



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text
Exodus 15:1-27

Topic
As Moses sings a hymn of praise celebrating the Red Sea crossing, his sister, Miriam, sings responsively

Title
"She Sings Sea Songs by the Sea Shore"

What do the following feature films and film franchises have in common: *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *E.T.*, *Jurassic Park*, *Close Encounters*, *Superman*, *Harry Potter*, and *Jaws*?

I'll give you a hint: [vocalize *Indiana Jones* theme].

All of them have memorable, immediately recognizable theme music that was composed by John Williams. After just a few bars, you're transported by the music into the atmosphere of the film.

In our verses today we will encounter the first song that is recorded for us in the Bible. It is the praise song that commemorated and celebrated the Israelites Red Sea crossing.

Was it Israel's theme music? It should have been; but they would soon be singing another tune.

Right after they sang praises to the Lord, the Israelites travelled in the desert three days without water. When they found water at a place called Marah, the water was bitter and undrinkable.

We read of them, “And the people **complained...**” (v24).

One minute they were praising the Lord; the next, they were grumbling. It reminds us of something James wrote in his letter in the New Testament, to emphasize grace in our speaking to one another:

Jas 3:11 Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?

- In nature, the answer is “No.”
- In our *human nature*, too often the answer is “Yes.”

Times of victory should elicit praise. Times of adversity should *not* elicit grumbling - but if we’re being honest, they do.

Today we want to take a look at ourselves in times of victory, and in times of adversity. I’ll organize my comments around two points: #1 On Your Journey Homeward You Will Experience Rushing Waters Of Victory, and #2 On Your Journey Homeward You Will Encounter Stagnant Waters Of Adversity.

#1 On Your Your Journey Homeward
You Will Experience Rushing Waters Of Victory
(v1-21)

Rolling Stone magazine polled its readers to determine the Top Ten “One-Hit Wonders” of all time.

Notables on the list were The Knack, with *My Sharona*; and Norman Greenbaum, with *Spirit in the Sky*.

Moses was no one-hit wonder. **He was a three-hit wonder.** In addition to the song here in chapter fifteen of Exodus, Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses. He wrote the third song in the last days of his life; it's in Deuteronomy 32.

In the fifteenth chapter of the Revelation, you read, "They sing **the song of Moses**, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb..." (v3). Commentators believe the song referenced is the song we're looking at today, sung in the future by Tribulation martyrs "who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing [in Heaven] on the sea of glass, having harps of God" (v2).

The Song of Moses is, chronologically, the first psalm, and it will be sung again in Heaven, in the Last Days. Pretty impressive.

Exo 15:1 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!

Look ahead to verse twenty-one:

Exo 15:21 And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

This means there was *responsive* singing.

Moses and “the people” sang, and at certain intervals, Miriam (and other women) sang in response, “For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea.”

According to the folks at the Book of World Records, “The largest choir [on record] consisted of 121,440 people in India, on January 30, 2011. The choir sang in unison for over 5 minutes.”

Israel holds the real world’s record for largest choir. There were between two and six million people praising the Lord. What an amazing worship service that must have been. Especially considering they had just personally experienced what the song celebrated.

The praise songs we sing - do they not celebrate your personal experiences of salvation and sanctification? Those things should never get too old to elicit heartfelt praise.

Exo 15:2 The LORD *is* my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He *is* my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him.

He was the God of their fathers, known to them by stories handed down, but now they had personally experienced Him for themselves. They could say, O God, You are “**my** God,” and I will ever praise You.

God’s strength saved them, so they sang to “praise” Him and to “exalt” Him.

Exo 15:3 The LORD *is* a man of war; The LORD *is* His name.

If you find yourself backed-up against an uncrossable body of water, with mountains on both sides, and there is a hostile armored force barreling down on you, then you might need the Lord to be a “Man of war.”

What about you? What is your adversity? How do you want God to respond?

You might want Him to be a “man of war,” when instead He is presenting His power to you as Someone else, e.g., the Prince of Peace.

God wears a lot of hats in His responses to us. Analyze how God is already responding to your circumstances. It might help you get a handle on what He is doing spiritually to conform you into the image of Jesus. Instead of being upset that He isn’t a man of war, embrace the way He *is* manifesting Himself to you. Go with it. When God doesn’t part the waters you want to walk through, He’s doing something else; trust in Him.

Exo 15:4 Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

The power of Egypt was overcome. There was nothing in reserve; all had been destroyed.

If you are a believer, you can praise the Lord for all that He overcame to save you: Satan and sin and death.

- It didn’t mean the end of conflict for Israel. They’d face fierce foes in the desert and in the Promised Land.
- Salvation isn’t the end of conflict for you, either.

Exo 15:5 The depths have covered them; They sank to the bottom like a stone.

There are stories on the internet that bodies and implements have been discovered in the Red Sea by archaeologists. It's not true. Remember we aren't even sure exactly where this crossing occurred. Bodies and implements might still be somewhere, if we knew where to look.

