

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: The Song of Moses and Bitter Waters

Exodus 15:1-27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this chapter reveals the character of God through both worship and testing. In the Song of Moses, the redeemed declare who God is: their strength, their song, their salvation, incomparable in holiness, mighty in power, steadfast in love. At Marah, the same God reveals Himself as the one who heals and provides. The aim is to let students see worship as the natural and fitting response of the redeemed, and to see God's steadfast love and healing care displayed precisely in the place of testing. This is a portrait of the Redeemer that points forward, as Revelation 15 makes explicit, to the song of the Lamb and the greater salvation accomplished in Christ.

This lesson also aims at the spiritual formation of the student. Most believers know the whiplash of Exodus 15: the heights of worship followed quickly by the dryness of disappointment. The chapter forms us by teaching that the God we praise on the shore is the same God we must trust at the bitter pool, and that He uses such testing to deepen our dependence on Him. We want students not merely to admire Israel's song, but to become people whose own gratitude overflows into worship and whose disappointment drives them to trust rather than to grumble.

Finally, the chapter trains the heart to hold together truths we often separate: God's majestic holiness and His tender love, His mighty deliverance and His intimate healing. The God who is 'awesome in glorious deeds' at the sea is the God who shows Moses a log at a desert spring. Our teaching should help students worship a God who is both transcendent and near, and trust Him to lead them, in steadfast love, all the way to Elim's springs and ultimately to the rest He has secured in Jesus Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 15:1-3. After the deliverance at the sea, Israel's first response is to sing to the LORD, exalting His triumph and declaring 'the LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name.' What does it teach us about God and about His redeemed people that salvation overflows so naturally into worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Exodus 15 opens with the first song recorded in Scripture, and it erupts immediately after the deliverance at the sea (15:1). 'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously.' The

redeemed do not first hold a strategy meeting or a celebration of their own escape; they turn their faces to God and sing. Worship is the instinctive overflow of a rescued people.

The song's focus is entirely God-ward. He is the one who triumphed, who threw horse and rider into the sea. The phrase 'the LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name' (15:3) celebrates God as the divine warrior who fought for His people, exactly as Moses had promised in the previous chapter ('the LORD will fight for you').

We should help students see that this is the proper grammar of worship: it is about God, His acts, His name, His character. Israel's song is full of the LORD, not of Israel. True worship lifts our eyes off ourselves and onto the One who saved us.

For the redeemed of any age, this models how salvation and praise belong together. When we grasp what God has done for us, gratitude does not stay silent; it sings. A heart that has truly tasted deliverance finds worship to be the most natural thing in the world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship as the natural overflow of the redeemed.
- The God-ward focus of true worship.
- God as the divine warrior who fights for His people.
- The connection between salvation experienced and praise expressed.
- How worship lifts our gaze off ourselves and onto God.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is worship the instinctive response of a rescued people?
- What does it mean that the song is full of God and not of Israel?
- How does grasping what God has done move us toward genuine praise?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think about your own response to God's deliverances in your life. Does His goodness regularly overflow into worship and song, or do you tend to move on quickly? What would more deliberate, joyful worship look like for you this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question turns the spotlight from Israel's worship to our own. The aim is honest reflection on whether God's deliverances regularly overflow into gratitude and praise, or whether we receive His mercies and move on without a backward glance.

Many believers are quick to ask and slow to thank. We pray earnestly in trouble, then forget to sing when rescue comes. The chapter gently rebukes that pattern by showing a people who could not help but worship.

The teacher should help students consider concrete habits of worship: not only corporate praise on the Lord's Day, but daily thanksgiving, songs in the home, prayers that linger on God's goodness rather than rushing to the next request.

Encourage students to name one specific deliverance God has given and to deliberately worship Him for it this week. Gratitude grows by being practiced, and a thankful heart is fertile soil for joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining whether God's mercies overflow into our worship.
- The tendency to ask earnestly and thank carelessly.
- Building deliberate habits of thanksgiving and praise.
- Naming specific deliverances and worshiping God for them.

