

The Red Sea *Exodus 14:1 – 15:21*

The people of Israel exit Egypt following the tenth plague that God brought upon the Egyptians – the death of the firstborn. As we saw last week, this is a picture of the redemption of the firstborn. God was redeeming Israel, whom he calls in chapter four of Exodus: “his firstborn son.”

Pharaoh finally yields to Israel’s God – summoning Moses and telling him to get his people out of their country. God leads the people, not in the way they might have expected – a short journey to Canaan on a northern rout. He leads them to the south towards the Red Sea. God did this for several reasons. Two of the most significant, I think, were to deal with Pharaoh and his people in an ultimate manner, and to display his glory to Pharaoh and to the Israelites.

God manifests his presence with the people through the visible means of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God, who delivered Israel out of Egypt, goes before and behind them to demonstrate tangibly that He is with them and will care for them.

Exodus 14:19-20

Now comes the first test of their faith in Yahweh. Let’s look as the story unfolds.

I. The Faith Challenge

Exodus 14:1-4

We are not sure just where the people of Israel encamp. There is no evidence for the specific location of the events that will now occur. There has been a lot of speculation. Some say that this is really the Reed Sea, not the Red Sea – that it was a place where papyrus reeds grew – a place today where you have essentially a swamp and sometimes only a few inches of water. In that scenario, the people of Israel simply waded across the water out of Egypt.

In Philip Graham Ryken’s commentary on Exodus, he writes:

Donald Bridge tells the story of a liberal minister preaching in an old, Bible-believing, African-American church. At a certain point in his sermon the minister referred to the crossing of the Red Sea. “Praise the Lord,” someone shouted. ‘Takin’ all them children through the deep waters. What a mighty miracle!’

However, the minister did not happen to believe in miracles. So he said, rather condescendingly, ‘It was not a miracle. They were in marsh-land, the tide was ebbing, and the children of Israel picked their way across in six inches of water.’

‘Praise the Lord!’ the man shouted again. ‘Drownin’ all them Egyptians in six inches of water. What a mighty miracle!’”

Whether God used natural means to accomplish his miracle or supernatural means to accomplish his purpose, the writer wants us to see that it was God and his power that was behind this momentous event.

Pharaoh, having dismissed the Israelites, has second thoughts – **Ex. 14:5-9**

Moses points out once again that Pharaoh’s actions follow God’s hardening of his heart. He refuses to be defeated by the god of this enslaved people. This is a formidable military force that goes in hot pursuit of the Hebrews.

God is leading the Israelites into a position which makes no military sense. The people are now sandwiched between the Sea and the mightiest military force of that day. Why would God do that? I would suggest at least three reasons:

- 1) To display his might power – to both the Egyptians and to the Israelites;
- 2) To set up the situation to gloriously triumph over Pharaoh, executing his judgment upon his enemy; and,
- 3) To teach the Israelites –
 - a. Showing them their own inability to save themselves, and
 - b. Demonstrating that He, God, would be their protector and deliverer.

Let’s return to the story: **Exodus 14:10-12**

Wow – what a lack of perspective. Did they really think they had it better back in Egypt? There were 400 years worth of graves back in Egypt. What’s happening here? The people are running away from their slavery, but when push comes to shove, their fears are not winning out.

This reminds me of the little boy who was riding his tricycle furiously around the block, over and over again. Finally a policeman stopped and asked him why he was going around and around. The boy said that he was running away from home. Then the policeman asked why he kept going around the block. The boy responded, “Because my mom said that I’m not allowed to cross the street.”

The Israelites were running away from their home of 400 years but, seemingly, saying: “But we didn’t think we would come this far or be in this situation!”

Now we come to God’s salvation. Here is God’s strong work of deliverance of his people. Before commenting on the passage, let’s read it and watch how it unfolds.

II. God’s Salvation – Exodus 14:13-30

God declares through Moses that He will fight for them. They were simply to stand fast and see the salvation of God. There is a parallel to this in the arena of spiritual warfare for the believer today. In Ephesians, chapter six, Paul writes:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. – *Ephesians 6:10-13*

Moses tells the people that there is something going on that was beyond the range of their physical sight. There is a wonderful story later in Israel’s history that demonstrates this very point.

II Kings 6:8-19

The problem with Gehazi wasn’t that he saw too much; it was that he saw too little. The problem with Israel sandwiched between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea wasn’t that they saw too much, but they saw too little. When we find ourselves between a rock and a hard place, and begin to doubt God’s love, concern and care for us, it isn’t that we see too much, but that we see too little.

