**God Tests His Chosen Ones**

Series: Exodus Scroll E4

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(00:00)

Jon: Hey, this is Jon at BibleProject. We're currently walking through the scroll of Exodus, and we want to hear your questions. So record your questions for us and send it before May 18th. Send it to info@bibleproject.com. And like always, tell us your name, where you're from, keep it to about 20 seconds, and then also transcribe your question for us when you send it in. Thank you so much. Now on to the episode.

The idea of taking a test stirs anxiety in our hearts. Am I prepared? Am I going to pass or fail?

Tim: I know the word "test" doesn't activate positive associations for a lot of people. But that is a word introduced in the biblical story for how God relates to his chosen ones.

Jon: Adam and Eve are offered a test. Are you going to eat from the tree of life, God's own life, or are you going to eat from the tree of knowing good and bad, seizing that knowledge on your own terms? Adam and Eve's son Cain is offered a test. When God doesn't (00:01:00) favor his sacrifice, is he going to give into his jealousy and anger and murder his brother? Noah is given a test: will you trust me and build an ark? Abraham is given a test: will you follow me to a new land?

Tim: The pattern is when God selects someone to bless them, appoints them as an image and a representative, and gives them opportunity and blessing and abundance and responsibility, the opportunity becomes the test.

Jon: And lurking in the shadows of any test is the slanderer, the evil one, the serpent. And he's asking, "Can you really trust God?" So we find that God tests us and so does evil.

Tim: The nature of the test depends on the purposes of the one doing the test. The snake is also testing the human, trying to trap them. But for God it’s the chance for the humans to prove their loyalty and their capability.

Jon: Today on the podcast, (00:02:00) we continue reading the Exodus scroll. Pharaoh has let Israel go and they are on their way into freedom. We're going to trace a new theme, the theme of the test. Because as they leave Egypt, they're now in the wilderness and they're going to get tested.

Tim: The people have no water, and so God tests them, tests their trust to trust him, gives them water. Then the people have no bread, so God tests to trust him by giving them manna. And then they have no water again. And then this time Israel tests God's patience by not trusting him, even though he's already provided for them. So this whole section is about are people going to trust Yahweh when they're in the wilderness?

Jon: I'm Jon Collins, and this is BibleProject podcast. Today, with Tim Mackie, we talk about Israel being tested in the wilderness. Thanks for joining us. Here we go. (00:03:00)

Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hey, Jon.

Jon: We are walking through the Exodus scroll.

Tim: Yeah, that is the thing that we're doing.

Jon: That is the thing that we are doing.

Tim: That is the second scroll of the Torah in the Hebrew Bible, that is the Christian Old Testament.

Jon: Yes. We're going through all these scrolls, breaking them up into movements. A movement is kind of ignoring the traditional chapter-verse structure that you're going to find in your Bible.

Tim: Which is very helpful structure as I always like to say.

Jon: It's a helpful structure, especially when you need to reference something, but it often hides some very native structuring that's happening through how the book is composed, through its own rhythm, and its own repeated words and ideas. There's actually a lot of really cool structure going on.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. So we've adopted a term from the world of music: movements. Taken from movements of a symphony. (00:04:00) So biblical scrolls have been organized by their authors into movements, that is meaningful, large sections that have a coherent unity.

So the Exodus scroll, which we're in, has three main movements. First movement went from Exodus 1:1 through chapter 13 verse 16. Which might seem random, but it's not because it goes from the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt, the beginning, and all of their baby boys being thrown into the water. And then God confronts their enslavers, Pharaoh the king of Egypt, by raising up Moses.

And God says, "Hey, you're killing my firstborn son, the Israelites. And if you don't let my people go, you're going to lose the life of your firstborn sons." So that's how first movement ends is with the night of Passover where God is going to send or allow the destroyer to come and take the lives of the firstborn throughout Egypt. But he provides (00:05:00) a means of escape for anybody who will take the offer.

Jon: And that is taking a sacrificial lamb, putting the blood on the door of the house. Then the narrative really slows down to a crawl and gives you instructions for future generations to repeat this Passover.

Tim: Yeah, through a seven-day celebration called Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Jon: So that's movement one. It's about liberation.

Tim: That's right. And we just talked about that movement through multiple conversations. We are now pivoting and moving into the second main movement.

Jon: Movement two of Exodus.

Tim: Of the book. And just as an overview, this is the section where Israel is in the wilderness. It goes from chapter 13 verse 17, through the end of chapter 24. They go from Egypt to Mount Sinai. And to get there they go through the wilderness.

Jon: They go through the waters and then through the wilderness.

Tim: Yes, yes, that's right. Exactly.

Jon: What theme are we going to be tracing?

Tim: Here we are going to be tracing ... (00:06:00) That's me patting on—

Jon: That's your drum roll.

Tim: Drum roll on this table. We're going to be focusing on the theme of the test.

Jon: The test. Because they're going to be tested quite often in this movement.

Tim: Yeah, the language and vocabulary of testing, God bringing Israel into circumstances that will test their loyalty, test their trust. The testing language is all over the second movement, so we've made it our focus theme. The test.

Jon: They're going to be tested because they're thirsty and they're hungry. This also leads into Mount Sinai and the giving of the law.

Tim: Yeah, God is going to show up in cloud and fire on Mount Sinai. And Moses will say that this is a test for Israel about whether they are going to draw close to their God or stay far away at a distance. That's the drama that we will be exploring in this movement. But the whole thing is about God has saved his people. But now that he's saved them, he's going to (00:07:00) invite them to become his representatives to the nations.

And to do that he wants to become closer partners, which means finding out if they're really going to be loyal to him. And that loyalty is put to the test.

Jon: And why does God test humans at all?

Tim: I know it.

Jon: I mean, come on. We're kind of fragile. Like, give us a break.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Well, yes. Yes. What we see is that God is fully aware of that. Fully aware of that. So yeah, that's what we're going to explore. We made a video about the theme of the test because it doesn't begin here in the Torah. It actually begins with the garden of Eden.

Jon: Give me the two-minute overview.

