

DHW

LESSON 13

The Book of Exodus

Chapter 15

INTRODUCTION

The opening word of this chapter *then* (Exodus 15:1) links the past experiences of the children of Israel (Exodus 1-14) with this chapter, which is the beginning of a new section continuing to chapter 18. In this new section, the LORD was building the faith and trust of His people in Him through their journey in the wilderness. Their sad and sorrowful experiences in Egypt were now ended with a celebration of victory and song on the shores of the Red Sea.

It is appropriate for Moses and the children of Israel to burst out with a rousing song of praise unto the LORD for the salvation, which they had just personally witnessed and experienced. Music is man's highest form of praise and adoration to someone who is to be honoured. Music has played a great part in our life as the chosen people of God and the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ our wonderful Saviour! Imagine

a Christian worship service without music at all! Music therefore is a gift from God and it is appropriate that we sing hymns and spiritual songs in praise of Him.

The song, which Moses sang, can be divided into three major stanzas, followed by the interlude of Miriam singing unto the LORD, and the chapter concludes with the challenge to the children of Israel to trust in the LORD their God for their provision and protection. This is a song of praise and the words were in poetic form meaning that some of the expressions were metaphorical in sense and should not be taken literally. For example, *the horse and the rider hath He thrown into the sea* (vv. 1, 21) does not mean that God literally snatched the horses and the Egyptians and cast them into the Red Sea. But rather it is an apt metaphorical description creating a vivid picture of God's actions.

The following is an outline of the chapter:

- 1) The LORD God is glorious in power (15:1-6);
- 2) The LORD God is incomparable (15:7-11);
- 3) The LORD God is Sovereign (15:12-18);
- 4) Miriam led the women to sing unto the LORD (15:19-21);

- 5) The children of Israel journeyed days into the wilderness and found no water (15:22-27).

STUDY THE WORD

The LORD God Is Glorious in Power

As a witness and an instrument used by God to lead the people across the Red Sea on dry ground by successfully crushing the Egyptian army of six hundred, Moses gratefully rejoiced with a song of praise to the LORD for the salvation of the children of Israel. The divine writer's use of the Hebrew expression that Moses *and spake, saying*, indicates Moses' confidence and confirmation that the contents of his song of praise were real and actual. The events were witnessed by the children of Israel themselves numbering *six hundred thousand on foot that were men*, beside their wives and children, and also *a mixed multitude*.¹

Moses set the example as the leader of the community by expressing his praise and gratitude to the LORD. He used the personal pronoun, *I will sing unto the LORD for He had*

triumphed gloriously (v.1). It was the LORD'S doing and victory, not his. He would not rob God of His glory and honour. The song is written in poetic form with wide-ranging images describing the event. And such descriptions in some parts should not be taken literally that *the horse and the rider hath he thrown into the sea* (v.1). God did not actually hold the horse and the rider and cast them into the sea.

This first movement of the song (vv.2-6) has three sections. The first section focuses on the LORD praising Him for the deliverance and salvation of the children of Israel. It intimates the covenant which the LORD made with their forefathers promising a land in which they would dwell in peace. The LORD is portrayed as a warrior - *a man of war* (v.3). Observe Moses' use of the personal pronoun: *my strength and song . . . my salvation . . . my God . . . I will prepare . . . my father's God and I will exalt Him* (v.2).

The second section (vv. 4-5) describes the event by developing the image of God as a warrior. Pharaoh's cracked charioteers were cast into the sea and drowned. They *sank into the bottom as a stone*. This should be understood as though they were drowned and dropped to the bottom of

¹ Exodus 12:37-38 *And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.*

the sea like a stone unable to swim to safety.

The third and concluding section of this movement ends with a praise directly addressed to God – *Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: Thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.* The use of the figure of speech *Thy right hand, O LORD*, is significant. Many times in Scripture the right hand of God is mentioned. The context in this song of Moses strongly suggests the import of this phrase. The right hand of God depicts the glory and power of God! And for the Lord Jesus Christ to be seated in heaven at the right hand of God is to be in a position of absolute power and authority.² The enemy can plan his strategy against the people of God and be gratified with his evil works, but God will not be mocked and in His divine wrath need only called upon the wind of the air and the waters of the sea to spoil the works of the enemy.

This pattern, which Moses used, is the same as in the next two movements, namely, (vv. 7-11; and 12-18).

