

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 280

Exodus 15, Part 2

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Episode Summary

Exodus 15:22-27 ostensibly serves as an itinerary anecdote about the grumbling of the Israelites at Marah, where they found the water undrinkable (“bitter”). But there is much more behind the short account. These verses theologically and symbolically encapsulate the deliverance from death (the Underworld) at the Red Sea Crossing and God’s desire to have human children in his abode, the “cosmic mountain” of Israelite and ancient Near Eastern thought. The symbolism extends into the New Testament as well. This episode overviews the symbolic motifs in the passage that would have informed an ancient Israelite reader.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 280: Exodus 15, Part 2. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Alright, Mike, some have noticed already. If you haven’t seen it, the Naked Bible Conference website is up, where you can go order tickets. People have already started ordering tickets. So get them while you can.

MH: Yep. If we learned anything last year, it’s that you need to act now. [laughs]

TS: Yes, I can’t tell you how many emails I received about missing out or that they waited too long or that they didn’t know it’d sell out. To be honest, we didn’t know it would sell out that fast last year, either. It sold out a month before it started. So it’ll be interesting to see what it does this year. It is on October 12 in Dallas, the same place we had it last time. You can go to NakedBibleConference.com. And we hope to see you there!

MH: Yeah, all day. So take Trey’s advice. We’re serious. If you want to come, you have to get your tickets now. Because last year should be a lesson. I got the emails, too. We had people even in our town (in our own church) that didn’t get tickets. It’s like, “Well...” [laughs] “Whose fault is that?” [laughs] What can you do?

TS: Yeah, and then we're also going to have a reception the night before. So I just wanted to announce that Fern and Audrey will be speaking at the reception Friday, October 11. So that's another reason to come out to the conference and see everybody.

MH: Yep, it's your chance to meet them. Yep. That'll be good.

TS: Well, can you share with everybody who's going to be speaking at this year's conference?

MH: Yeah. There's going to be some familiar speakers. If you've followed the podcast for any amount of time, you're going to basically know almost all of the names. Some will be more familiar than others. We're having Tim Mackie, who's the lead at the Bible Project. Tim's going to speak at the conference. So it's a good chance to meet him. He's just a fun guy. You'll enjoy it. Carmen Imes, who we interviewed at SBL... I think it was two years ago. I can't remember if we interviewed her last year as well. But we talked to her right as she was finishing her dissertation on the Name Theology. But she's going to be at the conference, speaking for us. Ronn Johnson is a speaker. Ronn has blogged on my site and we've had him on the podcast as well. His name will be familiar. And David Burnett is also very familiar. David's going to take some time to come to the conference from his doctoral work. He's going to come down from Milwaukee and get some warm weather in October. [laughs] I'm sure he'll be thrilled. But he'll be speaking. You probably followed him in other places. He's been on the podcast several times and in lots of interviews at the academic conferences. So you'll get a chance to meet Dave. Probably the main newcomer here would be Derek Brown. We've not had (I don't think... we've done so many episodes)... I don't think we've had Derek on the podcast. But he works at Lexham Press. He's one of the editors there—the academic editor. Derek did his doctoral work at Edinburgh and he did his dissertation on Satan. So naturally, what he's going to speak about is going to dovetail with that or derive from that in some way. So he's well-familiar with what we do here at the conference and he's eager to participate.

So there's your line-up. I'll speak once as well. So we have six sessions altogether if you count me. Mostly familiar faces, at least to some degree, and then at least one person that'll be new to most of the audience.

TS: Alright, there you go. NakedBibleConference.com. Get your tickets! Well, this week, we're going to finish up chapter 15.

5:00

MH: Yep. Yeah, the last few verses. And I think people will... We have enough material here for a whole episode, which is partly why we divorced it from the first half. But there's stuff in here that really deserves attention. And honestly, I think this will be an episode that illustrates what we do here and the kinds of things I'm trying to do in *Unseen Realm*—to prompt people to see their Bible through

ancient eyes and to engage the text tactically, with that kind of hermeneutic. To read the Bible with the pre-modern... The ancient writers and their readers with an eye toward a supernatural worldview... You might look at these verses and think, “How can you get even into that kind of stuff with verses 22-27?” But you really do. And I also think it’s going to illustrate how reading... not just a passage like this, but just reading the Bible generally, from the perspective of an ancient person, the writer and the reader originally—their context... It’s often just so much better than people coming along later (like the rabbinic community or the Christian community in the early Church) and just making stuff up. I think it’ll illustrate the difference there too.

So let’s just jump in. I’m going to read Exodus 15:22-27 and then we’ll get into some of the content here. I’m reading ESV.

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.

And that’s the end of the chapter. That’s verses 22-27—the end of chapter 15. And most people approaching this would fixate on the grumbling, and that would be your sermon content. There are a number of other things going on in here. And we can’t hit all of them, but I’m going to pick out a few to be trajectories for the rest of the episode. There’s a really nice summary in Durham’s *Word Biblical Commentary* about this that I want to read because it has some good stuff in it and it sets up why we’re going to do what we do in this episode. He writes:

The route of the continuation of Israel’s journey in exodus beyond the barrier of the “sea of rushes” [MH: Or the sea of reeds] is no more clear to us than their route through and from the Nile Delta.

We've had a number of episodes on this now, basically saying that most of these place-names aren't known. There are some that are. We've had a couple of episodes that deal with the *yam suph* (the sea of reeds, the Red Sea/Reed Sea problem). Last time, we got into the Egyptian cosmology as well—how the sea... One of these bodies of water that formed this barrier on the eastern boundary of Egypt there at the delta, extending from the Gulf of Suez... There was this network, all these bodies of water that were connected to form part of the eastern border. And one of them, to an Egyptian, was the underworld (it represented the underworld). So we got into that last time. There's a connection here even in this passage. The wilderness of Shur takes us back to what we talked about last time, with that particular underworld body of water. Again, there are scholars who know this information and prefer that particular body of water, because it's symbolism. There's just a lot of that kind of stuff going on. But outside of that, these places (this network of body of water)... Most of the places are just unknown, where they go. So Durham is right. What they do after they pass is no more clear to us than basically anything else here. So back to Durham. He continues and says:

10:00

Once again, the narrators have gone to some lengths (vv 22, 23, 27, cf. also Num 33) to make the direction of the journey clear to us, but places and landmarks that were clear to them are clear to us no longer. Several identifications of Marah and Elim have been attempted (cf. Hyatt, 172–73), but not one of them is convincing. The location of Sinai, equally uncertain, is of course a determining factor.