Tim: So when I think of the word "test," I just think of how poorly I did in school for basically all the way through high school. I just was a poor student in general until college.

Jon: Were you really?

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: Was it because you didn't care?

Tim: I could have cared less.

Jon: Me too. I was so bored. (00:08:00)

Tim: I didn't care.

Jon: I was like, if I could get a B without doing any homework, I have won at life. That was my strength.

Tim: Oh, here you go. That was great. I was happy with Cs. Anyhow, I know the word “test” doesn't activate positive associations for a lot of people. I get that. But it is a word introduced in the biblical story for how God relates to his chosen ones. And that's important. It's not just that God just enjoys testing everybody. The pattern is when God selects someone to bless them ...

Jon: To appoint them as being—

Tim: ... to appoint them as an image and a representative and gives them opportunity and blessing and abundance and responsibility, then all of those opportunities confront.

Jon: And opportunity becomes a test.

Tim: The opportunity becomes the test. The abundant trees of the garden and all that they offer Adam and Eve become the test of whether (00:09:00) they'll trust God to give them wisdom or they want to take wisdom to rule by doing what's good in their own eyes. So here, God has already delivered these people from the oppressor and he's de-created Egypt through the 10 plagues. He's undone the structures of the cosmos from Genesis 1. He's removed light and dark.

Jon: Yeah. He's moving Heaven and Earth to free his people.

Tim: That's right. So that same people who just experienced all that comes out into the wilderness, the wild and the wasteland, and they're going to have to make a dangerous journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai.

Jon: So it's interesting God doesn't test them and then see if they're worthy of being rescued.

Tim: No, the rescue comes before.

Jon: The rescue comes first.

Tim: That's right. He just rescues them because that's what he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So that was the theme. When the Exodus story begins, God heard their suffering, he heard their cry, and he remembered (00:10:00) his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And then he raised up Moses.

So yeah, it's to a saved people, a delivered people that God now is going to ask them to trust him and surrender their own ways of creating security for themselves. He's going to ask for a radical surrender. That's one of the main themes in this section.

Sometimes the test comes from their enemies. Pharaoh is going to chase after them, and they're going to have to trust God. Sometimes it's a lack of resources, water, and food. Other times it's the people's leader, Moses, that's going to have to trust the wisdom that God gives him through his father-in-law about how to lead these unruly people well with wisdom. So it's not like a vindictive, like, "Ooh, let me set up this obstacle and see if they all ..." kind of thing.

Man, my kids have ... We're a year and a half into having a hamster that has been the greatest (00:11:00) gift to our family. It was a COVID pet. We got a COVID pet. We didn't get—

Jon: You didn't get a dog.

Tim: We didn't get a dog, we didn't get a cat or rabbit, we got a hamster. Man, Opal, this hamster has become the most beloved creature to my sons. But what they do, they have this toy called Magna-Tiles ...

Jon: Yeah, we got those.

Tim: ... for building blocks. So they build mazes and castles. They build castle mazes for Opal. And sometimes they'll deliberately put a test, like put an obstacle in the way. Actually ... well, I don't know. It's actually not vindictive. They know that Opal is amazing and she can figure it out. So I guess in that sense they want to show, they want to demonstrate what they know Opal is capable of. But it does pose a challenge to Opal.

So in the video on the test, that's how we framed it. That the nature of the test depends on the purposes of the one doing the testing.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So the snake is also testing the humans, (00:12:00) but he's trying to trap them. The test is a trap. But for God, it's the chance for the humans to prove their loyalty and their capabilities. And that's what my kids are doing with Opal.

Jon: It's an opportunity.

Tim: It's an opportunity. And that's how the test is presented here. It's an opportunity to demonstrate their reliance on God's generosity, even another time and another time. And that's the nature of the test here. But it does pose a challenge to the people. And that's what makes the test the test.

Jon: All right.

Tim: I guess I've gotten used to this idea because I've sat with it in the Bible for a while now. But I know that this idea that God would introduce or allow challenges into his people's lives to develop their character and test them, this is not a comfortable idea.

Jon: No. I mean, life is already hard as it is, you know?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: We don't need an extra bend in the hamster maze. The maze is already a little too difficult. (00:13:00)

Tim: Well, but maybe that's the point is that it's not about like God introducing extra bends in the hamster maze. It's like life is the test. It's not like something extra.

Jon: But narratively, oftentimes it feels like an extra thing. God could have just been like, "Here's the water. Here, I'll give you some water." Instead it's like, "Hey ..."

Tim: All right. This is our mission. Let's build up a portrait of the test from these narratives and then let's let the narratives show us the nature of God's test. But I think that's a good way to frame it. Is this about God throwing down some banana peels on the sidewalk, and the sidewalk’s already cracked and uneven? And it's like—

Jon: It's like the least dangerous thing you could actually do is a banana peel. It's bright yellow.

Tim: I don't know why I thought of that.

Jon: I know. It's the classic ... It's so funny. Where did that begin?

Tim: I have no idea. They're not actually very slippery.

Jon: They are not even that slippery. (00:14:00)

Tim: But is it like that? Or is it just the sidewalk is uneven and rough and that's the challenge, and that's the test? I think that's the question here. So let's read these stories and let's see which one is more like the banana peel or the uneven sidewalk? What a ridiculous illustration. But it works.

Jon: Yeah, I get it. I get it.

Tim: So let's dive in. This section of Exodus goes from Exodus 13:17 through the end of chapter 18. And it itself has three parts, lo and behold. So this first part here is the second half of chapter 13 through the end of chapter 15. Basically, 13, 14, and 15. It's the story of the deliverance through the waters of the Reed Sea. Here we go.

**Section break (00:14:43)**

Tim: So in Exodus 13:17, the people leave Egypt. When Moses confronted Pharaoh, what he said is, "Yahweh God of the Hebrews sent me to you. Let my people go." That phrase "let them go" is the Hebrew verb "*shalach*," which means "send away." "Send away my people." So it's repeated all throughout the story. Almost all the 10 plagues begin—

Jon: *Shalach*, is that like shellacking? Is that part of ...? No.

Tim: I don't think so. If you get shellacked—

Jon: You get hit up.

