

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Exodus

By Ken Miller

WEEK 6 READING



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Will You Trust Me?

¹⁷ When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” ¹⁸ But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. ¹⁹ Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.” ²⁰ And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹ And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ² “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. ³ For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ ⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.” And they did so. – Exodus 13:17-14:4 ESV

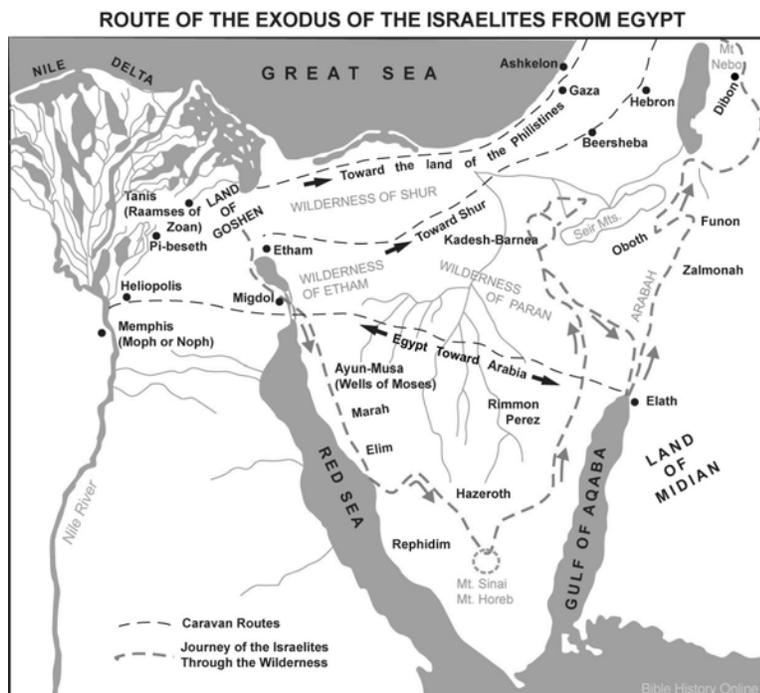
The day of deliverance had finally arrived. After a series of divinely-ordained plagues had devastated the Egyptian economy and taken the lives of thousands of its citizens, Pharaoh finally relented and gave his permission for the Israelites to go into the adjacent wilderness to worship their God. His understanding of the agreement was that Moses would lead his people on a three-day journey outside the borders of Egypt, where they would conduct their worship service, and then return.

...Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” – Exodus 5:2 ESV

Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” – Exodus 5:3 ESV

Pharaoh never agreed to a permanent departure that would free the Israelites from their role as his virtual slaves. These people had become his unpaid workforce and he could not afford to give them up. They had become a vital source of labor and were critical to building the Egyptian infrastructure.

...they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. – Exodus 1:13-14 ESV



Yet, God had other plans for His people. They would not be returning to Egypt but instead, would be traveling all the way to the land of Canaan. The most logical and shortest route for this journey would have taken the Israelites along the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Moses refers to it as the “way of the land of the Philistines” (Exodus 13:17 ESV). This region of western Canaan was occupied by a variety of warring nations collectively referred to as Philistines. Some of these people groups were of Semitic lineage, while others had migrated from Crete and Greece.

Had the Israelites taken this much shorter and easier route, they would have encountered stiff resistance upon their arrival in the land of Canaan. And it is likely that this well-traveled northern trade route was fortified and protected by an Egyptian military presence. God knew that the people of Israel would become disheartened at the first sign of conflict, so He instructed Moses to lead the Israelites in a different direction.

So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle. – Exodus 13:18 NLT

The English Standard Version states that the people of Israel “went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle” (Exodus 13:18 ESV). The Hebrew word is *חָמָאֵשׁ* (*hāmaš*) and it can be translated as “in battle array.” It is not suggesting that the Israelites were a well-armed militia but that they were leaving in an orderly manner. It is estimated that the Israelites may have numbered in the millions by the time they left Egypt, so Moses would have needed to arrange them in an orderly fashion just to maintain crowd control.

Moses provides a parenthetical statement that reveals his knowledge of his own people’s rich heritage. He somehow knew that the patriarch, Joseph, who had died more than four centuries earlier, had made his brothers swear an oath that they would bring his bones back to Canaan when the eventually returned.

Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. – Genesis 50:25-26 ESV

So, Moses arranged to have Joseph's body exhumed and prepared for transport to Canaan.

As this mass of people made their way south toward the wilderness, the Egyptians must have watched with a mixture of relief and awe. They were glad to see the Israelites go because they had been the reason for all the disasters that had overtaken their land. But they must have been shocked at the sheer size of the multitude that was making its way out of Egypt; a group that included some of their own people. And they would have been dumbfounded at the sight of the pillar of cloud that seemed to be leading the procession.



Little did the Egyptians know that this atmospheric apparition was a sign of Yahweh's presence and power. The God of Israel was leading His people as they made their way out of Egypt. There would be no doubt as to which direction they should go because God was directing their path. During the daylight hours, He would appear as a pillar of cloud, and during the dark of night, He would manifest His presence as a pillar of fire. At no point along the way would the people of Israel

run the risk of taking a wrong turn or losing their way because "The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people" (Exodus 13:22 ESV).

So, when God instructed Moses to have the people backtrack and reverse their course, the pillar of cloud would have led the way.

"Order the Israelites to turn back and camp by Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea. Camp there along the shore, across from Baal-zephon." – Exodus 14:2 NLT

This abrupt change in direction was God-ordered and God-led. He wanted Moses to lead the people back toward Egypt, knowing full well that the Egyptians would interpret their actions as a sign of confusion. It was all intentional and part of God's overall strategy for assuring Israel's full and final release from Egyptian domination.

"Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are confused. They are trapped in the wilderness!' And once again I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after you." – Exodus 14:3-4 NLT

God had one last judgment He was going to pour out on Pharaoh. Yahweh was not yet done displaying His power and authority over this self-consumed and overly confident sovereign of the Egyptian people. To his own people, Pharaoh was more than a king who wielded great power; he was a god who was worshiped and revered. They believed that he possessed divine

power and god-like attributes that made him invincible and worthy of their adoration and complete allegiance. And while the ten plagues had shaken their faith in the reliability of their gods, they still had Pharaoh at the helm of the national ship of state. But God was about to expose Pharaoh for the fraud he really was.

“I have planned this in order to display my glory through Pharaoh and his whole army. After this the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord!” – Exodus 14:4 NLT

The sudden change of course must have left the Israelites a bit confused. It would have left them wondering what Moses was thinking. But they couldn't argue with the fact that the pillar of cloud was still out front, leading them to their next destination. God was with them, so they obeyed. But as they made camp for the night, they had no way of knowing what was about to happen next. Their little excursion into the wilderness was going to become a living nightmare and a test of their faith in Yahweh.

