

# OpenTheo

## Exodus 15:1 - 16:3



### Exodus - Steve Gregg

Exodus 15:1-16:3 narrates the Israelites' journey after escaping slavery, including their crossing of the Red Sea and destruction of the Egyptian army. The chapter introduces prophetess Miriam and emphasizes the leadership roles of women in Old Testament times. Further, the Israelites faced a lack of provisions in the wilderness, leading to complaints against leadership, and the author reflects on the trade-off between freedom and security offered by governments versus the communal care approach of the early Christian community. The speaker suggests trusting in God's provision and emphasizes that hard times are testing moments.

### Transcript

Well, the climax of the story in Exodus was reached in chapter 14 when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea and the armies of Egypt were destroyed in the Red Sea. We have to realize what a turning point that really was in the experience of these particular people whose ancestors for several generations had been slaves. This group of people had been born into slave camps.

It's a little bit like someone maybe who'd be born in a refugee camp, but only worse because not only are they refugees in a foreign land, but they are also pressed into hard labor, which got increasingly harder and more unfair, more oppressive. And this is all they'd ever known. And now they stand on the other side of the Red Sea.

All those who had oppressed them are dead. And they are for the first time a free people, a free nation. Their ancestors, Abram, Isaac, and Jacob, had been free men, but they had not been a nation.

They'd just been a family. Now they are perhaps two or three million or more strong, truly the size of a small country, and they don't know anything about self-governance. In fact, they probably had never given it any consideration.

And now they stand as an infant nation and they have a leader. They have a leader who is like a political leader, although he's also a prophet. And that is going to be important because the leaders of Israel, because Israel was God's people, would have to be like

prophets.

They'd have to be people who heard from God and led the nation according to God and his ways so that God would be the real leader through the agency of prophetic men. Moses was to be that man for the rest of his life, another 40 years after this. And Israel was to have many experiences before they would settle into their land and be a settled nation.

However, it's just dawning on them at this point in chapter 15 of Exodus that they are free. And the first thing they do is celebrate and sing and dance. Now, the song that is we might call the song of Moses, which is recorded here in chapter 15.

I think most scholars would refer this not to as not the song of Moses, but the song of the sea. And that's because there's a later song that Moses wrote in Deuteronomy that is usually called the song of Moses. And to avoid confusion, scholars sometimes speak of that.

This song is the song of the sea. However, there's every reason to refer to it as the song of Moses. Moses leads this song and Miriam, his sister, also is a song leader among the women.

And you can see in verse 20, for example, then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron and Moses, took the timbrel in her hand and all the women went out after her with the timbrels and with dances and Miriam answered them. Sing to the Lord for his triumph gloriously, the horse and its rider. He is thrown into the sea.

Now, it says that Miriam answered them. It probably means that this song was sung, as we say, antiphonally. The Israelites sang this way.

I don't think they're the only people who did. But antiphonal singing was where one group, perhaps the men, would sing a line, maybe a verse. And the other group, in this case, the women sing a refrain.

And so that the men's song, in this case, was broken up into stanzas. And after each stanza, the women would sing their refrain. There's a psalm.

I don't remember which one it is. I thought I was going to mention I would have looked it up. But there's a psalm in the latter part of the Psalter for every alternate line is for his mercy endures forever.

Do you remember that song? It's like it goes through like single line summaries of things that God has done. And every other line is for his mercy endures forever. And that song that song was probably sung antiphonally.

That is, one group would sing the one line and the other group would chime in

with for his mercy endures forever. Then the next line for his mercy endures forever. It would appear that's how this song was sung.

We have the men's song given here in the first 17 or 18 verses. And it is it's not interrupted for us. We get the song in its completeness.

But it says in verse 21 that Miriam and the women. Who were also involved, they answered and said they answered probably means that they they echoed back and their antiphonal chorus that they sang was this that we find in verse 21. Sing to the Lord for his triumph.

Gloriously, the horse and the rider has been thrown into the sea. Now, that's actually, of course, the first line that the men sang also. So apparently the women took their cue from the men.

Moses led the children of Israel to sing. And he said, I will sing to the Lord for his triumph. Gloriously, the horse and its rider.

He's thrown into the sea. Apparently, Miriam picked up her tambourine and began to say the same line and then repeated that line after all the other individual stanzas here reading on in verse two. It says the Lord is my strength and 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 man of war. The Lord is his name. Actually, Yahweh is a man of war.

Yahweh is his name. Pharaoh's chariots in his army, he is cast into the sea. His chosen captains also are drowned in the sea.

