

Exodus 15

Exodus 15 records a song which Moses teaches and sings with Israel after the salvation through the Red Sea. Chapter 14 records the *historical narrative* while chapter 15 is a *poem* based on that history. Because it *is poetry*, we should not understand its imagery to be literal. It is a poetic description of what happened. Let's keep that in mind whenever we study biblical poetry.

The song uses old Hebrew words which has motivated many OT scholars to believe the song is among the oldest literature in the Bible. If we accept the facts on the surface, then Moses wrote the song, which makes it as old as Genesis, although it still seems to use old Hebrew words and terms. It is not unusual even today for a poet to use antiquated words and phrases even though she is writing modern poetry.

TRANSLATION - 15:1-18:

1 Then he sang, Moses and the sons of Israel, this song to Jehovah and they spoke saying, "I will sing to Jehovah because to lift up He lifted up horse and rider He cast into the sea. **2** My strength and My song [are] Jehovah and He will be to me for this salvation, My God and I will praise the God of My father and I will exalt Him. **3** Jehovah [is] a man of war; Jehovah [is] His name. **4** The chariots of Pharaoh and his army He cast into the sea and the choicest of his three were sunk in the Red Sea. **5** In the deeps they were covered; they went down in the depths like a stone.

6 "Your right hand, Jehovah, is raised in power; [by] your left hand Jehovah you struck the hating person. **7** In the greatness of Your majesty you overthrew your adversaries; You sent out your anger; it consumed like stubble. **8** By the breath of Your nostrils the waters were gathered; they piled up like a dam. The floods solidified; the deeps in the heart of the sea. **9** The hating one said, 'I will pursue. I will overtake. I will divide the spoil. My soul will satisfied. I will wield my sword. My hand will destroy.'" **10** You blew by Your breath when the waters covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 "Who [is] like You among the gods, Jehovah? Who [is] like you, being exalted in holiness, fearful in praises, performing wonders? **12** You extended Your right hand; them the earth swallowed. **13** You led by your loving loyalty a people whom You redeemed. You led by your strength to the pasture of Your holiness. **14** Peoples heard; they trembled in pain. The inhabitants of Philistia were seized. **15** Then they were terrified the chiefs of Edom, the leaders of Moab, trembling gripped them. They melted all the inhabitants of Canaan. **16** Terror fell on them and fear in the greatness of your arm. They became still like a stone when your people crossed over Jehovah, when the people crossed over whom You bought. **17** You brought them and You planted them in the mountain of Your inheritance, a place for You to dwell. You made, Jehovah, a sanctuary, O Lord Your hands established. **18** Jehovah will reign forever and always."

HEBREW WORDS:

"To sing" (ver. 1) is used for the first time here in the Bible; it is used in Exodus only here (15:1, 21). The verb (used 88 times in the OT) is used most often, as we would expect, in the Psalms (25 times). "Song" is related to the verb, but is only used 13 times, only here in Exodus. The noun is used more frequently in Deuteronomy (6 times). An alternative spelling of "song" is found an additional 78 times. This word for "song" (ver. 2) is a synonym for the prior word, but used less frequently (7 times). Again, this is the only place in Exodus where the word is used. The word for "Jehovah" used here is the shortened form (used 49 times) of His name. In transliteration, the long form would be: Jehovah; the shortened form (as here) would be: Jah. The word "salvation" was used earlier at 14:13. The word for "God" here is also the shortened form. The "long" form is *elohim* while this short form is *el*. It is used in poetry (as here: 15:2, 11)

but most frequently in Psalms (18 times). This verb “to praise” is only used here in the OT. The verb to “cast” was used earlier at 7:20; 14:16.

“War” (ver. 3) was used earlier at 1:10; 13:17. “Name” is one of the most frequently used nouns in the OT (864 uses); it is used 43 times in this book. This verb “to cast” (ver. 4) is different than the preceding verb; this one is used only twice in the OT: 15:4; Job 38:6.

“Choicest” is used only here in Exodus; it is used 12 times in the OT. “To be sunk” is used 10 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “Depths” (ver. 5) is used only here in Exodus (15:5, 8). It is found 36 times. “To be covered” was used earlier at 8:6; 10:5, 15. The second word “depths” is a synonym; it is only used here in Exodus, out of 12 uses. “Stone” was used earlier at 1:16; 7:19.

