

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 276**

**Exodus 14, Part 1**

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### **Episode Summary**

Exodus 14 is one of the major chapters detailing Israel's departure from Egypt and the miraculous passing through the "Red Sea." Other chapters include Exod 13:17-22, Exodus 15, and Numbers 33:5-8. The passages do not always agree in the way the event is described, a fact that has produced what scholars call the *yam suph* ("Red Sea") problem. What is problematic in that phrase is not the supernatural nature of the way the crossing is presented, but where the crossing occurred and whether any part of what we think as the Red Sea was crossed. This episode unpacks and addresses the problem.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 276: Exodus 14, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What's up?

**MH:** Well, I'm sitting here (as we record this) on my last day at FaithLife, so my office is basically empty. Even the portraits of Mori have been packed away.

**TS:** Yeah? Are you sad? Are you happy? Are you excited?

**MH:** Oh, I'm excited about what's next, yeah. No, I'm good.

**TS:** Did they throw you a party? Did they give you a cupcake? Did they give you a card?

**MH:** No, they know better than that. [laughs]

**TS:** Well, you've been recording some stuff. Can you talk about any of the final projects you've done with them, as far as recording-wise?

**MH:** Yeah. Yesterday, I sent out (I think my wife did, too, on Instagram, and I guess FaithLife did, too)... We recorded. The last thing I did was record what are going to be small group videos that are four or five minutes each, introducing

each chapter of the book that will come out in October called *The World Turned Upside Down: Finding the Gospel in Stranger Things* (the TV show). I'm a real fan of the show. It's really easy to look at that show and see how it taps in to big archetypal themes in the human condition and map that over to the story (the metanarrative) of Scripture (the metanarrative of the gospel—salvation history). So that's what that book aims to do. It's aimed at youth groups mainly, but then you have people like me who are older, who grew up in the '80s (or graduated in the '80s) who are fans of the show. So it'll be a good small group kind of thing. But I think the book comes out October 19<sup>th</sup> or something like that. Lexham didn't even tell me that it was even up on Amazon. So that's what's next. That's why the *Demons* book is getting pushed back...

**TS:** Booo! Booo!

**MH:** I know. It's frustrating.

**TS:** Why would they do it?

**MH:** You sound just like I have in three or four meetings at Lexham. But they have this thing about putting a certain number of months between my books, and I'm like, "Look, if people in my audience are interested in this, they're going to want to read it anyway, so what does it matter?" But I can't win that argument.

**TS:** Yeah. Why make us wait a year and a half? Boo! Oh, I'm so flustered about that. Oh my gosh.

**MH:** It's just been done for so long. [sigh] Oh, what can I say?

**TS:** It's a shame.

**MH:** But that's why. Because they moved this big, secret project (that's no longer a secret) in. So the next book that will appear is the *Stranger Things* book, and then *Demons* will follow that after the turn of the year. So on that high note... [laughs]

**TS:** And the new season of *Stranger Things* is coming out the first week of July, right?

**MH:** Yeah, they want me to binge-watch it on the weekend of July 4<sup>th</sup>, and then add a chapter to the book. The book is entirely done. It's all edited. We did these videos. But they want me to add something about the third season. So I'll do that. I mean, that's rough: binge-watching *Stranger Things*. That'll be real tough. [laughter]

**TS:** Right. I feel sorry for you. [laughter] I'll be watching it with you.

**MH:** I'll go through it two or three times and take some serious notes, and then crank out a chapter that week. But yeah, it's rough.

**TS:** We'll be looking forward to that book, too. But even more so the *Demons* book. Hope they don't change the date again.

**MH:** This sounds stupid because I wrote it, but I think they're both really good books. I mean, the *Demons* book approaches the whole "powers of darkness" thing in a way that I can honestly say no other book in print does. And that's because of the whole approach of three supernatural rebellions: how that frames the rest of the Bible. Nobody does that.

**TS:** Oh, that makes it worse...

**MH:** But I'm just saying, that's really going to be a good book, and I think it'll get a lot of attention just because it's different. And the *Stranger Things* book is just a good read. It think it'll really be good for youth groups and anybody really who's interested in the show, helping them to think not only about the show in terms of how it (and I don't think it does this intentionally) providentially imitates important themes about the human condition and the solution for the human condition and supernatural stuff. It does a lot of that that you'll find in the metanarrative of Scripture without even knowing it. So I think people who read the book will appreciate both the metanarrative of Scripture and the show a little bit more.

**TS:** Yeah, I'm looking forward to that for real. I'm just saying it makes it worse hearing all that good stuff that we have to wait longer for it. So it makes the wait even worse. But I guess it'll be worth it.

**MH:** Whenever that happens, just think of Mike fielding another email asking him when the *Demons* book is coming out. It's just painful to have to tell people the truth. But you know.

**TS:** I understand. Well, Mike, we are finally, *finally* getting across the Red Sea. Aren't we? [MH laughs] Please tell me we are.

