

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 10: The Song of Moses and Bitter Waters -- Exodus 15:1-27

Have you ever been so overwhelmed with relief and gratitude that words were not enough, and you had to sing? That is where Exodus 15 opens. The army is gone. The sea has closed. Israel stands dripping on the far shore, alive, free, rescued, and something rises up in them that ordinary speech cannot hold. So they sing. 'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously.' This is the first song recorded in the Bible, and it bursts out of people who have just watched God save them. Worship, it turns out, is the most natural thing in the world for the rescued.

Listen to what they sing about. Not their own courage. Not Moses' leadership. Not their clever escape. They sing about God. 'The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.' 'Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' Real worship is not mainly about how we feel; it is about how great He is. The redeemed lift their eyes off themselves and fix them on the One who saved them, and in that gaze the heart finds its true home.

But the song does not stay on the shore. It looks forward. 'You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed.' The same God who split the sea will lead them home, not by their merit, but by His steadfast love. And then the story does something honest. Three days after the singing, the water runs out, and when they finally find some, it is bitter. From the highest worship to the driest disappointment in seventy-two hours. If you have ever wondered how you can be praising God on Sunday and parched by Wednesday, this chapter understands you.

At the bitter pool called Marah, God does something tender and revealing. He shows Moses a log, it is thrown into the water, and the bitter becomes sweet. Then God names Himself: 'I am the LORD, your healer.' The God who saves at the sea is the God who heals at the spring. And just beyond Marah lies Elim, with twelve springs and seventy palm trees, a place of shade and abundance, as if to say: trust Me through the bitter water, and I will lead you to the springs. This is the God who redeems, who heals, and who tenderly provides for the people He has set free.

Group Discussion: The redeemed people of Exodus 15 responded to God's deliverance by bursting into song about who God is. What does our own worship reveal about whether we are focused on God's greatness or on ourselves, and how can we recover the wonder of the rescued?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life are you currently standing at a 'Marah,' a place of bitter disappointment that came right on the heels of a season of blessing? How is God inviting you to trust Him there as your healer and provider?

Read Exodus 15:1-27

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Revelation 15:2-4, the redeemed in heaven sing 'the song of Moses' and 'the song of the Lamb,' joining this ancient worship to the final triumph in Christ; Psalm 106:7-12, a retelling of the sea crossing that ends with the people believing God and singing His praise; Psalm 78:15-20, God's provision of water in the wilderness and the people's failure to trust Him; Exodus 23:25, God promises to bless His people's bread and water and take sickness from their midst; Deuteronomy 8:2-3, God led Israel through the wilderness to test and humble them and teach them to live by His word.

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