“To be raised” (ver. 6) is only used three times in the OT: 15:6, 11; Isa. 42:21. “Power” is used earlier at 9:16; here; 32:11 in Exodus. “To strike” is used only here and Judges 10:8. “Greatness” (ver. 7) is used only here in Exodus, out of 150 times. “Majesty” or “pride” or “excellency” is used only here in Exodus, from 49 uses. “To overthrow” or “to demolish” is used here; 19:21, 24; 23:24 in Exodus. It is used 43 times. “Adversary” is a synonym for “enemy” or “hating one;” it is used only here and 32:25 in Exodus. It is used 13 times. It is related to the verb “to rise up (against).” “Anger” is used only here and 32:12 in Exodus, from 41 uses. “Stubble” is used only at 5:12 and 15:7 in Exodus. “To be gathered” (ver. 8) is used only here. “To pile up” was used earlier at 2:4; 5:20; 7:15. “Dam” is used only 5 times in the OT: 15:8; Joshua 3:13, 16; Psalms 33:7; 78:13. The “floods” is used 6 times in the OT: 15:8; Isa. 44:3; Jer. 18:14; Psalms 78:16, 44; Prov. 5:15. “To solidify” is used 4 times: 15:8; Zeph. 1:12; Zech. 14:6; Job 10:10.

“To pursue” (ver. 9) was used earlier at 14:4, 8-9, 23. “To overtake” was used earlier at 14:9. “To divide” is used only here in Exodus, of 56 uses. “Plunder” is used only here in Exodus, of 74 uses. “Soul” was used earlier at 1:5; 4:19. “To wield” is used only here in 15:9 in Exodus, out of 19 uses. “Sword” was used earlier at 5:3, 21. “To destroy” is used here and 34:24 in Exodus. It is used in Numbers 15 times. It is found in the OT 232 times. “To blow” (ver. 10) is used only here and Isa. 40:24. “To sink” is used only here in Exodus. “Lead” is only used 9 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “Mighty” is used only here in Exodus. It is found in the OT 27 times.

“Exalted” (ver. 11) was used at verse 6. “Holiness” was used earlier at 3:5; 12:16. “Fearful” is a passive participle in Hebrew, denoting that God is to be feared. The verb was used earlier at 1:17, 21. “Praises” is used only here in Exodus, out of 58 uses. “Wonders” is used 13 times, only here in Exodus. “To extend” (ver. 12) is used extensively in Exodus relative to the “hand” of either God or Moses; it was used earlier at 7:5. “To swallow” was used earlier at 7:12. The first verb “to lead” (ver. 13) is used only here in Exodus, out of 39 times in the OT. “Loving loyalty” has a deep, rich theological meaning which encompasses faithfulness, loyalty, love, and kindness. The word is only used in Exodus four times: 15:13; 20:6; 34:6-7. It is used 249 times in the OT. “To redeem” was used earlier at 6:6. The second verb “to lead” or “to guide” is used only here in Exodus, out of 9 uses.

“To tremble” (ver. 14) is used 41 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “Pain” is used only 7 times in the OT: 15:14; Jer. 6:24; 22:23; 50:43; Micah 4:9; Psalms 48:6; Job 6:10. “To seize” was used earlier at 4:4. “To be terrified” (ver. 15) is used 39 times, only here in Exodus. “To be gripped” was used earlier at 4:4. “Trembling” is found 6 times in the OT: 15:15; Isa. 33:14; Psalms 2:11; 48:6; 55:5; Job 4:14. “To melt” is used only here in Exodus, out of 17 times in the OT. “Terror” (ver. 16) is used here and 23:27 in Exodus; 17 times in the OT. “Fear” (49 times in the OT) is used only here in Exodus. “Arm” was used earlier at 6:6. “To be still” (19 times in the OT) is used only here in Exodus. “To cross over” was used in the discussion of the death of the firstborn in 12:12, 23; 13:12. “To buy” is used here and 21:2 in Exodus. It is theologically related to the verb “to redeem” used in verse 13.