Discussion Prompts

- Does God's goodness regularly overflow into worship in your life?
- What specific deliverance could you deliberately thank God for this week?
- How might more intentional praise reshape your daily walk with God?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 15:2. The song declares, 'The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.' What does it mean to say that the LORD Himself, not merely His gifts, is our strength, our song, and our salvation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The heart of the song's confession is 15:2: 'The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.' Notice that the LORD Himself, not merely what He gives, is the object. He is their strength; He is their song; He has become their salvation. The gift and the Giver are bound together, and the Giver is supreme.

This is a crucial distinction for the worshiper. It is possible to love God's gifts more than God, to want His deliverance more than we want Him. The song refuses that error. God is not merely the means to safety; He is the treasure. He is their song, the very content of their joy.

The phrase 'he has become my salvation' is personal and possessive. This is not an abstract theological statement but the cry of people who have experienced God as their rescuer. Salvation is not first a doctrine; it is a Person who saves.

For the student, this presses the question of where we locate our strength and our joy. To make the LORD our strength and song is to find our deepest security and gladness in God Himself, not in His benefits, and certainly not in our own resources. This points forward to the One who is Himself our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God Himself, not merely His gifts, as our strength and joy.
- The danger of loving God's blessings more than God.
- The personal, possessive nature of 'he has become my salvation.'
- Salvation as a Person who saves, not merely a doctrine.
- The trajectory toward Christ, who is Himself our salvation.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between loving God's gifts and loving God?
- What does it mean to make the LORD Himself your strength and song?
- How is salvation more than a doctrine, a Person who saves?

Question 4

Student Question:

In what specific area of life are you currently relying on your own strength rather than making the LORD your strength and song? What would it look like to lean on Him there instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question applies the previous truth to daily life. The issue is the practical one of where we actually draw our strength from when pressure comes: from God, or from our own competence, resources, and willpower.

Many of us confess with our lips that the LORD is our strength while functionally relying on ourselves. The test comes in the area of life where we feel most capable, for that is often where we least sense our need of Him.

The teacher should help students identify a specific arena, work, finances, relationships, ministry, where self-reliance has quietly crowded out dependence on God. Naming it is the first step toward leaning on Him there.

Encourage practical expressions of dependence: beginning the day's work in prayer, acknowledging need before a hard task, refusing to act as though the outcome rests on us alone. Making the LORD our strength is not passivity; it is working in conscious reliance on Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying where we rely on self rather than on God.
- How competence can quietly erode conscious dependence.
- Practical expressions of leaning on God's strength.
- Dependence on God as active reliance, not passivity.

Discussion Prompts

- In what area are you most tempted to rely on your own strength?
- What would conscious dependence on God look like there this week?
- How is leaning on God's strength different from passivity?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 15:11–13. The song asks, 'Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds?' and then says God leads His redeemed 'in your steadfast love.' What does this reveal about God's incomparable holiness and His steadfast, covenant love working together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In 15:11 the song reaches one of its highest notes: 'Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' This is a celebration of God's incomparability. There is none like Him in holiness, in majesty, in mighty deeds. The so-called gods of Egypt have just been exposed as nothing before Him.

Then, strikingly, the song moves from majesty to mercy: 'You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed' (15:13). The same God who is awesome in holiness leads His people in steadfast, covenant love. His greatness and His tenderness are not in tension; they meet in His care for His redeemed.

The word translated 'steadfast love' speaks of God's faithful, covenant-keeping commitment. It is love that endures, that keeps its promises, that leads the redeemed all the way home. The God who is high above all is the God who stoops to guide His people through the wilderness.

For the student, this guards against a lopsided view of God. A God who is only holy becomes distant and terrifying; a God who is only loving becomes sentimental and small. The song holds them together: majestic in holiness and steadfast in love, and that fullness finds its perfect expression in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's incomparability: 'Who is like you, O LORD?'
- The exposure of false gods before the true God.
- The union of majestic holiness and steadfast covenant love.
- Steadfast love as faithful, promise-keeping commitment.
- Guarding against a lopsided view of God's character.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that there is no one like the LORD in holiness?
- How do God's holiness and His steadfast love work together here?
- Why is a balanced view of God's character so important for worship?

