



Exposition

EDITOR: Eric Marshall, The White House, Lynn Road, Castle Rising,
King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE31 6AA. Tel./Fax 01553 631279;
email: testimony@marshalle.co.uk

The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1–15

H. Victory at the Red Sea (Exodus 14–15)

Part 2: The Song of Moses—Exodus 15:1-21 (ii)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

Moses' Song, Stanza 2

- 15:14 The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants¹ of Palestina.²
- 15:15 Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed;³ the mighty men⁴ of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.
- 15:16 Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till Thy people pass over,⁵ O LORD, till the people pass over, which Thou hast purchased.⁶
- 15:17 Thou shalt bring them in, and plant⁷ them in the mountain of Thine inheritance,⁸ in the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made

for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary,⁹ O Lord,¹⁰ which Thy hands have established.

15:18 The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.

15:19 For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

Comment

The second stanza sets out the implications of what God has done to Egypt, both for the nations that Israel will meet on the way to and in the Promised Land, and for Israel herself. It links the past/present to the future by showing that God's purpose is continuous and goal-oriented, the past guaranteeing the future.

Verses 14-16 list the impact that the news of God's deliverance will have on other people, specifically the surrounding nations, who will have to work out how they will deal with Israel when their paths eventually cross. It is worth reviewing the sequence of verbs that are used to describe their forecast reaction (note that it is a set of seven*):

- they shall be afraid
- sorrow shall take hold on them
- they shall be amazed
- trembling shall take hold upon them

* Propp notices that the nations alternate as first subject, then object, then subject, then object, through the sequence of verbs. He translates the seven as: "shudder . . . convulsion seized . . . perturbed were . . . quaking seizes . . . liquidated were . . . upon them fall . . . they are still".

- they shall melt away
- fear and dread shall fall upon them
- they shall be as still as a stone.

There is in all this an implicit prophecy of the conquest of the land, a prediction which becomes more specific as the poem continues. The nations listed—Edom, Moab, inhabitants of Palestine, Canaan—are all nations who either inhabit the land or stand between Israel and the land. The last of the seven verbs, ‘they shall be as still as a stone’, is particularly poignant. A deathlike stillness will fall upon them, they will become statue-like, inanimate, conforming to the dumb idols that they worship. There will be no contest from God’s point of view when Israel come into contact with these people, they will simply be silenced (indeed, they already have been, from God’s victory over Egypt), and therefore the conquest of the land, which seems to require such an effort from a human point of view, is just a matter of course for Him.

This conquest, implicit in verses 14-16, must be what is meant by the ‘until’ of verse 16: “till Thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which Thou hast purchased”. The ‘passing over’ is the passing over into their own place, until they are stationed in the place that God has prepared for them.

Verses 17 and 18 make this promise explicit. God, Who has brought them out of Egypt, will now “bring them in” (v. 17) and plant them in His mountain. It is interesting to observe the way in which this is put. God will bring them in, not to *their* inheritance, but to *His* inheritance, the place He has earmarked and promised for Himself. It is the place He has made, not, in the first instance, for *them* to dwell in, but for *Him* to dwell in. That they should dwell there too is an important corollary, certainly, but it is He Who comes first. He will inherit the mountain and the sanctuary He has promised Himself, but He will not permit Himself to do so until He has performed that which He has promised to His people, bringing them in and planting them by Him, so that where He is, there they may be also.

The language which is used here, the language of the Special Place—the mountain, the place, the sanctuary/holy place—resonates with many other important passages of Scripture. Intriguingly, the mountain and sanctuary in question are not specifically identified. Reading with the entire Old Testament or Bible as our context, we would naturally take it to be Zion, and this must indeed be its fullest meaning. But the words

can also be applied in the first instance with some legitimacy to Mount Sinai, as the history of interpretation of the Song bears testimony. Psalm 68 takes up this theme and describes how the sanctuary of God was transferred from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, and that what was begun in Sinai was precisely that, a beginning which led, deliberately and inevitably, to Mount Zion.

And what will happen next, once both Israel and her Lord are established in the place of God’s inheritance? Now God will reign and reign, and there will be no ‘next’, at least from the perspective of this Song. God, now stationed in Zion, will “reign for ever and ever” (Ex. 15:18). What a superb contrast to the reign of Pharaoh which He has just brought crashing down! Who is lord now, and who king? Who will be king in times to come and for evermore? Who can it be but the Lord and the one He has appointed? This, apparently the first reference to kingship in the Bible, is all that needs to be said about the institution. Human kings will come and go, but they are but warped imitations of the true reign of God. The Lord is King, and will be King for ever and ever.

