

MEEKNESS OF MOSES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

The LORD did not conclude His miraculous activity against Egypt when the plagues were completed. The grand finale came at the Red Sea. The LORD once again hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he pursued after the Israelites. The purpose behind this act was identical to the purpose of the plagues and it brought to a climax the LORD's conquest of Pharaoh and the Egyptians: "I will be honored upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD" (14:4).

However, this incident also made it clear that Israel, for all the miracles they had witnessed on their behalf, still did not fully trust the LORD. The crisis Israel faced at the Red Sea was an opportunity for them to trust their covenant-keeping LORD but they turned it into an occasion for unbelief (14:10-12). In spite of this, Moses instructed them to "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD... the LORD shall fight for you and you shall hold your peace" (14:13, 14). The LORD'S miraculous deliverance of Israel obtained its purpose, at least for the moment, because "the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses" (14:31).

Following Israel's safe passage through the Red Sea, both Moses and Miriam celebrated the LORD's mighty power and mercy on Israel's behalf by composing songs of praise. However, three days later the songs and sights of that great event faded from their memories when they were confronted with another test of their faith. When the bitter waters of Marah could not assuage their thirst, they began to murmur, never considering the fact that the LORD, Who parted the waters of the Red Sea, could also purify the waters of Marah. Once again the LORD dealt patiently with His people and met their need through Moses.

Then when Israel's food supplies were almost exhausted after a month of wilderness marching, they were tested again. Once again they failed the test, but the LORD graciously supplied their need by sending bread from heaven. The manner of gathering this bread (manna) was a further test of Israel's obedience. God specifically instructed them when and how much bread to collect with penalties for those who disobeyed. It was in the context of these instructions that God officially instituted the Sabbath law.

I. Salvation of Israel — 14:1-31**A. The LORD Directs Israel — 14:1-9**

14:2 — "Encamp before Pihahiroth" - The technical description of this location indicates that it was not a well-known place. It is even less known today and therefore impossible to pinpoint on modern maps. Whether it was northeast or southeast of Goshen is not the most important point. The fact of vital importance is that God led them to a position strategically situated for the accomplishment of His divine purposes.

14:3 — "They are entangled" - Pharaoh said this of Israel. Literally, "They are perplexed." Taking this route made it appear that Israel had lost its way and run into a dead end. This move was divinely orchestrated to draw out Pharaoh in pursuit.

14:4 — "I will be honored upon them" - The LORD said this of Pharaoh and his elite company of soldiers. It is the ultimate purpose of all mankind to glorify God. This they do willingly by their faithful service or unwillingly as a consequence of divine judgment upon them.

14:5 — "The people fled" - Pharaoh's officials told him this devastating news. The full implications of Israel's departure fell on Pharaoh when he realized that the exodus was permanent. This could mean economic disaster to a system so dependent on manual labor. Yet, to regret that decision required a divine judicial hardening of the monarch who had witnessed the virtual devastation of Egypt and the loss of his own son at the hand of the LORD.

14:7 — "All the chariots of Egypt" - This does not necessarily mean that every chariot in Egypt pursued Israel and was destroyed in the sea, but a great number of them were. The eighteenth dynasty was noted to have implemented chariots as standard military equipment. They consisted of a semi-circular standing board rimmed on three sides at a height of 2¹/₂ feet but open to the rear. The chariot, pulled by two horses, carried a charioteer and a warrior.

14:8 — "Israel went out with a high hand" - They did not exit secretly or quietly but confidently with the hand of the LORD upon them.

B. The LORD Delivers Israel — 14:10-22

14:10 — "The Egyptians marched after them" - The circumstances, taken by themselves, warranted Egyptian confidence and Israelite despair. However, the LORD was testing Israel's faith in Him after they had seen His power in the plagues. Would they trust Him to take care of them in this crisis?

14:11 — "No graves in Egypt" — The Israelites failed The LORD's test. Their faithless pessimism saw no possibility of survival and prompted this sarcastic reproach of Moses: "Did you take us away to die in the wilderness?" They still lacked faith in The LORD's power to deliver them from the Egyptians.

14:13 — "Fear not, stand still" - Literally, "stand firm, waver not." The LORD's command was twofold: "Stop fearing!" and "Firm up your confidence in Me!"

"See the salvation of the LORD" — Salvation here is used not in the spiritual sense, but as physical deliverance from danger. The LORD would provide salvation from Egypt; Israel must trust His salvation. However, it illustrates spiritual salvation: God does all the work to provide it and we simply receive it.

14:15 — The LORD asked Moses, "Why do you cry unto Me?" - Evidently Moses was uttering urgent and fervent supplications for the LORD to deliver them. Moses was showing a lack of faith in the LORD. He had already conveyed His resolve to deliver Israel on this occasion (14:14). Consequently, it was not a time for prayer, but a time for faith and readiness to act!

14:16 — "Lift up your rod" - As in the previous situations, no efficacy is to be attributed to the rod itself or to Moses. The LORD was seen as the competent One and the principle acclamations belonged to Him. Yet Moses was made conspicuous in the event so that his authority might be publicly attested.