**MH:** Yeah. We've run into another wall. [laughs] Another mess. Another quagmire. It's not as bad as chronology, but sort of close. You know, we're going to do this in two parts, because in the first part today I'm just going to go through the itinerary. Not place by place, because to be honest with you, most of the places in the exodus itinerary, nobody has any idea where they are. And that contributes to the issue of where Mount Sinai is. Because it's going to determine what route they took and where you end up. But there are certain things in the itinerary that you can know for sure, so we're going to hit those. And there's this big problem of the "Red Sea," related to the crossing. Just the description of it—just how it's described. I'm not talking about a problem with the miraculous. If you've listened to this podcast for any amount of time, you know I

don't have any problem with the miraculous. But there are problems in just how this thing is described that will become evident in our episode today. But for Part 2, I'm going to look at the crossing in an entirely different way. Not in terms of geography (like boots-on-the-ground geography), even though Part 2 will deal with real geography. But I want to get into the issue of how the exodus plays off of and can be read through the lens of Egyptian cosmic geography—the theological messaging that the whole thing would have conveyed to an Egyptian, which I think is going to be a lot of new stuff for listeners. But as you can imagine, it's kind of dense. So we'll do that in a second part, looking at the crossing and the route.

But for today, you can basically boil it down to begin with the fact that the route that the Israelites take (the itinerary, as it were) is drawn primarily from three places in Scripture. And they don't always exactly agree. And that's part of the problem with the routes. Some of them are more complete than others. And those three places are Exodus 13 (so we're going to pick up a little bit from the prior chapter), Exodus 14 (obviously), and then Numbers 33 (which is a really important passage for all of this). So if you look at Exodus 13, going back to the previous chapter, you get to verse 17. I'm just going to read verses 17-22, because it gets us into the trip, as it were. We read this:

**<sup>17</sup> When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines...**

That's important because it eliminates the northern route along... They're leaving the delta. (Just think of your map of Egypt.) At the top, you have the delta with all the tributaries from the Nile flowing into the Mediterranean. There's an eastern border to all of that that extends all the way down to the left tip of what we know as the Red Sea (the Gulf of Suez). But this eliminates the northern route (following the coastline of the sea). Explicitly, God says, "That's not the way we're going." So...

**...God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines...**

The Philistines were on the coast. Because the Philistines were descendants of the sea peoples (or part of the sea peoples). We know that from Egyptian history and so on and so forth. So that eliminates that.

**<sup>17</sup> When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.**

So it's very clear where we're starting this narrative. The Israelites are leaving the Egyptian delta, the store cities of Pithom and Rameses. We're in the delta. And

so God's like, "We're not going to go the closest way. We're not going to go by the land of the Philistines."

**For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt."**

In other words, as soon as there's a conflict, if we go the easy route, they're going to want to turn back. So God says, "We're not doing that."

**<sup>18</sup> But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.**

This is, for our purposes here, this is where we first get this phrase "Red Sea." We're going to spend a good bit of time on that.

**And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.**

So we get this little note that they encounter... They're going toward the "Red Sea." Red Sea in Hebrew (the full phrase as it's translated in English Bibles) is "*yam suph*," which literally means "sea of reeds." Now in Part 2, when we deal with Egyptian cosmology, there are some scholars who wonder if *suph*... Remember, the Hebrew Bible didn't originally have vowels, and certain consonants did double-duty as vowels. And the waw consonant could be a U vowel (like in *suph*) or it could be an O vowel (as in *soph*). Some scholars wonder if *yam soph* is in view here, because that's "the sea that ends" or "the sea that is at the edge." If you're talking about Egyptian cosmology, it's basically "the sea at the end of the world." There's a body of water that marks the border of Egypt, and in an Egyptian mindset, that's like you're leaving (to borrow a biblical phrase) the Promised Land—the land of the gods, the black land. You're leaving Egypt, and you're going off into chaos. So that's going to be part of our discussion in Part 2 about a cosmological reading of this. But for now, we're going to stick with *yam suph* (sea of reeds). That's important here, because it's going to get us into a classic problem for the exodus that we'll get to in a moment. And then in verse 20, we actually get movement here. They move on from Succoth and encamp at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.

Now a bit of a rabbit trail here (and I'm not going to camp here, because I want to focus on the itinerary, as it were). But you've probably noticed (people have in the past, I'm sure, not just by virtue of this episode), but verse 21 said "the Lord." "The Lord went before them." He's leading the camp of the Israelites in a pillar of cloud, and at night, in a pillar of fire. So it's the divine name. "*Yahweh* goes before them." Now what's interesting about this is in Exodus 14:19, we read this:

**<sup>19</sup>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."**

But wait a minute. I thought it was the Lord who was out front, but here, it's the angel of God that's out front. And then you have the pillar of the cloud move as well and stand behind them. So it raises this issue. The wording pretty clearly says that the people are led by (at the very least) both the angel and the Lord. "He and the Lord were going before the Israelites." Because they're both put there, and then they both move behind. But then that raises the question. "Is this two ways of referring to the same being?" We can't necessarily say that here because there is something visible (the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire). So the presence of God could be in there and you could also have an anthropomorphic figure (the angel) also out front leading ahead. So you could have the presence of the two (the two powers) as opposed to saying that there was only one thing they could see. Evidently, there are *two* things they could see. They could see the pillar (whether it's cloud or fire) and then the angel of God, who was also going before Israel. So this is another interesting passage when you get to the "two powers in heaven" stuff. Because very clearly, you have at least two figures. You can't necessarily say that they're only looking at one thing. They're probably looking at two. But one of them is an anthropomorphized *Yahweh* (the Angel of God). Because he's interchanged positionally with the presence of the Lord himself. So I'm not going to camp on this. Just a passing note there, because I want to focus on the itinerary stuff.

