

## Prayer

Lord God, I praise You for the inner strength You have placed within me. Help me to deal with each challenge I face in the knowledge that I am not alone. I am Your child who has a place and a purpose within the world, and You will show me what to do and how to do it according to Your eternal purposes. Grant me the courage to persist in faith to the end of my days: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Give yourself space to think about the glory of God. Let yourself go, and release all your worries and cares to His almighty love.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the farming community** *Pray about the rearing of animals for slaughter and for food; pray about the moral issues surrounding the production of meat*
- *Pray about the legal protection of the seas, and fish stock*
- *Give thanks for the abundance of God's provision for all*

## Meditation

Hear these words of the Lord God given to you today:

*Listen to my voice and live.*

Salvation is my gift, and what I ask in return, is faith;

*Believe in me and live.*

Redemption is my work, and I do it through Jesus, my Son;

*Do what is right and live.*

Righteousness is what I declare, for I am all good, not evil;

*Discern what is right and live.*

Justification is my reward for those who repent of their sins;

*Confess all your past and live.*

Sanctification is the glorious path of growth in the my Spirit;

*Receive Him now and live*

Holiness is love's perfection and the goal of all my people;

*Aim for the best and live.*

Glory is the mystery of my presence, for now and for eternity;

*Worship me and live.*

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## Bible passage - Exodus 15:1-12

<sup>1</sup> At that time, Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

'I will sing to the LORD, for He has risen up in triumph;  
He has thrown both horse and rider into the sea.

<sup>2</sup> My strength and my song; the LORD!  
He is salvation for me!  
this is my God, I will honour Him;  
my father's God, I will acclaim Him.

<sup>3</sup> The LORD is a warrior;  
the LORD is His name.

<sup>4</sup> Pharaoh's chariots and all his forces He cast into the sea;  
his best officers have drowned in the Red Sea.

<sup>5</sup> The deep waters covered them;  
they went down into the depths like stone.

<sup>6</sup> Your right hand, O LORD, majestic in strength;

Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.  
<sup>7</sup> In the awesomeness of Your majesty You threw down Your opponents; you sent out Your wrath, it consumed them like stubble.  
<sup>8</sup> At the blast of Your anger the waters piled up, the currents stopped and stood still; the waters became solid in the heart of the sea.  
<sup>9</sup> The enemy said, "I will chase, I will catch up,

I will plunder,  
 I will fill up with what I want.  
 I will draw my sword to kill,  
 I will destroy them myself."  
<sup>10</sup> You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them over; they sank like lead in the wide waters.  
<sup>11</sup> 'Who is like You, among the gods O LORD? Who is like You, magnificent in holiness, Fearfully to be praised and doing wonders?  
<sup>12</sup> You stretched out Your right hand, The earth swallowed them up!

## Bible Study

### Review

After the amazing events of the deliverance of the people of Israel through the Red Sea, Scripture records a magnificent song of praise to God, which takes up most of chapter 15 (15:1-21). It is a lengthy song with fascinating insights into the experience of ancient Israelites, and it best studied as a whole. However, there is a great deal to look at so we will begin today by studying the first half. If you have time to read the whole song, then please do so.

Today's passage (15:1-12), consists mostly of Israel's praise to Almighty God for their deliverance from the Egyptians. The second half (to be read tomorrow, 15:13-21) looks ahead to the journey of Israel through the desert to Canaan, and the eventual occupation of the Promised Land. It even looks forward to a day when Israel would establish a 'holy sanctuary', which means a Temple, and says that this will be built on 'mountain' (15:17) from which the Lord would one day rule! This, of course, anticipates the capture of Jerusalem by David, centuries later, and the building of the temple by Solomon.

The entire song is generally called the 'song of Moses and Miriam', because it begins with Moses; '*At that time, Moses and the Israelites sang this song ...*' (15:1f.) and then at the end (15:20), Moses' sister Miriam takes up the song and repeats the very first stanza (see 15:1 and 21). We will look at this in the next study together with the meaning of what is said about Miriam.

This is a very important passage of Scripture, and it has been studied in great depth over the years. The conclusion of independent scholars of ancient languages is that this poem is very ancient. We do not know much about how the Scriptures we possess today have come to us, but it is clear that in early days, much was passed down from one generation to another until the form of it we have today was established. Within this process it is clear that some parts were written down at an early stage, and it seems that this poem was indeed written down a very long time ago. To say this is not to question the authenticity of Scripture, but only to follow through what we know about it from what it says. In general, the more ancient the Hebrew style and the more rare the words used, the earlier the passage was written down (we will see some examples of this later in the study).