Tim: Does that mean we get hit up?

Jon: You get hit. Okay.

Tim: No, it's just send away. The first time it's used in the Bible is about Adam and Eve being sent away from Eden in their exile.

Jon: Oh, they're *shalached*.

Tim: It's an "exile" vocabulary word. So Exodus 13:17, "And it came about when Pharaoh sent away the people, *Elohim* did not lead them by the road of the land of the Philistines because it was close by. (00:16:00) Because God said, 'Oh, man, these people are going to change their minds if they see war and they're going to turn and go back to Egypt.' So *Elohim* took the people by the way of the wilderness of the Sea of Reeds. By fifties the sons of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt."

Now, this is a good example. I'll just highlight here this is a good example of the patterning for how biblical authors organize literary movements. Everything I just read is exactly the same words the things that Pharaoh was afraid would happen if he let the people be fruitful and multiply. It's in the first paragraph of the Exodus story.

So in chapter 1, what Pharaoh says is, "Look, the people, the sons of Israel are great and more mighty than me. So come, let's deal wisely with them so that they don't be fruitful and multiply. (00:17:00) Because what if war happens? They will add themselves to our enemies and they will make war against us and go up out of the land." So he says, "I've got an idea. Let's enslave them."

And then what happens is Yahweh makes war on them and they are fruitful and multiply and they go up out of the land. And that's exactly what Pharaoh feared. He brings upon his own self by enslaving the people. So the same words are repeated right at the beginning. And then here they are at the beginning of the next movement of the story. Does that make sense?

Jon: And that repetition kind of announces to the reader we're kind of starting again.

Tim: Next movement. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: The narrative is kind of rebooting now.

Tim: That's right. So it's a shift of geographical location. They were in Egypt, now they're leaving Egypt. Pharaoh was afraid that there would be war and they would go up out of the land. And there was in fact a war (00:18:00) and they are, in fact, going up out of the land, but now against his will.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Here's another little structure here that creates a marker of the literary boundary. Verse 19, "And Moses took the bones of Joseph because he made the sons of Israel swear an oath, saying, *'Elohim* will surely come and visit you so you make my bones go up out of there along with you.'" It's a random little note. You're like, "Bones of Joseph? What is this?"

This is like a little arrow shooting back to literally the very last paragraph of the Genesis scroll. So it's like a hyperlink. So once again, in this paragraph, we're shooting over the whole Exodus 10 plagues story, and we just linked back to the first sentences of the Exodus story. And now with the bones of Joseph, we've linked back to the last sentences of the Genesis scroll. So this little paragraph is (00:19:00) like hopping over the Exodus story and linking back to the story that came before it to mark the literary boundary.

Jon: And because both of those hyperlinks happen to be markers themselves of the end or the beginning of a movement?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

Jon: So in Joseph's case, that was the very end of the Exodus scroll, the last movement where Joseph says, "Get my bones out of here whenever you leave." So it's activating the ending of Genesis and it's activating the beginning of Exodus scroll.

Tim: Exodus scroll, yeah. And both of those things collide right here in this little paragraph. So those are the types of ...

Jon: Clues.

Tim: ... clues that the biblical authors give. I think of it as firing a harpoon with a rope attached. I don't know why. But it's sort of like you just read a big section and then you'll come across a paragraph, it'll start repeating all this vocabulary and it's like, whoosh. Just think of a big harpoon with a rope. (00:20:00) And then it just launched from right here, Exodus 13, and anchored back in Exodus 1. The next one is anchored back in the end of the Genesis scroll. And now it's pulling the scrolls together into a unified storyline and marking that we're at a—

Jon: A juncture.

Tim: Yeah, we're at a juncture. I like pointing this stuff out. That was maybe too much time spent on these little details. But these are the techniques that biblical authors use to kind of link bigger chunks of the scrolls together, repetition like this.

**Section break (00:20:34)**

Tim: So notice that this whole thing was Yahweh was leading people out of Egypt. And there's multiple ways they could go up to the land promised to their forefathers. One way was to go kind of north up, and then till they hit the Mediterranean Sea, and then just hit the coastal road. That's what is referred to here as the road of the Philistines. Because the Philistines inhabited the coastline.

Jon: That'd be right through the Gaza Strip right there, right?

Tim: As you go down the Mediterranean ... Basically, if you get a like a Google map out, you'll see the Nile Delta, which is the big delta marshy region that goes right up at the northern coast of Egypt on the Mediterranean. And then as you follow that—

Jon: And then goes into the Red Sea, the Nile Delta?

Tim: It goes into the Mediterranean Sea.

Jon: Oh, it does?

Tim: It flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Yeah. And then you just follow that coastline up and you start going east in the north. And it curves—

Jon: So it's all marshy right there.

Tim: Or river deltas. Yeah, marshy and—

Jon: Deltas.

Tim: So the Nile River starts to splinter out into like a zillion little smaller streams. It's this huge area, (00:22:00) so lush and green. They irrigated it and made it big farming. Huge.

Jon: Oh, yes. Okay, this is where Cairo is.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Basically, it kind of begins where the Nile goes through Cairo. And then after Cairo, it splits out into a bazillion little streams. So they go east of that. And what God is saying here is, "Hey, I could lead them up to the coast and then we'll just take the coastline up." That was a normal way that people went between Israel and Egypt. But if you do that, you're going to go right through the cities of the Philistines.

So Yahweh says, "Hey, listen, I know these people are ..." Well, he knows and they're about to demonstrate it. "They're fearful people and I don't want to get them entangled in war. So what we're going to do is we're going to go just due east out into the Sinai Peninsula wilderness."

Jon: And this would be on the map, the Gulf of Suez, right? I mean, geographically to get to the (00:23:00) Sinai Peninsula, you got that Red Sea, and then you've got that jet of water ...

Tim: Yeah, you got it.

Jon: ... where that boat got stuck recently and screwed up the whole world economy.