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So as far as the steps, we're going to utilize Numbers 33, and we just read a few verses in chapter 13. We hit chapter 14. So Exodus 14 presupposes the context of Exodus 13:20, which says:

**<sup>20</sup> And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.**

So Exodus 14 picks up from that point. The chapter begins this way:

**Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. <sup>3</sup> For Pharaoh will say of the**

**people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' <sup>4</sup> 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.**

The Israelites did so. So we get a little bit more in terms of geographical points... We have this Pi-hahiroth place (whatever that is). We've got Migdol. We've got Baal-zephon. So if we take that in conjunction with Exodus 13:20 (Succoth and Etham), we're beginning to have sort of a station-by-station commentary. But when we go to Numbers 33:5, we actually get another place from which the journey actually begins. It doesn't begin at Succoth. Succoth is going to come. If you read Numbers 33:5, it says:

**<sup>5</sup> So the people of Israel set out from Rameses and camped at Succoth.**

And *then* they leave Succoth. And then they camp at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. That's Numbers 33:5-6. So it sounds exactly like what we read in Exodus 13 and leading to Exodus 14. I might as well throw in Numbers 33:7 here. I'll just read 5-7 here:

**<sup>5</sup> So the people of Israel set out from Rameses and camped at Succoth. [MH: That's where they actually begin, and that makes sense because of the Pithom and Raamses thing from Exodus 1:11.] <sup>6</sup> And they set out from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup> And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which is east of Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol.**

So we get all the place names that we've already encountered in Exodus 13 and 14, but we get the actual starting point here in Numbers 33:5. So the order that we have here is:

- Rameses (that city, that place)
- Succoth
- Etham
- Pi-hahiroth
- Baal-zephon
- Migdol

So this is our little concatenation of place names that we have to start with. They sound a lot like each other. Just think about this. I want to set something in Numbers 33 up. Exodus 13 sounded like, "Okay, we're on our way. We're not going north. We're going to leave Succoth. We're going to camp at Etham on the



edge of the wilderness. The Lord is leading us.” And then we hit chapter 14 and the Lord says:

**<sup>2</sup>“Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. <sup>3</sup>For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’**

I love the line from the Ten Commandments, where Yul Brenner (Pharaoh) looks at the situation and he sees the Israelites with the sea to their back and he says, “The God of Israel is a poor general.” [laughs] He doesn’t need to worry too much about whether he graduated from West Point or not. I just love the line, because Pharaoh is basically going to eat the words pretty quickly. But the sense you get here as we start chapter 14 is that this is a precursor... These place names are an immediate precursor to the crossing of the sea. That’s just a face-value reading of it. It just sounds that way, and I think that’s pretty transparent.

**<sup>2</sup>“Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea.**

Now if you keep reading in Exodus 14... Let’s just read verses 5-18—that observation that this concatenation of place names is leading up to the moment of the crossing. Because that’s basically what happens here. So Exodus 14:5... (Just bear with me. There’s a point to rehearsing all of this.)

**<sup>5</sup>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?” <sup>6</sup>So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, <sup>7</sup>and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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.**

Now you’ll notice in chapter 14 that we have now three references to “the sea.” None of them say “Red Sea.” The phrase “Red Sea” never occurs in chapter 14. It does in 13 and it will in 15, but it doesn’t occur in chapter 14. So hold onto that little factoid. Because you can see, this is where the conflict—the climax—is going to happen. “So he overtook them and camped at the sea by Pi-hahiroth, in

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front of Baal-zephon,” which is exactly where we read earlier that they were camped.

**<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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? <sup>12</sup> Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? [MH: Which is kind of new information.] For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”**

That’s a nice way of saying, “Just shut up. God’s got this.”

**<sup>15</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me?**

So again, Moses is evidently praying about this thing: “Lord, what are we going to do?”

**Tell the people of Israel to go forward. [MH laughs] [MH: Say what?]**  
**<sup>16</sup> 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. [MH: Notice the references to “the sea.” It’s never “the Red Sea.”] <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”**

It’s at this point that the angel of God, who was going before the host of Israel (which is basically the God-slot before) moves and goes behind them. And then the pillar moves as well. “And it (the pillar of fire) lit up the night...” And in verse 21:

**<sup>21</sup> 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. [MH: Sea. Sea. Sea.] <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. <sup>24</sup> 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, <sup>25</sup> 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."

<sup>26</sup> 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."

So Moses does that. And the rest of the story, we know. The waters returned and drowned the Egyptians. And at the end here:

<sup>31</sup> 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.

