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C0619 – May 10, 2006 – Ex 15:1-21 – The Song Of Moses

In this song of praise, elicited by God’s miraculous salvation of the Israelites from Pharaoh’s army, the central theme is God’s victory over His and Israel’s enemies (15:1-21); the central person who provides this victory is YHWH, the Warrior-King (15:3, 18); the central attribute of the Warrior-King is omnipotence (15:2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16); the central people who enjoy His victory are “the sons of Israel” (15:1, 19)

I. YHWH’s Past Victory of Salvation (15:1-12)

The Structure of the Song of Moses. The song of Moses has three stanzas that were sung by the men. After each stanza the women reply with a short chorus accompanied by timbrels and dancing. The song concludes with an epilogue. The first stanza is found in verses 2-6, the second in verses 7-11 and the third in verses 13-16. The reply of the chorus of women is found in verse 21. The epilogue is in verses 17-18.

Discovery of this structure comes by observing that the last line of each stanza repeats a phrase:ⁱ

1. “Your right hand...Your right hand” (v 6)
2. “Who is like you...Who is like you” (v 11)
3. “Until your people pass over...Until the people pass over” (v 16)

The Scope of the Song of Moses. The song spans from YHWH’s victory at the Red Sea to His future victory and eternal reign in the Kingdom with Israel planted securely in His land.

Exodus 15:1 Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.

Then, so this happened after the waters of the Red Sea returned and covered Pharaoh's chariots and the horsemen, even the entire army so that not even one of them remained (Exod 14:28). At that point the people feared the Lord (Exod 14:31) and believed in the Lord (Exod 14:31) and **sang this song to the Lord** as they stood victorious on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. The words of verse 1b make up the chorus which the women sing after each stanza.

A. Stanza 1: The Lord is a Warrior (15:2-6)

**²"The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
This is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will extol Him.**

**³"The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is His name.**

**⁴"Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea;
And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.**

**⁵"The deeps cover them;
They went down into the depths like a stone.**

**⁶"Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power,
Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.**

Verse 1. The praise **to the Lord** comes in light of His mighty work of hurling **the horse and its rider into the sea** which demonstrated that **He is highly exalted**. He is superior to all earthly powers, including the greatest army Egypt could muster. The Lord sits so high above the earth that it was with great ease that he **hurled them into the sea**. As a result, the Israelites could not contain their rejoicing and burst forth with joy! Probably, Miriam and the women of Israel responded with this chorus after each stanza (cf 15:21).

Verse 2. Moses and the Israelites sing, **The Lord is my strength**. They admit that they are weak but He is strong. They were not capable of such a deliverance.

PRINCIPLE: When we are weak, He is strong. When the Israelites were completely cornered by their enemies they had become completely helpless, weak and even hopelessness. But God's power is made perfect in weakness so that grace and not works becomes the basis of salvation. We must come to this point time and again in our lives to enjoy God's deliverance.

1 Corinthians 1:25 the *weakness* of God is stronger than men.

2 Corinthians 12:9 “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in *weakness*.”

By singing **The Lord is my strength** God’s attribute of omnipotence is highlighted. This is the dominant attribute of God in the song of Moses and in the first 15 chapters of Exodus. He is also **my...song**; YHWH is the subject and object of true joy in the heart, a joy that can’t be contained. And **He has become my salvation**, my *yeshuah*, the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus. The Lord alone is the source of salvation, in fact He is **salvation** and that’s what Jesus’ name means “the Lord is salvation”. The people sing YHWH, **He is my God**, He is my *el*. **and I will praise Him**. Because of who He is He is worthy of **praise**. He is also **My father’s God**, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. He is the same God who made covenant promises and He exists forever, having neither beginning nor end. **And I will extol Him**; to **extol** God means to lift Him up with praise for He is highly exalted, ruling the course of history with absolute freedom