14:17 — "I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians" - Pharaoh's hosts partook in his guilt by reveling in the prospect of capturing and plundering Israel in spite of the LORD'S obvious favor on them.

14:19 — "The angel of God" - The Divine Presence which attended Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night is vicariously referred to as "The LORD" (13:21; 14:24), and the "Angel of God."

14:21, 22 — No amount of naturalistic explanations can account for the timing, direction, or intensity of the wind, the fact of the dry ground or the protective division between the two nations. This was undeniably a miraculous event designed and wrought for God's glory!

C. The LORD Destroys the Egyptians — 14:23-31

14:23 — "The Egyptians pursued" - For the Egyptian army to enter this corridor through the sea cognizant of its supernatural origin and protective purpose was utter folly and inexcusable presumption.

14:24 — "Troubled the host" - Literally, the LORD "disturbed" or threw them into confusion.

14:25 — "Took off their chariot wheels" - Literally, caused the wheels to "give way." Whether they broke or sank into the sand is not certain, but the effect was a definitely impeded progress which gave rise to a growing awareness of opposition from Israel's God!

14:26 — The LORD Whom they disdained by their actions now destroyed them by His reaction.

14:30, 31 — Israel witnessed two sides to the LORD's character that day. They saw Him as a merciful deliverer as well as a holy judge. Both of these impressions were done for the LORD to instill a reverence which would result in obedience.

II. Songs of Praise — 15:1-21

A. Song of Moses — 15:1-19

This song, with its stress upon the miraculous intervention of the LORD at the Red Sea, ascribes glory and praise to the LORD for the redemption of Israel. William MacDonald said it well, "Just as the Passover speaks of redemption by *blood*, the Red Sea speaks of redemption by *power*." The LORD God demonstrated His great power in creation, then in the universal flood and here at the Red Sea. His awesome power in delivering Israel from the world power of Egypt at that time brought great fear to Philistia, Edom, Moab and Canaan. Who would be able to resist a nation with the LORD as their God? This was the greatest demonstration of His power in the life of Israel for almost 1500 years until the resurrection of Jesus, their Messiah, after He took their sins and the sins of the world and died for them. So Moses composed a song to commemorate this historic event. It is the first song recorded in the Bible.

It is composed of three or four strophes. Those who see three strophes in the song (2-5; 6-10; 11-18) see each strophe commence with praise to the LORD and speak of the destruction of His enemies. Those who see four strophes in the song (1b-5; 6-10; 11-16a; 16b-18) see each strophe began by addressing the LORD ("I will sing unto the LORD"; "Your right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power"; "Who is like unto you, O LORD"; "till your people pass by, O LORD"). Then they see the first three strophes end with similes of the destruction of the LORD's enemies ("they sank into the bottom as a stone" - v. 5; "they sank as lead in the mighty waters" - v. 10; "they shall be as still as a stone" - v. 16a). Then the last strophe ends this climatic truth: "The LORD shall reign for ever and ever." This truth is not emphasized in the three-strophe arrangement.

The song has two thematic divisions: (1) current event (15:1-12) regarding their deliverance from Egypt at the Red Sea, and (2) prophetic events (15:13-18) describing the future effects of this deliverance on Israel and the Gentile nations. The commentary will follow this twofold division.

1. Current Event — 15:1-12

15:1 — "I will sing unto the LORD" - LORD is Yahweh in Hebrew or Jehovah in some English Bibles. This name is related to His power to keep His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The LORD promised that they would become a great nation and Canaan would be their inheritance.

15:2 — Moses calls the LORD "my strength and song," "my salvation," "my God" and "my father's God."

"I will prepare Him a habitation" - This is a possible translation which appears prophetic regarding the temple construction. A more direct translation of the root meaning "to beautify" would be, "I will glorify Him."

15:3 — "The LORD is a man of war" - Not in the sense that David was a man of war or a bloody man. Rather, the LORD knows how to wage war effectively and to triumph over all of His foes.

"The LORD is His name" — He is the "I AM," independently existing, powerful, covenant-keeping God Who has just proven that He is equal to His name. See comments on 6:3.

15:5 — This verse ends the first strophe and it is possible that Miriam's refrain (v. 21) was sung here and after each strophe.

15:6-7 — In a series of poetic statements Moses makes general reference to the omnipotence and justice of the LORD. They refer not only to His dealing with Egypt, but to His universal ability to vanquish all His foes.

15:8-10 — The primary reference returns once again to the destruction of Egypt.

"Blast of your nostrils" — God caused a strong east wind to pile up the waters of the Red Sea like two frozen walls.

The Egyptian officers of Pharaoh's elite army saw that Israel was cornered and would be easy prey for them and they said, "I will pursue," "I will overtake," "I will divide the spoil," "I will draw my sword" and "my hand shall destroy them," but in their pride they forgot what the LORD did to Egypt in the ten plagues. "Pride goes before destruction (Prov 16:18).

"You did blow with your wind"— God returned the waters to engulf the arrogant Egyptian army.

[Miriam's chorus (v. 21) was probably inserted here again with an ascription of praise to the LORD.]

15:11 — The LORD is without rival among the gods in holiness, causing fear among the people in the nearby nations with His miraculous power.