Now what's the big deal about the vocabulary (the sea)? Just hold onto that. As we read that story, think back to the way it began, okay? Think back to the way it began. They leave Rameses. They leave Succoth then (that was stop #2). They go from Succoth to Etham. And then from Etham, God says, "Tell the people to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon." And then that's when the crisis happens and the deliverance happens. So this sea is right there somewhere where these places are (Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal-zephon). That's where this happens. Now let's go to Numbers 33. Listen carefully and I think you're going to detect a problem here. Numbers 33, beginning in verse 7:

<sup>7</sup> And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which is east of Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol. <sup>8</sup> And they set out from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and they went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah. <sup>9</sup> And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. <sup>10</sup> And they set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea.

Did you catch that? The sea that they passed through happens before they camp by the Red Sea. So how is it that we talk about the Israelites passing through the Red Sea? They passed through something else before they ever got there. This is something that scholars and many other people have noticed. And it's like,

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“How in the world...?” And it really gets weird when you look at the vocabulary across chapters 13, 14, and 15. In chapter 13:18, there is the phrase “Red Sea.” It’s a generic reference. I’ll read it to you again.

**But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea [toward the *yam suph*]. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.**

This is kind of generic. It just says that God led the people toward the Red Sea. So it doesn’t really capture the whole itinerary in one verse. It’s sort of a catch-all reference, like kind of designating where they’re going to wind up. But it might be useful in light of how we’re going to try to unravel this. In chapter 14, the term *yam suph* (Red Sea) is never used. You have verse 2, verse 9, verse 16, verse 21, verse 23, and more, where it’s just *yam* (the sea). But when you get to chapter 15, both of those terms are used, and one time they’re used in the same verse in parallel. In other words, the crossing for chapter 15 was the crossing in the midst of the sea (*yam*) *and* in the midst of the *yam suph*. And it’s like, “How can that be, because in Numbers 33 they pass through the midst of the sea (*yam*), and then they go *days* before they camp by the Red Sea (the *yam suph*)? In Exodus 15:4 (specifically—that’s the key text in chapter 15), it uses both *yam* and *yam suph* for what was crossed. Let me read it to you.

<sup>4</sup>**“Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea,  
and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.**

So it’s very evident that both terms are referring to the same event and the same place. Yet Numbers 33 seems to separate them by days. How does that work? What body of water did the Israelites cross if we’re reading Numbers 33 if it wasn’t the Red Sea? But then how could it *not* be the Red Sea if Exodus 15 uses that term in parallel to just the sea? So we kind of have a double-conundrum here. How can they be separate but the same? And how can they be different geographical places (because in Numbers they’re separated by days) but still be the same? So how can they cross something that... It’s just weird. It looks like there are two places at one time, but they’re also the same.

People have noticed this, and it’s become kind of a classic problem for this passage. And it contributes to (or makes worse) the problem of, after whatever it is they crossed, which way are they going? Because you first have to settle the crossing problem and have it somehow be both the Red Sea, but yet not the Red Sea. And then once they’re out, we’re going to read about them turning. Which way did they turn? Because that’s going to dictate the route, and that’s going to dictate what you think about Sinai (the destination). So all these problems are mixed together, which I’m hoping you’re seeing is why this is a struggle for interpreters to figure out. And nobody has it figured out. But where’d they go? Which way did they take? Where did they end up? Where’s Sinai? What’s the

Red Sea? What's this other sea?—all of these questions that just go into a straightforward reading of the three main passages that talk about the journey. Like, what in the world is going on?

Now James Hoffmeier has spent a good deal of effort resolving the problem of the *yam suph*. That's how it's known to scholars: the problem of the *yam suph*, the problem of the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds. That's another thing. If it's the Sea of Reeds, it can't be saltwater because reeds don't grow in saltwater. I mean, what's going on here? So I'm going to abbreviate Hoffmeier's treatment here, because I think he really does good work here. If you want the book with all of the details (and it's quite detailed), his book is called *Israel in Egypt*, which I have referenced before in other episodes. This is the book I always recommend when I get emails either asking genuinely or somebody trying to make it sound like they know something when they really don't, like, "The Bible's not historical. There's no supporting evidence from Egypt that makes the exodus narratives at all possible." Yeah, right. There's only like 200 pages of it here. Read that if you're really interested. Hoffmeier's an Egyptologist. There's a lot of cross-fertilization in Exodus with Egyptological material. Yeah, you don't have the Egyptian version of this event, but basically everything about the event you can find in Egyptian literature somewhere, and of course archeological remains. So just as a word to those of you who might be apologetics-minded, whenever you hear this, try not to laugh. But direct people to this book, *Israel in Egypt*. And he also has one called *Israel in Sinai* (or something like that), where you get more of it. But this is the book for the exodus.

I'm going to abbreviate how Hoffmeier proposes that we resolve this. And I'm going to refer to some things that we will have on the episode web page to help you. Basically, most of it is going to be pictorial—pictures that you can look at later if you're listening now in the car or something like that. You can go look at them later. But in his book, *Israel in Egypt*, he gets into this in a lot of detail. Now his discussion is primarily about the literal geography here. We haven't even gotten to the cosmic geography stuff. He has a little bit of that in his book, but we're going to get into that in a lot more detail next week.