Tim: Totally. At the end of 2021. Totally. That's right. Actually, I'll just flag it here. Big rabbit hole that I have read around and know that you can go deep here into the route of the Exodus, the location of the sea and the waters that people cross. These are hugely debated because there's so little information given in the biblical story. Which to me is always a clue that the biblical authors want to anchor this narrative in the actual historical memory of the people. But one of the main goals isn't to give us, as I say, security camera footage. Because they give so few details.

What they want to do is help us understand the meaning of it through narrative patterning and literary artistry. And that's what the section is full of. (00:24:00)

Jon: But the only way to get to the Sinai Peninsula—

Tim: ... is through some section of what is now the Suez Canal. That's right. But the Suez Canal didn't exist as such. So the question is, at what section did they cross?

Jon: Right.

Tim: But it was a marshy river land with lots of big bodies of water standing around. So what God does is he leads them not by the coastal route but by what's called the wilderness of the *yam suph*, which means the sea of ... And the word "*suph*" is reeds. Sea of Reeds.

Here's, let's check this out. This is interesting. Back at the beginning of the English translation tradition around the 1400s, 1500s, this phrase "*yam suph*" (Sea of Reeds) started getting translated the Red Sea. And it's stuck for a long time. You can still find it in translations today.

So the New American Standard, it translates *yam suph* as Red Sea with a little footnote saying, "Literally Sea of Reeds." I don't know why they don't do the other way around. (00:25:00)

Jon: Right. That doesn't seem like an NASB move.

Tim: No. It's not typical for New American Standard. The ESV—

Jon: They got it right I bet.

Tim: ESV translates it as the Red Sea with no footnote.

Jon: What? No footnote.

Tim: No footnote.

Jon: Come on.

Tim: Yes. NIV, the Red Sea with a footnote “or the Sea of Reeds.”

Jon: Which one’s that?

Tim: That's the NIV. Now, why did they say the Sea of Reeds? "*Suph*" does not mean "red.” It's the most common Hebrew word for the reeds that grow in marshes of the desert. The King James is Red Sea. NRSV is Red Sea. Do you want to go down this rabbit hole or not?

Jon: What was that first English translation? Was it Tyndale?

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: What'd he do?

Tim: Usually, that's the way this goes is that the King James translators of 1611 followed the lead of Tyndale who produced the first and most widespread English translation. (00:26:00)

Jon: Is that where it started here, the Tyndale?

Tim: I'm going to look it up. Because you can look up the Tyndale Bible online at Biblestudytools.com. Ooh, oh, fascinating. "Therfore God led the aboute thorow ..." Whoa, this is English from 500 plus years ago. It's hard to read. "Therfore God led the aboute thorow the wyldernesse that bordreth on the redd”

Jon: Why are you reading it like you're a robot?

Tim: Did I sound like a robot? "The childern of Israel went harnessed out of the lade of Egipte."

Jon: So it was Red Sea?

Tim: Tyndale translated Redd Sea. Redd with double D.

Jon: And is this because there is a sea there called the Red Sea, and everyone's like, "Ah, it must be red?"

Tim: That's a great question. You know, when it comes to this geographic stuff, (00:27:00) this is where I turn to my Bible dictionaries. Do you want to look it up?

Jon: I kind of do. I mean, I feel like, why is everyone so attached to this translation?

Tim: The phrase "the Red Sea," the phrase is *yam suph*. And “*suph*” is a standard word for marsh reed.

Jon: I mean, I get it. "Reed" is close to "red," but only in English. Not in Hebrew, right?

Tim: Yeah. That's not it. That can't be it. All right, we're doing it.

Jon: We're doing it.

Tim: All right. Go into IVP’s *Dictionary of the Pentateuch* is an outstanding collection Bible dictionaries. We're going to the Red Sea. See, the Exodus route and Israel's wilderness itinerary. Red Sea. “The precise location of the body of water that the Israelites crossed when leaving Egypt is not known. Various positions have been argued at present no conclusion claims universal support. The present-day Red Sea is a large (00:28:00) body of water that makes up the northwest arm of the Indian Ocean. This, however, has no bearing on the location of Israel’s crossing because Israel's wilderness wanderings were in the Sinai Peninsula.” Oh, interesting.

“A variety of bodies of water in the Hebrew Bible are given the same name *yam suph*, Sea of Reeds. *Yam suph* can refer to the Gulf of Aqaba by Eilat, the body of water east of the Sinai Peninsula. According to Numbers 33, the *yam suph*—"

Jon: That's the gulf on the other side of the Sinai Peninsula?

Tim: Yeah, interesting. “According to Numbers 33, the *yam suph* is the body of water reached later in Israel's wanderings after leaving Elim in the wilderness, hence, the Gulf of Suez west of the Sinai Peninsula is meant. Finally, the sea of the Exodus is referred to as the *yam suph* in the actual narrative and a number of other passages. These passages (00:29:00) don't specify whether the Gulf of Suez, the Gulf of Aqaba, or some other body of water is meant. In any event, the phrase *yam suph* seems to refer to more than one body of water throughout the Torah.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Wow.

Jon: It's a way to just say body of water.

Tim: And then they provide a big long table with a list of all the occurrences in the wilderness wanderings and so on.

Jon: So a better translation than Red Sea is body of water.

Tim: Actually, there's a Hebrew Bible scholar, Bernard Batto that thinks there's a double meaning here, wordplay. Because the word "*suph*" is spelled with the same letters as the Hebrew word "the end" or "the cut-off place." And so the sea of the end because it's where Pharaoh meets his end. So he thinks it's also a title used to describe what's going to happen there to Pharaoh. That kind of stuff happens everywhere, symbolic place names that determined why something is called by a certain name in a story. (00:30:00) So that also makes sense here.

Jon: But the fact that it's also a generic way to refer to a body of water speaks to what you said before, which was there's a lack of specificity here that you think's on purpose.

Tim: Yeah, totally. The fact that *yam suph* can refer and is used to refer to the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba and the body of water further down from both of those means that geographical precision is not the highest priority. Which makes you ask what would be another priority? And I think that's what Bernard Batto was on to.

Jon: Which is the plan words?