² **1 Peter 3:22** *Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.*

The LORD God Is Incomparable

This second movement of the song (vv.7-11) focuses on the uniqueness and greatness of the LORD God. Moses pointed to the greatness of the LORD'S excellence by recognizing that His enemies would be over-powered. His wrath would reduce them to nothing. The *blast of thy nostrils* alludes to the wind that God sent to separate the waters of the Red Sea forming two walls of water allowing the children to go across on dry ground (v.8).

The next section relates the arrogance and over-confidence of Pharaoh and his army. The enemy boasted of their confidence in six ways (v. 9): *I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.* They charged against the children of Israel right into the middle of the sea. But the LORD easily *didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters* (v.10).

The concluding section ends in verse 11: *Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods?* This is more than mere rhetoric. The LORD was incomparable and the gods mentioned

here are the Egyptian gods. The LORD had shown the Egyptian gods to be nothing. They were no good at all before the LORD, who is the only One Living and True God. The LORD is transcendently glorious in His holiness. Holiness is the essential attribute of God, indeed, the very essence of His deity.

The LORD God Is Sovereign

This third movement has also three parts. The first part (vv. 12-13) opens with the sovereignty of God – *Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth, swallowed them.* Again the *right hand* is mentioned which we have learned depicts the power and authority of God. No one was, is and will be able to stand before or stop Him! Moses' choice of the word *earth* means that God asserted His power and authority over all, sea and land. Moses spoke in praise of the LORD God who had been merciful to His people of Israel, whom He had led and redeemed. He had led and protected them by demonstrating His strength. He would guide them to Mount Zion *Thy holy habitation*, the holy city of Jerusalem.

The second section (vv. 14-16a) expressed the confidence they had on the LORD for their future pilgrimage

to the Promised Land. Moses looked forward. The people would hear of the stupendous and miraculous salvation of the children of Israel at the Red Sea. The nations round about them in Palestine would inevitably be informed of the incident and their hearts would sink as a result of fear and sorrow. This was precisely what happened when they confronted Joshua and the children of Israel in Jericho.³ This fear and dread would be experienced by the neighbouring nations of Israel whom they would encounter in their journey to the Promised Land of Palestine. Four of these neighbouring nations are mentioned: Palestina, Edom, Moab, and all the tribes of Canaan.⁴

In the concluding section, Moses confidently expressed the hope that God would ultimately lead His people *to plant them in the mountain and to dwell in, in the Sanctuary* (v.17). The phrase *to plant* means to be firmly

³ **Joshua 2:10-11** *For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.*

⁴ **Exodus 3:8** *And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.*

established. The children of Israel would be brought to Mount Zion and the Temple in Jerusalem where the LORD would be present in the midst of His people. Moses ended this song of praise with the exclamation (v.18): *The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.*

Miriam Leads the Women to Sing unto the LORD

Verse 19 may seem to be out of place with the literary scheme of the whole song. But it is appropriate for Moses to rehearse at this juncture the history of the LORD'S deliverance of the children of Israel from the enemy Pharaoh and his army before honouring his sister Miriam, who led the women to sing and dance with much rejoicing.

Miriam took a tambourine in her hand and together with all the women who *went after her* dancing also with tambourines (v. 20). Miriam sang together with the women. She called Israel to sing. It was a refrain (a repeat) of Moses' song of praise unto the LORD. The difference is that her call was to all Israel: *Sing ye unto the LORD for He had triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea* (v. 21 compare with v.1). Miriam used the second person pronoun, ye, plural in the imperative mood, whereas Moses

emphatically used the personal pronoun, *I*.

This is the first time a woman in the Bible was called a prophetess – *And Miriam the prophetess* (v.20). This is also the first time that Miriam was mentioned as Moses' sister, who probably was the young girl looking after him when he was a baby hidden in the basket floating in the river Nile. While Moses honoured her by that title, he did not say that she should assume the office of public teaching and leadership of the children of Israel. Later when she tried to oppose Moses in this regard she was severely chastised by the LORD (Numbers 12:1-10).⁵ In the Bible some other women also have the distinction of being called a prophetess. For example, they are Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14).⁶

⁵ **Numbers 12:10** *And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.*

⁶ **Judges 4:4** *And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.*

2 Kings 22:14 *So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.*

Nehemiah 6:14 *My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.*

Three Days into the Wilderness and No Water

From the shores of the Red Sea, Moses led the children of Israel into the wilderness of Shur.⁷ They journeyed for three days and found no water. They should be very thirsty by now. They came to Marah where there was water. But the water there was undrinkable because it was bitter. This was the first crisis they encountered since they left the Red Sea. The LORD would use such opportunities to build their faith and trust in Him.