So the *yam suph* problem... Hoffmeier notes that it should be obvious (and I would say it should be obvious from the little that we've read) that the crossing of the sea is at Egypt's eastern border. That much we know. We've hit the landmarks: Rameses, Succoth, Etham, and then from Etham they set out. They turned back (important phrase) to Pi-hahiroth (we'll find out what that is in a moment), which is east of Baal-zephon. And they camped before Migdol. Those names do tell us some important things. All of these places are known to be on or immediately adjacent to Egypt's eastern border—the eastern border of Egypt. Now that much is proof-positive that the crossing of whatever body of water this is was nowhere near Eilat, the Gulf of Aqaba, and Midian. It is nowhere near that. It's on Egypt's eastern border. The crossing basically occurs when they're getting out of Egypt—basically, right at the beginning of the whole trip.

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Now to be fair, those who argue that Mount Sinai is east of the Gulf of Aqaba in Midian somewhere, they don't necessarily tie that view of Sinai to a specific place of the crossing of the Red Sea. But some do. Just so that you understand, if someone holds to a Mount Sinai in Midian, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to have the Red Sea crossing at the right prong of the Red Sea (the Gulf of Aqaba). The left prong is the Gulf of Suez. Where the crossing actually happened (and the geography itself tells us we can know this with absolute certainty)... The crossing occurred on Egypt's eastern border. That's where these places are, and they are all known. Anyone on the internet (or anywhere else) that tells you that the Israelites crossed anywhere in the right prong of the Red Sea—the Gulf of Aqaba—(like the crossing at Nuweiba or some other such crossing to get the Israelites into Midian for Mount Sinai)... You can safely ignore any crossing view of the right prong. It completely ignores everything that is known about these place names. That doesn't mean that you've argued against Mount Sinai in Midian. There are other problems with that, as we've talked about. But there are some who tie these two things together.

I mentioned the Nuweiba crossing. That was associated with, I believe, Ron Wyatt. It's on the internet. If you google this, you're going to run into this view. This view, textually, is not possible because of the geographical names. So any view of the crossing of the right prong of the Red Sea is just not correct. Don't waste your time even thinking about it. And you're going to get some goofy archeology that tries to prove this. Look, all you need to do is read the itinerary and look up these place names in academic sources, and you're going to find out that they're all known and they're all on Egypt's eastern border. So we're done with that.

Let's go back to the actual *yam suph* problem. Hoffmeier takes Exodus 15:4 where both *yam* and *yam suph* are used in parallelism to describe the body of water that was crossed. Now his hypothesis (listen to this carefully) is that what is being described as a body of water with the word *yam* ("sea" in English translations), that that body (whatever that was) in ancient times was connected to what we know as the Red Sea (what the biblical writers would call *yam suph*). If you can picture in your mind (and I have maps on the episode page that you can look at) the two forks of the Red Sea (the left fork is the Gulf of Suez), it points, as it were, upward toward the eastern border of Egypt's delta region. In ancient times, there were a string of lakes extending from that tip of the Gulf of Suez northward to form part of a borderline of Egypt, and they were connected. They were either connected naturally or they were connected by a series of canals. We're going to come back to the canal thing, because that's going to become important. Therefore, Hoffmeier argues, Israel could cross one of these bodies of water (and there are just a bunch of them dotted upward from the tip of the Gulf of Suez all the way into the delta)... Egypt could cross one of these lakes (they're essentially lakes)... And the word *yam* can refer to any body of water, or even a river, in the Old Testament. When Israel crossed one of those

lakes, they technically (to the mind of an ancient person) would also be crossing the Red Sea, because all of those things are connected to the Red Sea. They're not the Red Sea proper, but they are nevertheless tethered to it by a series of waterways.

So in this view, "sea" and "Red Sea" are one in the same, but they're also different. The sea is just one of the smaller bodies of water connected to the left tip of what we know as the Red Sea (the left tip of it, or the Gulf of Suez). Now Hoffmeier, to articulate this and defend it, draws heavily on the work of geophysical surveys that for him (and I'll say for me as well)... I think this is how this needs to be thought of, and Hoffmeier does really good work here. These surveys (for him and for me) explain references in a variety of ancient sources to a string of lakes that at various times in Egyptian history were connected by canals. Modern geophysical surveys have detected these things even thousands of years after they dried up. You can actually see them in satellite photography. And so there's an important article that Hoffmeier draws on, and it's by Amihai Sneh, Tuvia Weissbrod, and Itamar Perath, and the article is entitled "Evidence for an Ancient Egyptian Frontier Canal: The remnants of an artificial waterway discovered in the northeastern Nile Delta may have formed part of the barrier called 'Shur of Egypt' in ancient texts." (That's a long title.) It's from *American Scientist* 63:5. This is September-October 1975.

Now I've posted pictures from this article in a pdf on the episode page. I can't post the whole article. It's not publicly accessible. I can put it in the protected folder. But I've at least put a couple of the relevant pictures in the article that will help you see what the satellite photographs show. So this 1975 article referenced by Hoffmeier is really an important piece of work. Now there's another article on this that can also give you some good pictures. That's much later. Hoffmeier's book was written after that first article I mentioned, but before this one. The second article is publicly accessible, so we'll have a link to this on the episode webpage. That's by John Cooper, "Egypt's Nile-Red Sea Canals: Chronology, Location, Seasonality and Function." This is pages 195-209 in a book called *Connected Hinterlands: Proceedings of the Red Sea Project IV Held at the University of Southampton, September 2008*. It's part of the BAR International Series and part of the Society for Arabian Studies Monographs series. But this chapter is publicly accessible, so we'll have a link there.