Tim: That it's the plan words communicating the meaning of this place. It's as if they're going back into the wilderness, to the wild and waste of Genesis 1:2, the watery wilderness, where depending on whether you trust Yahweh or not, you either find life or you meet your end. Which is what "*suph*" can mean is “end.”

Jon: Regardless, though, if they're going to get to the Sinai Peninsula, (00:31:00) they're crossing what we call the Gulf of Suez.

Tim: That's right. Again, the Suez, that canal was dug out in the modern era.

Jon: Not the canal.

Tim: They'll have to pass through that land, and there's lots of bodies of water in that land.

Jon: I see. That land where the Gulf of Suez stops, where the canal begins, which didn't exist back then, there's all sorts of little bodies of water there. I see. So it could have been at any of those junctures.

Tim: It certainly was somewhere in there, because they end up in the Sinai Peninsula, and they left Egypt. It's given a couple other names in the next narrative, where they camp at the edge of the waters. Okay, let's go back to the bigger point.

This whole section begins with Yahweh saying, "I'm going to lead my people out. But man, I know that the moment they see danger or war they're going to freak. So I'm going to take them this other way that's not direct, through the wilderness, it's by the sea of the end."

And it's like Yahweh is (00:32:00) aware that his relationship to them is tenuous. We're kind of sowing the seeds of the test of Yahweh is going to take these people through this land and that will pose a great test of trust. And Yahweh is aware. He says that "the people may not trust me, they might freak out."

So what happens at the end of this whole paragraph that begins this middle section in chapter 13 verse 21 is, "And Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to guide them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to light up their way going day and night. The pillar of cloud did not go away by day nor the pillar of fire, they were before the people."

It's this image of Yahweh's tenderness. He knows his people are easily freaked. So what Moses experienced in the burning bush now becomes a permanent guiding presence of fire and cloud, guiding them (00:33:00) through the wilderness going in front of them. This is a famous image, I think. This is the first time it appears.

Jon: And it sticks with the story for a while.

Tim: Yeah. It's going to lead them to Mount Sinai, then it's going to move up onto the top of Mount Sinai. Then once they build the tabernacle, this divine presence storm is going to move down and hover over the tabernacle. And then continue guiding them through the wilderness on the other side of Sinai. That's the opening paragraph and it sets the scene for the tests that are about to follow.

**Section break (00:33:32)**

Tim: So Exodus 14 begins, saying, "Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, "Hey, let's keep moving through the wilderness. Let the sons of Israel turn around and let them go camp at this place called Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and between the sea, in front of this place called Baal-zephon." And so they camped by the waters. There’s cool stuff happening there, but we just need to move forward. If you're a movie director, it would be hard cut. We'd go to Pharaoh stewing in his throne room. It's like everything is in ruins around him—

We hear of Pharaoh. Pharaoh said about the sons of Israel, "They're lost out there. The wilderness has closed them in." And then we go back to Yahweh speaking to Moses. He says to Moses, "If that's what Pharaoh's saying in the throne room back in Egypt, you need to understand that I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart one last time, and he's going to chase (00:35:00) after you, and I will gain honor by means of Pharaoh and his army so that all Egypt will know that I am Yahweh." That's the main theme we followed.

Jon: The name of Yahweh.

Tim: So that's the scene. Yahweh says to Moses, "Go camp here. This is what Pharaoh’s saying to himself back in his throne room. I'm going to do something with Pharaoh. I'm not done here. Contest with Pharaoh is not done."

Jon: The 10th plague was not the knockout punch.

Tim: No, it's not. And it's because Pharaoh is there still with a hard heart. So, verse 5, "It was reported to the king of Egypt that the people had fled and his heart was changed inside of him." Pharaoh's heart literally turned over. This is the same word of what Jonah says will happen to Nineveh. 40 days and Nineveh will be—

Jon: Turned over?

Tim: Turned upside down. Which is so funny because what he meant by that was being like roasted. (00:36:00) And what actually happened was—

Jon: Repentance.

Tim: Yeah, the people turned inside out. The bad guys become repentant. So they are turned upside down, just not the way Jonah thought. So here it's the opposite. Pharaoh goes from maybe being a little humble after the 10 plagues to he's back to hard heart again. So Pharaoh and his servants say to each other, "What is this that we have done? We have sent away the people from being our slaves." Pharaoh bound up his chariots, he took his people with him. 600 chariots, choice men, chariot riders, the captains, all of them.

Jon: These are ancient tanks.

Tim: Yeah, dude, ancient tanks. He's bringing out the tanks. Yeah, dude, especially against the people with no weapons and on foot.

Jon: The chariot will destroy you.

Tim: You're going to mow down.

Jon: You see a couple of chariots that mow down.

Tim: Totally. Yeah. (00:37:00) Yeah, much less. Yeah, 600. So he chases after them and he finds them camped by the sea. That's the scene, famous scene. So here's the first test, here it is, of Israel. This is down to verse 10. "When Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel lifted their eyes and look, Egypt coming after them, and they were greatly afraid. And they cried out to Yahweh. And they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there weren't any graves in Egypt that you took us out to the wilderness to die? What have you done to us ...’”

Jon: They're so snarky.

Tim: ‘... to bring us out of Egypt?’” Super snarky. This is on purpose.

Jon: Yeah, totally.

Tim: This is caricature trying to get at truth here. "Isn't this what we said to you when we were back in Egypt saying, 'Man, Moses, just leave us alone? Let us be slaves to Egypt. (00:38:00) It's better for us to be slaves to Egypt than to die in the wilderness.’”

Jon: I mean, that is true if you think about it.

Tim: Yeah. No, you can sympathize with the caricature.

Jon: There's 600 tanks coming at them.

Tim: Yeah, man.

Jon: And they're like, "We could have been just making bricks in Egypt."

Tim: That's a great point. Yeah, this is exactly how I would respond. Without a doubt.

Jon: That would be the first thought that crossed my mind.

Tim: Like, "Why did I leave?"

Jon: "What were we thinking?"

Tim: "What were we thinking? We went along with this." So Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. Here's what you need to do. Stand here and do nothing. Stand right here and watch the salvation of Yahweh that he will accomplish today."

