

The Escape Of Water

Psalm 114 May 15, 2024

Psalm 114:1-8

¹When Israel came out of Egypt—the house of Jacob from a people who spoke a foreign language—²Judah became his sanctuary, Israel, his dominion.

³The sea looked and fled; the Jordan turned back. ⁴The mountains skipped like rams, the hills, like lambs.

⁵Why was it, sea, that you fled? Jordan, that you turned back? ⁶Mountains, that you skipped like rams? Hills, like lambs?

⁷Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, ⁸who turned the rock into a pool, the flint into a spring.

In 2012, the Mississippi River flowed *backwards* for nearly 24 hours.¹ Strong winds from Hurricane Isaac pushed water back from where it came at 182,000 cubic feet per second.

It wasn't the first time the Mississippi flowed backwards. Two hundred years earlier, for a 2-3 month period between 1811 and 1812, three major earthquakes hit Missouri. They were all above 7.0 in magnitude. There are records of them being felt as far as Canada.² The seismic shift created waterfalls on the river and, for a time, caused it to flow backwards.

Here's what *didn't* happen: The Mississippi river didn't flow to a particular point, stand still, let a bunch of people cross on dry land, then resume its course when told it was allowed to flow again. That happened to the nation of Israel once on a river and once on a sea. Oh, and as a side show, mountains did some dancing. That is the message of Psalm 114. Short but powerful in its recollection.

Scholars categorize this as a *hallel* Psalm. These are songs that are meant to praise and thank God for His personal and national deliverance. There are three collections of hallel Psalms in the Psalter. We have the "Egyptian Hallel" Psalms in 113 through 118, the "Great Hallel" Psalms, also called the Songs of Ascent in Psalm 120 through 136,³ and then the "Final Hallel" Psalms in 146 through 150.⁴

Last week we learned from Psalm 111 how important it is to remember the work of God - the acts of God on our behalf. Throughout history, as Jews observed the Passover feast, this is one of the songs they would sing together.⁵

Let's begin in verse 1:

¹ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/08/120829192423.htm>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=em8xvSZ7gEw>

³ Psalms 135 and 136 are not part of the Songs of Ascent

⁴ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 5: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*

⁵ Daniel Estes *Psalm 73-150: An Exegetical And Theological Exposition Of Holy Scripture*

Psalm 114:1 - ¹When Israel came out of Egypt—the house of Jacob from a people who spoke a foreign language—

The Exodus was the birthday of Israel.⁶ And so, this song is sort of their *Happy Birthday To You*.

They lived in Egypt for more than four hundred years, and yet, we sense the distinction and separation. They didn't know the language. They were sheltered away in the land of Goshen. "Foreign language" here has a connotation of a "barbarous" tongue.⁷ We know the kind of barbarity God's people faced in Egypt: Enslavement. Beatings. The murder of their sons.

God saw their misery, He heard their cries and He came down Personally to rescue them.⁸ *But*, being prisoners in a land with a foreign language didn't only happen in Egypt. Some scholars think this Psalm was written after the exile. For the Jews, being trapped in a land with a barbarous tongue was a sign of judgment.⁹ A Jew could find himself in Babylon, hearing a language not his own, and know, "I'm here because my nation would not go God's way, even when He tried to to show us mercy."

But, *even then*, God was willing to rescue and deliver. Psalm 114 can be sung after Egypt or Babylon or Rome. Our God is a saving Deliverer.

Meanwhile, there is that subtle reminder that God's people are always meant to be *separate*. We're meant to belong to a *different* Kingdom, a *different* way of life, a *different* perspective and mentality. People sometimes criticize Christians for the vocabulary we use. I saw an article today titled, "*How NOT To Speak Christianese*." But we are *meant* to be a separate people.

Psalm 114:2 - ²Judah became his sanctuary, Israel, his dominion.

Who is the "his" in this verse? A lot of commentators believe it's referring to God, and that may be true, but it doesn't track perfectly. After all, God hasn't been mentioned yet and the whole earth is His, not just Israel. There's no other passage that suggests that the land of Judah is Yahweh's sanctuary.¹⁰

Instead, it makes more sense to some commentators and to me that the "his" in mind here is the family of Jacob. God's people who were delivered from their bondage and then given a land on the other side of the Red Sea and the other side of the Jordan.

Notice, the song talks about a *sanctuary* and a *dominion*. In other words, God freed them not just to go wherever they wanted, but to follow Him to a particular destination and *in* that destination, they would have a life of comfort *and* commission. Worship *and* work. Rest *and* regency. It was a

⁶ EBC

⁷ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

⁸ Exodus 3:7-8

⁹ Jeremiah 5:15

¹⁰ John Goldingay *Psalms: Volume 3*

place where they would commune with God but also serve God according to His purposes. Because it *is* true that our lives are His sanctuary and His dominion. He is our possession and we are His.¹¹

Within that framework they had a great deal of freedom and opportunity. God gave them everything they needed, as far as startup resources. But we see that they were *freed to serve*.¹² They were brought out from their bondage *for a purpose*. For *multiple* purposes. And it was when they abandoned those purposes that the rest of life started falling apart.

Psalm 114:3 - ³The sea looked and fled; the Jordan turned back.

You scared, bro? The sea *looked* and ran away. What was it that the sea saw? That question will be answered in a moment.

But first we should note the semicolon - a little piece of punctuation that indicates a pause. In this case, it was a pause of *40 years* because God's people, in the presence of the Shekinah Glory, said, "Eh...we're not sure You're for real. We kinda want to go *back* to slavery."

