

Exodus 15:1 – 27

- ¹ Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said,
'I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;
The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.
- ² The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
This is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will extol Him.
- ³ The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is His name.
- ⁴ Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea;
And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
- ⁵ The deeps cover them;
They went down into the depths like a stone.
- ⁶ Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power,
Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.
- ⁷ And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You;
You send forth Your burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff.
- ⁸ At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up,
The flowing waters stood up like a heap;
The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea.
- ⁹ The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil;
My desire shall be gratified against them;
I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.
- ¹⁰ You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them;
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.
- ¹¹ Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?
Who is like You, majestic in holiness,
Awesome in praises, working wonders?
- ¹² You stretched out Your right hand,
The earth swallowed them.
- ¹³ In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed;
In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.
- ¹⁴ The peoples have heard, they tremble;
Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.
- ¹⁵ Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;
The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them;
All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.
- ¹⁶ Terror and dread fall upon them;
By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone;
Until Your people pass over, O LORD,
Until the people pass over whom You have purchased.
- ¹⁷ You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance,
The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling,
The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.
- ¹⁸ The LORD shall reign forever and ever.
¹⁹ For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea,
And the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them,
But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea.'
- ²⁰ Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand,
And all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing.
- ²¹ Miriam answered them, 'Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;
The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.'

²² Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ ²⁵ Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. ²⁶ And He said, ‘If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.’ ²⁷ Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Salvation* (15:2): This is only the third time the word *salvation* has been used in the Pentateuch. The first was when Jacob mysteriously said, ‘For your salvation I wait, O God’ while he was prophesying over each of his sons (Gen.49:18). The second time was an explicit reference to the exodus event in Exodus 14:13. This is now the third time in Exodus 15:2.
- *Anticipating the Garden Land*: Marah and Elim (15:22 – 27). The word ‘Marah’ means ‘bitter.’ The sweet water and date fruit are demonstrations of God’s provision, but also reminders that God always wanted His people to dwell in the garden of Eden (Gen.2). They anticipate God bringing His people Israel to a new garden land.

*Literary Outline of the Song of Deliverance*¹

- A. The Birth of Praise: Yahweh is Salvation (15:1 – 2)
 - B. Victory Song: The Past – Yahweh is a Warrior, Egyptians Are Defeated (15:3 – 10)
 - C. The Uniqueness of Yahweh Above All Gods! (15:11 – 12)
 - B’. Victory Song: The Future – Yahweh is a Gardener, Planting His People in the Land (15:13 – 17)
- A’. The Permanence of Praise: Yahweh is Enthroned Forever (15:18 – 21)
 - Epilogue: Anticipation of a New Garden Land (15:22 – 27)

*A Literary Pattern: Narrative – Poetry – Epilogue*²

- Creation narrative (Gen.1:1 – 26), poetry (1:27), and epilogue (1:28 – 2:3)
- Garden narrative (Gen.2:4 – 22), poetry (2:23), and epilogue (2:24)
- Fall narrative (Gen.3:1 – 13), poetry (3:14 – 19), epilogue (3:20 – 24)
- Cain narrative (Gen.4:1 – 22), poetry (4:23), epilogue (4:24-26)
- Noah narrative (Gen.6:8 – 9:24), poetry (9:25 – 27), epilogue (9:28 – 29)
- Abraham narrative (Gen.11:27 – 24:59), poetry (24:60), epilogue (24:61 – 67)
- Jacob narrative (Gen.25 – 48), poetry (49:1 – 27), epilogue (49:28 – 33)
- Joseph narrative (Gen.37 – 48), poetry (48:15 – 16), epilogue (48:17 – 22)
- Exodus narrative (Ex.1 – 14), poetry (Ex.15:1 – 18), epilogue (Ex.15:19 – 21)
- Balaam narrative (Num.22:1 – 24:2), poetry (Num.24:3 – 9; 15 – 24), epilogue (Num.24:25)
- Moses narrative (Dt.1 – 31), poetry (Dt.32:1 – 33:29), epilogue (Dt.34:1 – 12)

¹ Adapted by Mako A. Nagasawa from Walter Brueggemann, ‘Exodus,’ in *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:799.

