know not. But numerous passages confirm that this is so. See II Kings 17:25-26.

The term *mountain* is an interesting title for the land of Israel. Psalm 78:54: "He brought them to the border of his sanctuary, to this *mountain* which his right hand had gotten." Perhaps it was given this title of *mountain* because of its prominence among nations, like a mountain among hills. Compare Isaiah 2:2 and Psalm 68:16.

The term *sanctuary* (holy place) seems to refer to all of the land of Canaan, and not just Jerusalem or the temple. *Sanctuary* in later times did often refer to the temple (Psalm 73:17). This fact causes some skeptical authors to assert that Ex. 15:17 was written after the time of Solomon's temple. But even Martin Noth, a rather extreme critic, says that *sanctuary* here may mean the whole of the land and not just

Jerusalem.

15. *What sublime spiritual thought closes the song?* (15:18)

Jehovah shall reign for ever and ever! Ramm correctly asserts that the whole exodus experience is a commentary on what the reign of God is. We must be cautious not to think of the reign of God as being totally in the future, either in a millenium or in heaven. The kingdom of God existed in Moses' time (Ex. 19:6; I Chron. 29:11), exists now as the church (Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9), and shall exist hereafter (II Pet. 1:11, II Tim. 4:18).

16. *Why is the restatement of the Red Sea story placed after the Song?*

Probably it is inserted to make the transition into the following prose narrative. It certainly also strengthens the assertion of 15:18 that Jehovah shall reign for ever. This verse has three clauses, each of which ends in Hebrew with the word *sea*.<sup>7</sup>

17. *How does the Song of Miriam relate to the Song of Moses?* (15:20-21)

The words of Miriam's song are almost identical to Moses' words in 15:1. Only the verb is changed from indicative to imperative. This similarity suggests that they sang antiphonally, Miriam and the women responding to the words of Moses and the "sons" of Israel. We do not know whether we have all or just part of Miriam's song. We suspect it is only partly given.

Numerous speculations about the relation of Miriam's song to Moses' song have been made. One radical proposal is that Miriam's song is the oldest part of Ex. fifteen, and was written by a different author than the writer of 15:1ff.<sup>8</sup> Another writer (S. R. Driver) gives a contradictory, though equally radical view, saying that verse 19 is a "later redactional addition," written AFTER 15:1-18.<sup>9</sup> Alan Cole

<sup>7</sup>Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>8</sup>Noth, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>9</sup>*An Introduction to the Literature of the O. T.* (New York: World, 1965), p. 29.

proposes that Moses' song was a "theological expansion" of Miriam's song.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to see how anyone could say that and still give credence to the plain statement of 15:1 that Moses and the children of Israel sang the song. The variations in these speculations show the futility and folly of men's judgments upon God's word.

In 15:21 Miriam is mentioned for the first time by name and by title. She is called the "prophetess." Compare Num. 12:2; Judges 4:4; II Kings 22:14; Isaiah 8:3. She was a prophetess because of God's divine gift, and not because of natural poetic and musical ability. Micah 6:4 indicates that when the Lord delivered Israel out of Egypt, he sent before them Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. This suggests that she played a rather important role in these events.

Although Miriam is here referred to only as the sister of Aaron, Numbers 26:59 specifically identifies her as also the sister of Moses. Miriam had watched over Moses as a babe in the river (Ex. 2:4). She would have been about ninety years old at this time.

A *timbrel* is a small hand drum, similar to a Salvation Army tambourine (without the jingling metal pieces). See Ps. 81:2; 68:25; 149:3. Its Hebrew name (*toph!*) resembles its sound (*thump!*).

The Hebrew women and men *danced* on occasions of victory (I Sam. 18:6) and on special religious holidays (Judges 21:21; Psalm 30:11; 150:4; II Sam. 6:14). These dances seem to have been practiced by each sex alone, and hardly resemble our modern social dancing, which is more like the evil dancing referred to in Job 21:7, 11, and is spoken of in the New Testament as "revelling" (Gal. 5:21; I Pet. 4:3).