“To plant” (ver. 17) is only used here in Exodus, out of 59 times. “Inheritance” is used 222 times, only here in Exodus. “To dwell” was used earlier at 2:15, 21. “To work” or “make” is used 58 times, only here in Exodus. “Sanctuary” is used only here in Exodus and 25:8, out of 75 times in the OT; it is used 31 times in Ezekiel. It is related to the noun “holiness” or adjective

“holy.” The expression “O Lord” is used 635 times in the OT. The word “Lord” here means “Master;” it is not the word that is normally translated “LORD” (with all capital letters), which translates the name “Jehovah.” The word “master” is used 774 times in the OT, 439 times referring to God. “To establish” is used here; 16:5; 19:11, 15; 23:20; 34:2. “To reign” (ver. 18) is used only here in Exodus, out of 350 uses in the OT. “Forever” is the word we often translate “indefinitely;” here it denotes “forever” because it is associated with the word “always.” It was used first in Exodus at 3:15.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The “father” in verse 2 is probably referring to Abraham. It might refer to Amram; it could also refer to the “patriarchs” under a single designation.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

On “Red Sea” (ver. 4), see at 10:19. It seems to have been an arm of the modern Red Sea, perhaps at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, perhaps even a part which no longer exists today. The phrase is used 24 times in the OT.

“Philistia” (ver. 14) is used 8 times in the OT: 15:14; Isa. 14:29, 31; Joel 3:4; Psa. 60:8; 83:7; 87:4; 108:9. It refers to the land of the Philistines, in the area between Egypt and Canaan. This is the only use of “Edom” (ver. 15) in the book of Exodus. This is the only use of “Moab” in Exodus. “Canaan” was used earlier at 6:4.

COMMENTARY:

Moses, inspired by the Holy Spirit, compiled and sang this song, along with Israel, to glorify Jehovah God. Notice that Moses is not praised in the song at all. He is not the one to praise; Jehovah God is. Verse 1 states that God “lifted up” the horse and its rider - these would refer to the chariots (14:26-29) of Pharaoh and God cast them into the sea. Remember, this is poetry, not historical prose.

In verse 2, Moses notes that Jehovah God is “my strength and my song, and my salvation.” Jehovah God was the *source* of Israel’s strength and courage. Jehovah God was the *subject* of their song and the *object* of their praise in song. Also, Jehovah God was the *source* of their salvation. It came by Him and Him alone. Therefore, Moses sings, Israel will praise the God of their father - perhaps simply referring to Abraham - and Israel would exalt (or praise or honor) Jehovah God.

Jehovah God is a “man” of war; He is a warrior. God is a “jealous God” (20:5); He fights for His people. Again, in verse 3, Moses notes Jehovah’s name. He is the God known by Israel as “Jehovah.” Jehovah is called “Jehovah of hosts” (a term filled with military connotations) 239 times in the OT, beginning at 1 Samuel 1:3. Isaiah uses the term 49 times; Jeremiah 71 times. Zechariah uses it 53 times and his contemporary, Haggai, 14 times. Additionally, the phrase “Jehovah God of hosts” is used 34 times, most frequently in Isaiah (11 times). We have noted the use of “hosts” several times in Exodus: 6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 51. Additionally, the verb “to plunder” used of the Israelites’ behavior toward Egypt (12:36) carries with it the connotation of an army taking plunder from a defeated opponent. Moses had told Israel in 14:14 that Jehovah would fight for them. In 14:25, the Egyptians recognized that Jehovah was fighting for them (see also 1 Samuel 17:47; Zechariah 4:6).

In verse 4, Moses repeats the idea that the chariots of Pharaoh and his army Jehovah God cast into the sea, even the best (the “choicest”) of his officers (“his three”) sank in the Red Sea. In verse 5, these enemies of Israel were “covered” by the deeps and went down into the depths of the water “like a stone.”

We have observed before how the “arm” (6:6) or “hand” (3:19-20; 7:4-5; 9:3, 15; 13:3, 9, 14, 16) of Jehovah God was against Egypt. Here, Moses mentions again the right hand of Jehovah God raised in power against Egypt (ver. 6). The “right hand” was the stronger side, yet Jehovah God could also raise His left hand to strike those hating Israel, His firstborn.

