



God Parts the Red Sea

TEXT: Exodus 15

Big Idea:

STUDY

*** Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. ***

H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.



Text

Read the scripture below. Use this copy to make observations, ask questions, and ask how God might be challenging you to move in response to his word.

The Song of Moses

15 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,

**“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.**

2

**The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.**

3

**The Lord is a man of war;
the Lord is his name.**

4

“Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea,



and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

5

The floods covered them;

they went down into the depths like a stone.

6

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,

your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

7

In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;

you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

8

At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;

the floods stood up in a heap;

the deeps 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 have its fill of them.

I will draw my sword; my hand shall 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, O Lord, among the gods?

Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

12

You stretched out your right hand;

the earth swallowed them.

13

“You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;

you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

14

The peoples have heard; they tremble;

pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

15

Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;

trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

16

Terror and dread fall upon them;



because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone,
till your people, O Lord, pass by,
till the people pass by whom you have purchased.

17

You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.

18

The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

19 For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. 20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Bitter Water Made Sweet

22 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24 And the people grumbled against Moses,



saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, 26 saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.



Leader Guide

Belong

Start the group by having time to connect. Take some time to hear about your group member's week and their walk with God.

- What have been the highs and lows since our last meeting? Is there anything in your life that you need prayer for?
- What is your all time favorite worship song or Hymn?
- Is there a time in your life where God did something in your life that caused you to worship?

Believe

The people of Israel have finally made it out! God has delivered the people of Israel out of the bondage of slavery. God has overcome the opponents of Israel and left them at the bottom of the sea. On the other side of this deliverance, Israel breaks out into worship on the other side of the Red Sea.

It's very important to understand what is going into this unhinged worship scene on the banks of the Sea.

Israel is overcome with worship because they recognize who God is in this moment.

Israel recognizes that God is exactly who he said he is.

God came on the scene and told the people of Israel and Egypt that he was the Sovereign Lord of the Universe, in control of everything, the one God over all gods. On the banks of the Red Sea, it is obvious that this is true.

Israel also recognizes that God did exactly what he said he was going to do.

God told the people of Israel that he was their Redeemer, the one who had come to deliver them. On the banks of the Red Sea, it is obvious that this is true.



The foundation of all worship starts with recognition. Worship begins when we recognize who God is and what God has done.

Do you recognize who God is and what God has done?

Why do you think so few people recognize who God is and what God has done for them?

How has God revealed himself in his life?

How do you remind yourself of who God is and what God has done for you?

Become

Recognition is only the first step in worship. After recognition, there must be a response.

What we are watching on the banks of the Red Sea is people responding to what they have just recognized. Their response to what they recognize is praise and worship to the God they just saw work so clearly.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that so many of us recognize who God is and what God has done, few of us move past recognition to responding to God in praise. This is a tragedy. Recognition without response is unChristian. Recognizing who God is and what God has done without responding appropriately is a sin.

When God works in our life, when God makes himself known, we **MUST** respond with worship.

This is why we find the people worshiping on the banks. They couldn't help but praise God for what they had just seen.

What do you need to be praising God for right now?



What keeps you from responding to God appropriately?

How do you build in responding to God in worship into your life?



Commentary

Tyndale Old Testament Commentary

c. The song of triumph (15:1–21)

This may be further subdivided: 1–18 is the ‘song of Moses and the people of Israel’, while verse 21 is specifically described as the song sung by ‘Miriam ... and all the women’. Verses 19 and 20 are a prose summary of the events. But, with the exception of a change to the imperative from the first person of the indicative, Miriam’s brief ‘song’ is the same as the opening lines of Moses’ song. So it is not clear whether Miriam and her women’s choir in fact went on to dance and chant the whole of Moses’ song, or whether Moses’ song is a theological expansion on the theme of Miriam’s song. Further, there is a division within Moses’ song itself. Verses 1–12 deal with the exodus, while 13–18 deal with the future conquest of Canaan.

15:1–12. Crossing the sea. 1. *I will sing to YHWH, for he has triumphed gloriously.* The metre is bold and strong, and the thought simple, yet deep, while the language is full of archaisms. All this suggests an early date. Davies points out the importance of the ‘for’ in this verse. Normally in Israel’s psalms ‘for’ introduces the reason for which God is praised (e.g. Ps. 9:4). The exact nature of God’s act is explained in the prose adjunct of verse 19 below. *Triumphed gloriously*: better ‘has risen up’ (like a wave). The word is used both of pride (in a bad sense) and triumph (in a good sense) as here. Ezekiel 47:5 uses the verb of a river rising in flood.