We talked about that last time, how all of this is connected to Sinai and the difficulties of finding that location.

If the traditional view [MH: of the location of Sinai] is followed, we must pose a route east, then south from the delta; if Sinai is located at Kadesh (Porter, *JTS* 44 [1943] 139–43) or in Edom (Seir), a direction more nearly due east is likely [MH: we've talked about that as well]. This question remains unanswered not only because of the uncertainty surrounding the geography of the places mentioned, but also because, as the studies of Coats (CBQ 34 [1972] 135–52), Davies (TynB 25 [1974] 46–81), Walsh (CBQ 39 [1977] 20–33) and Cross (Canaanite Myth, 301–21) have shown, there are at least two, and perhaps three travel sequences that give evidence in themselves of some independence from the tetrateuchal [MH: that's a way of referring to certain books of the Torah] sources generally posed.

The JEDP thing is what he's talking about there. So he's saying, "Look. Even in the Torah, you have two or three possible ways to reconstruct an itinerary. Once you get past that problem, most of the place-names in these itineraries are not known. So good luck with that." That's essentially what Durham is saying. It

summarizes what we've said in several episodes up to this point. So rather than spend our time talking about where Marah or Elim were located, I want to get into what an ancient reader would have been thinking, especially in relation to the last verse (the 12 springs and the 70 palm trees and Elim)—how that would have set their imaginations on fire. That they would have been thinking certain thoughts immediately when they hit that verse. And not only just that verse, but the whole way this thing is set up, from the crossing to this paradise place—this little mini itinerary here in verses 22-27. And I'll put this in the protected folder. There's an article by Bernard Robinson. There isn't much written on verses 22-27 specifically, and this is one of the few items that is. And I don't always agree with Robinson's assessment. But since it's one of the few sources that you can actually get that gets into the symbolism of these verses, I'll put it in the protected folder. The title of the article is "Symbolism in Exodus 15:22-27." It comes from the scholarly journal *Revue Biblique*, 94:3 (1987): 376-388. I'll be dipping into Robinson a little bit as we go along, several places. But he kind of sets up where he's going (and so sets up where we're going) early on in his article. So let me read a paragraph or two here, as to how he gets going. He writes:

The story begins at 15:22 with Israeli striking camp (näsa1) at the Yam-sup [MH: Sea of reeds, Red Sea, however we translate that] and reaches its climax after several ordeals with the opposite activity, Israel's pitching camp (hänäh) by the waters of Elim (15:27), as if to say that the theme of the narrative is, in Cassuto's words, 'From the peril of the Sea of Reeds to the safe dwelling-place by the waters of the wells of Elim' [MH: so he's quoting Cassuto there, who is a famous Jewish commentator]. Israel's journeyings between v. 22 and v. 27 are beset with hazards. No sooner has she escaped from pursuing Egyptians than she is in danger of death by thirst. She finds water, but it is rendered drinkable only by a divine interposition. She is warned by YHWH that she herself is in danger of incurring the plagues experienced by the Egyptians unless she obeys the divine commandments which will presently be proclaimed on Sinai. Immediately, however, after YHWH has pronounced himself her "healer" she is brought safely to the shady oasis of Elim.

15:00 Just by virtue of that little bit of an introduction, I'm going to tweak that a little bit. I'm going to tweak all of that a little bit. Here's my take on verses 22-27, and this will telegraph a little bit more for this audience where we're going to go here and where Robinson ultimately goes. I would say that verses 22-27 are a capsule presentation, and also a little bit of a preview of later deliverance and sustenance of the escape from Sheol or Death—that is the *yam suph*. Remember from our previous episode on Exodus 15 the Shi-Hor, that body of water that represented the underworld, the realm of the dead. So Israel escapes through that. They are delivered from death. They are delivered from the underworld. So they're delivered from that, and then they go out into the wilderness (the place of chaos). And they're delivered from the wilderness chaos threats as well, where they don't have good water. Sometimes they don't have food. So God delivers them from

the underworld, from the realm of the dead. He delivers them from chaos threats out in the desert and he brings them to salvation in the cosmic abode (or the divine abode).

Now we think that that means Sinai, and then ultimately Canaan, but these few verses are a precursor to those things—to Sinai. It reminds us that not only has God delivered his people Israel, who basically are reborn to life now. But what he wants is for a human family to dwell with him and he with them. So we get this cosmic mountain imagery—this Divine Council imagery, this divine abode imagery—at the end of this little section (verses 22-27). Because God is taking them from death (from chaos) to his abode, to where he is. He's sustaining them with food and water and, ultimately, he wants them home. He wants them where he is. And you get the 12 springs with the 70 palm trees, and it's a depiction of the lush, well-watered paradise garden. It's an Edenic depiction.

So we've talked a lot in *Unseen Realm*... And if you haven't read *Unseen Realm*, you just have to get up to speed. Either that, or read *Supernatural*, because I can't keep repeating the content of the book in these episodes. But there's a reason why Eden is described as both a well-watered garden (where there's an abundance of food) and a mountain. Scripture describes Eden as both. And the reason for that is because gardens and mountains are places of divine dwelling in ancient Near Eastern thought. The gods dwell in the best places where there is no want, and they dwell in the most remote, inaccessible places, where there aren't any people. Because the divine abode is not for people. But the Israelite version of this (the Hebrew Bible version of this) is an exception. God *wants* people. He actually installs humans from the very beginning of the story in his abode. He wants a human family. And then when that gets ruined by rebellion (not just in Genesis 3, but a series of other supernatural and human rebellions in the primeval story), the rest of the Old Testament (really, the rest of the Bible) is about God restoring his original desire—God working his original plan. There is no Plan B. God wants a human family. He wants them with him and he wants to be with them.