Now back to the text: verse 15 seems a little strange: **Verse 15.**

Apparently the people cried out, not liking Moses’ instruction. Yet, God gets on Moses’ case. Why? I think it has to do with the identification of Moses, the deliverer, with the people. He stands in for them before God; thus God addressing him and asking the question.

Moses is to tell the people that God is going to destroy Pharaoh’s army for his glory. Many people have a hard time with a passage like this that says that God is glorified by killing his enemies. It feeds their belief that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, while the God of the New Testament is a God of love and mercy.

But a reading of the Bible shows that to be false. There is a lot of grace in the Old Testament – grace towards Adam and Eve, towards Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, etc. There is God’s mercy towards Rahab, Jonah and the Ninevites. We see God’s forgiveness towards David and so many others. God’s everlasting love is mentioned over and over again in the Old Testament.

And there are clear statements in the New Testament about God’s wrath and anger against evil and evil doers. This challenges our views of sin and God’s righteousness. How nice if God is just a kindly old grandfather figure who will overlook sin and, in the end, welcome everyone into his heaven. But is just isn’t so.

God reminds his people, when he gives them the Law, that he is a jealous God – a God of holiness and righteousness and justice, a God who does everything for his own glory and will share his glory with no one else.

God delivers the people through the Sea on dry ground. God did for Israel what the people could not do for themselves. What a picture this is of our salvation. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

And then God executes his judgment on Pharaoh and his army. Again we need to see the significance of this battle in the greater context of God’s battle against Egypt’s gods. Ryken writes:

God was also judging Egypt’s gods, and this too was for his glory. It is ironic that the Egyptians were defeated at daybreak because that is when their sun god was supposedly rising in the east. But Ra could not save them.

Nor, we should add, could Pharaoh who was worshipped as the son of Ra.

The result of God’s salvation, his deliverance, is fear and faith:

Exodus 14:31

The people had valid reasons for both: fear and faith. In response to this great work of God’s power, Moses and the people sing a song. Moses or someone else captures what they are thinking and feeling having experienced the salvation of God.

III. The Song of Salvation

We are going to read the song and then look at some things closer. Let’s do something a little different. We are going to read the song responsively. I will read the un-bolded text and you will follow Becky in reading the sections in bold.

Read from Service Program – Exodus 15:1-18

We might divide the song into two parts: verses 1-12 are about the destruction of the Egyptians, while verses 13-17 are about what God is going to do regarding them.

The song is a learning tool – a memory device. They were to recall what God had done on their behalf, not only in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians but also in Egypt's defeat and destruction. It was to remind them that it was God who had saved them, had delivered them.

The Exodus was to play an ongoing role in the life of Israel. This event was such a defining moment in their history. This theme, for example, is clearly identifiable in the writings of the prophet Isaiah. Some 700 years later, he binds the experience of Israel's deliverance from Egypt with the promise of God's deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. Here's an example from chapter 43:

Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick. – *Is. 43:16-17*

The Exodus also has its parallelisms with Jesus. Just one example: In Luke's gospel, chapter 9, he describes the transfiguration of Jesus up on the mountain. Jesus is transformed, that is, the glory within Jesus as the Son of God, was visibly manifested without, such that his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. Luke writes:

And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. – *Luke 9:30-31*

They were obviously talking about Jesus' coming death and the significance of his death. But here's what's fascinating. The word "departure" in the Greek language of the New Testament is *exodos*. I don't think there is any escaping some identification with Moses and Israel. Jesus would pass through the rivers of death into life.

This is such a picture for us as believers: we have passed through the waters of death into life in our identification with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. We too have experienced deliverance from slavery. In our case, it is slavery to sin. Our salvation, our deliverance, is by the mighty hand of God.

Paul writes to the Corinthians and brings the exodus experience into his teaching about how they were to live their lives. He says:

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

– *I Corinthians 10:1-4*

Paul will go on to warn his readers to not yield to sin as the Israelites did – but that’s for a later discussion.

In Romans six, Paul again uses this imagery to describe the consequences of our union with Christ. He writes:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. – *Romans 6:3-4*

The result of this union with Christ, this salvation / deliverance is described as going from death to life. Recorded in John’s gospel, chapter five, Jesus says:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but as passed from death to life. – *John 5:24*

This is Israel’s exodus – a baptism into the waters that results in life. God’s people, going through the Red Sea, leave their old way of life and enter into a new life.

I want you to notice how the Song of Moses captures aspects of God’s character. There are several attributes of God that he identifies in recounting God’s work for them.

