

## **Bitter waters turned sweet through the Cross - Tony Pearce**

What does God tell Moses to do? To take a tree and put it in the bitter water and it will make them sweet. Why the tree?

In his work on the Exodus journey, 'A way through the wilderness' Jamie Buckingham explains how this may have worked. The chemicals in the sap of the broken limb of the tree drew the mineral content of the bitter water down to the bottom of the pools, and left only good water on top. He further speculates that even though the waters were now drinkable, there was still a significant magnesium and calcium content in the water. The laxative effect of this would clean out the digestive systems of the children of Israel, cleansing them of common Egyptian ailments such as amoebic dysentery and bilharzia, a weakening disease common among Egyptians. In addition, calcium and magnesium together form the basis of a drug called dolomite – used by some athletes as a performance enhancer in hot weather conditions. At Marah, God provided the right medicine to both clean out their systems, and prepare them for a long, hot march to Sinai.

Another explanation is that the tree represents the cross.

**Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”),<sup>14</sup> that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.**

The curse of the law does not mean that God is cursing the law – He gave the law, the curse = what happens to us because we fail to keep the law.

**‘Cursed is the one who does not confirm *all* the words of this law by observing them.’  
“And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” Deuteronomy 27.26.**

In this case we are all cursed because we all fail to observe the words of the law = sin. It is this curse that makes the bitterness of life and the heavy burden which all of us bear and which is leading inexorably to our death. The bitter water speaks of the curse which is on all human endeavour and leads to death because of sin. The answer is the cross, the tree, where Jesus died for our sins and through which we are saved from the bitterness of sin and death. As we go through the wilderness of this world and face its trials and disappointments and difficulties (and ultimately death if Jesus does not come first), we need to come to the cross, to put Jesus the Messiah crucified into the bitter water of this world's sin and failure and of our own sin and failure and let Him turn our bitterness to sweetness through the redeeming work of the cross.