So you get those ideas played out in various scenes throughout the Bible. And this is a little encapsulation of a much bigger scene, because the bigger scene is Israel as a nation—that Israel was chosen because of the rebellion at Babel and the nations assigned to the sons of God who become corrupt and have to be dealt with, and so on—Psalm 82. So God turns around and takes Israel as his portion through Abraham—his choice of Abraham, his supernatural enabling of Abraham and his wife Sarah to have a child. And out of that child is going to be his newly reconstituted human family. And then God is trying to get Abraham to the place where God has chosen to put his name to dwell, and he wants them to dwell with him. God appears to the patriarchs. Where? By trees—well-watered gardens or mountains. These themes ripple through the Bible, and they are designed to telegraph the fact that God wants to be with his human family and he

wants his human family with him. Eventually that morphs into a nation and a monarchy, so on and so forth.

20:00 So these things in the Old Testament just ripple through. And then we get the New Testament—how they are ultimately completed (or completed in an anticipatory way), inaugurated, waiting a full consummation, through Jesus and the coming of the Spirit.

So these are all the core, stock elements of the supernatural metanarrative of the Bible. And we get... In these few verses (22-27), it's told in capsule form—the deliverance from death, the deliverance from chaos, and now we are at the place where God dwells. His family is with him. That's the point, and that's what's being telegraphed in verses 22-27. And it's hard for us to pick that out unless we're sensitive to garden imagery [in the numbers] 12 and 70. The numbers and the imagery mean something. Even [the place-name] *Elim*, which is plural for gods... How much more could it be telegraphed? Now granted, if you actually look at the spelling, you have אֵילִם (ay-lim) in Hebrew instead of אֵילִים (ay-leem), but there are places elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible where you get the absence of the (sorry for the Hebrew spasm here) *yod* before the *mem* at the ending, where an emendation really needs to be made, because of something else in the passage, where you actually have gods there. But in this case, it's fine to say it's just wordplay between two different words (ay-lim and ay-leem).

But you have the 12 and the 70. The Semitic (Hebrew) reader is going to catch the wordplay immediately. This is the dwelling of God. This is the divine abode. This is what it looks like: springs of water, 70 palm trees, and the 12. The 70 and the 12 are going to matter here, and we're going to hit those. So what I want to do for the rest of the episode is talk about the water and the trees and the numbers and flesh this out a little bit. But what you have essentially (my tweak here that Robinson's beginning) is you get the supernatural metanarrative in just a few verses (the main themes—the core ideas—anyway). So what Robinson does after his intro is he proceeds to venture into a discussion of the symbolism. And the very next paragraph (once he gets into symbolism) is useful for illustrating the difference between what the rabbis are doing and what the early Church is doing, and what we ought to be doing—taking the text in its own original context rather than making stuff up. And Robinson writes this. I think this is a good illustration:

The early Jewish and Christian commentators frequently found symbolism in the Marah and Elim narratives. Thus a number of the Jewish writers saw in our passage a symbolic message about the Torah, usually to the effect that without the Torah the people's life was bitter, until at Marah YHWH gave them an advance-installment of laws and sweetened their lives with the tree of life which is the Torah; and that at Elim they then studied the laws that they had recently received.

Okay, that really isn't in the text. Of course, if you're a rabbi, everything's about the Torah. If you're a Christian, everything's about Jesus. [laughs] So Robinson continues:

The Christian Fathers tended, for their part, to see in the tree of Marah a symbol of the Cross of Christ: for them the bitter waters usually symbolized the letter of the Law which the Cross would sweeten, and the twelve springs at Elim stood for the truth that Paradise is to be reached only through the work of the twelve apostles of Christ.

Well, really? You can see how both the Jewish community and the early Christian community could take this passage and spin it to their core theological commitments (the Torah and then the Cross). But what I'm saying is the passage doesn't talk about any of that. If you're reading it in light of the worldview context of the writer, you're not going to get either of those things. You're going to get something different—just as significant, and that might have some peripheral connection to some of that—but the stuff that the rabbis are talking about and the early Church was talking about, that is just not what the passage means. It's not what the passage is doing.

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So I think it's a good illustration of how these later traditions basically just allegorize the Bible a lot. And this is going to sound harsh, but they just make stuff up. You don't need to make stuff up. What you need to do is you need to try to approach the text and read it with the thoughts of antiquity (the original, ancient context) in your head. And then you get something out of it. So that's all we're trying to do here on the podcast. It's all we're trying to do in *Unseen Realm*. And I think (especially if you've read *Unseen Realm*) you know the difference. And this is a little bit of a glimpse of the difference. So the rabbinic approach...

Let's just talk a little bit more about this. It is something of a leap. I would say, not as much as the Christian thing about the Cross and the apostles, but it's still a leap. The Torah is never represented in the Old Testament as a tree, for one thing. However, wisdom... And it's not the same word as Torah. Wisdom is *hokmah*. Wisdom is associated with tree language. That's true. But the Torah is never called a tree. Wisdom is referred to as a tree of life (Proverbs 3:18), but the Torah isn't mentioned. That would be a great place, if you were writing that proverb, to use the word "Torah" so that nobody could miss it, but they don't do that. They just don't do that.

So this is the kind of thing that you could look at... and the Christian version as well: "Ah, boy, I would have never seen Jesus and the apostles in Exodus 15:22-27!" Well that's because they aren't there. But if you say it eloquently or if you are in the rabbinic community and you start talking about this stuff, you start allegorizing the passage eloquently, then the people in your community are going

to glom onto it and think that it makes sense, even though they don't really have a textual rabbit trail to trace back to the idea. That's the problem.