The Lord Will Fight for You

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” ⁶ So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, ⁷ and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸ And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. ⁹ The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” ¹³ And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” – Exodus 14:5-14 ESV

At some point, it dawned on Pharaoh that the Israelites had no intentions of returning from their 3-day trek into the wilderness. Verse 5 states that “word reached the king of Egypt that the Israelites had fled.” The Hebrew word translated as “fled” is בָּרַח (*bārah*), which carries the idea of running away. It seems likely that Pharaoh had sent spies to keep an eye on the Israelites and to ensure that they kept their end of the bargain and returned after worshiping their God in the wilderness. Instead, Pharaoh was informed that the Israelites were attempting to make a break for it but had become lost and confused in the process.

Upon receiving the news of the somewhat circuitous route the Israelites had taken, Pharaoh concluded that they had become lost. He immediately regretted his previous decision to allow them to leave and was determined to do everything in his power to get them back.

So Pharaoh harnessed his chariot and called up his troops. He took with him 600 of Egypt’s best chariots, along with the rest of the chariots of Egypt, each with its commander. – Exodus 14:6-7 NLT

Twice, Moses emphasizes that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Once again, this is meant to emphasize God’s sovereignty over all that was taking place. But it does not absolve Pharaoh of guilt in the matter. He was not being forced to do what he did. This arrogant king was being motivated by the wickedness of his own heart but all according to the divine plan of God.

The very fact that God had ordered Moses to have the Israelites begin their journey out of Egypt headed in one direction and then had them reverse their course, is a clear indication that

God had something else He had planned to do. He was not yet done humiliating Pharaoh and was about to enact one more irrefutable demonstration of His superior power and authority.

God had told Moses in advance exactly what He was going to do and why.

“...once again I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after you. I have planned this in order to display my glory through Pharaoh and his whole army. After this the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord!” – Exodus 14:4 NLT

The Lord of Hosts(Jehovah Sabaoth) was about to do battle with the elite troops of Egypt. One of the most powerful and feared armies in the world was going to find itself going up against God Almighty.

As the Israelites sat in their makeshift camp along the shore of the Red Sea, waiting for directions from Moses, they were unaware that Pharaoh and his troops were headed their way. And Pharaoh was motivated by what he believed to be was a blatant display of arrogance on the part of the Israelites.

...he chased after the people of Israel, who had left with fists raised in defiance. – Exodus 14:8 NLT

He had been given time to reconsider his earlier decision and came to the conclusion that the Israelites needed a healthy serving of humble pie. So, mounted in his royal chariot, Pharaoh led his crack troops in hasty pursuit of a fleeing mob of confused and defenseless Israelites. But the Israelites weren’t running; they were sitting quietly by the shores of the Red Sea awaiting instructions from Moses. The pillar of cloud, a manifestation of God’s presence, still hovered nearby, and they had been instructed not to break camp until the cloud began to move. By all indications, they were right where God wanted them to be.

But, in time, the Israelites heard the sound of the approaching army and could see the large sandstorm stirred up by the horses’ hooves and the chariot wheels. And as the Israelites watched in horror, the 600 chariots of the Egyptian army came into view, barreling toward them with unbridled abandon. And the hearts of the Israelites sank in despair.

Almost as if in unison, the people cried out to God for help. Others directed their fear and anger at Moses, shouting, “Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren’t there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt?” (Exodus 14:11 NLT). These questions, among others, poured out in a torrent of rage and abject terror as the people considered their doomed fate. They began to hurl accusations against Moses and Aaron, questioning their leadership and demeaning the failed nature of their strategy. From their perspective, Moses and Aaron had blown it. Their promise of deliverance had turned into a guarantee of certain destruction. And the Israelites began to regret having ever left Egypt in the first place.

“It’s better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!” – Exodus 14:12 NLT

As far as they could tell, listening to Moses and Aaron had been a huge mistake. And as they vented their frustration, fears, and anger at these two elderly men, the Israelites failed to notice that the pillar of cloud had never stirred or left their sight. It remained right where it had been all along, signifying that God was still with them.

But Moses must have seen the cloud and gained renewed confidence. He withstood the verbal onslaught and responded with a powerful call to faith.

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” – Exodus 14:13-14 ESV

While the eyes of the Israelites were fixated on the 600 chariots headed their way, Moses must have fixed his sight on the pillar of cloud, remembering the words of the Lord.

“I have planned this in order to display my glory through Pharaoh and his whole army.” – Exodus 14:4 NLT

Moses gave the people three simple instructions.

Fear not – he encouraged them to cease fearing because he knew that uncontrolled fear can turn to flight. If they ran, they were as good as dead. They could not outrun chariots.

Stand firm – rather than run, they were to stand their ground because God had them right where He wanted them. He had led them to this very spot, and it would be on this ground that they would see the deliverance of God.

See the salvation of the Lord – whether they realized it or not, they had ringside seats to what would be the greatest show on earth. Moses was inviting them to stand back and watch their God perform a miracle of epic proportions. When they thought all was lost and their lives were in the balance, God was ready to provide them with salvation.

The army bearing down on them looked formidable. The fate awaiting them appeared to be unavoidable. Though they greatly outnumbered the Egyptians, they were no match for chariots, swords, and spears. Yet, God wanted them to trust Him. The army they feared would soon be gone. The deadly outcome they expected would not be forthcoming. All because Jehovah Sabaoth was on their side and He was about to display His omnipotence on their behalf.

Against All Odds

¹⁵ The Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶ Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

¹⁹ Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴ And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, ²⁵ clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.”

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.” ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.
– Exodus 14:15-31 ESV

The victory parade that Moses led out of Egypt had quickly turned into a nasty mob scene when the Israelites realized that Pharaoh and his army were bearing down on them. All hope of leaving Egypt had faded as soon as they caught sight of 600 chariots headed their way. Now all they could think about was certain death at the hands of their former captors.

“...it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”
– Exodus 14:12 ESV



The people were in full-blown panic, and Moses put up an impressive show of confidence in the face of a very difficult situation. He encouraged the people to “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exodus 14:13 ESV). But he must have had reservations about exactly how God was going to get them out of this

precarious situation. While the people screamed their questions at Moses, he must have issued a quick call for help to the Lord, because Yahweh responded to Moses with a question of His own.

“Why do you cry to me?” – Exodus 14:15 ESV

This inquiry was directed at Moses and was accompanied by a set of instructions that the beleaguered spokesman was to carry out. Rather than stand around waiting for God to do something, Moses was to get busy and do his part in bringing about the very salvation he had assured the Israelites was coming.

“Tell the people to get moving! Pick up your staff and raise your hand over the sea. Divide the water so the Israelites can walk through the middle of the sea on dry ground.” – Exodus 14:15-16 ESV

These instructions must have hit Moses like a brick to the forehead. While he and Aaron had been a part of some spectacular signs in Egypt, this was taking things to another level. God was demanding that Moses use his staff to divide the Red Sea so that the people could pass through it on dry ground. And all the while, the people continued to voice their disapproval of his leadership.

But before Moses could play his part in God’s divine drama of deliverance, the Egyptians had to be stopped. So, God had His guiding angel move to the rear of the Israelite camp, closest to the Egyptian forces. Then the pillar of cloud, the symbol of God’s presence, repositioned itself between the Israelites and their enemy.