Verse 3. **The Lord is a warrior**. This picture of the Lord is the central one for the entire song. He is a Man of war who entered “holy war” for the first time in the Bible in Exod 14. Holy war is distinct from war initiated by a nation or people. Holy war is God fighting for His own self-interests, reputation, and purposes. When He enters into holy war it means total annihilation of His enemies, as such, not one Egyptian remained. **YHWH is His name**, his memorial name for all generations, the full meaning of which was revealed to Moses in the burning bush episode (Exod 3:14-15). YHWH highlights two attributes; eternity and immanence. Eternity means God does not begin or end. He exists and is the root and ground of existence. Immanence means He is boundlessly active in history. He is not aloof and uninvolved in our lives. He is intimately involved. His immanence is clearly seen in verse 4. **Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea**. God is involved in history. God did this and He did this to be honored by their deaths. See, if a person rejects God and rejects God and rejects God, we call this hardening the heart, then eventually God says “Fine, you don’t want to honor me with your life then you’ll honor me through your death” and this is what the Lord meant back in chapter 14:4, 17.

Verse 5. **The deeps cover them**, the *tehom*, reminds us of the state of the earth in Gen 1:2.ⁱⁱ **They went down into the depths like a stone** vividly pictures the Egyptians sinking like rocks to the bottom of the sea, never to appear again. When God enters holy war He defeats His enemies completely. Holy war judgment is not tempered with mercy.

Verse 6 closes the stanza with emphasis on YHWH's **right hand**. The **right hand** of YHWH is an anthropomorphism (a human likeness). YHWH is Spirit and does not have a physical right hand but His power is like that of a human's **right hand** which normally overpowers the left. It accomplishes His direct will on earth. It is **majestic in power**. And YHWH's **right hand...shatters the enemy**, dashes them to pieces. When **His right hand** struck the Egyptian army they were like clay pots that shattered into thousands of tiny pieces which can never be reassembled. This is the total victory that occurs when God enters "holy war". It is interesting to pause and observe God's superior military tactics. God led the Israelites to Pi-hahiroth, the mouth of the gorges, surrounded by canyon walls rising 2,000 feet and mountains all around. So, when the Egyptian army approached the Israelites were struck with fear for they thought they would most certainly die. This appeared to be a superior position for the Egyptians. But the Egyptians made one fatal mistake. They did not know who God was. They failed to remember that God made a distinction between Israel and Egypt and that God was with the Israelites and God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. Would a God who delivered His people then abandon them in the wilderness? Professing to be wise the Egyptians became fools. And so, God, who was with them, turned what appeared to the Israelites to be a hopeless situation into a superior defense with one swift move, the parting of the Red Sea. And the hard hearts of the Egyptians drove them to chase after the Israelites right into the midst of the sea. So, what God did was gathered all His enemies in one place and all at one time He brought sudden destruction upon them so that not even one remained. This is a fantastic military operation. This reminds me of the future tribulation when the kings of the earth gather all in one place, in the valley of Harmageddon to make war against God and suddenly with great swiftness Christ will bring complete destruction upon them so that not even one of them will remain. Only a pool of blood four feet deep and 192 miles long. So, the Lord is a Warrior, able with one sweeping blow to crush His enemies. He is an extremely efficient and brilliant warrior.

PRINCIPLE: We learn from this that God is able to turn your most hopeless situations into a sweeping victory. You may not see a solution. You may be like the Israelites, standing on the shores with no where to turn, no escape that you can see, and struck with fear and anxiety. It is then that Moses says, "stand and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exod 14:1). Cast your cares upon Him for He cares for you. If you'll walk by faith, if you'll become weak, then He will demonstrate His strength. For my grace is sufficient for you, My power is made perfect in weakness.

B. Stanza 2: The Lord is Unmatched (15:7-11)

7 "And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You;

You send forth Your burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff.

8 "At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up,

The flowing waters stood up like a heap;

The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea.

9 "The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil;

My desire shall be gratified against them;

I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.'

10 "You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them;

They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?

Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?