18. *What area did Israel enter after crossing the Red Sea?* (15:22)

They entered the Wilderness of Shur. The part of the Wilderness of Shur they entered was also called the Wilderness of Etham (Num. 33:8). *Shur* means *wall*. It may have acquired this name from the abrupt wall-like rise in the land

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 123.



ten to twelve miles east of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal line. The Wilderness of Shur lies in the NW part of the Sinai peninsula, south of Mediterranean coastline, between the present Suez canal and the River of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish). The direct route from Egypt to Canaan runs through Shur. Its southward extension ran along the Red Sea east coast almost to Marah.

It is about thirty-seven miles from Israel's crossing place to Marah.

There are springs (called the 'Ayun Musa, or Springs of Moses) lying about one and a half miles from the east shore of the Red Sea, just east of the point where we think Israel crossed the sea. The scripture makes no mention of these springs. S. C. Bartlett<sup>11</sup> found them to be in a hillock some sixteen feet above the level of the surrounding plain, containing a basin twelve to fifteen feet in diameter, surrounded by a rocky rim. Their water is brackish and disagreeable because of mineral salts in it. Different travelers have described these springs differently, because the flow of water differs from year to year, and sandstorms choke up the springs in different patterns.

The surface from the Red Sea to Marah is hard compacted sand, sprinkled with gravel and some boulders scattered about. Sharp flints are occasionally seen on the surface, such as that used by Zipporah in circumcising her son (Ex. 4:25).

We must remember that Israel passed through this area in springtime, the most delightful time of year. S. C. Bartlett reported that when he passed through in February, the temperature some days dropped to the freezing point at night, and then shot up to 98 degrees in the sun at noon. The heat would certainly have continued up into March/April when Israel passed through. Little wonder the Israelites were

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<sup>11</sup>We have found Bartlett's book *From Egypt to Palestine* (New York: Harper, 1879) particularly helpful in its descriptions of the places in Israel's journeys. Bartlett was a very careful observer and recorder. Also he was thoroughly acquainted with the reports of other travellers; and he visited the area before modern roads and oil wells altered so much of it.

CARAVAN AT SPRINGS OF MOSES

15:1-27



Caravan at the Springs of Moses (Ayun Musa)  
(Matson Photo)

330A



Elim (now called Wadi Gharandel). Here Israel found twelve springs and seventy palm trees. (Courtesy Pictorial Archive: R.L.W. Cleave)

dreadfully distressed when they reached Marah and found no good water.

Between the place of Israel's crossing and Marah are at least two dozen smaller or larger depressions (valleys, or wadies) to be crossed. All of these have lines of vegetation along their courses. These would have had new spring vegetation in them as Israel passed through. The area is NOT good pasture land, but there was some pasture for Israel's flocks in transit.

19. *What did Israel find at Marah? (15:23)*

They found a spring of bitter water. The name *Marah* means bitter, or bitterness (Prov. 14:10). Most of the flowing springs in Sinai are bitter and unpleasant because of mineral salts dissolved in the water.

Marah is generally identified with the spring 'Ain Hawwarah.<sup>12</sup> Bartlett<sup>13</sup> reported it as being in the center of a low, flat-topped mound, which was largely a calcareous deposit. The water was in a hole five or six feet in circumference and was some two feet deep. The mineral deposit suggests that the flow of the spring was formerly larger. The water is so bitter that men cannot drink it unless they are very thirsty.

Besides its bitterness, it has laxative qualities, resembling those of Epsom Salts. Its bitterness varies from year to year, depending on the amount of rainfall and the volume of its flow. There are other springs in the immediate vicinity, which would furnish additional water, and may be included in the name *Marah*.

Ex. 15:23 says literally, "He called its name Marah." This suggests that Moses named it. However, this wording probably should be taken indefinitely to mean "It was called Marah."

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<sup>12</sup>Other identifications of Marah include the Springs of Moses (*'Ayun Musa*); Bir-Huwara, about 47 mi. SE of the Springs of Moses and seven miles from the coast; or El-Churkudah, a fountain of brackish water ten mi. SE of the town of Suez and fifty miles from Lake Timsah. We definitely prefer the 'Ain Hawwarah location as being the actual site.

<sup>13</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 199.

20. *How did Israel respond to the bitter waters?* (15:24).

They murmured. In murmuring against Moses, they actually murmured against God himself. This was their second murmuring: they murmured before at the Red Sea (14:11). There are over a dozen passages in the story of Israel's wanderings where murmuring is mentioned. It was characteristic of them. Psalm 106:13: "They soon forgot his works: they waited not for his counsel." But in their murmurings they were, sadly, a picture of all humanity; and their punishments are a warning to us (I Cor. 10:11).