Question 6

Student Question:

When you think about God, does His holiness or His love tend to crowd out the other in your imagination? How does Exodus 15 help you hold His majestic holiness and His steadfast love together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question asks students to notice which side of God's character they tend to neglect. Some imagine God almost exclusively as a stern, holy judge and lose sight of His tender love; others dwell only on His love and lose the awe of His holiness.

Either imbalance distorts our worship and our walk. A God shorn of holiness makes light of sin; a God shorn of love drives us to fear rather than to trust. The song of Exodus 15 corrects both by holding the two together.

The teacher can help students examine their own default picture of God and trace where it came from. Honest reflection often reveals that our lopsided views shape our prayers, our obedience, and our sense of nearness to God.

Encourage students to let Scripture, and this chapter in particular, recalibrate their imagination, so they come to worship a God who is both 'majestic in holiness' and full of 'steadfast love,' the very God revealed fully in Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Recognizing which side of God's character we tend to neglect.
- How an imbalanced view distorts worship and obedience.
- Examining the roots of our default picture of God.
- Letting Scripture recalibrate our imagination of God.

Discussion Prompts

- Does God's holiness or His love tend to crowd out the other for you?
- How does an imbalanced view of God affect your prayers and obedience?
- How does this chapter help you hold His holiness and love together?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 15:22–25. Just three days after singing, Israel finds only bitter water at Marah and grumbles, and the LORD shows Moses a log that makes the water sweet. What does this teach us about how God uses testing in the lives of His redeemed people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The scene shifts abruptly from song to thirst. Three days into the wilderness Israel finds no water, and when they reach Marah the water is too bitter to drink (15:22–23). The very name Marah means 'bitter.' The people who had just sung God's praises now grumble against Moses (15:24).

God's response is to teach, not merely to relieve. He shows Moses a log, which when thrown into the water makes it sweet (15:25). The text explicitly says, 'There the LORD tested them.' Marah was not an accident or an oversight; it was a test, designed to reveal and deepen their trust.

Testing is a recurring theme in Scripture for God's redeemed people. The wilderness was a school of faith. God led them by a way that would expose what was in their hearts and train them to depend on Him. The bitter water was a lesson as much as a hardship.

For the student, Marah teaches that God often allows His redeemed to face bitterness precisely to grow their trust. The right response to testing is not grumbling but turning to the God who can make the bitter sweet. The same hand that delivers also tests, and the testing is for our good.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The swift shift from worship to testing in the wilderness.
- Marah ('bitter') as a deliberate test, not an accident.
- Grumbling as the wrong response to testing.
- The wilderness as God's school of faith and dependence.
- God's testing as discipline aimed at our good.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might God lead His redeemed people straight into a test?

- What does Israel's grumbling reveal about the state of their trust?
- How can testing actually deepen rather than weaken our faith?

Question 8

Student Question:

Recall a time your circumstances turned bitter soon after a season of blessing. How did you respond, and what would it look like to trust God in the next 'Marah' rather than grumble?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question invites students to recall their own 'Marah,' a bitter turn of circumstances that came soon after a season of blessing, and to reflect honestly on how they responded.

The pattern of Exodus 15 is deeply human: spiritual highs are often followed by hard valleys. Recognizing this pattern helps us not to be blindsided by it, and not to assume that bitterness means God has abandoned us.

The teacher should help students move from past reflection to future resolve. The goal is not merely to analyze a previous failure to trust, but to prepare the heart to respond differently at the next Marah, turning to God rather than turning to complaint.

Encourage students to identify the practical difference between grumbling and trusting: grumbling rehearses the bitterness and questions God's goodness; trusting brings the bitterness to God and asks Him to make it sweet, confident in His steadfast love.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Recognizing the common pattern of valleys following heights.
- Not assuming bitterness means God has abandoned us.
- Moving from past failure to future resolve.
- The practical difference between grumbling and trusting.