2. Prophetic Events — 15:13-19

15:13 — Moses abruptly moves his thoughts from Egypt's destruction to the LORD's merciful kindness toward Israel.

"You have guided them" — Literally; "to guide gently, softly, or carefully" even as a good shepherd would his flock. The LORD's kind and merciful redemption of Israel from bondage was a pledge of His intention to bring them into Canaan.

15:14-16 — News of the LORD's deliverance would bring great fear upon the inhabitants of Palestine (Josh 2:9-11). "The inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away" - The term refers to a mental despondency or a dissipation of courage (Josh 5:1).

15:17 — "Plant them in the mountain of your inheritance" - The LORD would settle Israel into a firmly fixed inheritance. They would no longer be slaves or desert migrants, but they would be like a vine sending down its roots and becoming fruitful (Ps 80:8-16).

"The sanctuary... your hands have established" — Moses seemed to know by special revelation that God intended to establish His name in a specific place in Canaan (Deut. 12:5, 11, 14; 14:23, 24; 16:6, 11, etc.).

15:18 — The LORD's victory over Egypt was simply a foretaste when all nations will someday be under the rule of Jesus Christ on earth in His Millennial Kingdom (Zech 14:9; Rev 20:4, 6). When the thousand years are finished, He will give all of the nations of this world to His Father (1 Cor 15:24-28). After this He will reign with His Father in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:1, 3).

15:19 — This is a summary statement of the victory the LORD gave to the Israelites over the Egyptians.

B. Song of Miriam — 15:20-21

Miriam is the first woman in the Bible referred to as a prophetess (cf. Num. 12:2, 6-8). Evidently she had organized women into a tambourine band. It was customary in Egypt for the men and women to be organized in separate musical groups with the women generally playing the tambourine. Her song is generally understood to be a chorus sung by the women at the end of each stanza of the Song of Moses sung by the men's choir.

III. Sustenance from God — 15:22-16:27

A. Sweetened Water — 15:22-27

15:22 — "Three days... found no water" - It is not known how long the Israelites remained at the Red Sea celebrating their deliverance. Having resumed their journey they marched three days without finding water. Although they probably carried skins of drinking water on their animals they could not have carried enough for their livestock as well. Water is necessary to survival especially to people marching through such a wilderness, yet three days does not seem sufficient to warrant a wholesale forgetting of God's faithfulness.

15:25 — "The LORD showed him a tree" - Although trees and shrubs from different parts of the world are known to possess the quality of making bitter waters palatable, none are known to exist in the

Sinai. Whether or not this tree possessed inherent healing properties, the transformation was produced through simple obedience to God's command.

15:26 — Israel was not to assume that they are guaranteed God's unconditional blessing. The statute here reads like Deuteronomy when the emphasis is on their responsibility. The LORD made it clear that their obedience would keep them in good health and they would not receive the diseases that He brought on the Egyptians. It is implied that they would be treated like the Egyptians, if they disobeyed.

15:27 — The LORD brought them to Elim, where He provided them with twelve wells of water. The LORD gave them some relief before He gave them another test. This test was about food.

B. Savory Bread — 16:1-22

16:3 — "Flesh pots" - It appears from this passage and Numbers 11:5 that the Israelites enjoyed a pleasant and plentiful diet in Egypt. They longed for the best of Egypt but quite forgot the worst.

16:4 — "That I may prove them" - Often times God's gracious gifts are accompanied by a test of obedience. Israel was testing God in the wilderness but He was also testing them.

16:6 — "Then shall you know that the LORD had brought you out" - That evening when the quails descended (16:12, 13) in answer to their complaints, Israel would know that the exodus was God's doing and not the ambitious personal scheme of Moses and Aaron.

16:8 — "Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD" - In a practical sense, Moses was the brunt of their complaints, but the real object of their antagonism was the LORD (cf. 1 Sam 8:7).

16:16 — "It is manna" - Literally, "What is it?" Another viable translation of the initial particle *man(na)* is "portion, allowance, or gift." Consequently, it is understood by some to mean, "It is a portion" or "It is a gift."

16:17 — "Some more, some less" - This does not seem to be an indication of willful disobedience. They gathered proportionately to their appetites.

16:20 — "They hearkened not unto Moses" - Some violated Moses' specific order that none be left until morning. "It bred worms" - This was a supernatural judgment upon disobedience and greed.

IV. Sabbath of Rest — 16:23-36

16:23 — "Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD" - Literally, "a holy Sabbath." The noun appears without the definite article which indicates that the entire concept of Sabbath rest was new to these people. This then is an introduction to that concept which would be fully developed in the law at Sinai.

16:28 — "How long refuse you to keep my commandments and my laws?" Moses was addressed, but the people were to blame. The law was new yet simple to observe, but there are always a few lawless ones.

16:31 — "Like coriander seed" - Manna resembled this small round grain in shape, but in color resembled bdellium (Num. 11:6), which was white, according to this passage.

16:33, 34 — Moses instructed Aaron to store up a pot of this perishable bread as a memorial of God's merciful provision during the sojourn. Evidently God preserved it from one generation to the next.