In verse 7, Moses returns to the nature of God. He is great and His majesty, His honor, is great. Why? Because Jehovah God threw His “adversaries” into the sea. Notice that the enemies of Israel (ver. 6) were adversaries of Jehovah God (ver. 7). God “sent out” His anger and that fiery anger consumed Egypt as “stubble,” which Israel had to use to make their bricks (5:7, 12, 16). The “breath” of Jehovah’s nostrils is a poetic image used also in 2 Samuel 22:16. While the historical narrative says it was the wind which caused the sea to become a wall (14:21), the poetic description ascribes the work to the “breath” of Jehovah’s nostrils. The waters “piled up like a dam” which is a simile and the floods “solidified” or congealed (which is a metaphor). The waters did not literally solidify; they only appeared that way as they became a “wall” on each side of Israel (14:22).

In verse 9, Moses gives us insight into the heart and thinking of Pharaoh. Observe how arrogant and boastful he was. Count the times he refers to himself: “I will pursue. I will overtake. I will divide the spoil. My soul will be satisfied. I will wield my sword (see 5:3, 21). My hand will destroy.” Yet, under the hand of Jehovah God, Pharaoh actually was on the receiving end of all these actions. Jehovah God “blew by His breath” (ver. 10) and the waters covered the Egyptians and their army. They sank like lead into the mighty waters of the Red Sea. Again, we cannot draw the conclusion that this “Red Sea” was a shallow, swampy area. It does not fit the description of the destruction of the Egyptian army.

Having defeated the whole pantheon of Egyptian gods, Moses reflects on the unique (“holy”) nature of Jehovah God in verse 11: “Who is like you among the gods, Jehovah?” The implication is that *no god* is like Jehovah God. Moses is not stating that these gods *exist*. He is simply emphasizing that there is no god that compares to the True and Living God. He is holy. He is fearful. He is to be praised. He performs wonders. He extended His right hand and caused the earth to swallow them (ver. 12). Remember, this is poetry; it is not describing the events in a literal way.

God led Israel through His “loving loyalty” (ver. 13), the people whom He had redeemed (see 6:6). God did what it took; He paid the price to buy (obtain) His firstborn son out of the hands of the Egyptians. It was by His strength that He led them to the “pasture of His holiness.” Moses will picture God under several different images in this poem; here He pictures God as a shepherd leading His people as sheep (see Genesis 48:15; 49:24). This pasture is a spiritual pasture, not a literal pasture. It is the pasture “of His holiness.”

In verse 14, Moses meditates on the impact the crossing of the Red Sea had on the people around Israel. They heard about it. They trembled in pain. Which people specifically? He notes Philistia in verse 14, the chiefs of Edom and the leaders of Moab in verse 15. The word “chiefs” is literally “rams,” but apparently is a title for a chief. Trembling gripped them all. In fact, all the inhabitants of Canaan “melted” because of God’s work for Israel. See references below under “Application” for the later fulfillment of this imagery. Moses elaborates on this fear in verse 16. Terror fell on them. Fear of the greatness of the “army” of Jehovah God also fell on them. So fearful were they that they became still “like a stone” (compare the imagery in verses 5, 10). This happened when Jehovah “bought” His people, an idea similar to the “redemption” mentioned in verse 13.

God brought His people, His firstborn, and He “planted” them (as He had planted the garden of Eden; Gen. 2:8) in the “mountain of His inheritance,” a place for Israel to dwell (ver. 17). There was a “sanctuary,” a holy place, which Jehovah’s hands had established. God’s sanctuary might be Mount Sinai, the land of Canaan, the tabernacle, or the future temple on Mount Zion. The idea of a permanent place for God’s temple was expressed in the Law as early as Deut. 12:9-11. Solomon dedicated the temple which he built in 1 Kings 8:56, which was built 480 years after the exodus: 1 Kings 6:1. We believe Moses’ immediate reference to “sanctuary” or “mountain of His inheritance” refers simply to being in God’s presence and under His immediate protection. It will refer to Mount Sinai in the immediate future and the temple in Jerusalem in the distant future. Of course, eventually God’s “sanctuary” is found in Jesus Christ (John 1:14; Col. 2:9).