Then the angel of God, who had been leading the people of Israel, moved to the rear of the camp. The pillar of cloud also moved from the front and stood behind them. The cloud settled between the Egyptian and Israelite camps. As darkness fell, the cloud turned to fire, lighting up the night. But the Egyptians and Israelites did not approach each other all night. – Exodus 14:19-20 NLT

At the sight of this cosmic apparition, the Egyptians were stopped in their tracks. They could see the Israelite camp but were afraid to advance against them. Their most recent encounters with the power of the Israelites' God had left them reluctant to take any chances. So, as dusk turned to dark, the pillar of cloud transformed into a pillar of fire that lit up the night sky.

And as God held off the Egyptians, Moses "raised his hand over the sea, and the Lord opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind" (Exodus 14:21 NLT). Yahweh, the God of creation, sent a powerful wind that caused the waters of the sea to stand up like transparent walls, exposing the sea bed underneath. And this wind blew throughout the night, simultaneously holding back the walls of water and drying out the sea bed so that it would provide firm footing for the Israelites. Then at just the right moment, God ordered Moses to lead the people across.

So the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side! – Exodus 14:22 NLT

Stunned by what they witnessed but motivated by a strong desire to distance themselves from the Egyptians, the Israelites formed into ranks and began their journey across the perfectly dry sea floor. And while they made their way through this divine detour, the angel of God and the pillar of fire kept the Egyptians at bay. Pharaoh and his soldiers could only stand back and watch in stupefied wonder as the Israelites escaped across this massive causeway that had suddenly appeared in the middle of the sea.

But when the last Israelite's sandal had cleared the path and was standing firm on the eastern bank of the sea, the barrier provided by the angel and the pillar of fire was removed. And within minutes, Pharaoh ordered his troops to pursue the fleeing Israelites. But God was not yet done.

...just before dawn the Lord looked down on the Egyptian army from the pillar of fire and cloud, and he threw their forces into total confusion. – Exodus 14:24 NLT

As Pharaoh's troops entered the pathway the Israelites had just vacated, the Lord of Hosts got in on the action. Somehow, these seasoned charioteers became confused and unable to make their way to the other shore. Perhaps their horses became frightened by the sound of the wind and the sight of the walls of water standing up on either side of them. It seems that the dry sea bed was suddenly transformed into a muddy morass in which the chariot wheels became stuck. Before long the entire Egyptian force found itself logjammed between the walls of water. Sensing the hand of Yahweh, they cried out, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians" (Exodus 14:25 ESV).

But they never made it out. As the sun began to rise in the eastern sky, "Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the water rushed back into its usual place" (Exodus 14:27 NLT). Within minutes, every single Egyptian who had entered the pathway had been drowned by the sudden deluge as the walls of water collapsed.

And the Israelites, standing high and dry on the eastern shore, watched the whole thing take place right before their eyes. Not a single chariot made it across and the only Egyptians the Israelites saw on the eastern shore were lifeless and powerless to do them any harm. And Moses chronicles the impact this spectacular event had on the people of God.

When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the Lord had unleashed against the Egyptians, they were filled with awe before him. They put their faith in the Lord and in his servant Moses. – Exodus 14:31 NLT

When the odds were stacked against them and all seemed lost, the Israelites were delivered by their all-powerful, promise-keeping God. He had stepped into their reality and provided a one-of-a-kind miracle. And as the water of the Red Sea slowly settled back into its normal state, it was as if God had closed a door behind His people. There would be no turning back. That pathway was closed forever and the only way left for them to go was forward. With the enemy defeated, the angel of the Lord and the pillar of cloud took their places at the head of the column once again, and the people set out for their final destination: the land of promise.

The Holy One of God

¹ Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,

*“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.*

² The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

³ The Lord is a man of war;
the Lord is his name.

⁴ “Pharaoh’s chariots and his host he cast into the sea,
and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

⁵ The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.

⁶ Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

⁷ In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;
you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

⁸ At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps 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 have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.’

¹⁰ You blew with your wind; the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

¹¹ “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

¹² You stretched out your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

¹³ “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

¹⁴ The peoples have heard; they tremble;
pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

¹⁵ Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

- ¹⁶ *Terror and dread fall upon them;
because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone,
till your people, O Lord, pass by,
till the people pass by whom you have purchased.*
- ¹⁷ *You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.*
- ¹⁸ *The Lord will reign forever and ever.”*

¹⁹ *For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea.* ²⁰ *Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing.* ²¹ *And Miriam sang to them:*

*“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”* – Exodus 15:1-21 ESV

Chapter 14 ends with the uplifting statement: “Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses” (Exodus 14:31 ESV).

God had kept His word. He had promised Abraham that Pharaoh’s 600 chariots would not be a problem. In fact, God had confidently asserted that His handling of Pharaoh’s army would end up bringing glory to His name.

“I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” – Exodus 14:17-18 ESV

God’s lopsided victory over the Egyptian forces proved to be a wake-up call to Pharaoh and any of the troops that he had held in reserve. It seems unlikely that he committed all his chariots to the pursuit of the Israelites. The defenseless Israelites would have been no match for the faster and more mobile Egyptian chariots. Armed with swords, spears, bows, and arrows, a relatively small contingent of Egyptians could have made short order of the fleeing mass of Hebrew peasants as they made their way to the eastern shore of the Red Sea.

But as Pharaoh watched on in horror, he witnessed the complete annihilation of his crack troops. Weighted down by the chariots to which they were tethered, the horses drowned. In the days ahead, the lifeless bodies of the Egyptian soldiers would wash up on both shores, presenting a grisly scene of catastrophic loss. Pharaoh had been humiliated by the all-powerful God of Israel. And this glorious event caused Moses and the people to break out in a song of victory.

It seems likely that Moses was the one who penned the words to this celebratory song and taught it to the people of Israel. In it, he recounts the mighty acts of Yahweh that brought about the Egyptians' defeat and the Israelites' salvation.

*"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea." – Exodus 15:1 ESV*

Moses appears to use terminology that echoes an earlier edict decreed by Pharaoh that had ordered the deaths of all male babies born among the Hebrews.

Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile..." – Exodus 1:22 ESV

God was giving Pharaoh a taste of his own medicine. He "cast" Pharaoh's elite troops into the sea, where they drowned like helpless infants. Moses even repeated this refrain, emphasizing the overwhelming nature of God's victory.

*"Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea,
and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone." – Exodus 15:5 ESV*

Throughout this song, Moses stresses God's glory, greatness, power, strength, and fury. But, at the same time, he celebrates God's love.

*"You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode." – Exodus 15:13 ESV*

The Egyptians were the recipients of God's righteous indignation, while the Israelites were the undeserving beneficiaries of His steadfast and unfailing love. That love was manifested through God's decisive display of power over the Israelites' enemy and His glorious demonstration of providential protection for His people. And Moses adds a line that reflects God's ultimate promise to safely deliver them into the land of their inheritance.

*"You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established." – Exodus 15:17 ESV*

Moses knew that this victory was just the first of many the people of Israel would experience. The eastern shore of the Red Sea was not their final destination. And His defeat of the Egyptians would not be the last victory the Israelites celebrated. This led Moses to add several lines to the lyrics of his song that reflect the impact this event would have on their future enemies.