² John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.35 – 37

Questions

1. In the movie *Frozen*, when Princess Elsa sings the song *Let It Go*, what does it reflect about her story? It is a transitional moment for her, when she leaves home, embraces her real identity and her power, and experiences great freedom and creativity. What would happen if that song never happened in the movie? She would just be a character who perfected the cold shoulder. Similarly, the *Song by the Sea* here in Exodus 15 lets us see a great transition in the story of God's people.
2. The Birth of Praise (15:1 – 2)
 - a. How is salvation described here?
 - i. As an act of deliverance, rescue. God hurled the enemies, with their weaponry and superior force, into the sea.
 - ii. Notice the reference to 'my father's God' set parallel to 'This is my God' in v.2? Moses is personalizing his faith, because in his generation and to him has God given a mighty gift. But it's important to say that this God also worked in the chosen family of Genesis 12 – 50 because then, God brought Abraham and Sarah out of Egypt and Gerar with plenty, Isaac and Rebekah out of Gerar with abundance, Jacob and his family out of Aram with great flocks. When God delivered His people before to return them to the garden land, miraculously, though much more subtly than the exodus, He did so by providing for them. He is doing the same here. Now that God brings the whole nation Israel out of Egypt, with lots of provisions, this confirms that this is the same God.
3. The Victory Song, Past (15:4 – 10)
 - a. What kind of warrior is God?
 - i. A warrior who fights on behalf of His defenseless people, against their powerful enemies.
 - ii. A warrior who fights using the fabric of the creation itself
 - b. What kind of anthropomorphisms are here?
 - i. God has a 'right hand' (v.6, 9, 12)
 - ii. God has 'nostrils' from which He blasts the wind (v.8)
 - c. How are images of water and fire mixed here?
 - i. Most references are to the waters, but there is the language of God's 'burning anger' in v.7, consuming them like chaff
4. The Uniqueness of YHWH (15:11 – 12)
 - a. Recall that the ten words of God's plagues on Egypt were like the ten words of creation in Genesis 1, but in reverse. They undid the proper boundaries between things. For someone familiar with Genesis 1, or reflecting on it at the same time, what would this similarity have meant?
 - i. Real intervention in real history! Not just a philosophical teacher god (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism), but an activist God.
 - ii. God is master of creation and nature – He doesn't just embody nature in Himself, just embodying its cycles. He is master over it.
 - iii. A good God who will defeat of evil – in a preliminary sense now, foreshadowing a future sense on a deeper level later
 - iv. God brings people back to the creation order that He began with. The Israelites would have known something about the story of Genesis, including the Adam and Eve story, because they knew that Abraham and Sarah were a new kind of Adam and Eve, and God's attempt to undo the sin of humanity to restore people to who they were always meant to be.
 - b. State: This had a big impact on the Jewish mind, and the rest of the world. Historian Thomas Cahill writes:

'We can read the Bible (as do postmodernists) as a jumble of unrelated texts, given a false and superficial unity by redactors of the exilic period and later. But this is to ignore not only the powerful emotional and spiritual effect that much of the Bible has on readers, even on readers who would rather not be so moved, but also its cumulative impact on whole societies. The Bible's great moments – the thunderous 'lekh-lekha' spoken to Avram, the secret Name of God revealed to cowering Moshe, Miryam's song on the far shore, God's Ten Words, David's Good Shepherd, Isaiah's Holy Mountain – are hard to brush aside as merely human expressions with no relationship to the deepest meanings of our own individual lives. Nor can we imagine the great liberation movements of modern history without reference to the Bible. Without the Bible we would never have known the abolitionist

movement, the prison-reform movement, the antiwar movement, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the movements of indigenous and dispossessed peoples for their human rights, the antiapartheid movement in South Africa, the Solidarity movement in Poland, the free-speech and pro-democracy movements in such Far Eastern countries as South Korea, the Philippines, and even China. These movements of modern times have all employed the language of the Bible; and it is even impossible to understand their great heroes and heroines – people like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Mother Jones, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Helder Camara, Oscar Romero, Rigoberto Menchu, Corazon Aquino, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Charity Kaluki Ngilu, Harry Wu – without recourse to the Bible.

‘Beyond these movements, which have commonly taken the Book of Exodus as their blueprint, are other forces that have shaped our world, such as capitalism, communism, and democracy. Capitalism and communism are both bastard children of the Bible, for both are processive faiths, modeled on biblical faith and demanding of their adherents that they always hold in their hearts a belief in the future and keep before their eyes the vision of a better tomorrow, whether that tomorrow contains a larger gross domestic product or a workers’ paradise. Neither ideology could have risen in the cyclical East, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, or Shinto. But because capitalism and communism are processive faiths without God, each is a form of madness – a fantasy without a guarantee. Democracy, in contrast, grows directly out of the Israelite vision of individuals, subjects of value because they are images of God, each with a unique and personal destiny. There is no way that it could have ever been ‘self-evident that all men are created equal’ without the intervention of the Jews.’³

