

p 43 WEEK 6: DELIVERANCE AT THE RED SEA

Exodus 13:17–15:21

The Place of the Passage

In these chapters God fulfills his promises of deliverance by bringing Israel out of Egypt, leading them along the edge of the wilderness, miraculously parting the Red Sea so they can pass through on dry ground, and then bringing the waters back down upon the approaching Egyptian army. This deliverance at the Red Sea is recalled throughout the Old Testament as the paradigmatic account of God's saving work (see, e.g., Neh. 9:11; Ps. 78:13; 136:13–15; Isa. 11:10–16) and opens the door for God to communicate his will to Israel as he brings them to Mount Sinai.

The Big Picture

God leads Israel out of Egypt, saves them by parting the Red Sea, and judges Egypt by bringing the sea back upon them.

p 44 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the whole passage for this study, Exodus 13:17–15:21. Then review the shorter passages below and write your answers to the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 166–169; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Pillars of Cloud and Fire (13:17–22)

As Israel departs Egypt, Moses takes Joseph's bones with them, fulfilling Joseph's final request to his brothers (Ex. 13:19; see Gen. 50:24–25). Why would Joseph want his bones to be transported like this (for help, see Heb. 11:22)? What does this fulfillment of their transport here in Exodus show us about God? How might this have encouraged the original audience of Exodus? (For information concerning Exodus's original audience, review Week 1, "Date and Historical Background.")

2. Crossing the Red Sea (14:1–31)

The chariot was an advanced and formidable military device in the ancient world. Exodus 14:5–9 describes Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel and focuses on his impressive chariot force, mentioning chariots four times in these five verses, and twice noting that "all" of Pharaoh's chariots went after Israel (vv. 7, 9). In light of what God says in verse 4, what effect might this focus on Pharaoh's

grand chariot force have had on the original readers of Exodus? How do verses 23–28 reinforce this?

p 45 The stated purpose of Israel’s deliverance throughout the preceding chapters was that they might “serve” the Lord (e.g., 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 8, 11, 24). However, in Exodus 14:11–12 the Israelites highlight their past and present desire to “serve” the Egyptians rather than trust God and follow Moses. What does this suggest about God’s spiritual requirements for those whom he saves? How does this highlight God’s grace in salvation?

How would you summarize Moses’ response to the people’s fears in Exodus 14:13–14? What does this indicate is the proper response to God’s gracious salvation?

We noted that, throughout the plague narrative, God repeatedly hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he refused to release Israel. Here we see God further hardening the heart of Pharaoh (14:4, 8) and of the Egyptians (14:17). According to these verses, what does this hardening lead Pharaoh and the Egyptians to do? What effect does this hardening ultimately have for God (see vv. 4, 17)?

Verses 22 and 29 of Exodus 14 are nearly identical to each other, which is a literary device used to focus attention on what comes between them. What do **p 46** verses 23–28 emphasize? How does this emphasis differ from what we might assume the account of the Red Sea focuses on?

3. The Song of Moses (15:1–21)

Supporting the previous observation, the majority of Israel’s song of praise recalls God’s destructive judgment against Israel’s enemies (15:1–12), as does the reprise of verse 21. How might we apply this emphasis to our understanding of our own salvation? For clarification, see Eph. 6:10–13.

After recalling God’s judgment of Egypt in Exodus 15:1–12, verses 13–17 describe how this judgment will cause the peoples in and around Canaan to have a fearful recognition of God’s power, which will enable Israel to enter the Promised Land. In short, God’s faithfulness in the past is presented as grounds for God’s people to trust him concerning the future. What does this look like for the Christian?

After describing Israel’s future entry into the Promised Land (15:13–17), the song ends by proclaiming God’s everlasting kingship (15:18). Why might the **p 47** song connect these two themes? What does this suggest about the nature of God’s kingship?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

FAITHFUL TO THE FAITHLESS. When God delivers Israel, he doesn't wait for them to believe before he saves them. Despite their fearful disbelief, he saves them by his grace, which causes them to believe. As the Egyptians approached Israel at the sea, the Israelites "feared greatly" (Ex. 14:10) and showed their unbelief by rebuking Moses for bringing them out of Egypt (14:11–12). Nevertheless, God saved them by bringing them through the Red Sea and sweeping the Egyptians away, after which "the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD" (14:31). Similarly, Jesus accomplished his saving work on the cross for us while we were still unbelievers. As Paul says, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