All that remains now, then, is for Moses to reprise the beginning of his Song, as he does in verse 19. Here there is closure with verse 1 and verse 10; here is the assurance and the proof that the forecast given in this stanza will be delivered by God in His good time: Pharaoh and Pharaoh’s horse buried in the sea; Israel, like those walking in the valley of the shadow of death yet fearing no evil, walking on dry land in the midst of the sea.

Miriam’s Song

15:20 And Miriam the prophetess,¹¹ the sister of Aaron,¹² took a timbrel¹³ in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

15:21 And Miriam answered¹⁴ them, Sing ye to the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

Comment

Finally another voice, with probably a chorus of voices in support, takes up the strain. It was the practice in the ancient world for the women who had stayed behind in times of battle to come out to meet their (hopefully victorious) returning

warrior husbands with music and dances. It is a practice exemplified in the Bible as well, witness “Saul hath slain his thousands” (1 Sam. 18:6,7) and Judges 11:34; and Exodus 15 is the first of a collection of references that may be cited. Yet Exodus 15 is not really the same. The tradition for the women to praise their husbands’ valour survives here only in significant variation, for it is the Lord Himself, and not the men of Israel, Who is the object of veneration.

It must have been a delightful occasion; Moses, and perhaps all the men with him, now joined by Miriam “and all the women”, singing in turn and yet together of the mighty works of God. Notice that Miriam ‘answers’ her brother, and the two dialogue, as it were, concerning His mighty deeds. It is a wonderful model for the relationship between the sexes. A man and a woman, and more than this, a brother and a sister, joining together in one song, speaking and answering in the most beautiful tale of all, the story of salvation. This is how it should be in symbol for all of us in our marriages and in our relationships. What else is there to talk about and to make music about together in comparison with this?

Miriam’s ‘answer’ mirrors the opening line of Moses’ song, and may be a chorus reprise of it, or may indicate that the women now performed the whole song over, perhaps with the men finally joining in as well. How it was originally performed we do not know, but similar structures can be found in the Psalms, and some such arrangement seems likely. Our counterpart is part-singing, the parties answering one another, moving apart and then together again in harmony, coaxing one another on in praise.

What is worth commenting on in conclusion is the significance of Miriam’s refrain: “Sing ye to the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea”. What is the significance of the horse, and why should it be singled out, along with the rider, as the object of God’s judgements? The horse is the machine, the symbol of the man’s prowess. It is his implement of victory, and potentially the means of his escape. It signifies his might and dominion. It is whatever a man has that gives him prowess, that which enables him to look down on others who have no machine, or whose machine is inferior to his. And God tosses it into the sea. Both man and machine are gone in an instant, in all their pride and pomp, never to return. It is better to trust in God than

to put one’s trust in horses, princes, or the legs of a man. Such pride is like a millstone hanging round our necks that drags us down and down, like Pharaoh, into the heart of the seas.

There the Song ends, as it had begun. 15:22-27 belong to the next part of the Exodus narrative, the wilderness wanderings en route to Sinai, and will therefore not be considered here. With that mighty chorus, therefore, and with the horse and rider now cast into the seas, our studies of the Exodus are complete.

(Concluded)

