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Questions About The Exodus – Part 1

by Bryan Hodge

"He sent Moses His servant and Aaron whom he had chosen. They performed His signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham . . . He also brought them out with silver and gold . . . Egypt was glad they departed, for fear of them had fallen upon them" (Psalm 105:26-28).

"He rebuked the Red Sea also and it dried up; so He led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. He saved them from the hand of him who hated them, and redeemed them out of the hand of the enemy. The waters covered their enemies; there was not one of them left" (Psalm 106:9-11).

"He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand like a heap. In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire." (Psalms 78:13-14)

"By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned" (Hebrews 11:29).

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea . . . But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness . . . Therefore let him who think he stands take heed lest he falls" (1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

The Exodus fascinates Bible Students. Charlton Heston's 1956 movie, - The Ten Commandments; was a big hit. Wikipedia says "it is . . . one of the most financially successful films ever made, grossing \$122.7 Million at the box office during its initial release; it was the most successful film in 1956, and the second highest grossing film of the decade . . . it is the seventh most successful film of all time when the box office gross is adjusted for inflation."

There are common questions asked about the Exodus. This writing will provide concise answers to some of these common questions.

1. Do the ten plagues have special significance?

Many believe that the ten plagues were attacks on the various gods of Egypt. Consider:

(1) Waters to blood (Exodus 7:14-25). Rex Turner, Sr., "This plague was a wonderful stroke at the idolatry of the Egyptians for both the Pharaoh and the people worshipped the river Nile" (The Book of Exodus, 1987 Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship, p.94). Hapi was the god of the Nile. Jehovah was showing His power over their "god." (2) Frogs (Exodus 8:1-5). Rex Turner Sr., "This was also a wonderful stroke at the idolatry of the Egyptians. These people worshipped the amphibian animals, and they displayed Heka, a frog headed goddess . . ." (ibid, p.96) This goddess was considered the goddess of birth. Jehovah was showing His power over this "goddess." (3) Lice (Exodus 8:16-19). The term is uncertain. Some think it refers not to "lice" but "gnats," or "ticks." Rex Turner Sr., suggest that this was an attack on the Egyptian priesthood. They were obsessed with cleanliness and would not carry out their duties if such pests were upon them (ibid, p.97).(4) Flies (Exodus 8:20-31). One writer said, "Judgment was upon either Re or Uatchit who were both depicted as flies" (gotquestion.org). Rex Turner Sr., "This plague was another wonderful stroke at the idolatry of Egyptians, for those Egyptians feared and worshiped those flies" (ibid, p 98). (5) Disease on the livestock (Exodus 9:1-7). Rex Turners Sr., "This plague was another wonderful stroke at the idolatry of Egyptians, for they worshipped domesticated animals" (ibid, p 100). James Coffman commented, 'Like all the plaques, this one also struck at the pagan deities of Egypt. This one was Ptah (Apis) the god of Memphis, represented as a bull, as well as other gods represented by goat, the ram, the cow and other animals" (commentary on Exodus). (6) Boils (Exodus 9:8-11). Rex Turner Sr., "This plague was another wonderful stroke at the idolatry of Egyptians. The Egyptians worshipped the idol Typhon, This idol consisted of a grate wherein the Egyptians burned (Sacrifices) . . . then Egyptians were under the wild conception that if a particle of their ashes fell upon a person, that person would be safe from body defilement" (ibid, p. 101). There were several gods of health including Sekhmet, Sunu, and Isis. This could also be an attack upon them. (7) Hail (Exodus 9:13-35) Rex Turner Sr., 'The Egyptians worshipped the fig tree, the peach tree, the pomegranate tree, wheat, barely sorghum and the vine" (ibid, p.102). (8) Locust (Exodus 10:1-20). Rex Turner Sr., "These Egyptians worshipped the verdure of the land; that is, they worshipped all nature's beautiful growth which came in addition to the food growth of the several food-producing vegetables" (ibid, p. 103). (9) Darkness (Exodus 10:21-29). Rex Turner Sr., This period of thick darkness was another wonderful stroke at the idolatries worship of the Egyptians, for they regularly worshipped the sun, the moon, and the stars." (ibid, p. 104-105). "Darkness was aimed at the god, Re, who

was symbolized by Pharaoh himself" (gotquestions.org) (10) Death of first-born (Exodus 11:1-12; 30). This was "judgment on Isis, the protector of children" (gotquestions.org).