KINGDOM OF GOD. Israel's song of praise exalting God for his salvation ends by saying, "The LORD will reign forever and ever" (Ex. 15:18). In creation, God had sought to establish his reign on earth with humanity as his royal representatives (Gen. 1:28), but Adam and Eve sinned and rejected God's kingship. Although the Old Testament affirms that the Lord reigns as king (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:31; Ps. 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1), throughout this period God's kingdom is not represented well on earth, due to Israel's unrepented sin. However, the New Testament proclaims the good news concerning Jesus, which is repeatedly described as the "good news/gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16; Acts 8:12; see also Mark 1:15; Luke 9:2, 11, 60; 10:9; Acts 1:3; 19:8; 28:23, 31). That is, through Jesus, God has redeemed his people and has begun to rule over them as their king. One day, Jesus' reign will fulfill Israel's ancient song of praise: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

p 48 Whole-Bible Connections

PASSING THROUGH THE WATERS. The means by which God saves Israel is having them pass through the waters of the Red Sea. This theme of passing through water recurs at several points throughout the Bible. As Israel enters the Promised Land, when the priests carrying the ark step into the Jordan River, it stops flowing so the people can cross on dry ground (Josh. 3:13–17). Similarly, just before Elijah is taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, he and Elisha separate the waters of the Jordan and pass through on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8–15). Matthew records Jesus replaying Israel's early history, first going down to Egypt (Matt. 2:13–15) and then passing through the waters of the Jordan in baptism (Matt. 3:13–17), which seems to correspond to Israel's Red Sea crossing. Followers of Jesus likewise pass through the waters of baptism to identify with his death and mark our covenant relationship with him. Paul authenticates this description of baptism as "passing through the waters" by saying that Israel was "baptized into Moses" at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2).

THE DIVINE WARRIOR. The theme of God as the divine warrior is prominent in this passage, with both Moses (Ex. 14:14) and the Egyptians (14:25) recognizing that God is fighting on Israel's

behalf. This theme reaches its climax in the song at the sea in chapter 15, where the Israelites declare, “The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name” (15:3). The Old Testament goes on to portray God as the divine warrior in Israel’s conquest of Canaan (Deut. 20:4; Josh. 10:14), in his defense against Israel’s enemies during their time in the Promised Land (e.g., 1 Sam. 7:10–12; 2 Chron. 32:21), and in prophetic visions of end-time restoration (Zech. 14:3). Similarly, the New Testament presents Jesus as the divine warrior, triumphing over the spiritual forces of darkness on the cross (Col. 2:15) and empowering the church to engage in spiritual warfare (2 Cor. 10:3–6). At his second coming, Jesus will return to earth as the divine warrior, bringing full salvation to his people by bringing final judgment on his enemies (Rev. 19:11–21).

Theological Soundings

ACCOMMODATION. The doctrine of accommodation states that God communicates to us in ways that accommodate or take account of our frailty and finitude. The reformer John Calvin described it as God speaking to us with “lisps,” the way that a nurse speaks to a baby. In so doing, God lowers himself to interact with us in ways that we can handle. In Exodus 13:17–18, as God leads Israel out of Egypt, he doesn’t take them directly to Canaan. That would have sent them through Philistine territory, and God knew that such a war-ridden [p 49](#) path would make the people fearful and they would want to return to Egypt. Instead, he accommodates their fears and takes them the long way through the wilderness. This illustrates how the God of Scripture is both mighty to save and yet compassionate and attentive to our limitations.

GLORY. God declares that by his hardening and judgment of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army he will bring himself glory (Ex. 14:4, 17–18), and after being saved Israel praises him for “triumph[ing] gloriously” (15:1) and being “awesome in glorious deeds” (15:11). Indeed, God’s glory can well be described as the purpose of human existence, as people are created for his glory (Isa. 43:7) and are called to bring him glory in all their activities (1 Cor. 10:31).

POWER. God’s salvation of Israel in these chapters is presented as a demonstration of his power. After being delivered, Israel recognizes the “great power” that God used to save them (Ex. 14:31) and so their song of praise that follows is full of descriptions of God’s strength and might in salvation (see especially 15:2, 6–17). This emphasis reflects the attribute of God known as omnipotence, which means that he is all-powerful; nothing is too hard for him (Jer. 32:17).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Exodus 13:17–15:21 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

p 50 3. Theological Soundings

4. Exodus 13:17–15:21

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Exodus. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.