



Exodus - Chapter Fifteen

I. Exodus 1:1-18:27 - The Exodus of Israel from Egypt (continues)

I.d. Exodus 7:8-15:21 - The Plagues and the Exodus (continues/concludes)

I.d.xi Exodus 11:1-15:21 - Tenth plague: Final sign (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Fifteen

The primary focus of this chapter is that of thanksgiving for deliverance. First Moses leads the Israelites in songs of praise; then Miriam takes up the lead with the women dancing, singing and playing musical instruments.

The Israelites then set out into the wilderness of Shur. For three days they were without water and when they arrived at Marah, the water there was bitter and the Israelites complained to Moses. He cried out to the Lord who showed him a piece of wood, which was to be cast into the water for it to become sweet and drinkable.

God tested the Israelites at Marah by saying that if they remained obedient to him he would never bring on them any of the plagues he had wrought against Egypt in their sight. They then travelled on to Elim, where the conditions were much more favourable.

I.d.xi.11 Exodus 15:1-19 - The Song of Moses

Moses' song of praise is a celebration of the triumph over Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea as representative of the Lord's power and rule. It is similar to other songs or psalms in both the OT and NT that celebrate particular events that reveal God's character: e.g. Deborah and Barak's song in response to victory over Sisera and Jabin of Canaan (Judges 5:1-31); Hannah's song at the birth of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10); Mary's response to the angel's news and Elizabeth's greeting (Luke 1:46-55); and Zechariah's prophecy after the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:68-79).

¹ Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

‘I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

Exodus 15:1

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. This remarkable song is assumed to have come spontaneously as Moses led the nation into the wilderness on the other side of the Red Sea. They sang this song when their salvation was real to them. They sang it when the power and the presence of God were real to them.

I will sing to the Lord. One great principle of worship is that it is unto the Lord, not unto man. When believers worship God in song, their audience is the Lord himself and not the people around them. God’s awesome deeds often lead people to sing new songs to him in the moment of their deliverance, including: <<*He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord*>> (Psalm 40:3), <<*I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you, the one who gives victory to kings, who rescues his servant David*>> (Psalm 144:9-10), <<*Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants*>> (Isaiah 42:10), and: <<*They sing a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth’*>> (Revelation 5:9-10).

Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. They praised God because he did what Israel could not do. The drowning of Pharaoh’s army by the hand of the Lord is the central event celebrated by the song, and it is referred to with various images: ‘cast into the sea’ and ‘sunk in the Red Sea’ (v.4); ‘floods covered them,’ and ‘they went down like a stone’ (v.5); ‘the sea covered them; they sank like lead’ (v.10); ‘the earth swallowed them’ (v.12).

² The Lord is my strength and my might,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

³ The Lord is a warrior;
the Lord is his name.

Exodus 15:2-3

The Lord is my strength and my might. When a believer lets God be their strength, he will also be their song. They will sing because of the victory won by the great strength of the Lord. They will have a singing joy in their life because his strength will not let them down.

He has become my salvation. This is a glorious phrase. It recognises that one cannot save oneself, but God must become one's salvation. This is indeed a cause for rejoicing: <<*But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!*>> (Jonah 2:9), and: <<*Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation*>> (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

The singular reference to my father's God echoes the Lord's words to Moses at the Burning Bush, which indicate that this phrase refers to <<*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*>> (3:6), and equips Israel also to say of him this is my God.

- 4 'Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea;
his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
- 5 The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.

Exodus 15:4-5

The Red Sea. In 14:2 it was referred to simply as 'the sea' but now it is referred to by its proper name of *Yam Suph*. Refer to the comment made on 13:18.

- 6 Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power —
your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.
- 7 In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries;
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.

Exodus 15:6-7

The reference to the Lord's right hand takes up God's words to Moses describing the means by which Israel would come out of Egypt; refer to 6:1 and 7:4-5. The right hand was thought to be the hand of skill and power. When God works with his right hand, it is a work of skill and power. Obviously, this is the use of

anthropomorphism, understanding something about God by using a human figure of speech, even though it does not literally apply.

This idea of the right hand is used in the Scriptures more than fifty times, including the following passages:

- Psalm 45:4: God's right hand teaches those who obey him.
- Psalm 48:10: God's right hand is full of righteousness.
- Psalm 77:10: Remembrance of the years of the right hand of the Most High.
- Psalm 110:1: The Father invites the Son to sit at his right hand.
- Habakkuk 2:16: The cup of God's judgement is held in his right hand.
- Ephesians 1:20: Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father.

⁸ At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps 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 have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them."

¹⁰ You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Exodus 15:8-10

While the words of the enemy refer first of all to the actions of the Egyptians, i.e., I will pursue I will overtake, who intended to bring Israel back to serve as slaves, refer to 14:5, they also extend beyond the particular events of the Red Sea and are representative of the pride and desire of any adversary of the Lord and his people, i.e. divide the spoil, destroy.