So there's one appearance of the word "salvation" in Genesis that is cool, but we don't have time to talk about. But this is the first time the word appears in a narrative (00:39:00) about a people being saved. And this narrative becomes the dictionary definition of ...

Jon: Salvation.

Tim: ... salvation. Or rescue. Yeshua. It's Jesus' name. Yeshua.

Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: "Stand right here and see the *yeshua* of Yahweh. Because the people that you see here today, you will no longer see them anymore. Yahweh will make war on your behalf. You just stand here and be silent." So that's the first test. This is the first test.

Jon: Oh, gosh.

Tim: This is so gnarly.

Jon: Yeah. Pharaoh's army, 600 chariots ...

Tim: Yeah, just try and put yourself in—

Jon: ... coming at you, body of water behind you, you're pinned in, and you're like, "We're going to die," and Moses says "Just stand here ...”

Tim: "Stand here and do nothing."

Jon: “... and be ready for God to save you." I guess there's nothing else.

Tim: Yeah. It's hard not to let the familiarity of the story lull us into (00:40:00) missing its power. I mean, this is an iconic moment in the biblical story. It's life and death. But the way of life looks like the way of death. It looks actually like your choices are death and death. I've got this body of water here, we can't go there. Water is death. But then you've got tanks coming your way and that's totally death. So what are your choices? Death and death.

Jon: Well, your choice is to stand there and die.

Tim: Yeah, stand there and die.

Jon: But Moses is saying, stand there and have hope.

Tim: Yeah, stand there and trust that what you think is death is actually your salvation. That's so powerful, man. Yahweh says to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the sons of Israel that they should get ready to leave." And go where?

And here we go. I know you like this passage. (00:41:00) I know. "You, Moses, lift up your rod and extend your arm over the waters and split them so that the sons of Israel will go in the middle of the sea on dry land." What's cool is this is the vocabulary of the creation story in Genesis 1 and of the flood story.

Jon: Splitting the waters.

Tim: Yeah. This word "split" last appeared when the land splits open and the chaos waters below the land are ...

Jon: The geysers?

Tim: ... geysering up, surging up. It's the language of Genesis 1 where the waters recede to expose the dry land that emerges up out of the waters. So it's a good example of where the crossing of the sea story is the blending of the creation story.

Jon: Where God takes the waters, separates them so dry land will emerge (00:42:00) where humans can live.

Tim: Yeah. And it's also blending the imagery of the flood story, which is this great splitting that will happen. Here, to part the waters, in the flood story it's to bring the floodwaters to overwhelm the land. So what that clues us in is that this is going to be a de-creation and creation story. The creation story was dry land out of the waters.

Jon: And that's what we see. We see dry land there.

Tim: The flood story was the dry land is overwhelmed by the waters again, until God sent his wind to create dry land for his chosen ones. And all of that is going to be activated right here. Because in this case, you have two groups of people in the waters and they experience different fates.

So what happens is the cloud, the pillars ... And it says nighttime. So the pillar of fire sets out in front of the people and goes ... (00:43:00) And this long paragraph where the pillar of clouds sets out, and it actually sets up right in between Pharaoh and the people. It becomes a wall separating them. So it's this long paragraph about how the pillar in the cloud and the fire became a wall in between them.

In verse 20, it says, "They didn't draw near to each other neither on this side or on this side." So it's interesting image where we're used to thinking about the waters as the wall. But the first wall ...

Jon: ... is the firewall.

Tim: ... is Yahweh himself. The firewall. Wasn’t this done in one of the Exodus movies? It's cool image. But the idea of on one side and on the other side. That's a key visual image being set up here. Then after God separates the two between one and the other, then verse 21, Yahweh sent over the sea a powerful east wind ...

Jon: The *ruakh*.

Tim: ... all night long and he turned the sea (00:44:00) into dry land and the waters split.

Jon: This was a long splitting. Took all night?

Tim: Yeah, it's a good point.

Jon: I guess in my imagination is often just like there it goes.

Tim: That's interesting.

Jon: It was slow.

Tim: We're told actually the people start going at nighttime. And at the sunrise is when they started ...

Jon: They cross.

Tim: ... crossing through and the Egyptians chase after them. This is echoing Genesis 1, the spirit wind of Yahweh.

Jon: The Spirit of God over the waters.

Tim: It's also echoing the pivot of the flood story when God sends a wind to cause the waters to recede. It's both of those happening at once right here. The waters to expose the dry land. And the sons of Israel went in the middle of the waters on the dry land and the waters were like a wall on their right and on their left. So just like the presence of God was a wall with Egypt on one side, Israel on the other, now the waters (00:45:00) are this wall creating this tunnel. And they're in this narrow place that is the way of salvation. All these biblical images colliding here.

Jon: How do you know it's narrow?

Tim: Oh, well, I guess because it's just painting this picture of you're in this dry land that's like a ...

Jon: It's a passageway.

Tim: ... passageway with one side and on the other side. I don't know how narrow it is but it's painting this picture that you can't go this way and you can't go that way. There's only one way you can go—into death.

Jon: Through death.

Tim: I mean, dude, into what certainly must have felt like death.

Jon: Yeah, that'd be intimidating.

Tim: Man, our artists have done some great depictions of this scene over the years in our videos.

Jon: Yeah. It's very cinematic.

Tim: There's one where they depict lightning happening and then the waters are lit up, the wall, and you can see fish like you're in an aquarium. It's my favorite one. So then think of the creation imagery here. (00:46:00) Remember God sent the wind over the waters in Genesis 1, the Spirit. And then the first thing God did was speak, "Let there be light." So here in verse 24, at the morning watch, that is at sunrise, Yahweh looked down on the camp of Egypt with the pillar of fire—

Jon: We're still stuck behind the firewall.

Tim: Sorry, I skipped over the part that Egypt sees the people going into the sea–

Jon: Okay. Firewall is gone.

Tim: Egypt chases after them.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So now everybody is in the tunnel. And at the sunrise, at the morning watch Yahweh looked down on the camps of Egypt, and with the pillar of fire and cloud, he confused the camp of Egypt. So we're not actually told. What we're told is just the wheels of the chariot started to wiggle and come off. And it made the driving very difficult. And Egypt said, "Ah, let's flee. (00:47:00) Yahweh is fighting this battle on their behalf." And Yahweh said to Moses—

Jon: A muddy river bottom would do that.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. But we are told it was dry because of the east wind.

