

19 Marah

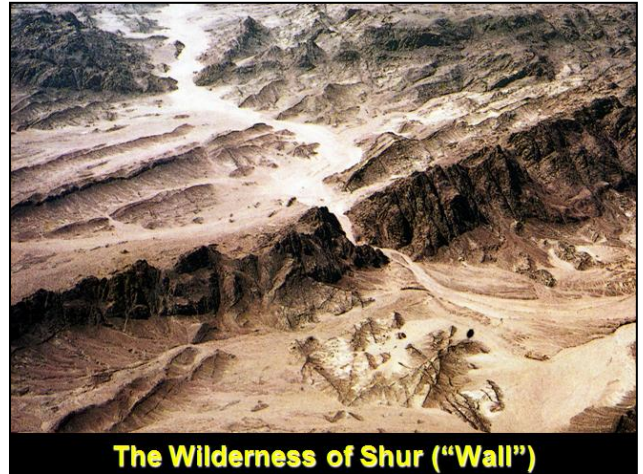
Names (also known as)

Marah; Mara; Myrrh; Mary

Etymology

All these words derive from Hebrew מָרָה: meaning 'bitter' (Marah masc.; מַרָּה Mara fem.)

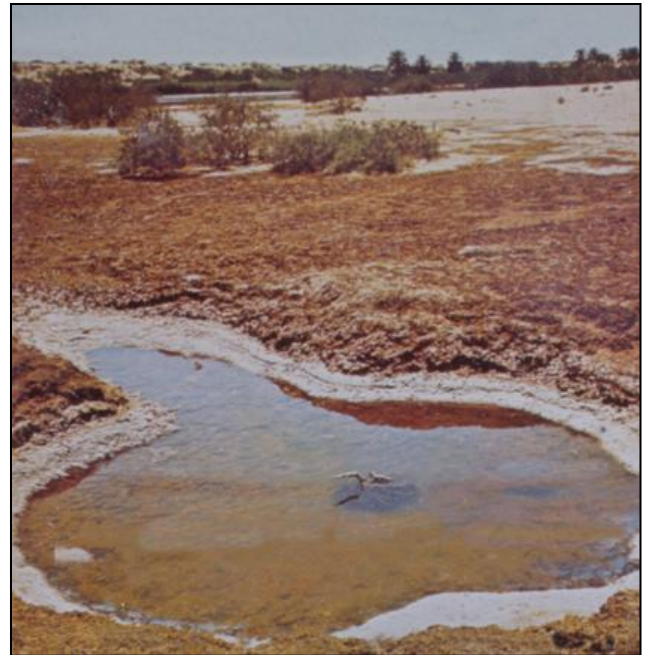
Location/Description



The Wilderness of Shur (“Wall”)

The traditional view, based on Mount Sinai being located in the south of the Sinai peninsula identifies Marah as ‘Ain Hawarah, a salty spring, about 60 kms southeast of Suez.

When Israel arrived Marah must have been a reasonable body of water to have been able to cater for the thirst of an entire nation.



Exodus 15 takes us from the edge of the Red Sea, with the victory song of Moses, through the wilderness of Shur (v.22) and three days later they arrive at Marah. The photo opposite was taken on a tour of Sinai by a Christadelphian in the 1970’s near the traditional site of Marah.

Shur means ‘the wall’. Israel were now officially outside Egyptian territory. While the location of Marah cannot be known for certain, when you look there are actually a number of possible watered areas across what first appears to be a stark, barren, desert wilderness. Like all deserts, drought and howling wind and sand storms change the face of the ground over time.

The traditional view of the route of the Exodus, while challenged in modern times, has stood the test of time.

Scriptural references

Old Testament

Exodus 15:23 at the waters of Marah.

Num. 33:8-9 recounting the encampment at Marah.

Ruth 1:20 - Call me not Naomi, call me Mara – bitter (fem.).

New Testament

Rev. 8:10,11 – 3rd trumpet (signalling Atilla the Huns’ overrun of the Northern Italian/Austrian heartland of the Holy Roman

Empire) turning the waters bitter – undrinkable.

Famous characters

Moses
Naomi
Mary

Brief history

The water the Jews carried out of Egypt was gone. Egypt no longer provided for the people’s physical needs. It was still a source of spiritual food though.

On the three day journey after crossing the Red Sea, they had found no water. Now the sight of trees indicated an oasis and the people’s spirit lifted. The first taste was revolting and as Bro. Whittaker writes “in their bitter disappointment they turned on Moses. The first plague he had brought on the Egyptians was to make their water undrinkable. Now, out of sheer misanthropy, he had deliberately poisoned the water before they go there” (Israel in the Wilderness p. 21).

The people murmured (Ex. 15:24). This is the first occurrence of this word and it becomes the theme of the insidious and faithless nation.

Moses pleads to God (v.25). God responds immediately with the Divine remedy to ‘heal’ the waters.

Then God enacts a law for His people (v.26). If they will:

1. diligently hearken to God’s voice
2. do that which is right in God’s sight
3. give ear to His commandments
4. keep all God’s statutes.

Then ‘none of the sicknesses which I laid on the Egyptians will I lay upon thee, for I am Yahweh, thy physician [Yahweh Rapha]’ (Roth.)

This implies, of course, that disloyalty and faithlessness, failure to listen and obey and keep the laws could lead to a repeat of the plagues they watched the Egyptians suffer.

Lessons for us

The deliverance of the people from Egypt was by the covering afforded by the blood of the lamb slain from the foundation of the Jewish cosmos.

They had been ‘baptised’ under the waters of the Red Sea.

Now in the wilderness of life, even though they were guided by the cloud (of multitudinous water drops?) they were dying of spiritual thirst (faithlessness). A tree cut down for their sake turned death (bitter water – cp. Num. 5:27) to life (living water - John 4:10; 7:38).

The tree suffered bitterness that Israel might be relieved of their bitterness. This tree prefigured Christ as Jeremiah (11:19) spoke Messianically – “But, I, was as a gentle lamb that is to be led to the slaughter,— and I knew not that against me, they had devised devices saying—**Let us destroy the tree with its fruit Yea let us cut him off out of the land of the living**, And, his name, shall be remembered no more!” (Rotherham).

The operative principle is “suffering before glory” seen in the transfiguration of Christ. The cross before the crown!

1 Pet. 1:11 - “Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before-hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

Hence, the cameo of Marah and then Elim (the place of mighty ones) which provided a cameo of the Kingdom with its 12 wells of water representing Israel and the 70 nations drawing their sustenance from them.

As Bro. Whittaker concluded, “the bitter waters ... had been changed to the sweetness of His mercy, and they will never change back unless men who have been called out of bondage despise the Tree that wrought the wondrous change” (ibid. p.22).

(Compiler – John Tierney)