*“The peoples have heard; they tremble;
 pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.
 Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
 trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
 all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.
 Terror and dread fall upon them;
 because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone,
 till your people, O Lord, pass by,
 till the people pass by whom you have purchased...” – Exodus 15:14-16 ESV*

Word was going to get out. The news of this miraculous victory over the Egyptians would quickly spread and even reach the nations that occupied the land of Canaan. Upon hearing of Yahweh’s devastating defeat of the Egyptian army, these future enemies of Israel would be terror-stricken. God’s reputation for greatness, glory, and power would be permanently associated with the people of Israel. This ragtag, but rather large and relatively unknown people group was protected by a formidable deity who had deftly handled one of the most powerful armies on earth. And this wandering horde of homeless Hebrews was headed their way.

Somehow, Moses knew that God was using the Red Sea victory to prepare the way for the Israelites’ arrival in the land of Canaan. With each passing day and each display of God’s providential care for His people, the rumors concerning Israel’s God would make their way to the nations occupying the land of Canaan. It became readily apparent that this great host of people, protected by a great and powerful God, were slowly crossing the wilderness and had their sights set on making Canaan their own.

This victory song, prophetically penned by Moses, is referred to in the book of Revelation. In one of his visions, the apostle John reported hearing a song emanating from the throne room of heaven. It was sung by “all the people who had been victorious over the beast and his statue and the number representing his name” (Revelation 15:2 NLT). Accompanied by harps, they were singing what John describes as “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Revelation 15:2-3 NLT). And while the lyrics they sang are different from those penned by Moses, they reflect a continuation of the same theme.

*“Great and marvelous are your works,
 O Lord God, the Almighty.
 Just and true are your ways,
 O King of the nations.
 Who will not fear you, Lord,
 and glorify your name?
 For you alone are holy.
 All nations will come and worship before you,
 for your righteous deeds have been revealed.” – Revelation 15:3-4 NLT*

God's victory at the Red Sea was just a foreshadowing of a greater victory to come. He is not done rescuing His covenant people. While He would eventually deliver the people of Israel to the land of Canaan and assist them in conquering and capturing all the territory He had promised as their inheritance, their stay would be impermanent. Eventually, their own rebellion against God would result in their defeat at the hands of their enemies and their eviction from the land. But as John heard in his vision, another great deliverance is coming. God will one day glorify His name again by providing one final victory over His enemies and restoring His covenant people to their former status as His prized possession.

The Disbelief of Family and Foes

²² Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵ And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, ²⁶ saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."

²⁷ Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water. – Exodus 15:22-27 ESV

With their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites were putting a four-century-long season of their life behind them. As the waters of the sea closed behind them, it was as if God closed a lengthy chapter of their existence that had been marked by slavery and persecution. They must have issued a collective sigh of relief as they realized that their days of suffering had finally come to an end. For the first time in centuries, they were a free people and on their way to the land that God had promised as their inheritance. None of them had ever set foot in Canaan before. More than 400 years earlier, their patriarch, Jacob, had entered Egypt of his own free will, bringing along the 70 members of his clan so that they could find refuge from the global famine that had left the land of Canaan a virtual wasteland.

But now, Jacob's descendants, whose numbers had greatly expanded during their time in Egypt, were returning to the land that he had left. The promise God had made to Abraham was coming true.

"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions." – Genesis 15:13-14 ESV

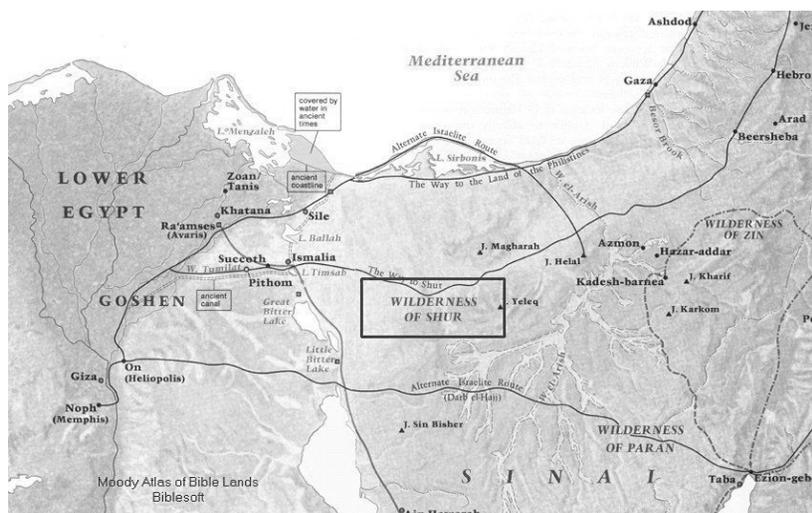
And God had reconfirmed that promise to Jacob as he and his family were making their way to Egypt.

"I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes." – Genesis 46:3-4 ESV

Jacob and his sons all died while living in Egypt. The only time his 12 sons returned to Canaan was in order to bury his body alongside those of Abraham and Isaac. But the brothers were

unable to remain in Canaan because the famine had not yet ended. So, they returned to Egypt where they lived out their lifetimes in the land of Goshen.

But now, their numerous descendants were making the long journey home. But after their four-hundred-year stint in Egypt, the Israelites had grown accustomed to their surroundings. They had acclimated to the land and the ways of its people. Over time, they had forgotten the God of their fathers and adopted the Egyptian gods as their own. Canaan had become a distant memory and the promises of Yahweh had long been forgotten as each successive generation became increasingly more “Egyptianized.”



But all that was about to change. Their long-forgotten God had not forgotten them. He had just miraculously delivered them from bondage and was now leading them to their future home in Canaan. And as the scene of their emancipation and the Egyptian army’s annihilation faded into the distance, the people followed the pillar of cloud into the wilderness of Shur. Little did they know that this was

going to be the beginning of a new chapter in their collective story. They were entering a new phase of their existence in which they would come to know and understand their “new” God. The ten plagues they had witnessed in Egypt had just been the opening act of His self-revelatory drama.

As they made their way to Canaan, they were going to get a steady dose of divine revelation as God displayed His glory and power. But He would also reveal the expectations He had for His chosen people. He had redeemed them for a reason. They had been set free so that they might live according to His will and display His glory and greatness to the rest of the nations.

The wilderness was to be their classroom, where they learned the painful truth about their own character and discovered the unflinching holiness and unwavering faithfulness of their God. And those lessons began immediately.

Just three days after leaving the Red Sea, they found themselves facing their first test in God’s school of spiritual enlightenment.

They traveled in this desert for three days without finding any water. When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. – Exodus 15:22-23 NLT

Shur was not a desert as much as it was an open expanse of land, and water would have been a constant need for the Israelites. So, during their first three days of travel, the Israelites found no source of potable water. This would have been a serious concern for a group their size. How could they remain alive without water? They knew that their sizeable flocks and herds would quickly diminish if a viable source of water was not found soon.

This unexpected predicament caused the people to turn their anger against Moses. Just as they had done when they found themselves backed up against the sea with the Egyptian army bearing down on them, the people of Israel took out their fear and frustration on God's appointed leader.