So let's get into the real conceptual metaphors here and see what they do telegraph. And I'm going to reiterate a point I made a few minutes ago so it's fresh in our minds. This a capsule presentation of the deliverance from the realm of the dead, deliverance from the underworld—from death—continuing on for deliverance from chaos threats (in the Israelites' case, no water and no food), ultimately to salvation with God—salvation in the cosmic abode, the divine abode. And that idea is telegraphed. The fact that Elim is a divine abode is telegraphed through the symbolism of the 12 and the 70 and the water and the palm trees. These are all motifs associated with the Divine Council, the divine abode, etc.

Now Robinson picks up on some of this and he points us first to the fact that Marah and Elim (this section) mention water six times. That's a lot for a small number of verses. So he wonders about a symbolic point of reference in view of that repetition. "What might it suggest?" he asks. So he goes first to the most obvious, that is, water is a life-giving and life-sustaining thing, especially in an arid culture—an arid place—and people who are used to living in that kind of climate. So that's the literal aspect of the water. And it's kind of obvious. But Old Testament references to water point readers to God's spirit and presence as well. They do that in other passages. So I'm just going to read a few. You have Isaiah 55:1.

Isaiah 55:1

Come everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters. But he who has no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

So in Isaiah 55, this is part of the servant stuff. And it's referring to more than just getting a bucket of water. It's referring to everything you need. Everything you need. And you get that by going to where the Lord is. And it's going to start talking about temple, and so on and so forth.

Isaiah 44:3

I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.

So water being linked to the spirit as a conceptual metaphor.

Jeremiah 2:13

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

It's a reference to idolatry. So they've traded me in (the fountain of living waters) for these things they create themselves. It's equating the divine presence with water. And obviously, if you read a verse like that (the fountain of living waters), who do you think of? Well, as Christians, we think of Jesus because he uses the same phrase—same idea—in the woman-at-the-well passage in John 4.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness. From all your idols I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

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So on and so forth. "I will put my spirit within you." So there again, we have water being used as a vehicle to talk about the presence of God, the Spirit of God. Ezekiel 47:1-9... I'm not going to read all of the verses, but you have this supernatural stream of water flowing from the temple. The temple imagery there... If you want to go back and listen to our series on Ezekiel, I'd recommend... We did two episodes on Ezekiel 40-48 and the temple imagery there. The first one deals with the difficulties of taking chapters 40-48 literally—the conundrums they create and the shortcomings that has. And then the second one loops Ezekiel 40-48 into New Testament temple-talk, which focuses first on Jesus and then on the body of Jesus—the body of Christ—which is the Church. And you get the imagery of the temple associated with the fountain of living waters. Well, that's how Jesus refers to himself and it's also how he refers to believers (those who believe in him). "I'll cause springs of living water to flow up and well up within you." This is actually consistent kind of language. It's just applied to Jesus and to the body of Christ on a bigger, grander scale.

So this is the kind of thing we need to be aware of, that we need to be thinking about. And in the Old Testament, the point for today is that you do have passages that talk about water, and what they're really referring to is the presence of God and the Spirit of God. So while, sure, water is the literal source of life (I get it), God as the life source is also conveyed by water imagery. And God's presence... Where God is, there is life. This is going to mentally take us back into garden imagery. Like in Eden, the presence of God was there. Why? Because that's where God lives. It's the divine abode. And you describe a divine abode through this garden—the well-watered garden imagery that we get with Eden and so on and so forth. These are classic elements of Divine Council descriptions in the wider ancient Near Eastern literature and in the Hebrew Bible.

And this is where God is. And so, we're going to use these metaphors (these things like water and springs) to take our minds back to the paradise that is the divine abode. That's what the description of Elim is about—to make us think of that.

Now the idea, of course, is reinforced by the palm trees. In this passage (verse 27), there are 70 of them. And yeah, it's interesting. And we'll come back to this, that 70 is the number of the sons of God—the members of El's council at Ugarit. Everybody who's in the Israelite religion pretty much knows that. In the Hebrew Bible, it's the number of the nations assigned to the sons of God by Yahweh (reading Deuteronomy 32:8 with the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls before them). The number 70 there is telling. It's the number of the nations that were abandoned (disinherited) by God. And then what does God do in the very next breath, so to speak? That's when he calls Abraham and creates for himself a new human family. And the rest... Humanity to that point is put under placeholders. And we know that doesn't go well because of Psalm 82 and some other passages. We have this situation here where the ideal (God over the nations, over all people, the fulfillment of the Edenic idea)... What was the idea in Eden? God comes to earth (this is what Eden is). Eden is not the whole world. Eden is a little place in the world. God comes to this garden that he has made. He has put humanity in it. He tells humanity, "Okay, multiply now. Be fruitful and multiply. And then go out and subdue the earth."

Now the garden doesn't need to be subdued. You don't have this subduing language of the garden. You still have the partnership idea. You have working and maintaining it. But the rest of the world needs to be subdued. It's a word that you would use for chaos—for something that needs to be made better or tamed. And so, the original mission is that here's where we live. This is our house. This is our headquarters—this place called Eden. God is with man. Man is with God. And God wants every human being, all of the children that come from Adam and Eve. He wants *all* humanity to enjoy him and his presence so he can enjoy them. He wants the whole world (all the nations) to be like Eden. Of course, that isn't what happens. But the numbering of them here—the fact that at Elim we've got the number 70, which corresponds to the number of nations—telegraphs the idea that God really wanted and still wants all of the nations home with him. This is the original Edenic idea, now just cast to reflect the situation that there are nations out there who are not literal ethnic descendants of Abraham that God still wants, but they're outsiders now. But they still belong here. These things are really hard to miss if you're thinking in ancient Near Eastern Hebrew Bible terms. Now Robinson writes this:

The image of the sacred tree, says E. O. James, is "an integral and recurrent feature in one form or another at all times and in most states of culture" and rests upon "the conception of an ultimate source of self-renewing life at the centre of the cosmos." The tree (often represented as planted on the top of a

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mountain, and standing beside a plentiful supply of water) symbolized everywhere the continual renewal of life, and the divine power that effects this. It also represented the hope of personal immortality, whether as a realistic aspiration...