The depths have covered them. They sank to the bottom like a stone. The word sank there in the Hebrew actually literally means they went gurgling down.

They went gurgling down like a stone to the bottom of the sea. A very graphic image. Again, that's one of the things that tells us that this was not shallow water is that they not only drowned, but they they descended through the water to the bottom, gurgling, drowning.

Your right hand, oh, Yahweh, has become glorious in power. Your right hand, oh, Yahweh, has dashed the enemy in pieces. And in the greatness of your excellence, you have overthrown those who rose against you.

You sent forth your wrath, which consumed them like stubble. And with the blast of your nostrils, the waters were gathered together. The flood stood up upright like a heap and the depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. My desire should be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword.

My hand shall destroy them. You blew with your wind. The sea covered them.

They sank again, gurgled down like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like you, oh, Lord, among the gods? Who is like you? Glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. You stretched out your right hand.

The earth swallowed them. You and your mercy have led forth the people whom you have redeemed. You have guided them in your strength to your holy habitation.

Now, this reference to God having led them to his holy habitation is spoken of as if it's already happened, that they really haven't reached any place at this point that could be referred to as God's holy habitation, because unless Israel itself as a people is referred to that way. But it doesn't sound like he's speaking that way because God has led Israel to someplace that he refers to as God's holy habitation. Now, one might think of Sinai as God's holy habitation, although the Bible really doesn't ever indicate that Sinai is where God lives.

It's just where he decided to meet with Moses. And they haven't even come there yet. So I think most scholars would say this is written in what you call the prophetic perfect tense.

We have not encountered very much prophecy at this point in the Bible because we've come only through Genesis and part of Exodus. But when we come to the prophets, when the prophets are predicting things, they almost always talk in the past tense called the prophetic perfect tense. It's apparently because God wants to make it obvious that he has already determined so much that this is to happen that he can speak about it as if it's already happened in the past or else it is the case that the prophet is transported in vision to a point after the fulfillment and describes what he sees as an accomplished thing.

But in any case, the prophets often speak of things that have not yet happened and speak of them as accomplished and finished. And it's probable that here when he says, you have guided your people to the holy habitation, he's prophetically seeing the time when they come into the promised land. That would be God's holy habitation, I would think, and it says the people will hear and be afraid.

Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Palestina or Palestina. That would be Palestine. That'd be the nation of the Canaanites, the promised land.

Now, the reason it's called Palestine in here is because, as it is even today, or at least in recent times, it was called Palestine. And in Roman times it was called Palestine. It is so called because of the Philistines.

Palestine is a word that's based on the word Philistine. The Romans actually called the place Palestine because they considered the realm of the place where the Philistines have been. They didn't consider Israel to be, you know, the defining people of that area.

Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed. The mighty men of Moab trembling will take hold of them. All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.

Fear and dread will fall on them by the greatness of your arm. They will be as still as a stone till your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over whom you have purchased. Now, this is talking about their traveling to the promised land.

They would pass through Edom. They would pass through Moab, it is assumed. And the people of those lands that might otherwise be hostile will be not hostile.

They will be still. They'll be afraid. They'll hear what happened to Egypt and they will be in dread at the prospect of opposing Israel.

And of course, this was I don't know that this really proved so much to be true in the case of Edom and Moab, but it did prove to be true of the Canaanites. Because when they came to the first city of the Canaanites, they wished to conquer, which was Jericho. We find that the people of Jericho were terrified because they had heard of what God had done actually 40 years earlier to the Egyptians on Israel's behalf.

So for a whole generation after the exodus, this rumors, the reports of the exodus and the destruction of Egypt were still discussed whenever people discussed the nation of Israel in foreign lands. It says in verse 17, you will bring them that is Israel in and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which you have made for your own dwelling. The sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established, Yahweh shall reign forever and ever.

Now, the reference to the sanctuary, that word normally in the Old Testament is used to speak of the temple of the tabernacle. The word sanctuary means holy place, and once the tabernacle was built, the building was called the sanctuary. And of course, later, the temple was viewed as the sanctuary of God, the holy place of God.

But remember that when Moses had met God at the burning bush, God had said, take off your shoes because you're standing on holy ground. Mount Sinai was a holy place also. It's not just the building.

And at this point, it's probable that Moses and the children of Israel did not contemplate a building. It wasn't until later that God gave them instructions to build the tabernacle. So probably holy place simply refers to a geographical place rather than a building.

And almost certainly, of course, it's referring to the promised land because he's talking about how you will bring them in to that holy place, which is the land. God's dwelling, the

holy place of Yahweh. Now, verse 19, the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them.