The theme of this part of the song appears in other parts of Scripture, including: <<All these curses shall come upon you, pursuing and overtaking you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God, by observing the commandments and the decrees that he commanded you>> (Deuteronomy 28:45), <<O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have repaid my ally with harm or plundered my foe without cause, then let the enemy pursue and overtake me, trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust>> (Psalm 7:3-5), and: <<Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude; she lives now among the nations, and finds no resting-place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress>> (Lamentations 1:3).

- 11 'Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendour, doing wonders?
- 12 You stretched out your right hand,
the earth swallowed them.

Exodus 15:11-12

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? If the people of Egypt still did not know who the Lord was, the people of Israel did. They knew the Lord was not like any of the false gods of Egypt or Canaan. Worship should proclaim the superiority of the Lord God over anything else that claims to be god.

In light of the events that have taken place, the rhetorical questions of this verse imply that there is no one among the gods of the nations like the Lord; refer also to 12:12 and 20:3. In a similar song, Hannah proclaims the complementary answers to the questions of this verse: <<*There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God*>> (1 Samuel 2:2).

Introduction to Exodus 15:13-19

These verses, like the song as a whole, describe Israel's journey out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan. They anticipate the fear that will befall the surrounding peoples, the Philistines, Edomites, and Moabites, as well as the Canaanites.

- 13 'In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

Exodus 15:13

The term redeemed refers to God's dealings for the sake of his people, rescuing them from danger and fostering the conditions in which their faithfulness may flourish; as confirmed by: <<*Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement"*>> (Exodus 6:6), <<*With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph*>> (Psalm 77:15), and: <<*Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem*>> (Isaiah 52:9).

- 14 The peoples heard, they trembled;
pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia.
- 15 Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;

trembling seized the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away.

- 16 Terror and dread fell upon them;
by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone
until your people, O Lord, passed by,
until the people whom you acquired passed by.

Exodus 15:14-16

All the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. Moses and the children of Israel knew that the victory also said something to the enemies of Israel. They would become afraid when they heard of the great things God did for Israel.

Terror and dread fell upon them. Some forty years later Rahab the prostitute from Jericho told the Israeli spies: <<*For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt*>> (Joshua 2:10a). The people of Canaan did hear of what God did for Israel and some responded with godly fear.

The people whom you acquired is an image for the way that God acquired his people through great deeds; this is confirmed by: <<*Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago, which you redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage. Remember Mount Zion, where you came to dwell*>> (Psalm 74:2).

- 17 You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession,
the place, O Lord, that you made your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established.

- 18 The Lord will reign for ever and ever.'

- 19 When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

Exodus 15:17-19

On the mountain of your own possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode. In one sense the whole hilly country of Canaan is to be God's dwelling. But his abode may be a more specific reference to the hill of Jerusalem, where God's temple would later stand.

The Lord will reign for ever and ever. After such a great victory it can be sensed that Israel really believed this, and they were really ready to let the Lord reign over them. This state of victory and surrender did not last very long. Yet, the enduring truth remains - the Lord shall reign forever and ever. This Song of Moses echoes all the way to the Book of Revelation, where a multitude that has come from great suffering, has experienced great victory, and stands on the shores of a great sea, sing this song: <<***And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: 'Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations!'***>> (Revelation 15:3).

The heart, the spirit of this song of Moses rings true in the people of God, who want to praise him and thank him for all the good he has done for his people. They sing in view of deliverance, of victory, of defence, and of confidence.

I.d.xi.12 Exodus 15:20-21 - The Song of Miriam

Moses' song of praise is followed by the women playing tambourines and dancing and Miriam singing the first lines of Moses' song.

²⁰ Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. ²¹ And Miriam sang to them:

'Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.'

Exodus 15:20-21

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister. This is the first mention of Miriam by name, and she is described as the sister of Aaron, so she is therefore also the sister of Moses (4:14). <<***The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram: Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam***>> (Numbers 26:59), and: <<***The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar***>> (1 Chronicles 6:3), seems to indicate that Moses had only one sister. It is not known for sure that it was his sister who supervised the launching of the basket onto the Nile River to preserve his life (2:4), and then arranged the hiring of Moses' mother as his nurse. Based on Numbers 26:59, it can be said this was probably - almost certainly - Miriam. She was the older sister of Moses. It can also be seen that Miriam had some kind of prophetic gift. Later she used her leadership position in an unwise and ungodly way - to challenge the authority of Moses; refer to Numbers Chapter 12.

Other prophetesses recorded in the bible are: Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3), Anna (Luke 2:36), and Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9).

All the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. On this occasion Miriam led the women's choir. The men fell silent to listen to the women and to watch them dance as they take up the praise of God.

Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. Miriam leads the women in singing a verse that repeats the first verse of the song. It is not clear if they went on to repeat the whole of the song or not as this is not recorded.