The Egyptians viewed this positively, but of course where did they drown? They drown (they die) in... If the body of water is Shi-Hor, they wind up in their own underworld. And we talked last time about how the dead in Egyptian texts are described as “drowned ones.” It doesn’t turn out very positively for them. And it telegraphs who is ultimately in control of life and death. It isn’t the gods of Egypt; it’s Yahweh of Israel. Back to what Robinson is saying. Personal immortality was viewed positively in Egypt...

... or as an illusion or lost cause (as with the “plant of youth” in the Gilgamesh story...

The Mesopotamians had a very negative view of this. But they still had these stories, like Gilgamesh, which has a tree of life (the plant of youth that can ostensibly give immortality), but it’s lost. What Robinson is saying (just to end what he says) is that the palm trees (the tree idea) is a stock element of all these things: the renewal of life, the hope of life, life sustenance, and even immortality. He also points out Carol Meyers, in her work...

...has shown the pervasive presence of [sacred-tree imagery] in Israel, where it came to have several specific positive connotations.

Now if you’re able to find these sources... I often recommend sources to this audience. E. O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archeological Study*. It was written in 1966. It’s really hard to find. If you find it used online, it’s going to be expensive. So good luck. However, Carol Meyers’ book (*The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult*, 1976) is still available for a reasonable price. And it’s really excellent. It’s tree imagery. It’s the menorah. It’s the tabernacle. It’s just a great work. It situates all that stuff in a wider ancient Near Eastern context. Now as far as... Let’s take a little sidebar here on tree imagery, because in the FaithLife Study Bible (I’ve written a lot of notes for that thing), I actually wrote a sidebar on sacred trees in Israelite religion. So I’m going to read that. It’s short. But it just gives you the idea of some of the things that a book like Carol Meyers’ work on the menorah would get into—tree imagery in the Hebrew Bible and what it signifies. So I wrote this. The little sidebar is called “Sacred Trees in Israelite Religion.”

The narratives about the patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) provide insights into the faith of God’s people before the establishment of the priesthood, tabernacle, and Law. Trees play a particularly interesting role in this faith. Sites

marked by trees often became associated with appearances of Yahweh that involved divine revelation.

The idea is that the trees signify the place of divine encounter, where God is. And ultimately, all of these link back to Eden because God was with man in a garden that had lots of trees.

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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).

Why trees? Well, you could say that’s where God chooses to appear. Well some of these places are only planted after the encounter. You would either appear at a place with a tree or plant a tree to commemorate a divine encounter to take the mind back to Eden—to the cosmic garden, the garden which is God’s abode. That is why you would do it. This is why the tabernacle gets decorated with (lo and behold) garden stuff. The menorah. The tree of life. Even the bread of the presence. How is that garden imagery? Because there was lots to eat in Eden.

And the bread of the presence is the bread of the *presence*. God is the sustainer of life. As it was at the beginning, so it is now, here in the tabernacle. This is the miniature home of God now. It's the portable Eden. And how do we know this is coherent? Because when they build the temple, the temple gets decorated like a garden—plants and animals and, of course, you have the menorah there. You have the ark. The ark guarded the entrance to Eden. All these things are not accidental. They are designed to take the mind back to the cosmic garden (also referred to as a mountain in Ezekiel) because this is where God dwells. Not only that, but it's where he wants *you*. It's where he wants his human family. So I would encourage you to get into this kind of material because it really helps.

Now James (just to elaborate on him a little bit more, and Robinson's use of him)... This goes some interesting directions, beyond what we've already talked about. James tends to see the sacred tree idea in any wooden member of the plant kingdom. It might be going too far. I'm not sure that's solid. But it's fair to say (in fairness to him) that the ancient Near Eastern imagery about trees isn't always depicted artistically as something that looks like (for example) an oak tree (something really big and solid). A lot of times, sacred tree imagery is a smaller plant, that's true—a plant or a bush. What does that make us think of? A bush... Ah, Exodus 3! And James goes here. In Exodus 3, this is where Yahweh is. Yahweh is in the burning bush. So James and Robinson suggest that the burning bush manifests by both the means of both the tree *and* the fire. Fire is an element associated with divine presence. They think that this is part of cosmic tree imagery. It's the presence of Yahweh. Fair enough. I would say that Deuteronomy 33:13-16 is kind of interesting. Let me read that. This is Moses speaking about Joseph, the tribe (without getting into how the tribes are parsed here).

45:00

¹³ **And of Joseph he said,
 "Blessed by the LORD be his land,
 with the choicest gifts of heaven above,
 and of the deep that crouches beneath,
¹⁴ with the choicest fruits of the sun
 and the rich yield of the months,
¹⁵ with the finest produce of the ancient mountains
 and the abundance of the everlasting hills,
¹⁶ with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness
 and the favor of him who dwells in the bush.
 May these rest on the head of Joseph,
 on the pate of him who is prince among his brothers.**

Kind of interesting. I'm no farmer. I'm no horticulturalist. But it doesn't seem like there's a whole lot that's grown on mountains. But the line here, "...the finest

produce of the ancient mountains and the abundance of the everlasting hills... the favor of him who dwells in the bush.” James and Robinson are going to go back to a passage like this and say, “Look. Yeah, you can grow stuff there. Okay. But it’s really designed to cast God as the sustainer of life.” And the mountain imagery combined with the abundance imagery is cosmic mountain/cosmic garden language. And here, it’s part of a blessing on Joseph and his progeny.