- 1) God’s eternity** – In verse 3, he identifies God by his covenant name – Yahweh. Moses remembers his experience on the mountain where God manifests himself in the burning bush. In response to Moses’ question as to his name, God says: “I Am That I Am.” This was the self-existent one; “I AM” being the Hebrew verb of being. “Who are you?” “I AM.”
- 2) God’s power – Verse 6a.** God is pictured in verse three as a warrior. It was by the power of his mighty hand that he delivered Israel.
- 3) God’s wrath** – the expression of his holiness: **Verses 6b-7**

Do you remember that scene at the end of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*? Lucy is standing with her friend, the faun Timnus – half goat/half man. She sees Aslan walking away; she cannot understand his departure.

“He'll be coming and going” (Timnus) said. “One day you'll see him and another you won't. He doesn't like being tied down--and of course he has other countries to attend to. It's quite all right. He'll often drop in. Only you mustn't press him. He's wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.” — C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Mariano DiGangi writes:

This wrath of God is not a vehement, irrational, vindictive, arbitrary, capricious venting of some supernatural spleen. It is the manifestation of the repugnance of a holy God against all who defile, disrupt and destroy the world that He has made.

God's wrath is his holy revulsion against anything which is unholy, unrighteous. If God did not act this way towards evil and evil doers, he would not be God. He must uphold his justice which conforms to his holiness.

4) God's supremacy – Verse 11a. The answer is there is none. It is the same point made later in Israel's history by the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:18-26

5) God's holiness – Verse 11b. God is separate – that's the basic meaning of the root word for *holy*. He is separate from all else. There is no one like him in the perfections of his being. This attribute of God is central to who God is. It governs all of his other attributes; so his love is a holy love; his justice is a holy justice; his mercy is a holy mercy.

6) God's love – Verse 13. God had chosen to set his love upon this people. And so, he made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants – not because they were deserving of his mercy and grace, but because he chose to bestow his love upon them. We see this same choice upon those who are believers in Christ.

The conclusion of the song is like a banner written over all the words: The LORD will reign forever and ever. It is the “amen,” the benediction, the exclamation point, the overarching truth. This God who delivers, who saves, will reign forever and ever. Amen.

The New Testament epistle writer Jude concludes his letter with this:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through

Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

As you face the uncertainties of life, write these words as a banner over your understanding: “The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

Conclusion

Two final thoughts regarding this Song of Moses.

1) Notice that it is not just a song about God, but a song sung to God. First of all, God is the focus. The emphasis here is on the one worshipped, not on the one worshipping. It isn't that the worshiper is unimportant or insignificant, but that the central focus is on God. So many songs – some traditional, but more so contemporary, are all about us, the worshipper. How we feel about God; how we feel about our salvation.

Again – don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. But more important is that we are directing our attention, our praise and worship towards God. Tim Keller writes:

When we praise God, we are not discussing our enjoyment of God, but the praising is the consummation and the completion of our worship as we glorify God.

It is a good exercise to examine the songs we sing to see where the focus is. God certainly wants us to enjoy our relationship with him. But more importantly, we are to praise him, the one with whom we fellowship – our Savior and Redeemer.

2) While we focus on God, we also see how personal this relationship is. Notice **Verse 2** again. Five times you have the word “my.” This God who is exalted, worshipped, praised, glorified in song is our God – not some distant being, removed from his people, but personal, intimate, familiar.

Conclusion

Philip Ryken tells the following story in his *Exodus* commentary:

In 1792 a group of settlers traveled to Africa. There were more than a thousand of them, all of African descent. Some had worked as slaves on American plantations. Others had served as soldiers in the British army and then moved north to live in Canada. Together they planned to resettle what is now Sierra Leone, on land purchased as a Province of Freedom.

The settlers were all professing Christians. When they reached Africa, they marched ashore singing a hymn by William Hammond (1719-1783), the song “Awake, and Sing the Song.”

Listen to the words and see the connection:

Awake, and sing the song
Of Moses and the Lamb;
Wake, every heart and every tongue,
To praise the Savior’s name.

Sing of His dying love;
Sing of His rising power;
Sing how He intercedes above
For those whose sins He bore.

Sing on your heavenly way,
Ye ransomed sinners, sing;
Sing on, rejoicing every day
In Christ, the eternal King.

Soon shall we hear Him say,
Ye blessèd children, come!
Soon will He call us hence away,
To our eternal home.

There shall each raptured tongue
His endless praise proclaim;
And sweeter voices tune the song
Of Moses and the Lamb.

Ryken continues:

It was an appropriate hymn to sing. The settlers had been released from captivity, they had crossed the sea, and now they were entering the promised land. So they sang of the prophet Moses, who brought Israel out of Egypt. They also sang to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who had set them free to serve God in a new land. God had done such a great thing for them that it called forth a song of praise.