The song is unmistakably full of praise to God, and the first two verses form a remarkable declaration of confidence in the Lord. It describes God as '*risen up in triumph*' (15:1), and the people respond by honouring Him and raising Him up in praise, for this what is meant by the Hebrew phrase for '*I will acclaim Him*' in verse 2. The song goes on to praise God's abilities as a '*warrior*' (15:3) and to mock Egypt, the defeated foe. Pharaoh and his army are ridiculed in verse 4 and 5, and then in verses 9 and 10. The scorn continues as the poem repeats the warlike desires of the Egyptian warriors before battle; '*I will chase .. I will catch up ... I will plunder ... I will fill up ... I will draw my sword ... I will destroy ...*' (15:9,10). Despite the arrogance of Egypt, the Lord blew away their presumptions with His breath (15:10), which divided the sea and then swallowed up Pharaoh's army (15:4,5,10).

Even though some find it difficult to use passages of Scripture that describe war, we can hardly doubt that these verses are as uplifting as the best of the psalms (e.g. 15:11). Whilst the song may have been used originally to give thanks for victory over Egypt, this song of praise has been used by Israel throughout the

centuries as a reminder of God's power and strength to save from all kinds of foes and all manner of evil. We can use it today in the same way.

### **Going Deeper**

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- A shout of triumph to the Lord
- The defeat of Pharaoh
- The holding back of the waters

## Going Deeper

The text of this song contains interesting words and phrases and some powerful expressions in Hebrew, which all go to make up a fascinating song. The song is much like a Psalm, though possibly much older, bringing together a wealth of words of wonder and praise to Almighty God. In the end, though, the passage is about celebrating a battle, and this is the greatest challenge presented by the text.

### ***A shout of triumph for the Lord!***

The very beginning of the song goes to the heart of the matter; the God of the Israelites is a God who has remembered His people and delivered them. A degree of mystery always surrounds why God acts when he does, but looking back on the story of the Exodus, we can see that the Lord was able to work through an extraordinarily large number of human situations to bring about the eventual deliverance of His people from slavery. Each part of the long story had its place, but the ultimate aim of the Lord was salvation and liberty. This is why he 'rose up', and the result of it was 'triumph' (15:1) visible in the remains of the Egyptian army scattered around the seashore (14:30).

Verse 2 contains an extremely rare word in Scripture, and it is one which helps us determine that the song retains very ancient words having been written down a very long time ago. The beginning of the verse reads '*My strength and my song; the Lord!*'; though you will find many translations have '*the Lord is my strength and song*' (15:2). The word for 'the Lord' at this point is not the usual four letter (Hebrew) name of God 'JHWH', but a shortened form, 'JH', pronounced 'Jah'. It is written at the end of the poetic line as if it was a battle cry of some kind, or a shout of affirmation and praise! It is common in some churches to call for people to shout out praise to the Lord; what better than to shout out His name in the most ancient form we know!

You will note that this shout is written before the next line which reads like a personal testimony; 'He is salvation for me!' This may sound wonderful and inspiring but it is more than that. When people of later years repeated this song, they would say these words as if the events of the Exodus had happened to them personally; they would talk as if they were saved from Egypt themselves. This significant and very early song is in complete agreement with what we learned earlier about the celebration of the Passover and Unleavened Bread, which was to be shared by future generations as if the events had happened to them personally (Ex 13:8,15). Certainly, this is all evidence that the Exodus was a powerfully uniting factor amongst God's people from the earliest of times.

### ***The defeat of Pharaoh***

The next great shout in the song comes in verse 3, which describes the Lord as a soldier; '*the Lord is a warrior, the Lord is His name*' (15:3). We are not the first people who baulk at the idea of God as a military man, for the Greek translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus' time changes this verse to '*the Lord crushes wars, the Lord is His name*'! It is better to face the facts of the original text and accept that God is honoured to be considered as one who fights for what is right; for liberation and for justice.

In truth, the very best of Pharaoh's forces were defeated (15:4) in the battle for Israel's freedom, including the 'best officers', that is, the men who Pharaoh depended upon to give him advice about the conduct of the battle. They had been outwitted, and they consequently drowned in the sea. The song compares Pharaoh's 'right hand men' who were drowned (15:4,5) with the 'right hand' of the Lord's '*majesty in strength*' (15:6); where the word 'majesty' in Hebrew means not only greater and more magnificent, but also more noble, more worthy and of higher moral worth. Here, Scripture makes a clear moral case for the defeat of Pharaoh: evil had been defeated and the consequence of the Lord's victory was just.

### ***The holding back of the waters***

What follows is an extraordinary description of the manner in which the waters of the Red Sea were held back. Verse 8 says literally 'at the blast of your nostrils the waters heaped up', using a very primitive notion of the flaring of nostrils to signify anger and wrath! I have translated this 'anger' because that is what is meant, but God's anger is a righteous anger (see above). The parting of the Red Sea was an act of

salvation for the people of Israel, but it was an act of anger against the stubbornness and disbelief of the Egyptians. The rest of verse 8 is equally stunning in nature, describing the currents of the Sea piling up to stand still, and the water becoming like a solid mass. Again, the Hebrew words used in this passage are very rare in the Bible because there are not very many places in the Bible where water currents are described, or even where water become solid. The Hebrew word for 'solid' used at the end of verse 8 is one which usually describes something cooked, which starts off liquid and becomes 'congealed'!