James goes on... He suggests that this is the point of Exodus 17, where Moses’ rod, which he refers to as a “portable symbol of the tree” (because it’s made from a tree) is successfully raised aloft as a victory-banner in the battle against Amalek. Now that I find really interesting because that’s kind of a bizarre passage, where they have to keep Moses’ arms up. And you could say, “Well, that’s because this is the rod that God gave him. Oh yeah, that’s right. He gave it to him at Sinai, and God was in the bush. Oh yeah.” You could say, “Well, yeah, that’s because the rod had power. God’s using the rod...” That’s all true. But what James and Robinson are angling for here is, “Hey, where’s that thing made from? It’s made from a tree.” It’s like a talisman kind of thing in that it’s a thing you carry with you to remind you of a tree. And when you think of a tree, you think of the divine presence. So Moses raising the rod above... Yes, that’s what God told him to do, but there’s a little bit more that goes into the worldview thinking here. It’s a symbol of the presence of God and the power of God, not just because Moses happened to have it with him at the bush encounter, but because of its material—what it is, just intrinsically. So I don’t know if they’re pressing some of that too far, but it’s interesting. I think it’s really worth thinking about.

There’s another trajectory here. There are actually a couple more that I want to hit. Israel herself... Remember, Israel collectively as a nation is called the son of God when Moses and Aaron go in before Pharaoh before the plagues start. God says, “Let my son go out into the desert three days and worship me...” So Israel collectively is the son of God, and that is connected to tree language, both collectively and individually. I don’t know if we’ve realized this, but that’s true. So let me just read you a few examples here. There’s tree language associated with the nation or with parts of the nation (individuals) and along with that is planting language. This is... I wish I had the right term here. I want to say horticulture, but I don’t think that’s the right term. But anyway, these are terms that you would associate with the nurture and care of trees. Of planted things. Of substantial planted things. That’s an awkward way of saying this, and somebody’s going to give me the right word later on. It’ll be too late then. But Exodus 15:17 says this:

You will bring them in...

This is Moses—the Song of Moses—talking about what God is going to do with the nation.

You will bring them in and plant them.

Where? In a field somewhere? No. “On your own mountain.” There’s the garden and the mountain imagery again.

You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place O Lord that you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.

That’s Exodus 15:17, talking about the nation using planting language. 2 Samuel 7:10:

50:00

I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more.

And the parallel to that is 1 Chronicles 17:9. Psalm 80:8-11:

You, O God, brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the river.

It’s cosmic garden and cosmic mountain imagery applied to not necessarily God or God’s own place, but it *is* God’s place because it’s applied to God’s family, God’s people. These are all little forays... The launching point for all of this stuff is the original Edenic vision that God has, that we have in the early chapters of Genesis.

Isaiah 44:3-5

I will pour water on the thirsty land, streams on the dry ground. I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring.

We read this before about the Spirit.

I will pour out my Spirit.

But notice the agricultural terminology. “Pour water,” “pour out my Spirit.” “They will spring up among the grass like willows.” That’s verse 4.

Israel will spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, ‘I am the Lord’s.’ Another one will call on the name of Jacob. Another will write on his hand ‘The Lord’s’ and name himself by the name of Israel.

Jeremiah 24:6

I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not pluck them up.

Hosea 14:6-8

His shoots [MH: think of roots or something like that] or branches shall spread out. His beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow. They shall flourish like the grain. They shall blossom like the vine. Their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress. From me comes your fruit.

So there you have God as a reference (probably messianic as a reference) and the nation itself as a reference, using the same kind of language.

Amos 9:15

'I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,' says the Lord your God.

So even the people collectively—the people of God themselves—get this kind of language applied to them. This is what God wanted originally in Eden. He wanted a family. Now the one you're probably still thinking about (the outlier here) is Messiah. Have you thought about Messiah in connection with this tree language? The Messiah is likened to a tree or a branch in a number of passages. And I'm going to read these to you. And note that there are several of them that also combine the branch language with God's mountain. That's not a coincidence.

Isaiah 4:2

In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.

Isaiah 11:1

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Isaiah 11:9-10

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day, the

root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations enquire and his resting place shall be glorious.

So there you have branch and tree imagery of the Messiah, and also mountain imagery for both the Messiah and the people of God.

Jeremiah 23:5

Behold the days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.'

Ezekiel 17:22-23:

Thus says the Lord God, 'I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird and in the shade of its branches, birds of every sort will nest.'

55:00

You've got this humongous, larger-than-life tree that God plants.

Zechariah 6:12

Say to him, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Behold the man whose name is the Branch, for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord."'

It's messianic imagery. We don't often think of things like this. Even in *Unseen Realm*, when I talked about cosmic mountain motifs and the cosmic garden... there's a lot here that I didn't include there. You just can't put everything in. This is why I say I have enough material for two or three more books. There's just so much of this kind of stuff. And here we've gone from a reference to palm trees at Elim (of course, with the springs of water) to what? To places of divine encounter. To echoes of Eden. To the people of God. To Messiah. To the land itself where these people are supposed to dwell and God with them. All of these things are connected. And the thread that runs through them in the verses that we've read here is tree and planting imagery. This is part of the ancient Near Eastern (and specifically here, the Hebrew Bible) worldview. This is part of the complex of ideas—the matrix of ideas. If it's in your head when you encounter a verse like Exodus 15:27, I'm sorry, but you're not going to be thinking of the Torah. You're not going to be thinking of the cross, even though the cross was made from a tree. There's a negative side of that: "Cursed is everyone that is hanged on a tree," and so on and so forth. I get that. But the positive side of the

tree metaphor is really what you should be fixed on. And you can do that with the Cross (obviously) but that isn't what's actually going through the mind of someone pre-Jesus who reads Exodus 15:27. They're thinking about the divine abode, though. And if it's a later Israelite who has more of the Hebrew Bible, they might be thinking about Messiah... dwelling place of God, being planted in the land. All of these things are important ideas. You don't have to allegorize the passages point by point. There's just plenty of material here—biblical, theological material—to track on in your own personal study or preaching or whatever. Now Robinson writes this:

Given, then, the considerable symbolic importance in the OT of water and trees, it seems entirely reasonable to ask whether the stories of Marah and Elim, which each contain references to both a tree/trees and water, have a symbolic reference...

You know, I would agree. That's quite reasonable.

This interpretation seems, indeed, to me to be already attested within the OT itself. In Isa. 12:3,

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

In Isa. 12:3, immediately after a reference to the crossing of the Reed Sea (11:15-16) and to the singing of the Song of Moses (12:1-2), we have the phrase, "With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation."