Sadly, the response of the children of Israel towards this problem, was disappointing, granting that they were dreadfully thirsting for water compounded with the fact when they at last found water it was undrinkable. Their frustration worked up and they grumbled against Moses (v. 24) – *What shall we drink?* Moses could not give them a drink much as he wanted to, for he too was in the same predicament. Moreover, there were about 2 million people! They were unfair and unreasonable to him. However, the best recourse for Moses was to turn to the LORD. He cried in prayer to the

⁷ **Genesis 25:18** *And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: and he died in the presence of all his brethren.*

LORD. The LORD heard his cry. This was what the children of Israel should do in the first place instead of murmuring against Moses. The LORD showed Moses a tree and instructed him to throw it into the water. He obeyed and the water became sweet and drinkable (v.25). There was no magic in the tree. Whether the tree had some intrinsic substance that could turn the bitter water drinkable is not revealed. Whatever it was, the power of the LORD made the water drinkable. In fact God had led them through the Pillar of Cloud and Fire to this place. It was to prove or test their faith and trust in Him – *there He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them* (v.25b). God “admonished by His Word, that hereafter they should submit themselves more teachably and obediently to His commands.”⁸ Note the pattern of their complaint and its consequence.

The LORD then said to the children of Israel (v.26): *If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these*

⁸ John Calvin, Genesis, Volume I, page 266.

diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee. Having tested them, the LORD graciously instructed them that if they would diligently obey His commandments and do what was right before Him, He would not bring the diseases which He had brought on to the Egyptians. They all knew about the kind of plagues the Egyptians suffered for they were eyewitnesses. This is the grace and mercy of the LORD God towards His redeemed people. The LORD promised: *For I am the LORD that healeth thee* (Hebrew, [^]a,p.ro hw"hy> ynIa – [pronounce, reading from right to left] *ani Yahweh ropheka*). The name of the LORD given is “The LORD your Healer.” This name expresses to all the redeemed people of God about His character and relationship to their families. This passage teaches the great Biblical principle of Christian living: Obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings judgment.

Then the LORD brought them to Elim where there were twelve wells of water, and 70 palm trees; and the children of Israel rested and camped there. They must have camped there for quite a while, although the exact

period is not mentioned, recuperating after the three grueling days in the wilderness finding no water. How wonderful is the LORD God!

PRACTICAL VALUE

All of us can truly testify that the LORD our God has been good to us. Every day we have received His blessings in one way or another. Therefore, on every Lord’s Day we must be determined to obey the Lord’s injunction to assemble together in His house to worship Him by praising and blessing Him for His loving-kindness and tender-mercies. We should sing loudly with heart of gratitude and praise to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ with the hope that He will return soon, as He had promised, to take us all to be with Him where He is forever and ever!

There is much theology concerning God in this first movement. God always triumphs over the enemy. The enemy’s horse, a symbol of power and the one who sits on it, are both powerless before God. This all-powerful LORD is the strength, song, and salvation of the children of Israel, God’s chosen people. Moses declared that *He is my God* (15:2). The personal possessive pronoun attached by Moses is significant. Moses had a clear and

correct understanding of who God was. And he personalized it. Although it is true that He is God of all Creation, every man and living thing, yet Moses testified that He was his God. Every Christian should share the same sentiment and conviction as Moses. The fact that many Christians are not living a victorious and effective life is evident that they do not have this experiential knowledge and conviction of God in their life. Unless we know and are deeply convicted of who the LORD our God is, especially to us individually and personally, we cannot live an exemplary Christian life let alone making a strong impression on others.

The children of Israel first murmured against Moses. Then Moses cried to the LORD. The LORD then told Moses what to do, Moses obeyed. The LORD provided the water. This is the pattern given to us. It is practical. We should learn it well. Whenever we are faced with a problem or a crisis in life, the first thing not to do is to murmur or grumble at someone or something. As the people of God, we believe that all things work together for good to them who are called and who love Him. Are we not called and as born-again Christians, do we not love the Lord our God wholeheartedly? If

yes, then we should not grumble or murmur. The best thing to do in such crises is to be like Moses. Turn to the Lord first. Pray to Him. Let Him know your problems and your sorrow. Then listen to His prompting. He might lead you to His Word, a particular passage or verse.

In this regard, how important it is that we maintain a consistent reading and studying of the Word of God. God speaks to us today through His Word, which is infallible, inerrant, and authoritative. Having read the Word, do not hesitate to do what God has revealed in His Word for you to do. Remember the great Biblical principle: Obedience brings blessing but disobedience brings judgment. The LORD is merciful and gracious to all His blood-bought children. He will bless you if you diligently obey His Word. AMEN