2. *The Lord.* Here the Hebrew uses the shorter form YH, not the longer YHWH, as in verses 1 and 3. It is this shorter form of the divine name which appears in proper names, and in the common exclamation ‘hallelujah’ or ‘praise YH’. For the thought, compare Psalm 118:14. *My song.* Cross and Freedman translate *zimrāt* as ‘defence’ or ‘defender’ rather than as ‘song’. This would suit the context better, has lxx support, and is based on a cognate word in Arabic. If true, the same translation would go for Psalm 118:14, etc. *I will praise him.* This word does not occur elsewhere in Hebrew. The translation is a guess, from the parallelism, and from similar words in other Semitic languages. This is one of the many archaisms of the song.

3. *A man of war*: ‘warrior’ would be a better translation in modern English. Compare the title YHWH Sabaoth. YHWH of armies or ‘Lord of hosts’.



5. *The depths* is a rare word, perhaps describing by its sound the gurgle and eddy of a returning tide-race. For the simile, see [Jeremiah 51:63, 64](#): so Babylon, God's enemy, will sink like a stone.

8. *At the blast of thy nostrils*. This is the theological interpretation of the 'east wind' which God had sent to dry the sea (cf. [Ps. 18:15](#)). The anthropomorphisms are part of all poetry: and the poetic nature of the whole passage warns us not to take literally the word *heap* (of the floods).

9. *I will pursue, I will overtake*. The heavy threefold beat of this verse is both impressive and primitive in its simplicity; compare Deborah's song in [Judges 5](#) (verse 27 shows the beat even in the English). *Destroy them*. The heavy Hebrew verb, with its archaic ending, is properly 'dispossess them', and is often used later of Israel's expulsion of the Canaanites and occupation of their land. In the mouth of the Egyptians, it has poetic irony when applied to Israel.

10. *They sank*: better, 'went gurgling down' into the 'whirlpools' mentioned above (verse 5). *Lead* takes the place here of 'stone' in the simile above as a natural symbol of weight.

11. *Who is like thee ...?* This is the 'monolatry' of early days (the insistence on the service of YHWH alone) which will later lead to full dogmatic monotheism (the denial of the existence of any other God, apart from YHWH), as in [Isaiah 45:5](#). YHWH is in a different class from these other *gods* or 'mighty ones', whose existence is neither affirmed nor denied, but ignored, for practical purposes. [Psalm 97:7](#) makes all such beings, if they exist, bow down in worship to YHWH: in later days they were usually regarded as mere angelic powers, subservient to him.

12. *Swallowed them*: 'gulped down', again with the archaic verbal suffix. As the crevasse in the desert swallowed Korah, Dathan and Abiram ([Num. 16:31](#)), so the sea swallowed up the Egyptian army. Perhaps 'ereš, 'earth', has its Ugaritic sense of 'underworld': see [Hyatt](#).

15:13–18. The march to Canaan. Some scholars feel that the second part of Moses' song must have been written after the occupation of Canaan, with which it deals. In particular, some see references in verses 13 and 17 to Mount Zion and Solomon's temple, but this is not necessary. Both phrases are archaic, and have parallels long before, in the Ras Shamra tablets. The past tenses throughout may be 'prophetic perfects': future events are described as if they had already taken place. This is common in early days, and particularly familiar in the prophetic books of the Old Testament.



13. *Steadfast love*, often translated ‘mercy’, is (along with ‘truth’) the great covenant word of the Old Testament, to describe God’s unfailing attitude of love towards his people ([Exod. 34:7](#)). In turn, this love is what God demands of his people ([Hos. 6:6](#)). *Redeemed*. God is seen as the *gō’ēl*, the ‘redeemer kinsman’ of his covenant people, Israel. See also on [6:6](#), above. *By thy strength*. Because of the phraseology, many editors have seen in this a reference to the ark, the symbol of God’s presence and guidance, carried before Israel when on the march ([Num. 10:33](#)). This is possible, but unnecessary: the same word for ‘strength’ is used of YHWH in verse 2, where the context makes impossible any reference to the ark. If *thy holy abode* referred to Jerusalem and the temple, of course it would show a late date; but the reference may be purely general. True, in [2 Samuel 15:25](#) the word refers to the sanctuary, but in [Jeremiah 25:30](#) it is general. The Hebrew *nāweh* means ‘pasture’: then perhaps ‘sheep station’ (in the Australian sense); then, more generally and poetically, any home. Here it could refer to the whole land of Canaan, to which Israel is moving.

14. *The inhabitants of Philistia*. The country cannot have taken this name until after the arrival of the Philistines in 1188 bc, so this phrase at least must date from after the conquest. The list of the nations here is given roughly in order, travelling north-east from Egypt.

15. *The chiefs of Edom*. *’allûpîm*, ‘clan-chiefs’ (see [Exod. 12:37](#) for the possible meaning ‘clan’ as well as ‘thousand’ for *’elep*) is a technical term for Edomite rulers (cf. [Gen. 36:15–19](#)). They seem to have occupied a position somewhat lower than a king. It is fair therefore to assume that the *leaders* of Moab (*’elîm*, literally ‘rams’) is also a local technical term. Others have seen a reference to the great sheep-stations of Moab ([2 Kgs 3:4](#)).