Another theory is that this ties to creation. Ten times in *Genesis 1*, it says, "God said" (*Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29*). There are ten plagues. The plagues affected all of creation: water (*Genesis 1:9*); water animals (*Genesis 1:20*); land animals (*Genesis 1:24*); man (*Genesis 1:26*); plants (*Genesis 1:11; 29*) and the firmament (*Genesis 1:11, 29*); visible light (*Genesis 1:3; 14*); man's offspring (*Genesis 1:28*). Thus, God is over all. This is an interesting theory, but Exodus does not follow the creation order which would make such easier to see if this is the point.

2. Could the waters have been parted by natural means alone?

Many, who have difficulty with believing in the super-natural, sometimes look for natural explanations for biblical events. This is an attempt to remove God from the true history of these events. This is the common approach by A & E, Discovery and The History Channel. Be careful when listening to such television programming about Biblical events.

Some have postulated that the dry land appearing and the water returning upon the Egyptians can be explained by a tsunami. However, this does not seem to fit the Biblical record. The sea was "a wall to them on their right side and on their left" (Exodus 14:22). "He divided the sea . . . He made the water stand up like a heap" (Psalm 78:13). This is not water ebbing and flowing in one direction. This is the parting of waters, and waters standing like walls on each side of them.

Some have postulated that the answer is in "wind setdown" wind setdown is the opposite effect as storm surge. The wind blows the water back. Trevor Major explains, "Doran Nof and Nathan Paldor suggests that the wind in Exodus 14:21 pushed the waters in the Gulf of Suez toward the main body of the Red Sea, thus exposing the sea bed The authors calculate that a northwesterly wind blowing at around 45 miles per hour for 10 hours could lower the sea level 8 feet, and cause the shore to receded $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. Recognizing that the Bible specifies water on both sides of the fleeing Israelites (Exodus 14:22; 29), Nof and Polder further purpose that a ridge existed across the gulf in biblical times" (AP Article: Parting The Red Sea: Scripture Or Speculation, Nov 1992).

Trevor Major points out several problems with this theory:

(a) the wind in Exodus 14:21 was from the east and not the northwest, as this model would seem to require. (b) There is no evidence of an east-west ridge beneath the Gulf of Suez, either now or then. (c) The Bible does not just refer to water on both sides, but to a "wall of water on the left and right" (Exodus 14:22; 29). Wind setdown moves water in one direction. (d) However this was accomplished, the text credits the LORD and not nature randomly acting. Though, it does seem that God used wind in some way in this crossing of the sea. He may have used wind to part the sea, or He may have used wind to dry the ground.

3. Did they cross the Red Sea or the reed sea?

Some have suggested that they did not cross the Red Sea, but the reed sea, a shallow marsh farther north. Why the suggestion? The Hebrew term is *yam-sup*. The first word, *yam*, means "sea." However, the second word, *sup*, is not the Hebrew word for "red." Some suggest that *sup* may be a corruption of an Egyptian word. Trevor Major says, "The favorite candidate . . . is the Egyptian phrase *Pa-tjuf*, meaning "papyrus marshes." The idea is that the Hebrews borrowed *sup* from the Egyptian to speak about papyrus reeds" (ibid).

There are several difficulties with this view: (a) the location of the *yam-sup* does not fit a papyrus marsh near or on the Nile Delta (Numbers 33:10-11). The location spoken of is thought to be on the Sinai Peninsula. (b) Solomon located his fleet of ships on the *yum sup* (1 Kings 9:26). "This ancient port was at the northern end of the Gulf of Aquba" (ibid). (c) The New Testament writers used the Greek words meaning "Red Sea" (Acts 7:36; Hebrews 11:29). (d) The water is referred to as "the great deep" (Isaiah 51:6). Keep in mind that the water they crossed was deep enough to destroy the Egyptians. "The sea returned to its full depth . . . so the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea . . . the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and the all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained . . . Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore" (Exodus 14:27-31).

So how should *sup* be translated? It may be related to the Hebrew *sop* meaning "end" (ibid). The Red Sea connects to the Indian Ocean and things south. It was the end waters to the south for these people.

Admittedly the exact location of the crossing is not certain. Some dispute even which arm of the Red Sea was crossed. However, it appears to this writer that it was the Red Sea which was crossed.