So the Lord said, "Ok, we'll wait. And 40 years from now when there's a group of people who *will* do what I'm asking, I'll be right there, ready to part the Jordan river to let them into the land."

That semicolon is full of the faithfulness and compassion and grace of God. A God Who is willing to wait. A God Who is willing to condescend to us. A God Who is willing to hang in there with weak and undeserving human beings because He loves us so much.

There's a lot of power in the semicolon. The Bible tells us that God was going to come a first time, then He's going to come again. We're in the semicolon. He still has all His power and all His loyalty and all His kindness and all His providence. But, rest assured, the sentence *will* be continued and completed, because it's already been written. It's already been published. We're just in the semicolon.

Psalm 114:4 - ⁴The mountains skipped like rams, the hills, like lambs.

This is probably speaking of the different shaking phenomena at Mount Sinai when the Lord gave Moses the Law.¹³ The language is interesting. The words used can mean alarm,¹⁴ or a joyful celebration.¹⁵ One commentary says it represents the "motion of the mountains."¹⁶

¹¹ Psalm 119:57

¹² Estes

¹³ James Smith *The Wisdom Literature And Psalms*

¹⁴ Goldingay

¹⁵ C. Hassell Bullock *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalm 73-150*

¹⁶ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown *Commentary Critical And Explanatory On The Whole Bible*

Creation is waiting and watching and groaning for the Lord's return. Creation is ready to move when God arrives. Mountains will level themselves. Seas will dry up. Hills will split apart. Because creation is excited about God doing His work.

Isaiah talked about the motion of mountains several times in his book. There he pictures mountains being leveled into a road, then breaking into joyful shouts because God was bringing back His people, because God was showing compassion to the afflicted.¹⁷

What did Jesus say about our faith? He said in Matthew 17, "if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move." That's a hard verse for us to understand. But, on a devotional level, it reminds us of Psalm 114. The created order is ready to bow down in obedience and worship of God - to move when He commands.

Psalm 114:5-6 - ⁵Why was it, sea, that you fled? Jordan, that you turned back? ⁶Mountains, that you skipped like rams? Hills, like lambs?

So in verse 3 we were told the Red Sea and the Jordan saw something and went running. What did they see? One translation puts it this way, "What's wrong with you, sea?"¹⁸ Another commentator has it like this: "What was with you?"¹⁹

The answer is still coming, but this is a good spot to remind ourselves that, as our life flows on, as the tides of life come in and out, sometimes the Lord may need to shake us up. Sometimes we may need to reverse course. Sometimes we may need to stop moving in the direction we've been flowing if the Lord comes and says, "I want to do something different in your life."

Remember: God wants our lives to be a *visible* testimony of His grace and His power and His truth and His trustworthiness. If we only, always flow the same way as all the other rivers, what notice would anyone take? How does that demonstrate a God Who acts so differently?

Psalm 114:7 - ⁷Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,

What did the sea see? Why did the mountains move? It wasn't because of Moses. It wasn't because of the *people* on the shore. It was the Lord. It was *His* presence. He came and everything changed. He spoke, He directed, He decided, and everything fell into place as a result.

In verse 7 God is referred to in two ways: "The Lord" and "the God of Jacob." The One true God has chosen to attach Himself to people. The *God of Jacob*. He would come to Isaac or Jacob and say, "I'm the God of your father." He gives Himself to us. He shares His presence with His people. He says, "I am yours and you are Mine. Let's dwell together."

¹⁷ Isaiah 49:11-13

¹⁸ Alter

¹⁹ Goldingay

There's nowhere we could go to escape His presence.²⁰ He is with us always, to the end of the age, bringing times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.²¹

We are called to tremble at His presence. The term of course means a reverent fear, acknowledging His power and greatness, but it also means to whirl in rejoicing.²² To *celebrate* the nearness of this God Who has given Himself to us with such grace.

Psalm 114:8 - ⁸who turned the rock into a pool, the flint into a spring.

So, not only did God part the waters so His people could cross, He did *so much* more. An earthquake once made the Mississippi flow backwards. Ok, that's a big deal. Here, the Lord says, "When My people needed water, I made water flow out of a *rock*." Of course, that was a beautiful symbol of Christ's redemptive work and His provision for us. But it also was an actual rock that started leaking water - gushing water - to feed thousands upon thousands of people and animals. As much as they needed. You didn't need a *LifeStraw* to drink out of this pool. It was pure, living water. And then that rock followed them through the desert and kept providing day after day.

This is what God does to accomplish His good purposes to save, to deliver, to direct, to transform the lives of His people. This is the distance He'll go. This is what He's capable of. Psalm 114 is a pretty short song, but the simple reminder packs a punch. There is *never* a reason for us to tell God, "Well, God, in my situation, I can't do what You've asked me to do. It's too hard." It's not!

James Smith writes, "*The Hebrew [in verse 8] uses a timeless participle in this last sentence which suggests the continuing provision for his people.*"²³

God *still* provides living water. He still moves mountains. He still makes a way and calls us to join Him. He says, "This is the way, walk in it." And He promises to walk *with* us. Giving us His presence, His tenderness, His careful attention, His grace. Always guiding and providing and accomplishing His good work.

Let's be the people who rejoice in His presence, who watch for His coming, who reverse the flow of our lives if He asks us, who trust that He knows the way, that He knows the best timing, that He knows what He's doing and then do it with Him so that we can worship and work according to His purposes for us.

²⁰ Psalm 139:7

²¹ Acts 3:20

²² See Alter, Estes

²³ Smith