Verse 7. **And in the greatness of Your excellence**, that is, in the full expression of His majesty **You overthrow those who rise up against You**. The picture is of God in the fullness of His majesty pulling down buildings built by His enemies who seek to destroy the work of God. Pharaoh and the Egyptians sought to destroy God's work of building the nation of Israel, bringing them into their land and providing the Messiah through whom salvation would come to the whole world. In the Red Sea God overthrew those plans. God **sent forth His burning anger** because they **rose up against Him** and His plans for His people. This is the principle of Gen 12:3. "I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse." Thus, **You send forth Your burning anger, it consumes them as chaff**. This is a picture of a stream of fire coming from the wrath of God and vaporizing His enemies.

Verse 8. **At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up**. This figure refers to the east wind that God sent to divide the waters. It only required the breath of the Lord's **nostrils**, a minute expenditure of energy, to create such a tremendous spectacle. **The flowing waters stood up like a heap** on the right and on the left so that the Israelites could enjoy salvation from their enemies but at the same time a trap was being set to judge the hardened Egyptians; evidence of this Warriors great military prowess (judgment/salvation). This **blast of the nostrils** made the **deeps congeal in the heart of the sea**, like gel, a thickened substance very similar to the 2nd bowl where the seas congeal like the blood of a dead man (Rev 16:3).

Verse 9. **The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.’** Notice the human will of the enemy in its hardened condition; **I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide, My soul will be gratified, I will draw my sword, My hand will destroy.** Where is God in this equation?

PRINCIPLE: Do not say “I will do this or that” but rather say “If the Lord wills”. **James 4:13-16** “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.” Pharaoh and his armies were boasting in their arrogance. Finally they would get the best of YHWH and these servants.

The evidence here is that Pharaoh’s army intended to destroy the Israelites, their human wills were bent on destruction. Once they were destroyed they would **divide the spoil**, the articles of gold and silver which the Israelites had received from their Egyptian neighbors. The phrase **My desire shall be gratified against them** literally means **My soul shall be filled with them**. Their souls (*nephesh*) were hot with fury and wanted to cool off by the **drawing of the sword** and destruction of the Israelites. This is an evil attempt to exterminate the Israelites.

Verse 10. **You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.** This is the breath of God used to bring the sea back to its original place and **cover them**. Such a small expenditure of God results in the total extermination of Pharaoh’s army, **they sank like lead**.

Verse 11 closes the stanza with another attribute of God. **Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?** YHWH is unmatched. There is no one like Him. Who, even **among the gods**, can expend so little energy and get such tremendous results? There is no match for Him. **Who is like You, majestic in holiness?** No one, no one is set apart in both His character and His actions except YHWH. The shattering of His enemies in the Red Sea reveals that God’s character is the source of His actions. He always works in conformity with His character and thus the shattering of His enemies in the Red Sea is an expression of His **majestic holiness**. It was a just judgment. **Awesome in praises, working wonders?** or better “fearful for praises, doing wonders”. That is, praise comes in response to His fear invoking miracles. Just think if you saw this awesome display of

God's power. It is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God. "it is only with fear and trembling that man can sing songs of praise worthy of His wondrous works."ⁱⁱⁱ The Warrior-Lord is unmatched.

II. YHWH's Future Salvation Victory (15:12-19)

The praise so far has focused on what YHWH has done. The praise in stanza 3 focuses on what YHWH will do! So, Moses composes this stanza as a prophet (Dt 18:15). The point of this stanza is to connect God's work in the past with God's work in the future. In other words, the victory at the Red Sea guarantees the Lord's final victory at Armageddon and the establishment of His kingdom forever and ever. The Red Sea paved the way for this by placing fear in those who stood in the way of Israel possessing the Promised Land. So, this stanza gives a general picture of God's future victories.

A. Stanza 3: The Lord's Enemies Tremble (15:12-16)

¹² "You stretched out Your right hand, The earth swallowed them.

¹³ "In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed;

In Your strength You have guided *them* to Your holy habitation.