But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. Now, that's not part of the song that that part is not in poetry like the rest. It is apparently simply a summary statement such as we have found several such in Exodus already that there's times when it tells us something we already knew.

It restates it wants to call that back to our attention again for the moment. And we're told that Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron. Now, prophetess is this first time the Bible uses the term prophetess.

There were other prophetess in the Bible. There's a woman named Huldah is said to be a prophetess. And there are other prophetess is not named in the Old Testament.

And that women would be prophets is not strange. It might seem strange in the sense that in Israel it was definitely a patriarchal society, or at least we depict it that way. But Israel was not entirely chauvinistic by any means, they would recognize women as prophets and prophetesses.

They don't even allow a woman to be a judge. So even though we sometimes think of the ancient Israelites as anti-woman or male chauvinist types, patriarchs, well, they were it was a patriarchal society, but not so rigidly so as to fail to recognize God's gifts and callings on women, too. Now, in the New Testament, of course, women.

Roles include being prophetess, as it says in Joel, which Peter quoted on the Day of Pentecost, your sons and your daughters will prophesy. And we find in the in the New Testament women who can prophesy Philip, the evangelist, had four daughters who prophesied, we're told. And so Miriam is the first woman to be called a prophetess.

But we have women prophesying up all the way through the Old Testament and into the New Testament as well and in the present time as well. I would point out, though, that although women are prophetesses, it would appear that Paul did not place women in leadership positions in churches. The Old Testament.

Believers were led by prophets. The New Testament believers were led by elders, teachers and so forth, and or by the apostles when the apostles were available. Anyway, we do find right early on that a woman has a leading role.

She is leading the women, however, and it's not very often in the Bible that women are seen as leaders of men. Deborah would be an exception. But Miriam here does not lead the men.

Apparently she leads the women in dancing and singing. And so they they celebrate the fact that God has triumphed over Egypt and they talk about how the warriors, the horses

and the riders have been cast in the sea and are gone. And then the song is over and we move forward.

I mean, they had a party, they rejoiced, they had reason to do so. But now they've got to move. They've got places to go.

And so they have and we will have a hard time identifying the exact places that are named. And the reason we'll have problems is because scholars have problems with it. It's not exactly known.

And I've said before, the location of Mount Sinai has been disputed and therefore the direction they went from where they started has been disputed. Most scholars believe that the wanderings that that followed here were essentially in the Sinai Peninsula. And so when they come to the waters of Mara and Rephidim and these other places that these should be sought in the Sinai Peninsula, many times they're sought along the western bank of the Sinai Peninsula up against the Gulf of Suez because of the traditional belief of the location of Mount Sinai.

However, if Mount Sinai is in Midian, as many now believe, and I think there's good reason to entertain that idea, then they're not near the Gulf of Suez. They've actually crossed the Gulf of Aqaba into what is now Saudi Arabia. And that's where they are now wandering on their way to Mount Sinai.

And the first location they come to, we read of in the remainder of this chapter. So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, then he went out into the wilderness of Shur and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now, when they came to Mara, they could not drink the waters of Mara, for they were bitter.

Therefore, the name of it was called Mara. Mara is the Hebrew word for bitter. It's actually the root word of the word Miriam, Moses' sister.

Her name was based on this word bitter. And you may remember that if you've read ahead and read the story of Ruth, that Ruth's mother-in-law was named Naomi, which means pleasantness. But when she became grieved because and bereaved of her husband and her son, she did not wish to be called pleasantness anymore.

People said, here comes Naomi. She's back. She said, don't call me Naomi.

Call me Mara, because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me. Now, just call me bitterness. Mara.

It's also the root, of course, of our English name, Mary. Mary comes from Miriam and Miriam comes from Mara. So that's where this this place is called bitter because the waters are bitter.

Now, we don't know if it came to be called bitter after this event and if the Israelites are the ones who named it that or if it was called that already. Because other people before Arabs and Bedouins had discovered it was bitter. It may have already borne this name.

The problem was they'd traveled for three days in the desert and had probably used up whatever water they had brought with them. And it was now time to refill the water bags and the water bottles. And so they came to what looked like an oasis.

There was water here. And when they started to drink it, they found out it was not possible to drink. In verse 24, it says the people murmured against Moses saying, what shall we drink? So he cried out to the Lord and the Lord showed him a tree.

The word showed here the verb actually is based on the same root as the word Torah. Law, the laws, the Torah. And I think I mentioned way back in our introduction to the Torah that the word Torah literally means instruction.