Finally, Moses concludes his song in verse 18 noting the reign of Jehovah God. This is the first time God is referred to as King of Israel; see also Judges 8:23; 1 Samuel 8:7; 12:12. Jehovah God will reign forever and always, denoting permanency and eternity. Daniel will also note God reigning forever in His (new) kingdom in Daniel 7:13-14, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18-19).

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Many passages present God as the King of Israel: Deut. 1:30; see below for more. Other passages present Jehovah as fighting for His people: Deut. 1:30. God describes His own nature in Exodus 34:6-7. God emphasizes later that there is no god like Him: Deut. 3:24; 4:39. God is said to have "created" Israel in Deuteronomy 32:6.

Later Jewish writers - Psalm 118:14 quotes part of verse 2. For the idea that God is King of Israel, see: Judges 4:14; 2 Sam. 5:24; 2 Chron. 20:17-18. Ezekiel pictures the defeat of Pharaoh in 29:3; 32:2. The psalmist does as well in Psalm 77:16, 19-20; 114:1-7. For other passages which relate the verb "to sing" to Jehovah, see: Isa. 12:5; Psa. 21:13; 30:12; 47:6; 57:7, 9; 59:17; 89:1; 108:1, 3; 138:1; 147:1. For other passages in which Jehovah is pictured as fighting for Israel, see: Deut. 20:1-4; Joshua 10:8-11; 23:9-10, 14; Judges 4:14; 2 Sam. 5:24; Isa. 42:13; Jer. 20:11.

Jehovah God, alone, can work miracles ("wonders"): Isa. 25:1; Psa. 72:18; 77:14; 78:12; 86:10; 88:10, 12; 106:21-22; 136:4; Job 5:9; 9:10.

The miracle of the exodus was heard by many nations in that area: Midianites (Exo. 18:1); Moabites (Numbers 22-24); Canaanites (Joshua 2:10; 5:1); Gibeonites (Joshua 9:9); Philistines (1 Samuel 4:7-8).

For further references to songs in the OT, see: Judges 5; 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:6; 21:11; 29:5; 2 Sam. 1:20; Jer. 31:7; Psa. 68:32; 98:1-5; 149:1-5; Song of Solomon 7:1. Psalm 78 might be one of the earliest reflections on Exodus 15.

There are later references to the fear of Israel experienced by the peoples of the land: Num. 22:1-7; Josh. 2:9, 24; Psa. 65:8; Jer. 49:23; Nah. 1:5; Psa. 75:4.

God requires "loving loyalty" of His people (Hosea 6:6). The Bible teaches monotheism: Isaiah 45:5.

There is no god like Jehovah God: Psalm 35:10; 71:19; 77:13-14; 86:8-10; 89:6-8; 96:4-5; 113:5; 135:5, 15-18; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:23; Jer. 10:6-7; Micah 7:18.

NT writers - God still desires His people to teach one another through singing: Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15; Rev. 15:3. The NT also presents the Christian in a battle in which God fights for him or her: 2 Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-17; 2 Tim. 2:3-4.

TRANSLATION - 15:19-27:

19 Because the horse of Pharaoh came, his chariots and his horsemen in the waters and Jehovah returned on them the waters of the sea and the sons of Israel went on dry land in the middle of the sea. **20** And she took, Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, the timbrel in her hand and they went out all the women after her with timbrels and dances. **21** And Miriam answered them, "Sing to Jehovah because to lift up, He lifted up the horse and chariot He cast into the sea."

22 And Moses broke the camp of Israel at the Red Sea and went out to the wilderness of Shur and went three days in the wilderness and they did not find water. **23** And they came to Marah and were not able to drink the waters of Marah because bitter they [were]. Thus they called its name Marah. **24** The people murmured against Moses saying, "What will we drink?"

25 And they cried to Jehovah and Jehovah revealed a tree and he cast [it] to the waters and the waters became sweet there. He made it a regulation and a judgment and there He tested them. **26** And He said, "If to listen you will listen to the voice of Jehovah your God and the right thing in your eyes you will do and you will give ear to His commandments then you will keep all His regulations, all the diseases which I put on Egypt I will not put on you because I

[am] Jehovah your healer.” **27** And they came to Elim and there [were] twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees and they camped there by the waters.