The drama of the battle is magnificently described, but perhaps justified by verse 9 which departs from the usual style of Hebrew poetry with a six fold repetition of the 'wants' of the Egyptian army; '*I will chase, I will plunder ...*' (15:9,10, see above). Some scholars have suggested that these six short terse statements were a war chant designed to stimulate the ordinary soldiers of an army before war with the thought of gaining plunder at the expense of the lives of others. This is a chilling reminder of the reality of war, and stands in strong contrast to the desperate and defenceless state of the Israelites who were saved by God. The soldiers met the same fate as their officers in the depths of the Red Sea (15:10)

There is no doubt therefore, that God was praised not just for saving the people of Israel, but for being just in a world of corruption and evil. No wonder the following verse (15:11) says '*who is like You ... magnificent in holiness*'. The people of Israel saw this great victory as one that was right and just, and indeed, holy. In the midst of a world full of sin and injustice, only God remains holy, and only God can say what is ultimately right and wrong; furthermore, what is done by a holy God must indeed be right, whether or not it is understood by us who only see things from the perspective of a faulty and sinful world.

## Application

We cannot afford to forget that the people of Israel did not receive their salvation by some ethereal means or simply by giving ascent to belief in God. Their liberation was wrought in the reality of life, in the experience of slavery and then liberation from an oppressive country. We who live in a world of relative peace and have the luxury of looking at wars as things which happen elsewhere, are cocooned from both the reality of history. We simply do not know what real life is like for most people in the world, many of whom experience tyranny and war in one form or another. Now, it is unfortunately true that none of us knows when we will be called upon to stand again for what is good and right in a troubled world and defend our own lives and homes. At such times, we may find that it is good to have moral compass bearings such as those wrought on the pages of world history by the events of the Exodus.

The moral authority of God who delivered His people from injustice at the Exodus has given us a commanding example of the defeat of evil by all that is good. This is very important because the present world order is defined by a Jewish (and subsequently Christian) definition of good and evil. This lies behind the workings of governments, national and international agreements, institutions, and even science and technology itself. These things have not come from societies based in other faiths, but from faith in a God who wins battles against evil and promotes all that is good in His world.

It is our prayer, of course, that none of us face the perils of war. However, countless generations have paved the way for what we now enjoy by being prepared to lose their lives to defend the liberties we possess. There is no doubt that the history of Christian involvement in wars is not entirely glorious, but in a world which is now uncertain of its bearings, it is vital that we rediscover the compass of a moral God who made the world and acts for good against what is evil.

Perhaps our Scripture today should be read more often in church, not missing out the gruesome sections about war within its glorious praise of God. We may then understand more about the ultimate consequences of believing in a moral God and a moral world, and accept that we have a duty under God to nurture and protect truth, goodness and liberty, for the good of all. I am not arguing for a militarily aggressive approach to world problems, or against the high ideals of pacifism; but I do believe that this text suggests we should have a realistic understanding of the nature of humanity and the facts of our own history which have shaped our world. In this world, evil must be fought and defeated if good is to prevail.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. Which verses of this song do you feel you could use to praise God in church today?
2. Is it possible or wise for us to give thanks to God for any military action which has happened in recent world history?

3. Discuss in your group what you learn about good and evil within this passage.

### **Topics covered by this text**

- *The victories of the Lord*
- *The wrath of God against all evil*
- *The salvation of Israel through the Red Sea*

### **Personal comments by author**

*Over the years, Christians have been divided on the issue of whether it is justified to wage war collectively, even against an evil foe. On the one hand, passages such as this suggest that God does fight wars, but much of Jesus' teaching tends towards what we might call Christian pacifism. The issues are complex, and we should always remember that very committed Christians have never fully agreed about this; but it is important for us to consider where we stand, and enter into the occasional debate about this. Even Jesus said that the peace we experience in our world will not last forever!*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Read this passage over again and ask yourself about what it means for the Lord God to fight evil. Ask yourself what this passage might mean for your own life, and your own discipleship.*
- *Make a list of the enemies of the church you see around you today, and against that list, write down how you believe it is best to deal with the enemy. Share this list with someone else if possible or appropriate.*

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## **Final Prayer**

Almighty God and Father, you have saved your people throughout the ages, and protected them in ways which can never be fully understood. Give us the courage to face issues of good and evil within our world with the strength and courage only You can give, and so contribute to Your work for love and peace within the world: AMEN

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