What he's saying here is that's a reference to Elim in the itinerary. It's the place of salvation. Well, how would it be the place of salvation? Because of the symbology that is in verse 27 when Elim is mentioned. It's the divine abode. It's the presence of God. That's why it's "springs of salvation"—place of salvation. It symbolizes where salvation *is*, where eternal life *is*. That would be with God. That's the original Edenic vision.

1:00:00

Let's talk a little bit about the number 12. If the water and trees point to the divine abode (the divine presence, and by extension the Divine Council)... God's entourage is in his abode, as his abode is also his throne room in Scripture. And, of course, we have plenty of instances where we have members of the heavenly host with God in his throne room where he runs the show. If that's true (and all those things are in Scripture), then the number 12 here seems transparently to speak of the inclusion of Israel (the 12 tribes) in God's family. Israel is the product of Abraham, whom God chose to restart his human family after divorcing the nations at Babel. That really makes complete conceptual sense to include the number 12 in this little description of Elim (where God is—his family, his house). To include the number 12 there would make perfect sense because that would

be the 12 tribes, and the 12 tribes are the restarting of the human family God wanted after he had to abandon humanity at Babel. Robinson says:

The number twelve was generally taken by Jewish commentators to contain a reference to the twelve tribes and I think it very improbable that this is a late conceit, for I cannot believe that any reader of the text in the OT period would have failed to make the connection.

I would agree with that, that this is not a late invention. You don't need that. This is going to be transparent. Now I would say, just as my own little rabbit trail (I have a couple of rabbit trails here)... In case somebody out there in the listenership wants to presume that this means salvation by ethnicity... That they're defining election that way. "Oh, you're a Jew. You're elect. You're going to be in heaven." It actually requires the opposite. One could not be worshipping another God and be part of Yahweh's home. Yahweh shares his fatherhood with no other. Israel is supposed to be utterly separate from the gods of the nations, and so believing loyalty (I discuss this in *Unseen Realm* a good bit), as always, is the point of salvation talk, not ethnicity. Not law-keeping. You can't merit salvation. You must believe and worship no other, okay? It's believing loyalty. In the Old Testament, you believed that Yahweh was the God of gods. He is who he says he is. He has chosen to be in covenant relationship with us and we will worship no other. We will assign our faith for our eternal destiny to him and his covenant, not by being born into it. We must believe this stuff and not worship another. It's believing loyalty. It's very consistent. It's consistent even into the New Testament as well.

Now I want to take this a little bit further into the New Testament. And this is going to be a bit of a riff, but I find it really interesting in relation to the 12 apostles. Specifically, my launching point here is going to be Mark 3:14 and following. You could start in one of the other Gospels, too, but it's the calling of the 12. I'm going to read you a section from Joel Marcus' *Anchor Yale Bible Commentary* on Mark 1-8 about the calling of the 12, because this is one of the few commentators that doesn't miss the bigger picture (the bigger metaphorical—the conceptual metaphorical—biblical theological picture) of the calling specifically of the 12. And it's also the backdrop for why when Judas was lost the number had to be restored. Because it meant something. It telegraphed a set of ideas. It's part of the matrix of ideas. So Marcus writes this. (This isn't an Exodus commentary. He's commenting on Mark 3, when Jesus calls the 12.) He writes:

It is probable that, when Mark describes Jesus' ascent of "the" mountain, he has in mind Moses' ascents of Sinai throughout the Pentateuch (Exodus 19, 24, 34; Numbers 27; Deuteronomy 9–10, 32). As Allison (*New Moses*, 174–75) points out, in the Septuagint Mark's phrase *anabainein eis to oros* ("to go up the mountain") occurs twenty-four times, of which eighteen are in the Pentateuch, and most of

the latter refer to Moses. Exodus 19:3 is a particularly interesting example, since two verses later it is prophesied that Israel will be God's treasured possession, and this is similar to the way in which the Markan Jesus chooses the Twelve for intimacy with himself and hence by implication with God.

Remember, who's leading the people in Exodus 15? That's Moses. They're on the way to Sinai, the 12 here being associated with the tribes of Israel. And in Exodus 15:27, choosing the number 12 there for the springs is a way of telegraphing the fact that God's people belong with him. Back to what Marcus is saying here:

Another important Mosaic ascent occurs in Exod 24:1–4, where Moses ascends Sinai in the company of a group of priests and elders and sets up pillars symbolizing the twelve tribes;

We'll get to that when we get to Exodus 24. But that's true. He sets up pillars (one for each tribe) at the mountain.

1:05:00

...thus the Markan linkage between the ascent of the mountain, association with a group of leaders, and the number twelve also has a Mosaic parallel... A Mosaic typology, therefore, is probably at least part of the background for the NT picture of Jesus surrounded by twelve disciples...

The number twelve awakens memories not only of Moses, the human leader who welded Israel into a nation, but also of deeply felt Jewish hopes for a renewal of the nation at the eschaton [MH: the end times]. Ten of the twelve Israelite tribes had disappeared as social units after the Assyrian invasion of the eighth century b.c.e., though some individual Jews such as Paul preserved memories of their affiliation to these tribes (see Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5). But many Jews in Jesus' time cherished hopes for the eschatological restoration of the Ten Lost Tribes (see e.g. *Sib. Or.* 2:170–76; *T. Jos.* 19:1–7; Josephus *Ant.*, 11.133; cf. Bergren, "People"). Twelve, then, was a number symbolizing the longed-for fulfillment of Israel's destiny in the end-time (cf. Sir 36:11; Ezek 45:8; *Pss. Sol.* 17:26–28; Matt 19:28), and it is no accident that the eschatologically oriented Qumran community [MH: this was where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found] was ruled by a council of this number [MH: 12] (see 1QS 8:1). In another Qumran passage, the pesher [MH: the interpretation] on Isa 54:11–12 (4Q164), the twelve chief priests and the twelve tribal leaders of the renewed Israel are compared to stones in the eschatological Temple, and the stone symbolism here is similar to that in our passage, in which Simon is renamed Peter, "the Rock" (cf. 12:9–10 and see Flusser, "Qumran"). The eschatological nuance is further supported by Mark's repeated usage of *epoiēsen* (lit. "made") for "appointed," which may echo Genesis 1 [MH: because in Genesis 1, that same Greek verb is used for the acts of creation frequently] and thus

associate Jesus' appointment of the Twelve with the hope for a new creation (cf. the COMMENT on 7:35–37), and by the fact that the Twelve are instituted to proclaim the good news and to cast out demons, both of which activities are linked with the arrival of the new age [MH: the age to come] in the Markan narrative (see e.g. 1:14–15, 24; 3:27; 7:24–30).