It came to refer to the law, but it literally means instruction. And that is the root of the word here that God instructed Moses concerning a tree. I don't know exactly what that means, but it could mean that there was a particular kind of native tree that provided an herbal cure for the alkaline waters there and made it possible for them to become drinkable.

In which case we would say that the turning of the waters of Mara into drinkable waters, potable waters, would be not so much a miracle as a matter of God showing Moses that there was a resource there that could do it. Which was a tree that God knew the medicinal properties of the tree and Moses didn't. So God instructed him about this tree.

That is at least how some people see it. I don't have any problem, however, seeing this as a mere miracle and the casting of a tree into the waters could simply be symbolic of something. Obviously, Christians who associate the word tree with the word cross, because the Bible often says that Jesus died on a tree.

I have a hard time avoiding the temptation to say, well, this is a reference to the cross. There's a reference to Jesus. The bitter waters of life are turned sweet by the introduction of Christ and the cross and salvation.

I am not sure that that would be the intended meaning here, but like I say, it's hard for preachers not to make that point. I see the meaning of this whole event somewhat differently than that. But let me read the whole thing and then I'll tell you what I think it's all about.

Anyway, the Lord instructed him about a tree and when he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet or not, not literally sweet like they're sugaring them, but sweet and since they're not bitter, they were they were nice to drink. There he made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there he tested them.



Now, this is just one of their tests. What was the test? They needed water. That's a legitimate need.

They were in the desert. Water was not easy to find. Who knows? I mean, God knows, but they didn't know how long it would be before they come to another oasis where they could find some water.

As they saw this one, as they approached, they no doubt thought, well, good, it's about time we found some water because my my supply is being low here. We're going to need some more water. There's some pools here.

Well, when they found out the water was alkaline and couldn't be drunk, they just thought, well, we're going to go without water. Then we're going to die out here. And they murmured because of it.

Now, it seems that they should not have murmured. It says they were tested here. God was testing them in what way? What was being tested? Well, I personally think their faith was being tested.

They had every reason to believe that God was with them. After all, they could see the cloud. They actually had a visual fix on God through all their journeys.

It's not like they had to live by total faith like we do, believing that God is here, although we can't see him. They could see him. And they had three days earlier seen him do a miracle in the crossing of the Red Sea.

Now, I'm not going to, you know. Blame them too severely for their lack of faith. They were in they were in difficulty.

They needed water. Their children needed water. There was no water.

I believe they failed the test by their murmuring and by their grumbling. It's just that I don't know that we have a lot of room to judge because we we don't pass our tests all the time either. When we worry.

We're not passing a test. Jesus said, take no anxious thought about tomorrow. He said tomorrow will take care of the things of itself sufficient to the day.

Other troubles thereof. And if we have rent to pay or needs a car that's broken, needs to be fixed or whatever, we don't have money. We have every temptation they have to grumble because there's a pressing need and there's not a supply.

Now, the fact that God had done a miracle three days earlier, we think that should have satisfied them. That should have made them have more faith. And I agree it should have.

But we've seen God come through, too. I'll speak for myself. I've seen God come through

hundreds of times.

But that doesn't change the fact that when there's a current need, there's still a sense of where's the money going to come from? How's this need going to be met? And obviously, in my mind, I remember every time there's been a need before God has come through, sometimes quite miraculously, sometimes in ways that truly, you know, one could not easily be a skeptic about the work of God in the situation and where I've never had a single doubt about it. I have no doubts at all that God was in the provisions that he's given me up to this point. It's the next one that I still need to have faith about.

I mean, we're just weak that way. I am weak that way. Everyone's weak that way.

I think the Israelites were weak that way. They had seen God provide miraculously, but they needed a provision now. And it was not evident that there was one.

Now, what's someone supposed to do in a case like that? They're supposed to believe that God is going to take care of them. He made promises to them. He had given certainly many miraculous tokens of his commitment to take care of them.

They should have known that although these waters are undrinkable, there would be some water somewhere when they needed them that God would provide. And rather than murmuring, they should have just said, OK, Lord, where's the provision? But again, I don't want to be too hard on these people because they really haven't had much experience with God. They had been slaves in a land where God had been not seemingly nearby.

Their parents and their ancestors apparently believed in Yahweh, but they'd seen no evidence of his activity until very recently. So they were like baby Christians. They're brand new acquaintances with God.

And so the lessons of faith, you know, they had not learned them yet. And perhaps they had more excuse in that respect than we do, who have been Christians longer. And still have sometimes failure in our tested when we're tested.