Exo 15:6 "Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces.

The "right hand" symbolized authority. This lyric proclaims God as the absolute authority over the affairs of men and nations.

We like the phrase, "God is in charge." It establishes His sovereignty over all creation while allowing for the fact that He tolerates Satan as the ruler and god of this world system, until the Second Coming of Jesus.

Exo 15:7 And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble.

A by-stander would have concluded that Egypt was against Israel. But in positioning themselves against God's people, their real aggression was against God.

After using His people to give Pharaoh ten chances to repent, God released His wrath at the Red Sea.

God's wrath is compared to fire consuming dry stubble. It's a metaphor within a metaphor. God's wrath is a consuming fire, but it manifested itself in this instance as waves of water.

In the last book of the Bible, in the *Revelation*, God's fiery wrath is manifested in many ways as He strives with men but ultimately must judge them.

Exo 15:8 And with the blast of Your nostrils The waters were gathered together; The floods stood upright like a heap; The depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

God used a strong east wind that Moses poetically likened to the Lord breathing heavy from His nostrils.

Exo 15:9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them.'

"I, I, I, My, I, My." Pharaoh was proud and impressed by his physical strength.

It's so hard, among believers even, to get over judging things by their outward prosperity. Money and numbers and property are too often a terrible gauge of spiritual success.

Exo 15:10 You blew with Your wind, The sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

This is an abbreviated version of the action described in the song. Maybe it's a portion that sort of stuck with them - like when you hear a song and then find yourself humming it.

Exo 15:11 "Who *is* like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

Who are "the gods?" Most likely this is a reference not to Pharaoh or other human powers, but rather to supernatural beings, e.g., angels (both faithful and fallen). It is an exclamation and a proclamation that God is unique as Creator. He alone in Heaven is holy, to be feared, in "doing wonders" on behalf of His people.

These words might be a warning to Israel not to go after the idols that represent other gods. Even if they or their adherents did wonders, they are *not* holy or to be feared.

Exo 15:12 You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them.

Other phenomena accompanied the crashing of the waters of the Red Sea upon Egypt. One was a massive earthquake. Could it be that we haven't found any bodies or implements because the majority was "swallowed" by the earth in a massive chasm?

At this point, the song begins to look forward, to the conquest of the Promised Land.

Exo 15:13 You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided *them* in Your strength To Your holy habitation.

It hadn't happened yet, but it would happen. It wouldn't happen as originally planned, but it would happen.

These words were for Israel, but they capture something that is true for every believer: We've been redeemed, and are guided in His strength by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and have a home waiting for us in Heaven.

We might not walk exactly as planned, since we are still "Prone to wander, Prone to leave the God I love." But His "streams of mercy, never ceasing," will get us home.

Exo 15:14 "The people will hear *and* be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia.

Exo 15:15 Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.

Exo 15:16 Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be *as* still as a stone, Till Your people pass over, O LORD, Till the people pass over Whom You have purchased.

We have the benefit of history and can consult the Book of Joshua. When the next generation of Israelites finally entered the Promised Land, all the tribes and nations that were settled in the land were, in fact, trembling with fear on account of the advance of the God of Israel.

Exo 15:17 You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, *In* the place, O LORD, *which* You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O LORD, *which* Your hands have established.

Jerusalem is the "mountain." They would indeed establish it as their capital, and erect first the Tabernacle, then the Temple, on the Temple Mount.

Exo 15:18 "The LORD shall reign forever and ever."

It reads like the conclusion to a prophecy update! Looking beyond the Red Sea crossing, and beyond the Promised Land, the Lord will establish His forever kingdom, free from sin.

Exo 15:19 For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry *land* in the midst of the sea.

Back to the situation at hand. Victory in Jesus was theirs to enjoy.

Exo 15:20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

Exo 15:21 And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

Miriam was the oldest; at least in her nineties at this point. The word we use in such cases is "spry," is it not?

As I suggested earlier, this was responsive singing (accompanied by timbrels and dancing) throughout the song. It was arranged; it was choreographed; in order to bring glory to the Lord.

Occasionally I'm asked why we don't have female dancers come and aid us in our worship on a Sunday morning. **It's just so hard to find spry lady timbrelists in their nineties.** If you know any...

Miriam was a “prophetess.” God spoke through her. We don’t have any of her prophecies recorded in the Bible. There are extra-biblical accounts that survive as traditions among the Jews, but nothing we can say for sure.

The Israelites experienced what I’m calling “rushing waters of victory.” You have experienced them, too:

- If you’re saved, it doesn’t get more victorious than that. Plus Jesus promised you the Holy Spirit as rivers of living water flowing into you, and through you.
- If you’ve been saved for a while, you’ve experienced victories in your walk with the Lord. You probably didn’t commemorate them with a song, but they are praiseworthy.

Take some time today or soon to remember some Red Sea crossing of your own. Then “sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord.”