"What are we going to drink?" they demanded. – Exodus 15:24 NLT

And by this time, Moses must have been questioning why he ever agreed to lead this ungrateful and easily disgruntled band of hotheads. As God's spokesman, he became the target of the people's wrath. When they became unhappy with their circumstances, they took their complaints to Moses and his brother, Aaron. These two elderly men had shown up in Egypt with lofty promises of emancipation and relocation. They had declared themselves to be the official representatives of Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they had come to lead God's people out of Egypt and back to the land of promise.

So, when things didn't go well, the people held Moses and on as responsible. And when Moses felt the heat, he turned to God for help.

So Moses cried out to the Lord for help, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink. – Exodus 15:25 NLT

What's important to note in this story is that there *was* water, but it was undrinkable. Their problem wasn't a *lack* of something, but it was that the solution to their need was "bitter." It was plentiful but undrinkable. It wasn't that the water was non-existent but that it was worthless in its current condition. And this non-potable water contained a powerful lesson for the Israelites.

The Hebrew word translated as "bitter" is מַר (*mar*), which can also be translated as "angry" or "discontented." Little did the Israelites know that the water was a symbol of their own spiritual condition. Despite all God had done to set them free from their bondage in Egypt, they were a bitter and discontented people. In a sense, they were unusable. Instead of displaying gratitude for all that God had done, they quickly resorted to anger and blame. And their blatant displays of dissatisfaction were evidence that their hearts were bitter and in need of change.

So, God took this opportunity to teach the Israelites a much-needed lesson on how He was going to transform the bitter condition of their hearts. He had Moses take a particular piece of wood and throw it into the bitter water. This act of faith on Moses' part had an immediate

effect, transforming the bitter, worthless water into a refreshing and life-giving source of sustenance for the people of God and all their livestock. The bitterness was removed.

Hundreds of years later, the prophet Ezekiel would record the following promise that God made to His people.

“I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.” – Ezekiel 36:26-27 NLT

From the very beginning, God revealed His desire to transform the hearts of His people. Their real problem had never been slavery. They suffered from a heart condition that had left them bitter, angry, and discontented. Their 400-year separation from God had reduced them to a state of spiritual stagnation and impurity. They had become polluted by the culture and robbed of their ability to be a source of life to the nations around them. So, God was going to intervene and, over time, begin His miraculous plan of heart transformation.

One of the things that Moses makes clear is this event at Marah had been a test of their faithfulness. God wanted to know if they were going to trust Him or would they continue to display their distrust through bitter displays of discontentment and dissatisfaction. So, He had Moses give them a warning.

“If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and keeping all his decrees, then I will not make you suffer any of the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you.” – Exodus 15:26 NLT

God had used an ordinary piece of wood to transform bitter water into a life-giving source of sustenance. He had just proven, yet again, that He could meet all their needs. And all He was asking in return was that they live in obedience to His commands. If they did, they could expect to see more miraculous evidence of His provision, but they would also experience protection from His judgment. Obedience would bring blessing. Disobedience would result in curses. This would become a recurring theme in their relationship with God. He could both heal and hurt. He could bless and curse. And all He asked of His people was that they could trust and obey so that He could turn them into a life-giving source of sustenance to the nations of the world.

Food for Thought

¹ They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ² And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” ⁸ And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.”

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’” ¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. ¹¹ And the Lord said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

¹³ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” ¹⁷ And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. – Exodus 16:1-18 ESV

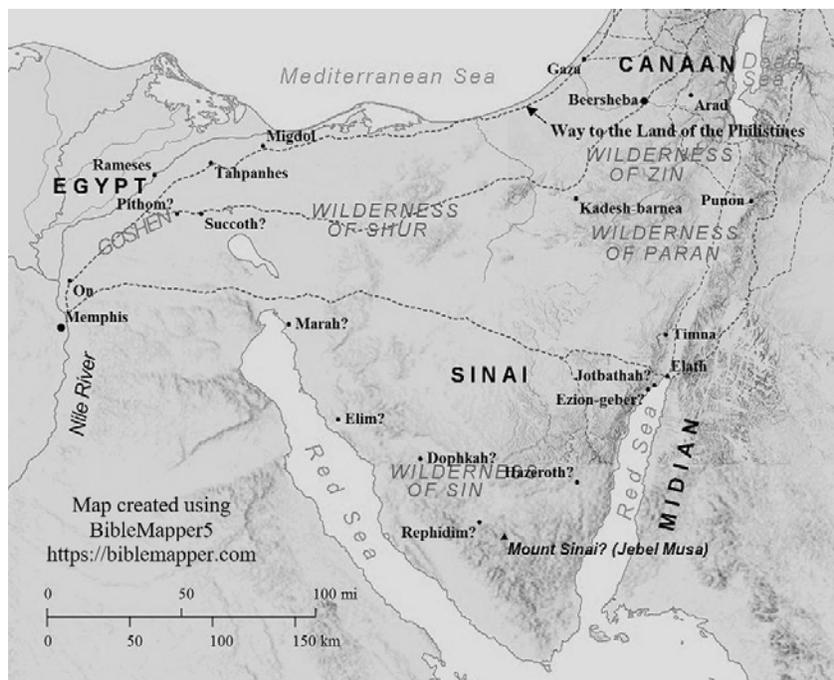
In the wilderness of Shur, God had answered the Israelites’ bitter discontentment over their lack of water by graciously and miraculously transforming the bitter water of Marah into a safe and plentiful source of refreshment. In doing so, He had proven His ability to care for any and

all of their needs. They had been given a powerful lesson in the providential provision of their God, but it had come with a condition.

“If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer.” – Exodus 15:26 ESV

In return for God’s gracious provision, the Israelites were expected to “do that which is right in his eyes.” God was demanding that they live in obedience to His revealed will. Up to this point, He had not articulated any of His commandments or statutes, but that day was quickly coming. As they made their way to the land of Canaan, the Lord would begin to reveal His will for them, and these incidents in the wilderness were designed to test their readiness to hear and obey what He had to say. The Hebrew word יָשָׁר (*yāšār*) can be translated as “right” or “pleasing, correct, proper, or upright.” It conveys the idea of doing that which is righteous in the eyes of God.

God described Himself as their “healer” or physician. He was the only one who could restore them to full spiritual health. The Hebrew word רָפָא (*rāpā*) was used to describe one who makes another whole or complete. God was in the process of transforming His spiritually deficient people into a nation of committed followers who would live in obedience to His sovereign will for them.



And He repeatedly showered them with undeserved grace and mercy in order to prove His love for them. In fact, when they left Marah and headed toward the wilderness of Sin, He led them to a place called Elim, “where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water” (Exodus 15:27 ESV). Had they only trusted God and followed His leading, they would have arrived at Elim and found an ample source of water to meet their

needs. The events at Marah would never have had to happen. But this was all part of the learning process they would have to go through as they made their way to Canaan. God was

testing the degree of their faithfulness and assessing the level of their commitment to live according to His will.

So, as they made their way south, they eventually arrived at the wilderness of Sin, which Moses describes as lying “between Elim and Sinai” (Exodus 16:1 ESV). This point of reference will become important as the story unfolds because it will be at Sinai that the people receive the full complement of God’s law. But before they ever reach the base of Mount Sinai, they will have to answer for their less-than-righteous response to the situation in Sin.

