

NOTES ABOUT THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt after the death of the Egyptian firstborn. However, God was going to demonstrate His power in another awesome way. He did not lead the Israelites on the shortest journey from Egypt northwards on the road that went to the land of the Philistines and the Promised Land (Ex 13:17).

The Israelites had good reason to be terrified, when the Egyptians followed them and they were hemmed in. The sea that the Israelites faced was probably the last place from which they expected any rescue to come for them. However, when Moses stretched out his staff, God provided a safe escape-route for the people when God divided the water. When the Egyptians followed, the Lord troubled them, and made the wheels of their chariots come off, so that they had difficulty driving them (14:24-25). When Moses again stretched out his hand over the sea, Pharaoh and his soldiers were caught. The water that had been held up miraculously so that the Israelites crossed on dry land, flooded in over them, so that none of them survived (Ex 14:28).

The plagues in Egypt had been a contest between the Lord and the gods of Egypt, who had been helpless against the power of the Lord (Ex 12:12). Earlier, Pharaoh had refused Moses' request and asked, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I shall also not let Israel go" (Ex 5:2). In the report of this event, God stated twice that He destroyed the Egyptians' army so that they would know that He is the Lord (Ex 14:4, 18). The account also underlines the changing attitude of the Israelites, from unbelief and fear when the Egyptians threatened them (14:10-12) to faith and trust in God's ability to deliver them (14:31).

Perhaps the most convincing of the claims by Ron Wyatt and his associates was the one about the crossing of the Red Sea and the location of Mount Sinai. His alleged discoveries have been available on video, and have been commented on by Jonathan Gray.

Another book has been published by another associate, Lennart Möller (a Swede) called *The Exodus Case*, tr. Margaret Bäckman, (Scandinavia Publishing House, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2000).

One interesting hypothesis is that the Pharaoh at the time of Exodus was Thutmose IV, and that his eldest son, slain at the time of the Passover, was none other than the famous Tutankhamun, who was allegedly buried in the tomb intended for his father, after his father was drowned at the Red Sea. One of the chief claims was that the site of the Red Sea crossing was not at the western arm of the Red Sea, but at the Eastern arm, the Gulf of Aqaba, and that the true site of Mount Sinai is (as St Paul says, Gal 4:25) in Arabia, in Midian (Jebel Al Lawz).

Most of the claims of Ron Wyatt have the unfortunate aspect that they are difficult to verify. The authorities in Saudi Arabia do not want tourists from the West moving through their country. However, the location of Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula, and the building of the monastery of St Catherine's at the place that was assumed to have been the true Mount Sinai have apparently been mistaken. Helena, the mother of Constantine, was credited with finding Mount Sinai, but then her finding of the site of Jesus' crucifixion and the wood of the true cross probably also came from the fact that people told her what they thought she might want to hear. For one thing, the present Sinai Peninsula has always been a part of the Egypt, but the account in Exodus has clearly said that, when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they had left Egypt (Ex 19:1).

There has been much discussion about the location of the "sea of reeds", but there is no place on or near the western arm of the Red Sea that fits this description. There is no place near the present Suez Canal where mountains could have hemmed in the Israelites (Ex 14:3) as they were being pursued by the Egyptians, but there are in the eastern Sinai Peninsula (Ex 14:10-12). When they had been journeying for three days, at Etham (Ex 13:20), God instructed the Israelites to turn back from the highway (Ex 14:1). So we are probably right to think of them turning from their northern route towards Canaan, to the south-east, towards the eastern arm of the Red Sea. The Israelites numbered over six-hundred thousand men not counting the women and children (Ex 12:37), and, although they left Egypt "in their military divisions" (Ex 12:51), they were apparently unarmed. After all the plagues, the loss of their Pharaoh, whom they could not even bury in a pyramid tomb, the loss of all the firstborn, and the loss of a whole army, the Egyptians must have been devastated.