But notice it says specifically that God tested them here. And that is certainly the way that we are to interpret our lives. Every difficulty, every challenge in our life is part of a test.

And it helps to know that because it's like we saw in Job. Job was being tested. He didn't realize he was being tested initially.

But God and the devil were both they both had a stake in his response to this test. And that is true, no doubt, every time that we're tested, no matter whatever happens, God has a stake in us in this test. And so does the enemy.

And so passing the test always means we trust God, even though the test by its very nature is a challenge. To trust in God. But that's the nature of our lives, that God has us here, that's what we're here for, is to pass such tests so we can graduate when we die and be qualified to serve with him and reign with him.

And so it says in verse 26, he said, if you diligently heed the voice of Yahweh, your God, and do what is right in his sight, give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes. I will put none of the diseases on you, which I have brought on the Egyptians, for I am Yahweh who heals you. Now, Yahweh, who heals you in the Greek is Yahweh Rafa Rafa means your healer.

And we'll say something about that. Then they came to Elim where there were 12 wells of water and 70 palm trees and they camped there by the waters. So the waters of Mara were actually transformed so they could fill their jugs and refresh themselves.

But then they kept moving beyond Mara and went to Elim where there was apparently an abundance of good water. And it may be that they camped there for a long, longer period of time. The whole journey from well, from the time of the Passover, when they left Egypt to the time when they came to Sinai and received the law was about two and a half months.

And so we don't know how long they stayed at each of these places, but they were probably allowed to stay a little while to refresh themselves where there was 12 wells of water. And therefore, they were able to not have to worry about that for a little while. Now, the waters of Mara, what's that about? It's interesting that God on this occasion brings them to bitter waters and then through seemingly a miracle or at least through providence, makes those waters drinkable, makes them potable, makes them life sustaining.

And then he gives this oracle that is apparently related to the event, namely that if they will diligently heed the voice of God, if they'll do what's right in his sight and keep his commandments and statutes, then he says, I will put none of these diseases on you that I put on Egypt. I understand the diseases to be references to the plagues that God had brought upon Egypt. He dis-eased the Egyptians with these various plagues.

These people were the nation was smitten. And in the Bible, God's judging a nation and the nation suffering the pains of that judgment is figuratively spoken of as sickness and disease of the nation. As we've mentioned in earlier lectures on other subjects, the Bible uses that metaphor.

So God had brought disease, that is, judgment and disaster upon the nation of Egypt, and he had done so through the plague. And he's telling Israel now, if you be obedient to me, as you should, I will not bring such plagues as those that I brought on Egypt upon you. Now, I consider this particular thing as an aside to be helpful in understanding the

book of Revelation, because, as I have said earlier, I believe that the book of Revelation, the plagues in Revelation are intentional echoes of the plagues of Egypt.

I don't necessarily believe that the plagues in Revelation are all literal because Revelation is not a historical book, but a prophetic apocalyptic book, which that genre of literature typically uses symbolism rather than literal. Sometimes people say, well, if you don't take the plagues in Revelation literally, then you might as well not take the plagues in Egypt literally. Nonsense.

The plagues in Egypt are recorded as historical events. In a historical narrative, I accept what the Bible says, I believe it. I have no problem believing in the literal plagues of Egypt.

The question is, Revelation, is it written as a literal document or is it written as something else? And most scholars have had no trouble recognizing that it's written as an apocalyptic prophecy. And apocalyptic prophecies exist in the Old Testament and in the book of Revelation and outside the Bible, too. Apocalyptic writings are a common genre and they are always written in symbolic form, symbolic visions.

And in Revelation, the plagues are likened to the plagues of Egypt. That doesn't mean those literal plagues necessarily recur, but it does mean that in principle, the plagues that come in Revelation are intended to have a connection in principle to the plagues of Egypt. Now, different people have obviously different opinions about when the fulfillment of the book of Revelation and its plagues is to be recognized.

And I believe that most modern Christians think that it's about the end times. I personally have my reasons to believe that Revelation is primarily about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state, which happened when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and scattered the Jews throughout the world. And as a result of the Jewish war in AD 66 through 70.

Israel has been scattered throughout the world since then, the temple's been destroyed, the Jewish religion is gone. The Jews still worship in their synagogues, but they don't worship according to the laws of Moses because there's no sacrifice, there's no priesthood. They don't they don't practice Judaism as ordained by God in the scripture.

They practice Talmudism, which is the variation on it that the rabbis came up with because they didn't have the ability to practice the Jewish religion that God prescribed. So they have a man made religion, in other words, ever since the temple was destroyed. And that's not biblical religion.