That's the way the Gospel of Mark describes the future—the eschatological hope, the age to come. Now he goes on... I'm not going to read it. But he goes on to get into this about how three of the disciples are put into a subgroup (Peter, James and John) and the imagery of that, and the renaming—all that kind of stuff. But I think that's enough for now.

But the number 12 symbolizing the people of God (in this case, the tribes of Israel) really had significance throughout Israelite and Jewish history. So when you put it in Exodus 15:27, that's no accident because you associate Israel as the family of God. And later on in the intertestamental period when you have to go through the Exile, and after the Exile when ten of the 12 tribes are still missing, it was really a big deal when Jesus goes out... He's this guy who's doing all this crazy stuff and he claims to be the Messiah (or people claim that about him)... He's going into the synagogue and Nazareth and saying, "Isaiah 61 is fulfilled in your day." When he calls *twelve*, people are going to be thinking eschaton. "He's going to bring the 12 tribes together. This guy, he's the Branch. And we have the tree, and the full tree is the people of God, and the dwelling of God, and the land..." All these things are going to converge because they're supposed to converge. They're all connected. Our little passage for today is a little seed (if I can borrow the metaphor here and use it)... It encapsulates a whole bunch of ideas.

1:10:00

But we have to ask, "If the 12 points to Israel as Yahweh's family—if it telegraphs God's desire to have these people in his home (so to speak)—what does the 70 suggest?" I think you already know. I would say it suggests precisely the same thing. I think it's a textual allusion back to the nations in Genesis 10 being included in the covenant with Abraham. God's intention is not only that ethnic Israelites be in his human family. In fact, anyone who assigns their exclusive believing loyalty to Yahweh is a true Israelite—a true seed of Abraham. And that is why Paul explicitly uses that language of Gentiles in Galatians 3. Let me just read you Galatians 3:7-9. It just can't be any clearer.

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

He's quoting Genesis 12:3, which is part of the covenant he makes when he calls Abraham right after abandoning the nations at Babel (abandoning the 70 nations). By faith, they are still going to be part.

⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

We go to Galatians 3, a little bit later, verses 26-29:

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you [Galatians, Gentiles] are all sons of God, through faith.²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile], there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

He just can't be any more explicit than that. So the 70 points to the 70 nations. An Israelite reading Exodus 15:27, "Ah, Elim, the palm trees and the well-watered garden, and God took us out from the realm of the dead, through the Shi-Hor [through whatever body of water it was]. He delivered us from death. He's made us new. He's raised us to life. We're reborn as a nation. We cross the border. We go out into the desert and we have all the chaos that the desert represents, and God protects us from that. He gives us good water to drink. He gives us food." So on and so forth. And they're going to wind up at Sinai. They're going to wind up at Canaan—the land that flows with milk and honey. But in little capsule form, they wind up at Elim in Exodus 15:27. You're going to wind up with God. You're going to wind up where God's house is. You're going to wind up in God's home. And they're going to look at that and see the number 12, and think, "The 12! That's us! It's the 12 tribes!" And then they're going to keep reading and, "Seventy palm trees... Oh yeah, that's right. When God called Abraham and supernaturally created us, he also looped the nations into that. We can't forget that. We shouldn't forget that." And if they're living at a time when they have access to the later chapters of Isaiah, Isaiah doesn't let them forget that. It's when you have Gentiles ministering as priests before Yahweh in the temple. It's very clear that the nations are supposed to be in. In other words, Babel is supposed to be reversed. The nations aren't supposed to be forgotten. Babel is supposed to be reversed and restored. God's family comes from all tribes, all nations. So I think the 70 is a numerical, conceptual reminder of that. God rebirths them at the exodus. They go through all this stuff. And oh, by the way, let's not forget [laughs] about the nations.

So in a nutshell (to wrap up here), this is what we have in Exodus 15:22-27. We've got a rehearsal of what's happened to this point. We have a little bit of telegraphing of what's going to happen (deliverance from death, deliverance from chaos, back in Yahweh's home, where he is). We have all of that in a nutshell in

Exodus 15:22-27. God delivers them from death, preserves them supernaturally in the wilderness from chaos threats, and he brings them home. And they're supposed to be the conduit through which the rest of the nations are to be brought home as well. So there's a lot in this passage to riff off and think about. If you're aware of the wider matrix of ideas, there are a lot of places to go here and a lot to think about. So I wanted to give these verses their own episode—give them their own little stage time—because I think they deserve it.

TS: Does Rusty Osborne's *Trees and Kings* book track on any of this tree imagery that you're talking about?

MH: You know, I haven't looked. I haven't looked specifically, because my library is packed away now. So I didn't want to re-buy the book. [laughs] So I can't tell you with authority. I'm sure he does, but I couldn't tell you specifically.

TS: Alright, sounds good, Mike. Next week, are we getting into chapter 16?

MH: Yep. Chapter 16.

TS: We'll be looking forward to it. Appreciate it, Mike. I just want to thank everyone out there for leaving a review on iTunes. On iTunes, we're over 1600 ratings, so we appreciate that.

MH: Wow, that's a lot!

TS: And over 300+ reviews. We appreciate everybody taking time to do so. It helps other people find us, and we appreciate that. Alright, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.