HEBREW WORDS:

“Dry land” (ver. 19) was used earlier at 14:16, 22, 29. “Miriam” (ver. 20) is mentioned only here in Exodus (15:20-21). She will be mentioned extensively in Numbers 12 (12:1, 4-5, 10, 15); 20:1; 26:59; Deut. 24:9; Micah 6:4; 1 Chron. 4:17; 6:3. “Aaron” was mentioned earlier at 4:14, 27-30. “Prophetess” is used far fewer times than the masculine “prophet.” “Prophetess” is used at: 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Isa. 8:3; Neh. 6:14; 2 Chron. 34:22. “Timbrel” is used only here in Exodus out of 17 times. “Dance” is used only here and 32:19 in Exodus, out of 14 times.

“Marah” (ver. 23) is used in this verse and Numbers 33:8-9. “To drink” was used earlier at 7:18, 21, 24. “Bitter” is a play on the word Marah. It is used here and 30:23 in Exodus, out of 38 times. “To murmur” (ver. 24) is used in Exodus (5 times) and Numbers (8 times) and Joshua 9:18. “To cry out” (ver. 25) was used earlier at 5:8, 15; 8:8; 14:10, 15. “To reveal” was used earlier at 4:12, 15. “To become sweet” is one word; it is used 6 times: 15:25; Psa. 55:14; Job 20:12; 21:33; 24:20; Prov. 9:17. “Regulation” was used earlier at 5:14; 12:24; 15:25-26. “Judgment” is used in Exodus here; 21:1, 9, 31; 23:6; 24:3; 26:30; 28:15, 29-30. It is used 425 times in the OT. “To test” was used of Abraham at Genesis 22:1. It will be used in Exodus at 15:25; 16:4; 17:2, 7; 20:20, 36 times in the OT.

The “right thing” (ver. 26) is used 119 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. “To give ear” is a verb related to the noun “ear,” which means “to listen.” This is its only use in Exodus, out of 41 uses. “Commandments” is used in Exodus at: 15:26; 16:28; 20:6; 24:12. It is used 184 times in the OT. “To keep” or “to observe” is used in contexts with “commandments” to carry the idea of “obedience” or “submission.” The word was used earlier at 10:28; 12:17, 24-25; 13:10. “Regulation” was used earlier at 5:14 ;12:24. “Disease” is used only here, 23:25 in Exodus and also 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chron. 6:28. “Healer” is a participle in Hebrew; it is used at Genesis 50:2; here; Jer. 8:22; 30:13; 46:11; Ezek. 30:21; Job 13:4; 2 Chron. 16:12. “Palm trees” (ver. 27) is used only here in Exodus. “To camp” was used earlier at 13:20; 14:2, 9.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“To lift up, He lifted up” (ver. 21) and “to listen, you will listen” (ver. 26) are the Hebrew emphatic construction, the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in the perfect tense.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The “testing” of Israel (ver. 25) brings to the reader’s mind the “testing” of Abraham at Genesis 22:1.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The “timbrel” (ver. 20) was perhaps a hand drum. “Shur” (ver. 22) was mentioned at Genesis 16:7; 20:1; 25:18. It will be mentioned again only at 1 Sam. 15:7; 27:8. “Elim” (ver. 27) is found here; 16:1; Num. 33:9-10. Many artesian wells (ver. 23) are often bitter due to the mineral salts.

COMMENTARY:

Verse 19 notes the purpose, the motivation, of the song: the horse of Pharaoh, the chariots and horsemen, were all in the middle of the Red Sea when Jehovah God caused the waters to return to their place, drowning the aggressive army. Consequently, the sons of Israel escaped Egypt on dry land in the middle of the sea.

Verse 20 relates that Miriam, the prophetess (which means she had the ability to share God’s message, even in song, directly from God), who was the sister of Aaron, led the women in song. Moses, no doubt, states that Miriam was the “sister of Aaron” because Aaron was the oldest brother (7:7). She sang with the “timbrel” in her hand and the women sang with her, with

timbrels and dance. The text states Miriam “answered” (ver. 21) which suggests to some scholars that the song (vs 1-2) was antiphonal. That is, Moses sang part of the song and Miriam and the women responded in a different part of the song. That is conjectural. It could also be that Moses led the nation in song and then Miriam “answered” his song by leading the women in the song as well. Verse 21 relates the theme of verse 2, which might be an abbreviated way of saying that Miriam led the women in the same song Moses writes in verses 1-18.