Now to summarize all of that, what you have... (And what Hoffmeier is going to defend, and I think he does a good job of it. I think this is the answer to the *yam suph* problem.) What you have is that you've got the Gulf of Suez (the left tip of what we think of as the Red Sea), but extending from that you have a series of lakes that are connected by canals. So Israel crossed one of those bodies of water (one of those lakes) and then they turned, and then they camped somewhere by the actual Red Sea. So you could have crossing the sea before you get to The Red Sea. This is how you approach it. So I'm going to read a little bit from Hoffmeier. He says this:



In the early 1970s, a team of scientists of the Geological Survey of Israel, while working in the Sinai Peninsula during Israel's occupation of the territory east of the Suez Canal, discovered the remains of what they believed was a canal that ran along Egypt's border with the Sinai. Aerial photography and on-site study led to this identification by the leaders of the team, Amihai Sneh and Tuvia Weissbrod. The width of this canal constantly measures seventy meters at the top and was probably tapered toward the bottom where it is thought to be around twenty meters wide. [MH: So that's a pretty substantial canal.] This makes it wider than the Suez Canal when cut in 1873... The recently discovered channel is calculated to be two to three meters deep...

**So what's left of it... It dries up and then it's going to fill up with sand. But it's still detectable by satellite photography. What's left of it isn't very deep, but it's there.**

The Israeli geologists associated the newly discovered canal with the one shown on a relief of Seti I (ca. 1300 BC) at Karnak temple, Thebes.

**Hoffmeier is a late-dater, but this doesn't really factor into early or late date. It's just a canal. The canal is actually much older than either of the dates. So the geologists thought, "Hey. Here we have this canal." And they remembered (or found) that there's a reference to a canal on Egypt's border in one of the inscriptions of Seti I at the Karnak temple in Thebes.**

In the midst of the waterway [MH: of that inscription, that relief, that drawing] a hieroglyphic label reads *t3 dnit*. Sir Alan Gardiner commented on this scene in 1920 and noted that the building complex depicted on the relief [MH: on the piece of art], to the left of the canal, is labeled *Khetem en tcharew*, "the Fortress of Tjaru." Concurrently, the earliest reference to this fort by this name is in the annals of Thutmose III...

The name of the canal was *t3 dnit*, clearly meaning "the dividing waters" and so-called because they sundered Egypt from the desert... Weissbrod and Sneh believe that the history of the canal might go back to the 12th Dynasty because of the references concerning Sinuhe's journey back from Palestine by boat to Itj-tawy, the capital [MH: at the time].

**And then Hoffmeier goes into the text and talks about commentary on it. Hoffmeier winds up his discussion by asking this on page 169 of his book:**

If indeed a canal existed along Egypt's border with Sinai during the New Kingdom, and the evidence does support this view, it seems logical to conclude that it would have been an impediment to the Israelites in their departure from Egypt.



Thus it must be asked: Is there any reference or allusion to this canal in the Exodus narratives?

If they're leaving Rameses and then Succoth and Etham, they should be running into this waterway and the lakes that it connects. So is there any reference to that? Hoffmeier thinks the answer to this question is, "You betcha. Yes." He writes:

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The itinerary of the departing Hebrews from Egypt includes Pi-ha-hiroth in Exod 14:2 and Num 33:7. Scholars have long attempted to find an Egyptian etymology [MH: Egyptian source, origin] for Pi-ha-hiroth because of the initial element pi (i.e., pr) is suggestive of Egyptian toponyms [MH: place names] such as Pi-Ramesses, Pithom, and Pi-Besethet.

Just to name a few. There are a lot of these. So when scholars saw Pi-hahiroth, they thought, "This is probably a term that comes from Egyptian." Hoffmeier proceeds to discuss why an Egyptian etymology fails (and it does), basically because of what comes after the "Pi" (i.e., ha-hiroth), which does not conform well to Egyptian for linguistic reasons. If you've had Hebrew, when I say *hahiroth*, you should be thinking "definite article plus a feminine plural." This is a Hebrew term. This is a Semitic term. So I'm amazed that they kept looking in Egypt for as long as they did. Basically, it's because of the "Pi" that came in front of it. But basically, there aren't any seasoned, trained Egyptologists now who would disagree with Hoffmeier, who says, "Look. This is not an Egyptian term." Everybody more or less agrees with that now. There really aren't any good equivalents. And if you know Hebrew, *hahiroth* should just scream Hebrew to you. It's just a normal feminine plural noun.