For the third time since leaving Egypt, the Israelites will reveal their propensity for vocalizing their dissatisfaction. After completing the long and difficult journey from Shur to Sin, the people find another reason to complain.

...the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. – Exodus 16:2 ESV

This time, their complaint had to do with their lack of food. After nearly two months of traveling through some rather inhospitable places, the unleavened bread the people had brought with them from Egypt must have run out. This basic staple to their diet was essential for their survival and they began to worry that they were going to starve to death in the wilderness. Their overly dramatic portrayal of their circumstances conveys the degree of their concern and their lack of faith in God.

“If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger!” – Exodus 16:3 NLT

This melodramatic outburst from the people did not phase God. He simply responded by telling Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people will go out and gather the amount for each day, so that I may test them” (Exodus 16:4 NLT).

He had heard their complaint and He was going to address it in a miraculous way. But the key would be whether they were willing to obey the conditions that came with His provision. He was going to graciously “rain bread from heaven” so that they would have more than enough to eat each day. But would they do the right thing and follow God’s commands? Would their greed get the best of them? Whether they realized it or not, this was a divine test of their faith and faithfulness.

Moses gathered the people together and informed them of God’s plan to meet their perceived problem. Moses also let them know that their grumbling, while directed at him and Aaron, had really been an expression of dissatisfaction with God.

“...the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.” – Exodus 16:8 ESV

The people had a bad habit of shooting the messenger. But Moses wanted them to understand that God took their complaints seriously personally. They were a blatant display of disrespect for the very one who had delivered them from their captivity in Egypt.

As Moses and Aaron addressed the people, God appeared before them in the pillar of cloud. Somehow, God manifested His presence in a visual and audible way. Perhaps the people saw flashes of lightning and the sound of thunder emanating from the cloud. But whatever the case, they knew that God was near. And from the cloud, Moses heard God say, “During the evening you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be satisfied with bread, so that you may know that I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 16:12 NLT).



God had decided to address their need by providing two different sources of sustenance. First, He would provide them with meat in the form of quail that would appear every evening in such vast quantities that the Israelites could catch as many as they wanted. Then, in the morning, God would cause a bread-like substance to appear on the ground. This would happen every day for six days, and the people were told to “Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an

omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent” (Exodus 16:16 ESV). And Moses makes it clear that if the people followed God’s instructions, no one would go without.



Once again, God proved Himself to be their faithful provider. He could and would meet all their needs, but He demanded that they trust and obey Him. He wanted them to replace their complaints with willing compliance to His will. He would provide for them. He would graciously sustain them. They would

never face a need that He could not meet. But His provision must be accompanied by their adherence to His commands. They were going to learn to do things His way or suffer the consequences. Providing His people with bread and meat was no problem for God. But convincing His people to comply with His commands was going to be another matter altogether.

Moses would later remind the Israelites of the lesson found in the miracle of the manna.

“Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” – Deuteronomy 8:3 NLT

Bread of Life

¹⁹ And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” ²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹ Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

²² On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’”

²⁴ So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. ²⁵ Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.”

²⁷ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? ²⁹ See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

³¹ Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” ³³ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations.” ³⁴ As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. ³⁵ The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶ (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.) – Exodus 16:19-36 ESV

Moses had clearly instructed the people to refrain from hoarding the manna that God provided. The Lord had promised to provide just enough to meet their daily dietary requirements.

...whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. – Exodus 16:18 ESV

But some within the camp of Israel refused to follow Moses’ instructions, choosing instead to preserve some of their manna for the following day. Underlying this action was a doubt in God’s ability to provide for their daily needs. Fearing that the manna might not show up the next day, they tried to preserve some of their rations to help tide them over. But when they woke the following morning, they found that their manna had spoiled and become inedible. And their actions angered Moses.

These people had no need to doubt God because He sent the manna every morning, like clockwork. And after the people had gathered what they needed, whatever manna was left over simply melted away from the heat of the sun. God graciously and miraculously met their needs, and no one among the millions of Israelites went hungry.

But God's provision of manna came with a second and highly important test. Up until this point, the people had been instructed to gather just enough manna to meet their needs for that day.

"Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat." – Exodus 16:16 ESV

But on the sixth day, Moses announced that they were to gather twice as much manna. When the leaders of the people questioned Moses about this surprising change in protocol, he revealed the message he had received from the Lord.

"This is what the Lord has said: 'Tomorrow is a time of cessation from work, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Whatever you want to bake, bake today; whatever you want to boil, boil today; whatever is left put aside for yourselves to be kept until morning.'" – Exodus 16:24 NLT

On this occasion, God altered His prohibition against attempting to keep manna for the next day. This time He told the Israelites to gather enough for two days and assured them that it would not spoil. But God had a specific reason for changing the rules of the game. He was establishing a new pattern for their daily lives by setting aside the seventh day of each week for the purpose of rest. Moses made God's instructions perfectly clear.

"Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." – Exodus 16:25-26 ESV

God would provide double the amount of manna on the sixth day, but on the seventh day, there would be none to gather. He would remove any temptation for the Israelites to go out and gather on that final day of the week. But when that first "Sabbath" day arrived, some of the people refused to believe God's word and went out to gather their daily quota of manna, only to find that the ground was bare. And this time, it was God who became incensed by the peoples' refusal to obey His commands.

"How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." – Exodus 16:28-29 ESV

God was attempting to indoctrinate His people into this new way of life. From this point forward, the seventh day was to be a special day, set aside for rest. There would be no need to gather manna because God had already provided enough for that day. And there was to be no

preparation of the manna on the seventh day because it was to be a work-free day. All of this was instituted to prepare the people for the fourth law that would be given to them on Mount Sinai.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” – Exodus 20:8-11 ESV

God was making the seventh day a holy day. The Hebrew word for “holy” is *קָדַשׁ* (*qāḏāš*) and it means “to be set apart, to consecrate.” God was separating this day from all the rest, indicating that it was to be treated as sacred or hallowed. On this day, the people were to cease from their labors and, in so doing, they would be following the example given by God during the days of creation.

“The Israelites must keep the Sabbath by observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the Israelites forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.” – Exodus 31:16-17 NLT

God was giving His people a day set apart for rest and refreshment. But more than that, it was a day to remember His providential provision for all their needs. The God who made the heavens and the earth and all they contain was also capable of meeting all their needs. In time, the Israelites would understand the sanctity of this special day. It was a non-optional observance that came with severe consequences if it was ignored.

“Surely you must keep my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. So you must keep the Sabbath, for it is holy for you. Everyone who defiles it must surely be put to death; indeed, if anyone does any work on it, then that person will be cut off from among his people. Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; anyone who does work on the Sabbath day must surely be put to death.” – Exodus 31:12-15 NLT

From this point forward, the observance of the Sabbath was to remind the people of Israel of their long tenure in Egypt, where they labored seven days a week without rest. They never knew where their next meal would come from. Their desire for rest was never met. But now, God had provided them with freedom from labor and the fear of want. He was their liberator, provider, and protector. And to commemorate this special act of provision, God instructed Moses, “Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 16:32 ESV). This specially preserved manna was placed in the ark of the covenant as a memorial

and a reminder of God's gracious providential care. And for the next 40 years, the lives of the Israelites would be preserved by this daily sign of God's faithfulness and love.

