

EXODUS 15: TREES, WATER, 12 AND 70; THE EDENIC ARCHETYPE

Take off your glasses – put on another pair. This chapter is the perfect case – study for how we can so easily, as modern westerners, read over the guts of a text because the original context is so far removed from us all these centuries later.

The way this chapter would typically be preached.

But let's look at it through the glasses of those to whom it was originally written.

1 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying:

“I will sing to the Lord,

For He has triumphed gloriously!

The horse and its rider

He has thrown into the sea!

2 The Lord is my strength and song,

And He has become my salvation;

He 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 army He has cast
into the sea;***

***His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red
Sea.***

5 The depths have covered them;

They sank to the bottom like a stone.

***6 "Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious
in power;***

***Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy
in pieces.***

7 And in the greatness of Your excellence

***You have overthrown those who rose against
You;***

You sent forth Your wrath;

It consumed them like stubble.

8 And with the blast of Your nostrils

The waters were gathered together;

The floods stood upright like a heap;

The depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue,

I will overtake,

I will divide the spoil;

My desire shall be satisfied on 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, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?***

***12 You stretched out Your right hand;
The earth swallowed them.***

***13 You in Your mercy have led forth
The people whom You have redeemed;
You have guided them in Your strength
To Your holy habitation.***

***14 “The people will hear and be afraid;
Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of
Philistia.***

***15 Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed;
The mighty men of Moab,
Trembling will take hold of them;
All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.***

***16 Fear and dread will fall on them;
By the greatness of Your arm
They will be as still as a stone,
Till Your people pass over, O Lord,
Till the people pass over
Whom You have purchased.***

17 You will bring them in and plant them

***In the mountain of Your inheritance,
In the place, O Lord, which You have made
For Your own dwelling,
The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have
established.***

18 “The Lord shall reign forever and ever.”

***19 For the horses of Pharaoh went with his
chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the
Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon
them. But the children of Israel went on dry
land in the midst of the sea.***

- The Song of Moses – praise for deliverance
- Verse 3: Part of the two powers in Heaven debate. This was linked to Daniel 7 where a “young” man, one like the Son of Man is seen ascending to the throne of the ancient of Days, (an old man – God)
- Verses 4-7 recount the victory of God over Pharaoh’s forces at the Red Sea.
- The Red Sea, (Sea of Reeds/ Yam Suph) in Egyptian cosmology – seen to be a window or portal to the underworld. To the ancient Egyptian, the souls of the dead passed over this particular body of water after death.
- God is not through with His polemics

- regarding the Egyptian ma'at.
- Look at verses 8 – 13.
 - In verse 13 we are told that the earth – eretz, meaning earth, but also the underworld swallowed Pharaoh and his army. In our parlance we would say, they were swallowed by their own version of Hell. They didn't pass over.
 - And in the last portion of verse 13, we see that God is guiding His people to His holy habitation. And that is the crux of the context not only for this chapter but also for the balance of the book of Exodus.
 - Verses 14 – 16 speak of the fear of the nations and tribes who at that time inhabited the Promised Land upon Israel's entry into the land. Israel being the people whom God has purchased. (verse 16b)
 - Now please pay close attention to the words and imagery used beginning in verse 17 throughout the rest of the chapter, because what we would just read over literally meant all the world to the ancient Israelite, in fact right on up into the time of Jesus.

17 You will bring them in and plant them

***In the mountain of Your inheritance,
In the place, O Lord, which You have made
For Your own dwelling,
The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have
established.***

18 “The Lord shall reign forever and ever.”

***19 For the horses of Pharaoh went with his
chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the
Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon
them. But the children of Israel went on dry
land in the midst of the sea.***

- God will plant them. Think about gardening or horticulture. He will plant them on His holy mountain. The mountain, God’s own dwelling, which He has established. (Mt. Zion in Jerusalem)
- Gardens and mountains. God and His family in Eden. We will see Edenic imagery throughout this chapter and it carries great weight in the meta-narrative of the Bible.

***20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of
Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the
women went out after her with timbrels and
with dances. 21 And Miriam answered them:***

***“Sing to the Lord,
For He has triumphed gloriously!
The horse and its rider
He has thrown into the sea!”***

- The prophetess Miriam leads the people in a song and dance commemorating God’s victory.
- Isn’t it mean that the rejoiced in the deaths of people?

22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24 And the people complained against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” 25 So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.

- Being thirsty in a desert is a legitimate complaint.
- God has brought Israel through the

underworld unscathed. He is now taking them through the wilderness delivering them from chaos until He brings them to their divine destination. We think of that simply as the Promised Land but it goes much deeper than that. They are on their way to Sinai, where God will be present in a way not normally seen. Gardens and mountains were seen to be the abode of the divine in all ancient near eastern cultures. Israelite culture was no different.

- Eden is described in the Bible as a place with abundant water and food. It was also the abode of God here on earth. Mankind was to be fruitful and multiply, then go out of the garden and subdue the earth. The garden didn't need to be subdued. So whenever the Israelites found themselves, especially in an arid climate, in a place of abundant food and trees, it was seen to be a special place that hearkened back to the original scene and idea of Eden.
- Water imagery: tied to the Spirit.