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1. **vv. 14,15 inhabitants.** One might instead justifiably translate this as ‘rulers’. The related verb *yashav* means ‘to sit’, ‘abide’, hence the sense of ‘dwell’, ‘inhabit’, but the concept of sitting can also be extended to the idea of sitting on a throne or sitting in judgement, hence ‘rulers’.
 2. **v. 14 Palestina.** This term refers to Philistia.
 3. **v. 15 amazed.** The verb *bahal* in the passive form, ‘be disturbed’, ‘alarmed’, ‘terrified’.
 4. **v. 15 mighty men.** Literally, ‘rams’! This could be a nickname, or a technical term for a Moabite chieftain, or at a stretch it could be a literal reference to the abundance of sheep/rams in Moab (2 Kgs. 3:4). Alternatively, some translate the phrase as “the tribes of Moab”.
 5. **v. 16 pass over.** Probably in the sense of ‘pass by/through’ (on their way to the Promised Land), or perhaps ‘cross over’ (Jordan?). The same verb was used at 12:12,23 to describe the Lord’s ‘passing through’ the land of Egypt to destroy the firstborn, and again in 13:12 as “set apart” (see footnote 5, [Nov. 2003, p. 403](#)).
 6. **v. 16 purchased.** This term, from the root *qanah*, refers to acquiring by purchase, and it is to be set against “ransomed” (“redeemed”, AV) in verse 13. God has ‘bought’ the Israelites; they are His, He owns them. An alternative is that the verb is used in its sense of ‘create’, ‘the people You have created’. The real meaning of the term in this context is ‘engender’, ‘procreate’, see Genesis 4:1 (‘gotten’), Deuteronomy 32:6, Proverbs 8:32, and Semitic cognates. This would fit with our comments earlier in the series about the Exodus narrative describing God’s creation of a nation. Compare Deuteronomy 32:6 and Psalm 102:18 (different Hebrew roots are used in these passages). The verbs *qanah* and *ga’al*, ‘redeemed’ (v. 13), are also used together in Psalm 74:2 and Ruth 4:4.

7. **v. 17 Thou shalt . . . plant them.** God, Who once “planted a garden eastward in Eden” (Gen. 2:8) and placed a man and woman within it, frequently uses the planting metaphor to speak of His placing of Israel in their land. 2 Samuel 7:10 is particularly close to the present context: “Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more”, but other uses of the metaphor are as follows: Psalm 44:2; 80:8,15; Isaiah 5:2,7; 51:16; Jeremiah 2:21; 11:17; 12:2; 18:9; 31:28; 32:41; 42:10; Ezekiel 36:36; Amos 9:15. Jeremiah is evidently particularly fond of the imagery.
8. **v. 17 the mountain of Thine inheritance.** A strange phrase, and one used in the Ugaritic (Canaanite) literature to describe the mountain dwelling of Baal. One could translate ‘inheritance’ as ‘possession’ (‘Your mountain that is Your property’). This is God’s mountain, the one He has coming to Him, the one which belongs to Him and for which He has grand plans. The takeoff of Canaanite/Ancient Near Eastern standard religious phraseology may be deliberate.
9. **v. 17 Sanctuary.** This is the first occurrence of the Hebrew *miqdash*, the term commonly used to refer to the tabernacle, but which may be used of temples or other holy places. It can also carry the more specific, technical sense of the Holy Place.
10. **v. 17 O Lord.** The term here is *adonai*, which means ‘lord’, ‘master’. A great variety of names for God are used in the Song, as earlier footnotes have brought out; Sarna suggests the ten-fold occurrence of YHWH may be deliberate.
11. **v. 20 Miriam the prophetess.** This is the only time she is thus designated, and no account of the content of her prophetic ministry is given (but compare the rebellion of Numbers 12). Six Scriptural women are given the official designation ‘prophetess’ (Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah, Isaiah’s wife, Anna and Miriam), but there are other references to women prophesying.
12. **v. 20 the sister of Aaron.** Aaron was the first-born son, hence Miriam is described as his sister rather than as the sister of Moses.
13. **v. 20 timbrel.** The *toph*, a tambourine or drum-like instrument.
14. **v. 21 answered.** Although the regular verb ‘to answer’, the term probably carries a technical sense here, referring to antiphonal singing, or singing with responses. We do a similar thing today with hymns like ‘Lead me, Lord’ and ‘Lift up to God the voice of praise’. One might translate, ‘sang back’.



Encounter

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the Publishing Editor

The Law given through Moses*

28. The significance of names

Islip Collyer

THE MEANING of names, and any significance arising out of the way in which they are used, may seem to be outside our subject. An exposition of the Law would be incomplete, however, if the names received no attention. The Scriptures clearly show that in many instances names were given with a prophetic object. Some names were changed by Divine instruction, and the reason for the change was clearly stated. With others the significance of the name is not a matter of special comment in the

text of the record, and yet the reason for the change is too obvious to be missed by any reader. On the basis of these clear meanings we may see the significance of many other details, although, as with so much in Scripture, the lessons are partly hidden.

The name given to the father of the faithful was definitely prophetic: “thy name shall be

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