So Hoffmeier goes on to reference the work of Albright here (back in 1948) who suggested (and this is pretty clear) a meaning for Pi-hahiroth as this: "the mouth of the canals." *Pi* is mouth. *Hiroth* is canals. That's what it is. Hoffmeier proceeds to link the phrase with the canals that connect various bodies of water (lakes) from the tip of the Gulf of Suez that formed part of Egypt's eastern border. This makes a lot of sense. It explains the dual reference to the "sea" (one of these bodies of water) and then the Red Sea later on—how they can be the same and yet different. And in so doing, it explains why both terms are used interchangeably for the body of water through which Israel passed. "Yes, you're crossing a lake. I got it. But it's part of the Red Sea technically, because it's joined by all these canals." This is how they would have thought about it. So if you go back to the itinerary, you have Rameses, Succoth, Etham.

**Then they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which is east of Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol.**

Now the text here speaks of a “turning back” after leaving Etham to Pi-hahiroth (the mouth of the canals). So they set out... They’re going, and for some reason, God directs them to turn in a certain direction so they’re at this water border. And we know what the purpose is. God knows that the Pharaoh is going to look at this and snicker. And like Yul Brenner said, “The God of Israel is a poor general.” Because God is going to get glory over the Pharaoh. [laughs] “I don’t need to be a good general, okay? I’m God.” So this is a set-up. The whole thing is a set-up. And then they pass through one of these bodies of water (they pass through the sea), and then they’re going to turn. And then they’re going to go for a few days, and they’re going to go to this place and that place. And eventually, they’re going to camp by the Red Sea.

So what we know for sure is that the crossing is at one of these lakes (and there are a number of candidates). Hoffmeier in his book goes through all the candidates: Lake Timsah, Lake Ballah... There are three or four of these. And he’s like anybody else. He has his favorite. But that isn’t important. What they cross... Even the canal. If you look back at the measurements of the canal, lots of people would have drowned even in the canal. This is a meaningful, serious crossing. It has to be divided. You don’t just walk across it like you’re going across a sandbar or something. This is a serious obstacle. It’s a lethal obstacle. Because the waters are going to part, the Egyptians are going to go down in there, and they’re going to get drowned when God closes the thing up. But it’s not The Red Sea proper. It’s one of these extension bodies of water.

So we have the crossing, and then we run into some questions. Numbers 33:8:

**<sup>8</sup> And they set out from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness...**

You have to ask, “What direction were they going?” They get through the barrier and pass through the midst of the sea into the wilderness. Now they’re out in the desert.

**...and they went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah. <sup>9</sup> And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. <sup>10</sup> And they set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea.**

Now here’s the question. Think about your map again. You have the two prongs of the Red Sea as we know it (as we refer to it now). They’re crossing some body of water that extends from the left one (the Gulf of Suez). They get through. The Egyptians are drowned. Now they’re out in the wilderness. Do they turn south or do they go more or less straight across the wilderness? And the answer is, “Nobody knows.” If you believe in the traditional site of Mount Sinai (which is

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way, way south—Jebel Musa), you're going to say, "Oh, they must have turned south." If you don't believe that that's where Mount Sinai is, you're going to say, "Well, they must have gone straight across, because after all, there are caravan trails there. They could follow a caravan trail." And there *are* caravan trails there. There have been for thousands of years. See, that's the question. Once you get past the crossing, where are they going? Because from this point on, while the early place names are known with certainty, none of what follows is known with certainty. And frankly, there is only really a guess at one or two of them. And it's nothing more than a guess. So here we are again. How do we take this information and know where they end up? Now just to illustrate this for you, Levine's commentary on Numbers 33... This is Baruch Levine in his *Anchor Bible* series. I just want you to hear... It's not just Mike saying, "Nobody knows where in the world these things are." This is Levine's commentary. He says:

From Etham/Pithom [MH: at the beginning] the Israelites "turned back" (wayyāšob) to Pi-Hahiroth (Pi-haḥîrôt) [MH: this is the set-up—God's putting them in an impossible situation so that he can show Pharaoh who's God], which is facing ('al penê) Baal-Zephon (Ba 'al Şepôn), encamping before Migdol. None of these three toponyms has been positively identified. The name Migdōl, which means "watchtower, fortress" is West Semitic rather than Egyptian (Exod 14:2). In context, it would have been located in the eastern Delta region... The name Migdol occurs once in the El-Amarna letters [MH: But again, we don't know exactly where this particular tower was]... As for Pi-Hahiroth [MH: this is the key] (Exod 14:2, 9), a likewise [specifically] unidentified [MH: like we don't know exactly where in the network of canals they crossed, but it's somewhere in the eastern Delta region] site in the eastern Delta region, it appears to represent a Hebraized rendering of an original Akkadian designation [MH: I didn't mention the Akkadian equivalent, but he's correct]: pī ḥirītu "the mouth of the canal"...

So he's saying, "Look, we don't know exactly where, but all these places are in the Egyptian delta. The eastern border of the Egyptian delta.

Finally, Baal-Zephon (Ba 'al Şepôn; Exod 14:2, 9), also unidentified [MH: with precision], was named after a well-known Syro-Canaanite deity [MH: Baal], whose cult was imported into Egypt. At least three Baal-Zephon sanctuaries have been found in northern Egypt, in Memphis, Tahpanhes (Tell Defneh) and Mount Cassius at Ras Qasrun. According to Bietak [MH: the guy who excavated Avaris (the Pithom and Rameses site associated with that)] (1981:253), a temple at Tell el-Dab'a just south of Qantir was dedicated to Baal. [MH: This is all in the eastern delta. All of it.] He takes note of a place called Migdōl [MH: this is Bietak; there's a place called Migdol up there]... located near Wadi Tumilat, which is mentioned in Cairo papyrus 31169. This all indicates a location in the eastern Delta area...