- c. Illus: When I home schooled my son John for 6th grade, I had him read Thomas Cahill’s book. I asked him this question: ‘Throughout his book, Cahill explains that the Jews had a different view [than all other peoples] of time, the future, meaning, and God. What evidence does Cahill give for why they had these views?’ He wrote, at the beginning of his answer, ‘There is one clear and distinct answer that Cahill gives us for why the Jews had a different view of time, the future, meaning, and God. The answer *is* God.’
5. The Victory Song, Future (15:13 – 17)
 - a. What does it mean that God ‘will plant them in the mountain of His inheritance? The place... The sanctuary...’ (v.17)? How does Moses know that God is going to build a ‘sanctuary’ (v.18)? Because Moses met God on Mount Horeb (Ex.3:1), and God told him He wanted to meet Israel on that mountain, too (Ex.3:12). We will see that encounter (Ex.19). It will be like a holy marriage between God and His people. But the wider pattern will be fulfilled when God brings them into the garden land, and plant Himself on Mount Zion for a while.
 - b. When is this song written? For what occasion is it to be sung? Notice that Moses is anticipating God’s victory in Canaan as well! So Moses wants Israel to sing it not just now, but when God brings them into the promised land.
 - c. What would it be like to say, ‘Thank you God for helping me grow to old age, having a rich and abundant life, with lots of godly impact on others?’ If it hasn’t happened yet, it seems weird, doesn’t it?
 - d. God, through Moses, is training Israel to exercise faith! It’s even faith in God to be victorious in the future, and bring them into the land, and be faithful to His promise and creational pattern.
6. The Permanence of Praise (15:18 – 21)
 - a. Buddhism tends to teach that emotions need to be tamped down. What does this episode suggest about how God wants to cultivate our emotional lives? To celebrate what God does in goodness to His people, to hope with joy before and celebrate with praise afterwards.
7. Epilogue: Reminder of the Garden of Eden, Anticipation of the new Garden Land (15:22 – 27)
 - a. Why doesn’t God just make the water sweet? Why use the tree? Because there is a principle of sacrifice that God is giving. God invests Himself into something in the creation, and offers His life to save His people. We’ve already seen this with the Tree of Life in the original Garden, and then after the fall, the sacrifice of animals. God associates Himself with, and even inhabits, something in creation to be consumed by human beings for our life and health.

³ Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.256 – 257

- b. Why twelve springs? One for each tribe of Israel!
 - c. Why seventy date palms? Seventy was the number of people in Jacob's family who went into Egypt (Gen.46:8 – 27).
 - d. So this is very personalized to Israel. It's as if God had prepared a banquet for them in the wilderness for a long time, with place settings just for them, and their favorite foods. He was just waiting for them to get here. It's a bit like Joseph in Egypt, setting the table for his brothers with their birth order in mind, astonishing them.
 - e. What does this little episode tell us about God? Such a personal touch, this God has.
8. Anticipation of greater songs
- a. We find the same theology expounded by the prophets. Isaiah's poetry taught the exiles to sing their victory songs long before the second exodus became history. Drawing on the imagery of the Exodus, Isaiah challenged the downtrodden exiles to sing with the assurance of victory and freedom of a second exodus.

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord;
 Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago.
 Was it not You who cut Rahab in pieces,
 Who pierced the dragon?
 Was it not You who dried up the sea,
 The waters of the great deep;
 Who made the depths of the sea a pathway
 For the redeemed to cross over?
 So the ransomed of the Lord will return
 And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
 And everlasting joy will be on their heads.
 They will obtain gladness and joy,
 And sorrow and sighing will flee away... (Isa 51:9 – 11)
 For you will go out with joy
 And be led forth with peace;
 The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you,
 And all the trees of the field will clap their hands. (Isa 55:12)

- b. And we find the song of Moses referred to when we are delivered from mortality, our own flesh, the enemy, and worldly opposition. According to the book of Revelation, when Jesus returns and defeats all his enemies, we will find ourselves not by the Red Sea but beside a sea of glass, singing this 'Song of Moses' with the 'Song of the Lamb.'

And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty;
 Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!
 Who will not fear, O Lord,
 And glorify Your name?
 For You alone are holy;
 For all the nations will come and worship before you,
 For your righteous acts have been revealed. (Rev.15:2 – 4)

Literary Outline of the Song by the Sea, Exodus 15:1 – 21

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And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.*

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The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.*

¹⁸ The LORD shall reign forever and ever.

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