Isa. 44: 3,4

3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,

**And floods on the dry ground;
I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,
And My blessing on your offspring;
4 They will spring up among the grass
Like willows by the watercourses.'**

Jeremiah 2:13

**13 "For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living
waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken
cisterns that can hold no water.**

Ezekiel 36: 25 - 28

**25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and
you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all
your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will
give you a new heart and put a new spirit
within you; I will take the heart of stone out of
your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I
will put My Spirit within you and cause you to
walk in My statutes, and you will keep My
judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall
dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers;
you shall be My people, and I will be your God.**

This idea of 'living waters' is reiterated by Jesus in John 4 when He is speaking to the woman at the well. And we are also familiar with how Paul uses this terminology regarding the Holy Spirit.

Rev. 7:17

17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

- Tree imagery: a stock idea in ancient near eastern cultures.
- **Recommended reading: The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study by E. O. James**
- **The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult by Carol Meyer**
- The basic idea here is that trees tend to signify the place of a divine encounter – where God is. These ultimately link back to Eden because God was in a garden with man where there were lots of trees.

Examples:

For example, in **Gen 12:6–7**, the oak at Shechem commemorated Yahweh’s appearance to Abram with the promises of the covenant. Later, in Gen 35:4, it marked the place where Jacob buried his family’s idols to fulfill a vow to Yahweh.

Due to these events, the oak at Shechem became a sacred site; it was considered a place of divine residence and encounter many years after the patriarchs. In **Josh 24:25–27**, Joshua erected a stone at the oak of Shechem containing a portion of the Word of God. The site was chosen for its significance as a holy place (miqdash, “sanctuary”) for the God of Israel.

In **Judg 9:5–6**, Gideon’s son, Abimelech, was declared king “by the oak of the pillar at Shechem.” The “pillar” at the town of Shechem also appears later in the same chapter. There, the tree is associated with divine revelation (**Judg 9:34–37**).

Judges 4:4–5 contains a similar association of a tree with divine revelation. There, the prophetess Deborah customarily sat under “the palm tree of Deborah” to fulfill her ministry. In **2 Sam 5:24–25**, God tells David to listen for the sound of marching in the tops of balsam trees as a sign to

attack the Philistines. This guidance was supernatural.

Later in Israel's history, the land was apparently dotted with trees (or pillars, to mimic a tree) to mark the location of false gods and their place of worship. These "high places" and their pillars (matstsevoth) were ubiquitous. Pagan tree symbols were particularly associated with the goddess Asherah (**1 Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 17:10; Jer 17:2; compare Deut 16:21**).

This unfortunate evolution profaned a sacred symbol of Israel and Yahweh's presence with the nation. God angrily spews judgment of such places in Ezekiel 6:13 (compare Jer 3:6).

This sort of imagery could also work with bushes, (burning bush) and even something made from a tree, such as Moses' rod.

When the temple was completed, it was painted on the inside with animals and trees to replicate the Garden of Eden. The interior pillars were made to look like trees. There was a spring running out of the Temple. Why? Because the Temple was God's dwelling place on earth – where His presence resided. It was linked back to Eden.

So a tree is used in a supernatural way to make the waters drinkable. Now look at where they now go. Verse 25

There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, 26 and said, “If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.”

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.

- Diseases – plagues and sicknesses derived from the plagues.
- Elim – El- a name for God.
- 12 wells of water. The number 12 was significant because of the 12 tribes of Israel. Later, when Moses ascends Mt. Sinai, Israel will erect 12 pillars (think trees) which stood for the 12 tribes.
- Look at this parallel. This is imagery that

would not have been missed by an Israelite in Jesus' day.

- **Mark 3: 13, 14**
- **13 And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. 14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach,**
- Jesus ascended a mountain and then chose how many disciples? He chose 12. Why? Because of the representation of the 12 tribes. This is why it was so important to replace Judas, to bring the number back to 12.
- What about the number 70? What was the number of the nations when God scattered them at Babel? It was 70. How many nations were represented at Pentecost? It was 70 as they are tied back to the place-names they represented.
- God brought Israel to Elim, a place that would have taken them straight back to the imagery of Eden. They will eventually build a tabernacle, an abode for God. A portable home. They will then eventually build a Temple, which was a more permanent

structure/ residence for God on earth. What was represented on the inside of that Temple? It was the garden of Eden – God’s original home on earth where He wished to exist with His family on earth as He did/ does with the Heavenly host at present.

- At the time of chapter 15, God is moving His family to the promised land so that they can establish a toe-hold on earth in order that all the nations will one day come back to the worship of the one true God. And this isn’t just a national identity.
- **Gal. 3: 5-9**
- **5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing**

Abraham.

Gal. 3: 26 - 29

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

- We aren't born into our faith. We can't earn it. We don't deserve salvation. It is by grace through faith that we are saved. Paul makes it clear in these verses that it is faith that brings us into His family.

God has had an over-arching plan from the beginning. But as humans, we all fail. For us as Christians we have been brought through, passed over death (Red Sea) and are now a new creation just as Israel was in the desert. We are being led on a journey where God

bring us through trials and chaos in this desert, just as He did ancient Israel. One day we will be with Him in His abode – His home – a new heaven and a new earth. But for the time being, we are to be living sacrifices and imagers of what that will be like. We have a vocation whereby we are to multiply and subdue the planet by sharing the Gospel and discipling those around us in order that everyone, both Jew and Gentile would be in the presence of God forever.

This chapter actually gives us an encapsulated version of God's overall plan and eventually the Gospel when we read it in context.