Verse 22 returns to the movement of Israel further away from Egypt and the land of Goshen into the Promised Land via the Arabian peninsula. Israel had moved from Rameses (where Goshen was located: Genesis 47:11) to Succoth at 12:37. Then they moved close to the Red Sea opposite Baal-zephon, near Pi-hahiroth and Migdol (14:2). Subsequently, they crossed the Red Sea. Now, they move into the wilderness of Shur, three days into the wilderness. The problem Israel experiences here, noted at verse 22, is that they can’t find water.

God was testing Pharaoh earlier when He told Pharaoh to release His children for a travel of three days: 3:18; 5:3; 8:27. God is testing Israel by taking them three days into the wilderness where they now do not find water. The three days’ travel would be about 45 miles. When they came to Marah, they found water, but it was not potable. Subsequently, they murmured against Moses (again; see 14:11-12), “What shall we drink?”

The people cried to Jehovah God, as they had done at the beginning of Exodus: 2:23-25. This time, Jehovah revealed a tree (literally) which “he” (we presume “he” refers to Moses) cast into the waters and the waters became sweet. It serves no purpose to research what type of tree or wood this might be that could make bitter waters sweet. The point is that it is a miracle, designed to reaffirm to Israel God’s commitment to providing for their needs. There is no reason to “murmur.” Simply praying to God and trusting His care is sufficient.

In some way, verse 25 notes that God made a “regulation” and “judgment” there at Marah, where He “tested them.” The test is stated in verse 26 wherein Marah was simply the location of this specific testing. If Israel would listen intently (the denotation of the Hebrew emphatic construction; see above under “Hebrew grammar”) to the voice of Jehovah their God, they would do the right thing and they would “give ear” (a synonym for “to hear” and “to submit”) to His commandments. Based on their “hearing” the word of God, they would “keep” all His regulations and consequently, none of the diseases (likely referring to the “plagues” God brought on Egypt) would come over them. Jehovah is their “healer.” Just as surely as He was Egypt’s judge through the plagues, Jehovah will be Israel’s “healer” from the plagues. They simply needed to hear, trust, and obey Him.

Verse 27 notes the next place where Israel stopped on their exodus from Egypt: Elim. There, they found plenty of water: twelve springs of water. The seventy palm trees simply serves to denote how fertile the area was, showing there was plenty of water to meet Israel’s needs. There, they camped.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - Israel will continue to murmur and grumble against Moses and, sometimes, against Jehovah: 16:2, 7-8, 9, 11; 17:3; Num. 14:2; 16:11, 41. For other verses which refer to God testing Israel, see 16:4; Deut. 8:2-3; 13:3-4; 33:8; Exo. 20:20. The path of Israel is detailed for the reader of the Bible in Numbers 33. There are later references to “diseases” in Egypt also: Deut. 7:15; 28:27, 60. Israel tests God through her disobedience and lack of trust: 17:2, 7; Num. 14:22; Deut. 6:16; Psalms 78:18, 41, 56; 95:9; 106:14.

Later Jewish writers - Elisha performed a similar miracle: 2 Kings 2:19-22, likely to emphasize to Israel that the “God of the fathers” was still alive and working. God states to Israel in Amos 4:10 that He struck them as He did Egypt. God is the Healer: Isaiah 19:22; Hosea 6:1; 11:3. Israel will “murmur” again in Joshua 9:18.

NT writers - Paul will warn Christians not to “grumble” as the Israelites did: 1 Cor. 10:10. While Jesus controls the storms on the Sea of Galilee, in Matthew 14:22-33, He calls on Peter

to participate with Him in that mastery, through faith in Him. The “song of Moses” will be sung in heaven along with the “song of the Lamb” (Rev. 15:3). In fact, much of Revelation 15 brings to mind the exodus from Egypt and crossing the Red Sea.