16. *Pass by:* or ‘cross over’. The reference may be to Israel’s ‘passage’ by the territories of Edom and Moab ([Deut. 2](#)) or, more likely, a reference to the ‘crossing’ of the Jordan ([Josh. 3](#)) which would lead more directly to the occupation of Canaan. *Whom thou hast purchased*. The word means ‘to acquire’, usually by money. It is an archaic word, used in participial form in [Genesis 14:22](#) as a title of God, translated there as ‘marker’ in most English versions. Hyatt, on these grounds, would prefer to translate ‘created’ here.

17. *Thy own mountain*: literally ‘the mountain of thine inheritance’, but the translation gives the sense. It could mean ‘the mountain country belonging to Israel, your inheritance’ (for Israel as ‘God’s inheritance, see [Exod. 34:9](#)), but in view of Ugaritic parallels the existing translation is to be preferred. Because of the parallels, there is no need to assume a direct reference to Mount



Zion or Solomon's temple: the date therefore could be as early as Moses. *The place ... for thy abode.* [1 Kings 8:13](#) uses this of the temple: it could also refer to Shiloh, or any other early centre of Israelite worship. *The sanctuary.* This word is neutral and only means 'holy place', although in late days it was used of the temple (as the one great holy place).

18. *The Lord will reign.* This thought is characteristic of the psalter later (e.g. [Ps. 10:16](#)) and so some scholars have seen it as argument for a late date. But there are also at least two references in the Pentateuch to the kingship of YHWH in Israel ([Num. 23:21](#); [Deut. 33:5](#)) and indeed the whole concept of covenant probably demands kingship as a necessary corollary.³ Unless Israel from the start believed in the kingship of YHWH, it is hard to explain the violence with which the old-fashioned Israelites opposed the attribution of this title to mortal man a century later (Gideon in [Judg. 8:23](#) and Samuel in [1 Sam. 8:6](#)).

15:19–21. Prose summary and Miriam's song. As mentioned above, the little couplet of Miriam's song is undoubtedly archaic: it may be compared with Deborah's song in [Judges 5](#). However, it adds nothing to the Song of Moses.

20. *The prophetess:* like Deborah ([Judg. 4:4](#)). The word is much less common than the masculine form. Moses is of course regarded in the Pentateuch as a prophet (indeed as the yardstick of all prophethood, [Deut. 34:10](#)); but what is meant by 'prophetess' in this context is not clear. In [Numbers 12:2](#) Miriam makes claim to have spoken YHWH's word just as Moses has: in [Numbers 12:6](#) a prophet is defined as one who had visions or dreams (although Moses is specifically put into a different class). Because Miriam (the name that appears as 'Mary' in New Testament days) is here described as 'Aaron's sister' and not 'Moses' sister', some have concluded that Moses was only her half-brother. There is no other evidence for this, apart from the negative evidence of the Mosaic birth narrative; but the 'sister' mentioned there is not specifically named as Miriam. Hebrew *'āhôt* could mean 'half-sister' just as well as 'sister'.

A timbrel. This was like a Salvation Army tambourine, or a sort of small hand drum, as its onomatopoeic name ('thump!') suggests. Women usually danced and sang on occasions of victory rather than on liturgical occasions. See [1 Samuel 18:6](#) for a victory song: but [Judges 21:21](#) seems to be dancing by women at the autumn festival, therefore liturgical. It seems spontaneous rather than organized music here, but that was probably true of much music in early days. Women singers had a particular role as mourners in later days ([Amos 8:3](#); [2 Chr. 35:25](#)) and later temple-singers included women ([Ezra 2:65](#); [Neh. 7:67](#)) and women singers formed part



of the tribute demanded from Hezekiah by the Assyrians. Some of these singers may of course have been secular rather than sacred: but such a distinction was unlikely to exist in Israel in early days at least.

d. A desert journal (15:22–18:27)

15:22–27. Bitter waters. Israel is now clearly to the east of the salt marshes and inlets of the gulf; but how far south she was we do not know. The position of wells and oases is not likely to have changed since Mosaic times, and we can guess the general route (roughly, down the west coast of the Sinai Peninsula) until they turn due east at some point or other, dependent on the location of Mount Sinai. But the exact identification of the halts is not easy, since we do not know how many miles Israel could or would cover in a day. For nomads with flocks and herds today, ten to fifteen miles is good going, although of course men on a raid can cover much more. It has often been pointed out that Israel, if nomads at all, were ‘donkey nomads’, not ‘camel nomads’. They could not cut across the desert, but must drive their flocks where there was pasture and water. This could be almost anywhere in et-Tih, the ‘desert of the wanderers’ as it is still called in Arabic.