Jon: That's true. So it's dry. It's not muddy.

Tim: The word "confused" is spelled with the same letters as the basic root word of Hebrew word "*tehom*," which means the chaos waters. And that is for sure a wordplay happening here. He's doing chaos—

Jon: Confusion is pretty chaotic.

Tim: He's de-creating them and disordering their camp, their army. So what he tells Moses is, "The thing you did with your hand to split the waters, now do that again over the waters." This part is pretty brief. What we're told is that the arrival of the morning as Egypt was fleeing, verse 28, “the waters returned and they covered over the chariots and the horsemen and the whole army of Egypt. (00:48:00) And there was not one of them as a remnant."

This is the vocabulary used to describe Noah and the people and animals in the boat ...

Jon: They were the remnant.

Tim: ... they were the remnant remaining. So this gets inverted where Israel's enemies are the anti-remnant. So the sons of Israel went through on dry land. "And the sons of Israel saw”—this is the last sentence, verse 31—"the great hand of Yahweh, what he did to Egypt and they feared Yahweh, and they trusted Yahweh, and in Moses the servant."

So that they passed the test. They went through the waters, they freaked out, they had a freak out, then they go through the test. They die as it were.

Jon: So going through the waters instead of just staying there paralyzed, that was the test.

Tim: Staying there would have been ...

Jon: Failing the test.

Tim: .... failing the test. I mean, they were told to stand there and wait for the deliverance of Yahweh. I guess maybe failing the test would have (00:49:00) been going to surrender to Egypt and saying, "Take us back. We'll be your slave."

Jon: But there's a qualifier there. That's a hard move.

Tim: It's true. They could go around it. I don't know. I mean, clearly the narrative isn't trying to—

Jon: I feel like the test of stand there is not much of a test. What else are they going to do?

Tim: Yeah, that's a good point. That's a good point. I hear that.

Jon: I guess they could sit, but that's not the point. The point is change your perspective.

Tim: Thank you. That's a better way to put it. You think you're about to die ...

Jon: But you're about to see God's salvation.

Tim: ... but I'm telling you're about to live. You're going to go through what—

Jon: The actual test is, are you going to go through the chaotic tunnel or not?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. That's right. So that's the iconic scene.

Jon: Sometimes life is like a chaos tunnel.

Tim: The chaos tunnel.

**Section break (00:49:50)**

Tim: So what follows is another retelling of the same story, but in the form of a poem. Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea ... And actually, there's a long-form of it that Moses leads the people in singing. Then there's a short form of it, which Moses' sister, Miriam, leads the people in singing. That's down in verse 21. Dude, this poem is so rad.

But what's cool is how the poem begins. "Yahweh is my strength and my power. He is for me, salvation (Yeshua). Yahweh,” verse 3, “is a man of war. Yahweh is his name.” So Pharaoh thought he was the mighty warrior, (00:51:00) but it's actually Yahweh. Verse 5, "The deep water ..." This is the word *tehom*. "The abyss waters covered over them. They sank down into the deeps like a stone. Your right hand, Yahweh, your right hand has shattered the enemy." So who was the snake crusher in this story in terms of ...?

Jon: God.

Tim: Yeah, that's interesting. Or Moses.

Jon: Moses outstretched his hand.

Tim: Yeah, Moses outstretched his hand. Remember in one of the signs that Moses was given, he held out his hand with that staff and that staff became a snake that Moses was to grab and take power over. And then he used that same staff to part the waters. And then we're told this is Yahweh's hand crushing that of the enemy.

Jon: He's controlling the snake.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, the snake is under Yahweh's control here. "By the *ruakh* of your nostrils the waters congealed, they stood up in heaps, they coagulated. (00:52:00) Who was like you, Yahweh, among the *elim*?” Just like a variant of the *elohim* on the spiritual beings.

Jon: How do you spell that in English? *Elim*?

Tim: E-L-I-M. That's how you transliterate it. *Elim*. It's actually the word “*elohim”* but minus the H sound. "So you have led your people whom you redeemed, you've led them forward in your loyal love." That word "leading forward" links us back to the paragraph we begin with. Yahweh lead his people out and said, "I'm not going to lead them by the coastal route, because there'll be a war. So I'll lead them through the wilderness."

Jon: "I'll fight the war for them."

Tim: "And I'll fight the war for them." This is key line here, Exodus 15:13. “You've led your people whom you redeemed ...” Ooh, this is the second time the word "redeem" is used. *Gaal*. It means to (00:53:00) purchase a slave’s freedom. To buy them on the slave market and then set them free. "So you have led forth the people that you purchased their freedom and you did that by your loyal love. You led them in strength to your holy dwelling." Wow. We're going to a holy dwelling, I guess.

We start talking about all of the Canaanites who are going to hear what just happened and they're going to freak out when these people arrive at their doorstep. Philistines, the Edomites, the Moabs, Canaanites, these are all ancestors and relatives of Israel. “They are going to be silent like a stone.” So Pharaoh sank like a stone and the Canaanites are going to be silent like a stone. “When your people pass over, the people that you purchased—"

Jon: Is that the same word “redeemed”?

Tim: Different, but it's to buy them. This is key. "You will bring them and you will plant them (00:54:00) on the mountain of your inheritance, at the location of your dwelling."

Jon: This is Eden.

Tim: Eden.

Jon: Being planted on the mountain.

Tim: God's going to plant a garden on a mountain at a place where he dwells. And the word "dwelling" there is spelled with the same letters as the word “*Shabbat”* (Sabbath). "The holy place, Yahweh, that your hands have prepared. Yahweh is king forever and ever."

Jon: Oh, that's interesting. I'm reading ESV as we go. It says, "Yahweh will reign." But we talked about this. King could a verb, which means to reign.

Tim: That's right. The Hebrew noun for "king" is *melech*. The Hebrew verb "to rule as a king" is *malach*. So Yahweh will reign as king forever and ever.