21. *How were the waters sweetened?* (15:25)

By casting a certain tree into the water. No known tree can instantly (or even gradually) sweeten spring water. Hence, this was a miracle. Compare II Kings 2:19-22.

Medieval commentators on Exodus delighted in seeing in this tree a reference to the cross of Christ, by which the bitterest of life's waters are sweetened. As an illustration it is edifying; but the comparison cannot be called an exegesis of the Biblical text.

Moses received the instructions to cast in the tree as an answer to his cry (prayer) to the LORD. We admire Moses' action of turning to prayer, rather than to rebuke and contention with the unreasonable people.

The fact that the LORD showed Moses the tree was God's method of teaching Israel that they constantly needed divine guidance and instruction. This awareness of their need for instruction prepared the people spiritually for their acceptance of the law at Mt. Sinai.

This experience at Marah was a *testing* for Israel. There God *proved* them. Similarly he tested them again soon after this by the manna (16:4), as to whether they would walk in his law (torah) or not.

At Marah God made for them a statute (or law) and an ordinance (or judgment). Possibly the words of God in 15:26 constitute the law and ordinance. If so, the ordinance is extremely general in nature. If 15:26 is not the ordinance referred to, then we simply do not know what the ordinance

was. Possibly God's *act* of sweetening the water was in itself the ordinance, since there was a message from God implied in the miracle: "Thou shalt always trust the LORD and seek His deliverance in thine every affliction."

22. *What did God promise Israel if they obeyed His commandments?* (15:26)

God would put none of the diseases which He had brought upon the Egyptians upon them.

Deut. 7:15 extended this promise into the time after Israel entered and occupied Canaan. Deut. 28:58 warned that they would get plagues in Canaan if they were disobedient there.

Why are the words about Jehovah being their healer inserted here? It may have been a broader application of the healing of the bitter waters of Marah. God would heal ALL their bitter diseases, just as He had sweetened the Marah waters. Also it may have been a warning to the Israelites as they journeyed: they were not morally superior to the Egyptians. They could suffer diseases like those which killed Egypt's firstborn. See Ps. 78:49-50. See notes on Ex. 12:29. A redeemed people must be a holy, spiritual people.

23. *What happened to Israel at Elim?* (15:27)

They camped there by the waters from twelve springs, in an area graced by seventy palm trees. The specific details about these numbers sound like the record of an eyewitness.

It is about seven miles from Marah to Elim, an easy day's journey. S. C. Bartlett found much shrubbery between Marah and Elim.

Elim is generally considered to be the Wady Gharandel. This wady (or winter-flowing brook channel) has water issuing from it in several spots, forming brisk rivulets, flowing several barrels a minute. Several considerable pools of water overgrown with rushes lie by the wady channel.

The water of Elim is as good as that of the Nile, and nowhere in the Sinai peninsula, except in the wadi Feiran, is it so abundant.

Elim can be an illustration of the Lord's Day, a time of refreshment amidst the toils of life's journey.

“Elim! Sweet foretaste of rest and blessing:  
 Soon must be left for the lengthening way.  
 But it is well that the pilgrims may gather  
 Courage and strength for the wearisome day.”<sup>14</sup>

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THE TEXT OF EXODUS  
 TRANSLATION

**16** And they took their journey from E-lim, and all the congregation of the children of Is-ra-el came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between E-lim and Si-nai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of E-gypt. (2) And the whole congregation of the children of Is-ra-el murmured against Mo-ses and against Aar-on in the wilderness: (3) and the children of Is-ra-el said unto them, Would that we died by the hand of Je-ho-vah in the land of E-gypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

(4) Then said Je-ho-vah unto Mo-ses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or not. (5) And it shall come to pass on the sixth day, that they shall prepare that which they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. (6) And Mo-ses and Aar-on said unto all the children of Is-ra-el, At even, then ye shall know that Je-ho-vah hath brought you out from the land of E-gypt; (7) and in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of Je-ho-vah; for that he heareth your murmurings against Je-ho-vah: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? (8) And Mo-ses said, *This shall be*, when Je-ho-vah shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that

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<sup>14</sup>From *Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*, Vol. II, p. 293.