God destroyed Israel's religion because he brought a new covenant that replaced it. And some of the Jews embraced the new covenant became what we call Christians, others have rejected it and have come up with their own man made religion to substitute for it.

But the point is that judgment that came on Israel was the decisive end of the Jewish Commonwealth and Jewish religion.

It was a judgment of God upon them for their killing the prophets and ultimately killing Jesus. That's what Jesus said. Jesus said, all the blood of all the righteous prophets who were slain from Abel to Zechariah will come upon this generation.

That is, the punishment for all this innocent blood that was shed will come upon that generation of Israel. And it did. It was the cumulative judgment of God.

And I believe that Revelation is talking about that. But if that is true, if that thesis is true, then it's significant that Revelation's plagues resemble the plagues of Egypt. Because on this occasion in Exodus 15, God said to Israel, if you are faithful to my covenant and keep my statutes and laws, then I will not bring the plagues on you that I brought on Egypt.

And by implication, if you are a covenant breaking nation, then I will bring on you such plagues as I brought on Egypt. And the book of Revelation, by recording such plagues, although they're not, in my opinion, they're not strictly literal. It's linking the disasters that came on Jerusalem by the use of imagery from Exodus, linking that in principle with the destruction of Egypt.

Remember, I said that in Revelation, Jerusalem is referred to as a second Egypt. In Revelation 11, verse 8, Revelation 11, 8 refers to the city where our Lord was crucified, which is spiritually called Egypt. And Sodom in the book of Revelation, there's a new Egypt and that's Jerusalem.

There's a new set of plagues on Egypt. They're like the plagues of the old Egypt, but there are new plagues on the new Egypt, which is Jerusalem. It's Jerusalem that is under judgment there.

And the literary device of describing that judgment in terms of Egyptian plague in Revelation is no doubt connected with this very promise and the implied threat in it. God told Israel, you'd be faithful to me. I won't bring the plagues of Egypt on you.

By implication, if you're not faithful to me, I will bring the plagues of Egypt on you. I will treat you no better than I treated Egypt. In fact, you'll be I'll regard you the same as Egypt.

You'll be like a new Egypt. And I'll bring such plagues on you. He doesn't say that here, but it is seems fairly implied when he says, I won't do this if you're obedient.

Then it says, well, I should point this out. I believe that this threat is related to the bitter waters being turned sweet because bitterness. Is it is an image of the affliction that the Israelites suffered in Egypt, remember that when they would keep the Passover at the

table, there'd be these bitter herbs.

And when it shows, why do we need better herbs? The father would say, well, this represents the bitterness of the bondage that our our ancestors suffered in Egypt. The bitterness of the herb was to remind them of the bitterness of the bondage, and now they come to bitter waters, and I believe the bitterness of the waters has the same symbolic meaning. This reminds them this is the condition you were in not so very long ago.

You're murmuring now, but let me remind you of the bitterness of your bondage and the hopelessness you were in, even as you feel hopeless now when you need water and all the water is bitter. But now God turns the water into sweetness. God turns the water into something life sustaining, and that is like his having brought them into freedom and having their present condition.

He's changed their bitter waters of bondage into sweet waters of independence and freedom and blessing, and so their life has been changed as a nation in the same way these waters have been changed. And it's in that connection that he makes this promise. You know, I am the Lord Raha, I am your healer.

I've healed your national condition. You were sick in Egypt. I made Egypt sick and I made you well, like I healed these waters.

I've healed your nation and brought you out of that bitterness into sweetness. But you must be obedient to me. If you are not obedient to me, then these plagues that I brought in Egypt, this sickness that I brought in Egypt, this disease, I will bring it on you.

I am the Lord who has healed you. He's not here making reference specifically to individuals who are sick, getting well. We do not read of specific cases of that in this particular narrative.

There no doubt were among the Israelites some who were sick and maybe some of them got well. What we don't read about it. Maybe some of them died.

We're reading about the fate of the nation collectively, not of every individual in the nation. And when God says to the nation, if you're obedient, I'll not put the diseases of Egypt on you. I'm the Lord who heals you.

I healed your nation. I made Egypt as a nation sick with plague. I won't make you sick.

I have actually healed you and I won't make you sick again if you're obedient to me. That's what I believe he's saying here. And it's interesting that one of the plagues in the book of Revelation is that the waters become bitter.

Wormwood. And I think that in that in that plague, that's in one of the trumpet

judgments that the waters become bitter and cannot be drunk. And I believe that's again, I think it's probably more symbolic than literal, but I mean, people can take it how they wish.