It would become their bread of life and provide a foreshadowing of a future day when the Messiah would come to earth, offering Himself as the true bread of life. On one occasion, His disciples reminded Jesus, "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, **'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'**" (John 6:31 NLT). But Jesus responded, "I tell you the solemn truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but my Father is giving you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:32-33 NLT).

For now, the Israelites would have to be satisfied with manna. But it served as a sign of greater things to come. God was going to preserve their lives so that, one day, He could send His Son as one of their own so that He might become the true bread from heaven.

Doubting God's Presence

¹ All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" – Exodus 17:1-7 ESV

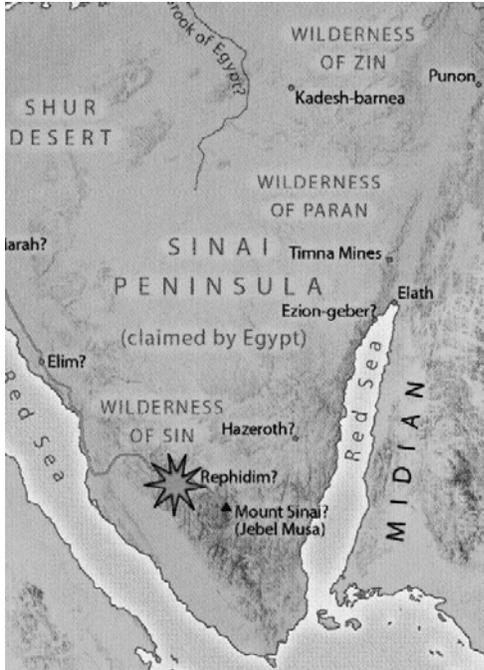
Since leaving Egypt, the Israelites have displayed a clear pattern of behavior when encountering what they believe to be unexpected and undesirable difficulties. As soon as things take a perceived turn for the worse, they express their disapproval to Moses and Aaron. At Marah, they discovered that the water was undrinkable, so they took their dissatisfaction with the situation to the two brothers.

So the people murmured against Moses, saying, "What can we drink?" – Exodus 15:24 NLT

Rather than reprimand them for their mistreatment of His appointed leaders, God miraculously transformed the bitter water of Marah into fresh drinking water. But He also gave them a warning about their ongoing behavior. He demanded that they begin to do what is right and obey His commands or they could find themselves suffering some of the same plagues that befell the Egyptians. His constant care for them came with conditions.

Not long after that event, as the people made their way through the desolate wilderness of Sin, their supply of unleavened bread ran out, and their growing hunger caused them to lash out in frustration yet again.

The entire company of Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger!" – Exodus 16:2-3 NLT



Once again, God intervened and performed yet another miracle. He provided them with quail each evening and a bread-like substance every morning that would supply all their nutritional requirements for the rest of their journey. But just days later, when the people arrived at a place called Rephidim, they found another reason to complain. There was no water. It seems that the water they had gathered at Marah had run out and now Moses and Aaron had led them to yet another desolate and dry spot that provided no hope of quenching their thirst. So...

...the people were very thirsty there for water, and they murmured against Moses and said, "Why in the world did you bring us up from Egypt—to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" – Exodus 17:3 NLT

In each successive encounter, their complaints become increasingly darker and more desperate. Their inflammatory rhetoric reflects their growing disillusionment with the entire enterprise. They expressed their regret of having ever left Egypt and accused Moses and Aaron of leading them on a virtual death march into the God-forsaken wilderness.

The further they got from Egypt and the closer they got to Canaan, they began to second-guess the leadership of Moses and the reliability of Yahweh. Despite all that God had done for them, they questioned the very nature of His "deliverance" by declaring it to be headed to certain failure. In their minds, each difficulty they faced provided further evidence that this problem-plagued trip to the promised land had been a huge mistake.

Driven by thirst and fear, they accused Moses of trying to kill them. Their deliverer had become their executioner. But what they failed to understand was that Moses was simply following directions. He was being guided by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. These manifestations of God's presence were always with them and had been guiding them all along the way. Their arrival in Marah had not been a mistake. God had led them to a place where the water was undrinkable. He had known all along that their bread would eventually run out and their hunger would cause them to question His goodness.

God was not lost. He had not become disoriented in the trackless wilderness of Sin. He knew exactly where He was going and what He was doing. He was testing His people to see if they would trust Him. He was placing them in situations that were designed to expose their doubts and fears. And here at Rephidim, He provided them with yet another test of their confidence in Him. There was no water. But the pillar of cloud remained at the head of their column. As they made camp, the divine presence of God was visible for all to see. He had not left them or forsaken them.

But the people had their doubts. They could not understand why this God of Moses and Aaron would allow them to suffer. If this Yahweh was so powerful and great and if He truly was with them, why did they keep ending up in less-than-satisfactory situations? Did He not know that Rephadim had no water source? But rather than take their questions and concerns to God, they turned on Moses and Aaron, and their anger was so intense that Moses feared for his life.

“What will I do with this people?—a little more and they will stone me!” – Exodus 17:4
NLT

But, once again, God intervened. He gave Moses the following instructions:

“Go over before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will be standing before you there on the rock in Horeb, and you will strike the rock, and water will come out of it so that the people may drink.” – Exodus 17:5-6 NLT

God could have acted on His own, but He chose to use His servant Moses as the means of addressing their perceived problem. As the elders looked on, the pillar of cloud moved from the camp and repositioned itself above a particular rock. In a desert filled with rocks, this relocation of God’s divine presence provided Moses with a clear indication as to which rock he was to strike. Not just any rock would do. In fact, God clearly indicates that His presence will reside over “the rock” in Horeb.

This rock had already been set apart by God as the source of their sustenance. He had known all along that Rephidim would be an arid region devoid of water. But “the rock” was already in place and ready to deliver what the people needed. So, when Moses obeyed the command of the Lord and struck the rock, water poured from it in a steady stream. That ordinary-looking rock became a source of life-giving refreshment in the midst of a barren wilderness. And it became a symbol of God’s salvation that, centuries later, the apostle Paul would use as a foreshadowing of Jesus

I don’t want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. – 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 NLT

This divine deliverance would be repeated multiple times during the peoples’ wilderness journey. God delivering water from a rock would become a symbol of His providential care and life-sustaining power. Even in the midst of a waterless desert, God could provide salvation from the most unlikely of sources. But would the people trust Him? Would they stop judging His character based on the nature of their surroundings?

God knew that the real problem with the people was not a lack of water, but a lack of trust. Despite the pillar of cloud, the manna and quail, and the miracle at Marah, the Israelites continued to doubt the presence of God.

...they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" – Exodus 17:7 ESV

And to commemorate this place of testing, Moses gave it two different names: Massah and Meribah. Massah means "place of testing" and Meribah means "place of murmuring or discontentment." It was a place of testing because the people tested the patience of God. But it was also a place where God tested the faith of His people and, sadly, they failed. Rather than recalling God's past provision in times of difficulty, they murmured and complained. Instead of trusting in God's proven ability to provide for all their needs, they allowed present circumstances to raise doubts about His power and presence.