Jon: In Hebrew is it a noun or verb?

Tim: It's a verb.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: He will reign.

Jon: He will reign.

Tim: So you have Yahweh and his people, he reigns over them. (00:55:00) They are the people he purchased. He plants them on a mountain garden where he lives with them forever and ever in a holy place. Amen. So what's interesting is that that's a preview of what's about to happen.

Jon: Right, yeah. Some foreshadowing.

Tim: Yeah, all the way forward to out of the Torah and into the book of Joshua. So as the reader, you're now anticipating that the fulfillment or at least the first stage of fulfillment of this promise will be that. But first, we got to get through the wilderness.

Jon: This is another one of those literary markers then that kind of tells you something's concluding, something new is starting?

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: What's starting next isn’t a new movement, but it's the second half or the second part ...

Tim: The second part of this middle movement.

Jon: ... of this movement.

Tim: That's right. So we just had these three stories. Yahweh leading them out to camp by the sea. What happens at the sea is the deliverance and then the song about the sea, which is about them. And then at the end of the song, we're going to move on from here into the land. And then the next story is, "And they went (00:56:00) further into the wilderness."

So this is the first testing of Israel's trust. And it ends with them trusting in Yahweh. It's another act of creation and de-creation. He de-creates Egypt, but he recreates his people through what you thought was death. He brings them through the chaos waters.

Jon: I know, we're calling it a test because we're going to be tracing the theme of test. Tests will become a little more clear as tests. They are going to be called tests. Here, this isn't called a test. In fact, it feels more just like a rescue mission.

Tim: Yeah, sure. But there's a focus in the story on how the people feel and their fear and their lack of trust in the moment. The whole question is, will they trust?

Jon: And that is a test of sorts.

Tim: It puts their trust to the test. And that's the point. That's the point here.

Jon: I mean, I like these kinds of tests. This is a good test. A test where it's just kind of like, "Here's the way out, don't panic. Well, the test of like, "Look at death in the eyes and know you can trust me," (00:57:00) I mean, that's a difficult thing to do but it seems like a nice perspective to have. And then "And here's the way out through death. Don't be scared. Go with me."

Tim: Let's bring it all the way back to the beginning of this conversation. We said let's let the story begin to define what it looks like when Yahweh tests his people. So Yahweh didn't put any additional banana peels on the sidewalk.

Jon: No, he put up a firewall.

Tim: Totally. Yeah, that's right. But the circumstances themselves because of the evil of Pharaoh, that's what created the test. So in this case, it's someone else's sin and evil that creates a test for God's people. And the test is, are they going to trust God?

Jon: Pharaoh means it as a trap.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Back to our language.

Tim: That's right. That's what he says, "People are trapped in the wilderness."

Jon: "We got them."

Tim: "Now that they are trapped, let's go get them, recover our slaves, or kill them all," or whatever he's going to do. (00:58:00) So yeah, it was a test of trust. And it's not Yahweh being like, "I know what I'll do. I'll cook up this—”

Jon: This new, little maze.

Tim: Like my kids do for Opal. The narratives that follow will, let's keep asking that same question. But at this point let’s just notice that the test comes because of their circumstances. And then what Yahweh does is draw attention to it and say, "Hey, you need to trust and just stand here and do nothing. That's the choice in front of you."

Jon: And that's powerful in and of itself. But also, what's powerful is that oftentimes or sometimes I suppose, a test, a moment of decision is really God giving an opportunity to be rescued.

Tim: Yeah. Some third way. We're talking about moments where—

Jon: Everything looks like death. Death there, death there, death there. And God's like, "Actually, that one, that's the way to life. Just trust me on this." (00:59:00)

Tim: "Trust me." The way—I don't see it. I'm in a situation where I feel like all my options are bad and then there's this one option that seems really bad, but I feel like that's the one that God's leading me to. And then somehow that way becomes the surprise resolution through the crisis. That's the portrait here.

We're echoing themes of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham's own sin has created this cascade of sad consequences. And so Yahweh tests Abram by asking him to give back the life of the son. It's actually Abram, following that way that God pointed out that seems like it leads to death, that that becomes the way to life. That's the ultimate test in the Genesis scroll is the story of Abraham and Isaac.

Jon: I mean, when you're looking through the chaos tunnel, through the Sea of Reeds, there's a hope. Right? It's just kind of scary.

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: There's dry land there. (01:00:00)

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Abraham was not given any dry land. He was just like, "Go sacrifice your kid."

Tim: "Give me my son back, the son that I gave to you."

Jon: It's more like, "Hey, just start walking through the water."

Tim: That's true. You're saying this was a little bit less terrible.

Jon: Less intense, yeah. This kind of test is kind of like they're all bad options. But of all the bad options, the chaos tunnel, you know, give it a shot.

Tim: Yeah, totally. The reason why creation imagery is used here is it's about Yahweh bringing life out of death. Yahweh creating a way out of no way, creating the hope of a garden after passage through the waters and through the wilderness is the image here. Just like the ark landed on top of a high mountain where Noah got off, built an altar, met with God, planted a garden, and it all went wrong. But here similarly we're repeating that (01:01:00) narrative patterning of a promise to go through the wilderness to arrive at a mountain garden ...

Jon: Where they'll be planted.

Tim: ... where they will be planted and meet with God and he will reign over his people. So that's the hope that we have is that this passageway through the flood will arrive them in a new mountain garden. But in the meanwhile, we just have to pass through the wilderness and see what's going to happen next. And what's going to happen next is more tests.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. Next week we're continuing to explore this theme of the test.

Tim: So what Yahweh says is, "Look, I am going to reign. I'm going to cause it to rain bread on you from the skies." So it's going to be a flood of bread, but bread from Heaven, heavenly bread, sky bread.

Jon: Today's show is produced by Cooper Peltz, edited by Dan Gummel and Zach McKinley, and our show notes are by Lindsey Ponder. BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit (01:02:00) and we exist to experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Everything that we make is free because of the support of thousands of people just like you. So thank you so much for being a part of this with us.