I think it's deliberately harking back to this. God had taken the bitter waters of Israel and made them sweet in the deliverance of them. But when he judges them again because of the rejection of the Messiah, it's like he turns their waters bitter again.

He he places the same bitterness upon them. He unheals them. I am the Lord, your healer, and I'll keep you well if you are obedient.

Crucifying Jesus was not an act of obedience on their part. And it was, in a sense, the last straw so that they filled up the iniquity of their ancestors and then their sweet waters were turned bitter and the diseases of Egypt were placed upon them again. That's what I think is I think that's how the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation, takes the statements here and.

Communicates that this has been reversed now as they came out of Egypt, that was their salvation. When they rejected their Messiah, that was their condemnation. And so the situation is reversed.

The bitter waters have been turned sweet. Now there's sweet waters turned bitter again. It had been Egypt that had been the recipient of God's judgment.

Now it's the new Egypt, that city where our Lord was crucified, which is spiritually called Egypt. Now it's the recipient of God's judgment in the book of Revelation. And all that did happen.

OK, let's look at Chapter 16 now. They've been at Elam for a while. And then they move.

They journeyed from Elam and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the wilderness of sin or sign. The fact that that looks like our English word sin is a mere coincidence. It's probably etymologically related to the word Sinai.

And so it might be pronounced sign. It looks like we'd pronounce it sin. I have a habit of pronouncing it sin because it looks like our word sin.

But of course, when people are spiritualizing this whole story, as we can in some measure do, it's very tempting to say, oh, they were wandering in sin. You know, they were in the wilderness of sin. But that's really just almost a quirky coincidence of the English language, that the word sin in English looks like the particular name of this place.

And in Hebrew, the word sin doesn't look like that. And therefore, we shouldn't try to make anything special about that similarity. It says, which is between Elam and Sinai on the 15th day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt.

Now, this is the 15th day of the second month. They had left Egypt on the 15th day of the first month. They killed the Passover on the 14th day and were released the next day, the 15th day.

And now it's one month, exactly one month later. And they departed. So then the whole congregation of the Children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

This is the second time they murmured. And the Children of Israel said to them, oh, that we had died at the hand by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Well, it was not at all obvious where the food was going to come from.

They had spent a month in the wilderness, no doubt, whatever provisions they brought from Egypt were now fairly exhausted or stale or rotten, traveling the wilderness for a month without fresh provisions. They may have been able to scavenge or even hunt a little bit out there and get a little bit of food. But there were millions of these people and there just wasn't that much food.

They couldn't farm. The travelers. The terrain was probably not hospitable to farming anyway, but they had to move too frequently.

They couldn't farm and harvest. They did have livestock, but they needed that. They needed their livestock for breeding and so forth.

They perhaps killed an animal once in a while and they got hungry. But it was not at all clear where the continuing supply of food for all these people was going to come from. At least when we're in Egypt, though we were slaves, our taskmasters provided food for us.

We never had to wonder where the bread was going to come from. And you know what? If you give up your freedom, you can often get security in exchange for it. You know, if you let the government take care of you, you'll have a certain amount of security the government provides.

They were slaves of the land of Egypt and the government provided their food. But they were slaves. Masters always provide food for the slaves.

And that's how governments are. The more you let them enslave you, the more they'll offer you security, you know, a safety net. You can they can provide guarantees that if you lose your job, you'll get free money.

If you lose your health, you get free health care. Those are things that people like. And no wonder.



Who wouldn't like that? You feel secure that way. You don't feel like you're vulnerable to anything. If I get sick, at least the government will take care of me.

If I lose my job, the government will take care of me. True. But what will the government expect of you? If they provide the services, they also call the tune for you to dance to.

And so there's always a tradeoff throughout the world, at least in modern times, there are countries that are more or less free and countries that are more or less not free. And the more the government provides security, the less freedom it can allow you, because for one thing, it can only provide that security by taking things from the populace to redistribute to other people who who have need and therefore your freedom. To work and to and to steward the fruits of your labors is limited by the fact that the government is providing security for you and other people.

And if you're one of the productive members of the society, that means they have to take your stuff to give to the people who are currently unproductive. Now, that might seem like a really Christian thing to do. It might be thought that that's really a good idea.

But the early church had a much better way. They had security and freedom economically. Anyway, they had security because they were part of a loving Christian community and they knew that people would voluntarily help them if they're poor.

That's what we read in the book of Acts. There was none of them that had need because as any had need, others were selling stuff voluntarily. They had freedom to do so or not to do so.