That's what we know for sure. There is no crossing anywhere except in the eastern delta border. That's why I'm saying that if you go out on the internet and you're thinking, "I want to learn about the crossing of the Red Sea," if you read anything else but somewhere on Egypt's eastern delta border region, it's wrong. It just is. Levine goes further into Numbers 33 and starts talking about Marah. He postulates a place where the water is "brackish," because Marah means bitter. And he says, "some have suggested Marah is 'Ain Hawarah, forty-seven miles south of Suez." Well, you know why they're picking that location? Because it's south. And the traditional view of Sinai is that it's south of where they crossed. That's the only reason. And then about all of the other sites (Dophkah, Alush, Rephidim, and Sinai) that show up in Numbers 33, Levine says, "We don't know where they are."

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So what you have is after the crossing, you have a situation where the place names in any view (not just a view you like or don't like)—in any view—they are all speculation. And I'm hoping you see how it matters. Once they break through... Once God brings them through, you have two choices. And I have a map on the episode website for this. Where people try to argue these other place names are in Numbers 33 depends entirely on where they think Sinai is. And most people will say, "Oh, Sinai is down there near St. Catherine's Monastery at Jebel Musa—way, way down there between the forks. So it's *obvious* that we should expect to find these places moving southward after the crossing." Well, it's not actually obvious, because you're letting one preconceived conclusion dictate your methodology and your conclusions for the other stuff. But the alternative views do the same thing. You have to realize that everybody's in the same boat. Some people are going to say, "Har Karkom is Mount Sinai, because that's Mount Sinai, then they went directly across." Or they're going to say, "Well, Mount Sinai is somewhere in that Edom border with Midian area," like we talked about in earlier episodes." So if you like that view, you're going to take them straight across. If you think Mount Sinai is east of the Gulf of Aqaba, over in Midian proper, you're going to take them straight across. That's what you're going to do. Your view of the location of Mount Sinai will dictate where you look for these place names and try to defend certain sites as being these places. But the reality is, nobody knows.

So that's the unfortunate situation. But all of that is really dealing with, what do we do with the toponyms (the actual geography here)? Next time, in Part 2, what I want to do is backtrack to some of these things (the phrase *yam suph*, the sea at the end, the whole concept of "when you leave Egypt, you go into the wilderness, and it's chaos.") The Egyptians thought this way, too. They thought their land was the best land, "We're at the top of the heap of civilization. The gods love us. Everywhere else is bad or inferior. It's not Egyptian." So if you're looking at it that way as an Egyptian, there are going to be certain things about the narrative and about some of these locations that are going to speak theology to you. They are going to be religious, theological polemic statements, because of the worldview that's involved. So next time we're going to devote a second

episode to the crossing and some of this location... Try to take a different angle for it: Egyptian cosmology. And I think you'll find it interesting. I'm not saying that you have to pick between a cosmological interpretation of the itinerary and the crossing or a historical one. You don't. It's a "both and," not an "either or." It's just different ways of looking at the same data points.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. We'll be looking forward to Part 2. And I guess your free time, too. Let us know what you do with yourself after your job. [MH laughs] I'd love to know what your first lazy day or thing you do for yourself. Like are you going to take...?

**MH:** I can't really even fathom that, because I don't... To me, it's like I'm unleashed now. [laughs]

**TS:** Well, take a nap.

**MH:** So I'm not going to spend the time eating KitKats on the sofa or something... As much as I would enjoy that. But no, we'll come up with something to do, trust me. Okay, this is going to sound sad. It might make somebody cry... Or laugh. But I have a list of 46 things that I want to do in the first month. [laughs]

**TS:** Are they in order? Are they ranked in order of importance?

**MH:** Well, some of them are ranked. [laughs]

**TS:** Give us three things.

**MH:** They're like 1) first two weeks, and 2) everything else. I know, it's kind of sad.

**TS:** Give us one thing on the list.

**MH:** One thing on the list is to tag... See, I have all of the... Well, I don't have all of them, because this is part of the task. I'm probably 20 hours away from having all of my physical books and all of the books I have on pdf and all of the books I have on Logos in a database, so I know everything I actually have, so that I don't accidentally buy something I already have. And then once that's in there, I want to tag them, just like I did for the Divine Council bibliography, so that I know, "Hey, I need... Is there a book on this? Or this passage?" I can just put the tag in there. "There it is!" So I can search the titles and the tags in my library. That's a really geeky kind of thing to do. But once you have it done, it's a huge timesaver.

**TS:** Absolutely. Alright, Mike. That sounds good. Well, myself, I'm just going to take a nap. So... [MH laughs]

**MH:** I'm going to let Mori sit on my lap while I do that. [laughs]

**TS:** Sounds good. Well, enjoy the summer, and we will be looking forward to Part 2 next week. And with that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.