Reluctantly and rather slowly, they were learning to trust in God. He was sufficient to supply all their needs. There was no circumstance too dire, no enemy too great, or difficulty too large that God could not overcome. But that lesson would take years for the Israelites to learn.

The Lord is My Banner

⁸ Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. ⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” ¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. ¹² But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. ¹³ And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” ¹⁵ And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, *The Lord Is My Banner*, ¹⁶ saying, “A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” – Exodus 17:8-16 ESV

After miraculously providing water for His disgruntled and dissatisfied people at Rephidim, God followed that gracious act with a much more dangerous and deadly demonstration of His power that also served to validate Moses’ role as His chosen leader. To quench their thirst and assuage their anger, God ordered Moses to use his staff to strike “the rock” so that it gushed forth water. This blatant demonstration of divine authority, accomplished through God’s official spokesman, was intended to bolster Moses’ credibility and credentials among the people.

“Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” – Exodus 17:5-6 ESV

God allowed Moses to play a significant role in meeting the people’s need for water. It would have been just as easy for God to cause water to spring up from the dry ground, but He chose to deliver this miracle through Moses. And one of the lessons God wanted the Israelites to learn was that Moses was His personal representative. Moses spoke and acted on behalf of God. And by questioning the quality of Moses’ leadership, they were actually raising doubts about the reliability of Yahweh Himself. In a sense, their anger-filled rants against Moses were really a vocalization of their lack of faith in God.

...the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord here with us or not?” – Exodus 17:7 NLT

So, with the people’s thirst temporarily satisfied, God brought a new and even more demanding trial for the people to endure. This time, the problem wouldn’t be a *lack* of water or meat, but it would be an overabundance of enemies.

While the people of Israel were still at Rephidim, the warriors of Amalek attacked them.
– Exodus 17:8 NLT

The timing of this attack is impeccable and thoroughly ordained by God. The people had just satisfied their thirst with water from the rock when suddenly and as if out of nowhere, a force of Amalekite warriors descended upon them.

The Amalekites were a nomadic people who had descended from Esau, the son of Isaac and the twin brother of Jacob.

These are the descendants of Esau who became the leaders of various clans:

The descendants of Esau's oldest son, Eliphaz, became the leaders of the clans of Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, Korah, Gatam, and Amalek. – Genesis 36:15-16 NLT

These descendants of Esau were close relatives of Israelites who had settled in the southern region of Canaan, between the border of Egypt and Mount Sinai. During the Israelites' 400-year sojourn in Egypt, the Amalekites had grown in number and considered the wilderness of Sin as their homeland. The scene of millions of Hebrew refugees setting up camp on their home turf must have alarmed the Amalekites. Water rights and pastureland would have been of great value in that arid part of the world. So, the Amalekites decided to give the Israelites ample reason to move on. But rather than ordering the Israelites to run, Moses put together a battle plan, formed a makeshift army, and assigned a young man named Joshua to serve as commander. Then he gave this new general his strange-sounding strategy for achieving victory.

"Choose some men to go out and fight the army of Amalek for us. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill, holding the staff of God in my hand." – Exodus 17:9 NLT

The Israelites were shepherds, not warriors. None of them had any military training or battle experience. Yet, Moses was ordering them to go up against an Amalekite force comprised of seasoned and well-equipped warriors.

So, the next day, as Joshua led his rag-tag group of citizen soldiers into battle, Moses ascended a nearby hill in the company of Aaron and Hur. There on the mountaintop, Moses took the very same staff he had used to strike the rock and raised it above his head with both arms. The text states that, as long as he held the staff aloft, the Israelites were able to get the upper hand in the battle taking place in the valley below. But as time wore on, Moses' arms grew weary, and as he lowered them to rest, the battle went in favor of the Amalekites. The key to victory over the Amalekites was directly tied to God's chosen leader raising his staff over the enemies of Israel.

In the heat of the battle taking place in the valley, Joshua had no way of knowing what was happening on the mountaintop. One minute his forces gained the advantage, only to find themselves retreating in apparent defeat. It was a touch-and-go affair that could go either way.



But Moses' two companions could see exactly what was going on and knew that they were going to have to intervene or the battle would end in tragedy. Moses was insufficient for the task. He had the heart and possessed the staff through which the power of God was displayed, but he lacked the stamina necessary to stay the course.

Moses' arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset. – Exodus 17:12 NLT

The power of God was more than sufficient to meet the need. What was lacking was Moses' ability to serve as the unwavering conduit through whom God's power could flow unchecked. God's chosen leader was well into his 80s when this battle took place and the physical demands on his elderly body proved to be too much. He understood that victory hinged on his ability to keep the staff aloft, but he lacked the personal strength to do his part. That's when Aaron and Hur stepped in. These two men immediately understood the role they were there to play.

First, they provided a stone on which Moses could rest. The exhausted octogenarian was completely worn out from the physical exertion and the emotional toll he suffered every time he lowered his arms and watched the battle turn against Joshua and his troops.

Next, they each stood alongside Moses, lifting his arms into the air and using their combined strength to serve as conduits of the power of God. The staff remained aloft, the power of God flowed, and the army of Israel won the day.

Joshua overwhelmed the army of Amalek in battle. – Exodus 17:13 NLT

In the aftermath of this great victory, God ordered Moses to make a permanent record of this victory, along with a promise regarding the eventual destruction of the Amalekites.

"Write this down on a scroll as a permanent reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will erase the memory of Amalek from under heaven." – Exodus 17:14 NLT

God specifically told Moses to deliver this divine promise to Joshua. It was as if God was letting Joshua know that this battle was far from over. They had not destroyed the Amalekites but had simply defeated them in battle. That meant they would live to fight another day. But God wanted Joshua to know that he would lead one more battle against these enemies of Israel and, when that day came, Joshua would have the pleasure of wiping them off the face of the earth.

This promise would not take place until long after the Israelites had entered the land of Canaan and made it their own. Some forty years later, Moses would pull out his written record of God's promise and read it to Joshua again.

Therefore, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies in the land he is giving you as a special possession, you must destroy the Amalekites and erase their memory from under heaven. Never forget this! – Deuteronomy 25:19 NLT

And at the scene of the battle, Moses erected another record of their decisive victory. He erected an altar and named it Yahweh-Nissi (which means “the Lord is my banner”). This memorial or tribute to God's faithfulness celebrated His sovereign role in Israel's victory. Moses, Aaron, and Hur were simply instruments in God's hands. Joshua and the men who fought alongside him, each served under the banner of the King of kings. They were the army of God Almighty. But the victory was God's alone.

And Moses recognized that the Amalekites would pay dearly for their decision to stand against the God of the universe. Their assault on the Israelites was a direct attack on the sovereignty of Yahweh, the ruler of heaven and earth. And God would hold the Amalekites accountable for their actions.

“They have raised their fist against the Lord's throne, so now the Lord will be at war with Amalek generation after generation.” – Exodus 17:16 NLT