¹⁴ "The peoples have heard, they tremble;

Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.

¹⁵ "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;

The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them;

All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

¹⁶ "Terror and dread fall upon them;

By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone;

Until Your people pass over, O LORD,

Until the people pass over whom You have purchased.

Verse 12 clearly moves beyond the Egyptians and the Red Sea to what lies in Israel's future; the Egyptians were not swallowed by the earth but by the sea. But their future enemies will be swallowed by the earth (imperfect). This section also speaks as if the future battles that the Lord fights for Himself and for Israel are as good as accomplished (perfect tenses).

PRINCIPLE: Once God starts a work of salvation He finishes. God is a finisher. This applies to our salvation. Once we believe and are given salvation (phase 1; justification)

then we enter into salvation (phase 2; sanctification). And while we may lose some battles along the way ultimately there is victory (phase 3; glorification). He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). In the realm of salvation, God is a finisher.

Verse 13. God's **lovingkindness**, this is God's *chesed* love, this is His covenant love, His loyal love for the nation of Israel. It will never depart from them. It's the love of a faithful husband. It is by this loyal love that YHWH has **led the** Israelites, His **redeemed** possessions.^{iv} He graciously and carefully led them through the wilderness and across the Red Sea and His love will never leave them nor forsake them.

PRINCIPLE: God will never leave you nor forsake you. He is always with us.

In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation. Where is God's power leading them? To His **holy habitation**, a reference to the **holy** land of Israel promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The land is **holy** because God set apart this land of all the land in the universe to be His land and Jerusalem to be His habitation. As such, it is holy. The verse speaks in the perfect tense as if God has already led them to Israel even though they were standing on the eastern shore of the Red Sea.

Verse 14. "**The peoples have heard, they tremble.** What have they **heard** that makes them **tremble**? They heard about how Israel's God, YHWH, destroyed the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Who **heard**? **Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan.** These enemies were thrown into despair, anxiety and alarm due to this work of God. What **Edom and Moab** feared was Israel passing through their land next. What **Philistia and Canaan** feared was the conquest of their land.

Lands to Pass Through: Edom and Moab

On the way to the holy land the Israelites would have to pass through **Edom** and **Moab**. The **Edomites** are an Arab people, descendants of Isaac's son Esau. They inhabited land north of Mt Sinai (in the Arabian Peninsula) and east of the Jordan River. The **chiefs of Edom** or "princes" **were dismayed**, and so they put up a front of war to discourage the Israelites from passing through and so they went around (Numb 20:18ff; Dt 2:3, 8). Third, **the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them.** Located directly north of Mt Sinai, their knees shook for fear that Israel would pass through and they would be destroyed. **Moab** did not force them to go around but tried to destroy them with Balaam's curse (Numb 22:2ff) which was unsuccessful.

Lands to Conquer: Philistia and Canaan

The **Philistines** had superior military weapons yet were **gripped with anguish** because of YHWH, Israel's God. They were Cretans who had migrated and settled along the Gaza strip. Both Saul and David later warred against them and finally they were completely defeated by the Assyrians and assimilated into the surrounding cultures, never again to become a nation. The **Canaanites** we learn from Josh 2:9, 10, 9:9 knew that God had given the Israelites their land and they had heard the report of the Red Sea crossing.

Joshua 2:9 "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.

Verse 16. "**Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; they are "dumb" as stone** knowing not what to do, unable to move. **Until Your people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom You have purchased;** a lasting condition until the people pass through and enter the holy habitation.

B. Epilogue: The Lord's Kingdom (15:17-19)

The epilogue of this song shifts to the future tense. **I will bring them**, that is Israel **and plant them** so that they will never be uprooted (Amos 9:15). Where? **in the mountain of the Lord's inheritance** which is Mt Zion in Jerusalem. That is, He will plant them in the future Temple where YHWH will have perfect fellowship with His people, and where the people will show themselves by their sacrifices to be the "people of possession," and will serve Him for ever as their King. This was the goal, to which the redemption from Egypt pointed, and to which the prophetic foresight of Moses raised both himself and his people in this song, as he beholds in spirit and ardently desires the kingdom of Jehovah in its ultimate completion."^v

Zechariah 8:3 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain.'