But because they loved each other, they were part of a caring community. They were free to sell what they had or not. That's what Peter said to Ananias and Spire.

While the property is yours, you have the right to do with it what you wanted. It was yours. No one made you sell it, but people voluntarily sold things and helped the poor so that because of the dynamics of the Christian community, there was complete freedom.

To give or not to give, as you felt personally led by God to do, but there was also security because God made promises to his people that he would provide for them and it would normally be through people that felt led to give. That's an economy that the governments of the world don't know. They can't run a government to the world that way.

They can't just count on all these unconverted citizens to voluntarily hand over their money. So they have to make laws to take the money from them. And so a government either has to allow a lot of freedom, economic freedom, but not really offer any security to people.

Or they have to offer them a lot of security, but they can't give them economic freedom.

You can't have both. The slaves in Egypt were secure.

Their masters would feed them. And now that they were free, they didn't have or didn't sense that they had security. They had freedom, but no security.

Or did they have security? Of course they did. They just didn't know it. God was their security.

They were free and secure. But their security was a matter of faith. And they didn't have a lot of faith at this point.

If you can trust that God will provide all your needs as he has promised, then you'll always be secure. You'll never be insecure. And you won't need the government to provide security for you because you've got God for that.

Let the government provide you with the freedom to worship Yahweh according to your conscience. Let the government stay out of your business. Let the government not tell you what charities you have to support and then let you decide to support the gospel if you want to, instead of Planned Parenthood or something.

I mean, I personally believe it is the best of all worlds to be in a free country and to be a Christian because the government in that case doesn't offer you very much. But you don't want them to. God offers you everything you need.

And so I would certainly rather be free than secure in the sense that, you know, given a chance to have a government that provided all my health care and all my welfare and all that stuff. But of course, I didn't have the freedom to really take what I generate and give it to the kingdom of God because I had to give it to the government so they could distribute it as they wish. We are very, you know, we have to remember, we're very fortunate.

We live in a very unusual time in history where we can even think about freedom. Economic freedom is a pretty rare thing in history. And but the point is, we can see the principle here.

The same thing when Joseph was ruling in Egypt. The people were starving and they said, give us grain. So they looked to the government and the government said, OK, you give us your land.

You give us your cattle. You give yourselves as slaves. And so everyone became owned by Pharaoh and all their land was owned by Pharaoh.

And they got fed. They were secure. Pharaoh would keep them alive because they were his servants.

And if you're not servants of God, I suppose there's nothing wrong with being servants of

your government. But if you're servants of God, then to be owned by your government is not a desirable thing. You can't easily serve two masters.

So the people of Israel at this point had not come to appreciate the economic freedom they had because they didn't feel secure yet. They didn't have enough faith in God to know that they were, in fact, secure. And so they were longing for the days of slavery when they had that financial security.

Back then, we had plenty of food. It's possible that they were remembering it rather inaccurately. It doesn't sound to me when I read about their days of slavery that they were sitting around rejoicing over their flesh pots in Egypt and saying, boy, is it wonderful.

I don't all this bread, you know. I mean, they were much more aware of the oppression and the affliction and the slavery and longing for something else. You always know the grass is always greener on the other side of the hill.

And, you know, you can always see the part that you don't have, and that's what they're doing now. Now they were in the conditions they had essentially begged God to bring them into. And he had done so.

But they're thinking, well, but we don't know what food is going to come from. Well, I can tell you where the food is going to come from for the Christian. It's going to come from God.

It may not come out of the sky for us. It may come through a job. It may come through some other means that God provides.

But it's going to come from God because he's our provider and he was their provider. In their case, the food was going to come from the sky. As we shall see, we're going to break in the middle of this narrative because there's too much ahead of us in this chapter to hope at all to cover it right now without a break.

So we've got to break somewhere. And this is where I think we should do so. So we'll see the solution to their bread problem and their meat problem as God addresses it for them and shows them they don't really have to worry because God can provide for them.

And that is where our security is, too. A lot of times with the economy, dad, there may not be any obvious visible means of support. There couldn't be any less for us than there was for them in the wilderness.

There's truly no visible means of support there. They couldn't even farm. They were in much worse condition if God was not there than we are.

If God is not here. But if God is not there is a condition we don't have to worry about.

God is there.

And he proved that he could take care of them where there was simply no natural way that they could feed themselves. So we shouldn't be worried if there are, in fact, more obvious provisions around than they had. But we still have hard times if we have hard times.

That's the times when we're being tested to remember they were being tested. So are we. Let's take a break and we'll come back to this chapter and resume it when we come back.