I.e Exodus 15:22-18:27 - The Journey

Israel journeys from Egypt to Rephidim and responds to difficulties like the need for water (vv.22-27 and 17:1-7), and food (16:1-36). The narrative also includes two difficult situations the people face while encamped at Rephidim (17:1): the external attack by another nation (17:8), and the internal question of how to help the people make decisions according to the Lord's statutes (18:1-27). From Rephidim Israel will make their final short journey to the wilderness of Sinai.

I.e.i Exodus 15:22-27 - Bitter Water Made Sweet

The people of Israel respond to a lack of water at Marah in a manner similar to their grumbling against Moses at the Red Sea (14:10-12). They do not yet trust that the Lord's presence with them is sufficient for their protection and provision, which will be a recurring struggle in the journey to Sinai, and ultimately lead to the situation through which this generation of Israel will be not be allowed to enter Canaan.

²² Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went for three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah. ²⁴ And the people complained against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?' ^{25a} He cried out to the Lord; and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

Exodus 15:22-25a

Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. God's man led them, but he led them an unusual way. Into the wilderness of Shur was outside the major trade route along the sea.

They went for three days in the wilderness and found no water. Three days is the maximum time the human body can go without water in the desert.

When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. It must have seemed like a cruel joke; after three waterless days, they finally came upon water and found that water undrinkable.

That is why it was called Marah. Marah means bitter and that is just how Naomi felt when she returned to her homeland without a husband or her sons: <<***She said to them, ‘Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me>>*** (Ruth 1:20).

With the large number of people and livestock coming out of Egypt, the inability to find drinkable water is a significant problem. However, Israel has just experienced the Lord’s power over the waters of the Red Sea and thus their choice to grumble against Moses about the lack of something to drink is ironic. The signs in Egypt confirmed Moses as the Lord’s chosen leader of his people Israel, and Israel needs to faithfully appropriate what has been revealed to them.

The people complained against Moses. Although the people of Israel had just seen the power of the Lord unforgettably demonstrated, they nevertheless forgot and failed to trust the Lord: <<***But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things>>*** (Matthew 6:30-32). In contrast to their unbelief, Moses cried to the Lord to deliver the people from their distress.

The Lord showed him a piece of wood. In response to Moses’ cry for help, the Lord intervenes by causing the water to become sweet. Although some have proposed a naturalistic explanation for this, it seems more likely that it was entirely the Lord’s direct intervention, i.e. the Lord showed Moses what to do.

In his work on the Exodus journey, Buckingham explains how this may have worked naturally. The chemicals in the sap of the broken limb drew the mineral content 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 Egyptian peasants. In addition, calcium and magnesium together form the basis of a drug called dolomite, which is 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. It could be

said that God was not only interested in getting the children of Israel out of Egypt, he also wanted to get Egypt out of the children of Israel, both physically and spiritually.

^{25b} There the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test. ²⁶ He said, 'If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you.'

Exodus 15:25b-26

There the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test. The purpose of the event at Marah is made clear. The statute was to demonstrate, by means of testing, the principle, i.e. an ordinance, that if the people would carefully listen to the voice of the Lord, he would graciously care for them as their healer. It had yet to be demonstrated by testing whether the children of Israel were a worshipping people who occasionally murmured, or if they were a murmuring people who occasionally worshipped. Their true nature would be revealed in times of testing, as Paul indicates: <<*For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

The statute calls Israel to give heed to all that he has commanded, e.g. Passover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and the consecration of the firstborn, and all that he will reveal further, which requires implicitly that the people follow Moses as the one through whom they will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord.

The Lord's reference to himself as the one who heals you indicates that Israel has already been graciously spared from what happened to the Egyptians and that faithfulness is the means by which they will continue to appropriate the blessings of the covenant relationship with the Lord; refer to 23:25. The statute given here is the seed of that which Moses will give the next generation of Israel before they enter the land: <<*If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the Lord your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors; he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, in the land that he swore to your ancestors to give you. You shall be the most blessed of peoples, with neither sterility nor barrenness among you or your livestock. The Lord will turn away from you every illness; all the dread*>>

diseases of Egypt that you experienced, he will not inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you>> (Deuteronomy 7:12-15).

²⁷ Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water.

Exodus 15:27

Elim, as confirmed by Numbers 33:9, was perhaps an oasis in Wadi Gharandel. With its twelve springs and seventy palm trees it signified to Israel once again that, since the Lord is leading them, they should not conclude too quickly that they know the meaning of their circumstances, especially when they cannot yet see how the Lord will work on their behalf, just as they had not foreseen the parting the Red Sea.

Elim was wonderful - a place of provision, with 12 wells and 70 palm trees. Yet there was no new revelation of God at Elim as there was at Marah, where God revealed himself as Jehovah-Rapha, that is, 'I the Lord am your healer'.