Verse 17b. **The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.** This, of course, refers to

Jerusalem and particularly the Temple. A common Jewish saying explains, "God's world is great and holy. The holiest land in the world is the land of Israel. In the land of Israel the holiest city is Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the holiest place was the Temple, and in the Temple the holiest spot was the Holy of Holies..."^{vi} And in that place, verse 18 says "**The LORD shall reign forever and ever.**" This, of course, speaks of the King of kings and Lord of lords, ruling on earth in the Millennial Kingdom. Why will He do this?

¹⁹ For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them, but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea.

The reason He will reign forever and ever is linked with His victory at the Red Sea. So, why will the Lord reign forever and ever? Because Pharaoh's army sunk in the sea and the sons of Israel walked through the sea on dry land. God finishes the work of salvation that He begins so that we can say that when He won His first victory over Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea so was sealed His final victory over all Israel's enemies. So, His kingdom on earth is certain.

III. The Women's Responsive Worship (15:20-21)

²⁰ Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. ²¹ Miriam answered them,

**"Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;
The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea."**

After each stanza, Miriam and the women would answer the men with these words which began the song in Exod 15:2. She was a **prophetess** and thus received divine revelation which explains why she later challenged Moses in Numb 12:1-10. She was **Aaron's sister** and we know she was also Moses sister but that is left out because neither she nor Aaron were equal to Moses (who was the "servant of YHWH" Exod 14:31). YHWH spoke to Aaron and Miriam through dark sayings but He spoke to Moses face to face (Numb 12:8). Both Aaron and Miriam were subordinate to Moses who would be to them as God. Micah 6:4 indicates that Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were the leaders of Israel. "As prophetess and sister of Aaron she led the chorus of women, who replied to the male chorus with timbrels and dancing..." She was 90 years old and still dancing. The accompanying timbrels and dancing became a Jewish custom that was associated with

victory celebrations (Judg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6, 7; 21:12; 29:5). One such victory celebration is mentioned in heaven during the Tribulation where those who have been victorious over the beast will sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (Rev 15:2-3). So, the song has deep significance and a rich past and future. It is interesting that it was composed by a man who claimed he did not have eloquent speech, and yet here remains one of the greatest psalms ever written; a psalm of victory that should be appreciated by all who overcome their enemies through faith in the Lamb of God.

CONCLUSION:

The thing that is most important about this song is YHWH. YHWH is our strength. YHWH should be our song. YHWH has become our salvation, our Yeshua. YHWH is His name, meaning He is eternal and immanent. YHWH is a Warrior of superior military prowess. Anyone who tries to rise up against YHWH will be torn down YHWH is unmatched. He has no equal. And even while He is a Warrior, He also displays lovingkindness to His covenant people. YHWH is holy and all His actions in history reflect His holiness. At the Red Sea He set the stage for future victory in His holy habitation in the Temple in Jerusalem in the Holy Land. And there He will reign forever and ever.

PRINCIPLE: When we are weak, He is strong.

PRINCIPLE: God is able to turn your most hopeless situations into a sweeping victory.

PRINCIPLE: Do not say “I will do this or that” but rather say “If the Lord wills”.

PRINCIPLE: Once God starts a work of salvation He finishes.

PRINCIPLE: God will never leave you nor forsake you. He is always with you.

ⁱ Walvoord & Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*.

ⁱⁱ **Genesis 1:2** The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

ⁱⁱⁱ K & D, 355.

^{iv} “Had it not been for the Lord, they would have been decimated by Pharaoh and his army. Their deliverance was by God’s power alone.” (*Ungers Commentary on the Old Testament*, 119)

^v K & D.

^{vi} http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/The_Temple.html

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