Discussion Prompts

- When did bitterness follow closely on a season of blessing for you?
- How did you respond, and what would trusting God have looked like?
- What is the practical difference between grumbling and trusting at Marah?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 15:25–26, where God says, 'I am the LORD, your healer.' Drawing on the whole chapter, from the worship at the sea to the bitter waters made sweet, what does this passage reveal

about God's character as Redeemer and Healer, and how does that revelation point us forward to the greater salvation God offers in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, drawing the whole chapter together into a portrait of God's character. At Marah, after making the bitter water sweet, God reveals Himself with a new name and a new promise: 'I am the LORD, your healer' (15:26). The God who triumphed at the sea now binds Himself to His people as the one who heals and restores.

Trace the movement of the chapter. At the sea, God is the mighty Redeemer who saves His people and overthrows their enemies. In the song, He is incomparable in holiness and steadfast in love, leading His redeemed by His covenant faithfulness. At Marah, He is the healer who turns bitterness to sweetness and pledges His care. This is a rich, unified revelation: the God who redeems is the God who heals, and both flow from the same steadfast love.

We should be careful and accurate in how we apply this. God's promise at Marah is tied to the covenant He was making with Israel: 'If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God,' He will be their healer (15:26). This is not a blanket guarantee that the faithful will never be sick, nor is it a New Covenant promise we can lift mechanically into our own lives. It is a revelation of God's heart toward His redeemed people, a heart that desires their wholeness and well-being.

Read forward carefully and the picture deepens. The God who is Redeemer at the sea and healer at the spring points us toward the One in whom redemption and healing find their fullest meaning. In Christ, God has accomplished a far greater deliverance, not merely from Egypt or from bitter water, but from sin and death, and a far deeper healing of the whole person. Revelation 15 even pictures the redeemed in heaven singing 'the song of Moses' and 'the song of the Lamb' together, joining this ancient worship to the final triumph in Christ.

The teacher should let this revelation of God's character produce both confidence and worship. We serve a God who saves and a God who heals, whose steadfast love leads His people through every bitter pool toward the springs He has prepared. To know Him as Redeemer and healer is to trust Him in the wilderness and to worship Him with the song of the redeemed, looking forward to the greater salvation secured in Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's self-revelation as 'the LORD, your healer.'
- The unified portrait: Redeemer at the sea, healer at the spring.
- Reading the covenant promise of 15:26 accurately, not mechanically.
- Not turning the promise into a blanket guarantee of health.
- How Redeemer and healer point forward to fuller meaning in Christ.
- Revelation 15 joining the song of Moses to the song of the Lamb.

- Worship and trust as the fitting response to this revelation.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God reveals Himself as ‘the LORD, your healer’?
- How do God’s roles as Redeemer and healer fit together in this chapter?
- How does this portrait of God point forward to His work in Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 15:27, where God leads Israel to Elim with its twelve springs and seventy palm trees. Looking back across this whole chapter, from the song to Marah to Elim, name one specific way the Lord is teaching you to trust Him as your Redeemer, healer, and tender provider, and to worship Him for it.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter closes at Elim, where Israel finds twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camp there by the water (15:27). After the bitterness of Marah comes the abundance of Elim. The God who tested them at the bitter pool now leads them to a place of shade, water, and rest.

Elim is a quiet picture of God’s tender provision. The springs and palms are not incidental scenery; they are evidence that God leads His redeemed not only through testing but on to refreshment. The journey does not end at Marah. There is an Elim ahead for those who trust Him.

This is the capstone question, asking students to look back across the whole chapter, from the song at the sea, through the bitter waters, to the springs of Elim, and to name one specific way the Lord is teaching them to trust Him as Redeemer, healer, and tender provider, and to worship Him for it.

The teacher should help students see the wholeness of the picture: the God who saves, who heals, who tests for our good, and who provides springs in the desert is worthy of our complete trust and our heartfelt worship. And He is leading His people, in steadfast love, toward the ultimate rest secured in Jesus Christ, of which Elim is only a foretaste.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Elim as a picture of God’s tender provision and rest.
- The journey moving from Marah’s bitterness to Elim’s abundance.
- God leading His redeemed through testing and on to refreshment.
- Trusting and worshipping God as Redeemer, healer, and provider.
- Elim as a foretaste of the ultimate rest secured in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Elim reveal about God's care for His people after testing?
- How does the move from Marah to Elim encourage you in your own journey?
- Name one way the Lord is teaching you to trust and worship Him through this chapter.