The hypothesis of Wyatt and Möller is fairly convincing, and seems to fit the record of Exodus, including the location of places such as Elim and Marah. There are many photographs of alleged chariot wheels, skulls and skeletons on an under-water ridge, with deep water on each side, across the Gulf of Aqaba from Naweiba on the

western coast, allegedly Pi Hahiroth (Ex 14:9), to the eastern coast in NW Arabia. Near this allegedly true Mount Sinai there is the split rock, the “Rock of Horeb” from which water flowed, actually for over a year while the Israelites camped near Mount Sinai. Some of the alleged finds near Mount Sinai are its blackened top, a cave (perhaps associated with Elijah) and a cleft (in which Moses may have been hid), a plateau area, where the elders of Israel may have had their vision of the Lord, the remains of an altar at the base, an altar for worship of the Egyptian bull cult, a river bed, remains of wells, stone circles (possibly connected with tents), raised pillars, a large area for a camp site, and much more. There are many rather small colour photographs, some diagrams, and some satellite maps.

There are other interesting theories. One is that the strong east wind (Ex 14:21) not only carved a path through the water, but caused it to freeze. If that was so, it would be reasonable to imagine the western part of the watery defile melting first, so that the Israelites saw the bodies of Egyptians washed up onto the eastern shore where they were (Ex 14:30).

We ought to discount the ABC programs several months ago that tried to attribute the plagues of Egypt and the parting of the water of the Red Sea to a volcanic explosion on the island of Thera (Santorini) in the Aegean Sea. Such a suggestion cannot account, for example, for the plague of locusts, or the fact that the Israelites in the area of Goshen were spared the plagues. It cannot account for the killing of only firstborn people of Egyptians. Such an event cannot explain darkness at one place and light in another (Ex 14:19-20). Since the Red Sea crossing was separated from the Mediterranean, it is silly to try to explain the miracle as the tide going out at the site of the crossing of the Red Sea, and a subsequent tsunami because of volcanic activity at Santorini.

Paul told his hearers at Antioch in Pisidia, “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made them a great people while they lived as foreign residents in Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out of it” (Ac 13:17). That is the dominant perspective in our consideration of this great miracle at the “sea of reeds” (the Hebrew for the Red Sea) at Ex 13:18. Important motifs in the story of the Exodus were that God redeemed the people whom He had chosen from slave quarters in Egypt immediately after the time when the angel of death passed over Egypt. This pointed forward to Jesus Christ’s redemption of all people from a different slavery, to sin and death. The timing of this event at the first Passover is a vivid reminder that the great central event of the Gospel, Jesus’ death and resurrection, occurred at the time of the Passover and during the feast of unleavened bread, which followed immediately. Paul drew a parallel to the New Testament sacrament of baptism, when he said that the experience of the Israelites in the cloud and the sea “baptised them into Moses” (1 Cor 10:2). There are also important parallels between the Passover and the Lord’s Supper.

During the earlier plagues in Egypt, Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let the Israelites go. In the later plagues there was a shift. In these God made Pharaoh stubborn. On this occasion, God also made the hearts of the Egyptians stubborn, so that they went into the path that had been opened up through the sea (Ex 14:17). God hardens people who first make themselves impervious to His will. It reminds us of Paul’s statement, “Therefore He has mercy on the one on whom He wants to have mercy, and makes stubborn the one whom He wishes to make stubborn” (Rm 9:18).

Moses and the men of Israel celebrated the crossing of the Red Sea with a song of praise (Ex 15:1-19) It had characteristics of the older Hebrew language, just as today some poetry deliberately reverts to more archaic forms of language. Miriam and women took up the chorus, which repeated the first verse of the song (Ex 14:1).

We, who have been redeemed by the Lamb, shall in eternal life sing a similar song, which extols our Lord’s redemption. Parts of it will be parallel to parts of the song of Moses and the Israelites. John wrote, “I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. I saw those who had won the victory over the beast, over his image, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass. They were holding harps of God. They were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: ‘Great and wonderful are Your works, Lord God Almighty. Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations. Who is there who will not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all the nations will come and worship before You. For Your righteous judgments have been revealed’” (Rv 15:2-4).