#2 On Your Journey Homeward You Will Encounter Stagnant Waters Of Adversity

(v22-27)

- Drink plenty of water, they say, so it’s estimated we consumed 391 billion liters of bottled water in 2017.
- Bottled water is killing us, they say.

CBS News posted this:

More than 90 percent of some of the most popular bottled water brands contain tiny particles of plastic. That's according to research conducted at the State University of New York by Orb Media, a nonprofit journalism group, which detected

"constellations" of plastic in brands including Aqua, Aquafina, Evian and Nestle Pure Life.

Orb's findings suggest that a person who drinks a liter of bottled water a day might be consuming tens of thousands of microplastic particles each year...

Hanford water never tasted so good.

Water, in the desert, for millions of people and their livestock, took center stage in Israel.

Exo 15:22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

This was a crisis of biblical proportions. Survival blogs suggest that an average person can only survive from as little as two days up to a week without liquid.

Exo 15:23 Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah.

In 1965 one-hit wonders, The Standells, recorded *Dirty Water* about the then-famously polluted Boston Harbor and Charles River. It would have been an appropriate title for the waters of Marah.

As a devotion, we would say that many things in the world look refreshing, but experience proves them bitter. It prompted one commentator to say, "All the waters of life are embittered by sin. They look well, but are vanity and vexation of spirit."

Famous pastoral question: “What well are **you** drinking from?” Is it Jesus, and His rushing river of life... Or some reservoir of the world’s, promising life, but yielding only distraction at best, and disaster at worst. “Living water we desire, to flood our hearts with Holy Fire.”

Exo 15:24 And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

Moses just can't catch a break. Nevertheless, he was their leader, so it was time to man-up.

Exo 15:25 So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree...

Stop there for a moment. I think it's safe to assume that the Israelites had been looking for rivers or streams or old wells; maybe even natural formations that acted as cisterns, capturing rain water.

I can tell you what they were *not* looking for: “A tree.” No one said, “Find a tree that we can throw into the water to make it drinkable.”

The tree was hiding in plain sight, but it had to be revealed to Moses, through *patience* accompanying *prayer*.

The Do-Nut Man memorialized this event when he sang,

*The bitter water was at Marah;
The bitter water was no good.
But the bitter water was a better water
when it was made better with wood!*

What about this tree? I came across this quote:

Shall we say with the fathers that the tree cast into the waters represents the cross of Christ? At least it is a type of the sweetening and assuaging influences of [Christ] - a new element, entering life... making all wholesome and refreshing to the disappointed wayfarer, who found it so bitter hitherto.

I don't think it's going too far to see the tree representing the Cross. Later in the exodus we'll see a rock from which water flows, which we definitely know from the New Testament *is* Jesus (First Corinthians 10:4).

The Bible does refer to the Cross upon which Jesus died as a tree; Peter does so in his first letter (2:24). Dr. J. Vernon McGee said,

We are told that a tree cast into the water made it sweet. Deuteronomy 21:23 says, "he that is hanged is accursed of God ..." and in Galatians 3:13 it says, "... Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Jesus Christ died on a tree, and it is that cross that makes the experiences of life sweet.

Your adversity, your Marah, is thus helped or healed by applying the Cross to it. At the Cross, His love ran red, and your sins were washed white. You owe all to Him; Be in awe of Him.

What does that mean, in practice?

- For one thing, it means you must die to self, and take up the Cross as a disciple. In those cases, your adversity doesn't change, **you do** - being conformed into the image of Jesus.

- For another thing, some situations are only resolved by a person coming to salvation in Jesus Christ. The father waited and waited, but it wasn't until the prodigal son came to his senses and returned that all could be restored.

Exo 15:25 So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast *it* into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them,

God gave Israel an object lesson to “test” them. They failed the test, but He blessed them anyway. We, too, will fall short; we, too, will go on experiencing grace on top of grace.

The “statute and ordinance” is in verse twenty-six.

Exo 15:26 and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I *am* the LORD who heals you."

Some of God's promises are conditional. Obedience would bring them physical prosperity. Disobedience would bring them physical adversity.

We have no such physical promises, as should be evident by reading about the apostle Paul and all he suffered for the privilege of knowing God and preaching the Gospel.

Exo 15:27 Then they came to Elim, where there *were* twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.

I know what you're thinking: "When do I get to leave Marah and arrive at Elim?"

I can't say. Not for you; not for me. I know that the Cross, applied to Marah, can accomplish God's purposes in my life. But it doesn't always release me from Marah, or turn Marah into Elim.

Elim isn't always the best place to be, by the way. The Israelites would learn that prosperity was dangerous to their spiritual walk. It fostered apathy, which led them into apostasy.

I don't generally like musicals, but you've got to love the classics. *The Sound of Music* recently celebrated its Golden Anniversary.

Our walk with the Lord is a musical. For one thing, we are told to "[speak] to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19).

We similarly read in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Blessed be His Name in the land that is plentiful **AND** when you're found in the desert places. Whether He gives, or takes away, let your heart choose to say, "Blessed be Your Name."