22. *The wilderness of Shur* (Gen. 25:18) is generally taken as the north-west corner of the peninsula, in contrast to the ‘wilderness of Paran’ in the south-east (Num. 13:3)⁴ and the ‘wilderness of Sin’ in the south-west (Exod. 16:1). Whether the later Israelites themselves knew the exact location of all these places is doubtful, but they most certainly knew a list of ‘halts’ in the wilderness, with names and distances of water-holes. Either they or their ancestors may well have worked at the turquoise mines of Sarabit-el-Khadem, halfway down the west coast of the peninsula of Sinai.

23. *Marah*. Unlike many Old Testament etymologies, this is not a mere pun based on similarity of sound, for ‘marah’ could actually mean ‘bitter’ or ‘bitterness’, if it is a Semitic root. The word ‘myrrh’ seems to be from the same root, referring to the sharp flavour of the myrrh. Many desert oases are named from wells, springs and pools, since water is their essential common feature. The spring in question is probably the modern ‘Ain Hawarah. *It was named*. The vague third person singular (literally ‘he called its name ...’) need not necessarily refer to Moses, but could be taken (as *rsv*) impersonally, following the Semitic idiom. That means that



the name may have existed long before Israel's passage. Most artesian wells are bitter and unpleasant because of mineral salts.

24. *The people murmured*: 'grumbled', explicitly against Moses, whom God had appointed as their leader, and thus implicitly against God himself ([Exod. 16:8](#)). In so doing, they are typical of all humanity: that is why they can become both a lesson and a warning to us ([1 Cor. 10:11](#)). There are over a dozen passages in the Pentateuch where such 'murmuring' is mentioned; it was characteristic of Israel.

25. *YHWH showed him a tree*. The verb *showed* is the root from which the word 'Torah', 'instruction', is derived. This in itself shows how much richer the Hebrew concept 'Torah' was than the English concept of 'law'. Here, knowledge of a way to blessing and salvation is called a 'torah'. What the tree was, and how it sweetened the water, it is probably vain to ask. De Lesseps, quoted in [Driver](#), mentions a barberry bush as so used by modern Arabs, and various parallels are quoted from other lands. No doubt the need was to find some pungent or aromatic shrub, whose flavour would cover the mineral taste and make the water palatable. Medieval commentators delighted to see here a reference to the cross, by which the bitterest of life's waters is sweetened. So long as we claim this only as an illustration of a great biblical truth, and not as an exegesis of the passage before us, this is fair enough. It has sometimes been suggested that God may have shown Moses this shrub not at that moment, but during his long stay in Midian previously. But the text seems clear that it was in response to Moses' cry of despair on this occasion. If God had showed it in Midianite days, it would have been another instance of his preparation of Moses. For a similar story of 'healing' of bitter water, see [2 Kings 2:21](#).

Made for them a statute and an ordinance occurs again in [Joshua 24:25](#), with reference to the law-giving at Shechem: it sounds like a set phrase. *There he proved them*. The meaning is 'God tested Israel', the same root as is used in 'Massah' ([Exod. 17:7](#)). But there is no need to assume that this sentence really refers to the later happening. In the present incident of the bitter water, God was testing Israel just as truly as he did at Massah later. By their grumbling reaction, Israel showed only too clearly their true nature when under test. It is possible however that the 'testing' refers to the conditional nature of the promise in verse 26, which is also typical of the teaching of the book of Deuteronomy. God's blessing is always dependent on the obedience of his children to his revealed will.



26. *I will put none of these diseases upon you*: presumably the diseases ‘put upon’ the Egyptians refer in the first place to the plagues in general, but in particular to the turning of the water into blood, which made it undrinkable. Israel will never find the water that God supplies unpalatable: he is YHWH their healer.

27. *Elim*: the name ‘terebinth-trees’ seems taken from the most prominent natural feature. If Marah was ‘Ain Hawarah, then Elim must be the lush Wadi Gharandel, seven miles south, with its jujube trees and wells. There is no need to spiritualize either the *twelve springs* or *seventy palm trees*. The numbers may be strictly literal or round numbers, since both figures, to the Hebrew mind, give the idea of perfection.

Matthew Henry’s Commentary

Chapter 15

In this chapter, I. Israel looks back upon Egypt with a song of praise for their deliverance. Here is, I. The song itself (v. 1–19). 2. The solemn singing of it (v. 20, 21). II. Israel marches forward in the wilderness (v. 22), and there, 1. Their discontent at the waters of Marah (v. 23, 24), and the relief granted them (v. 25, 26). 2. Their satisfaction in the waters of Elim (v. 27).

Verses 1–21

Having read how that complete victory of Israel over the Egyptians was obtained, here we are told how it was celebrated; those that were to hold their peace while the deliverance was in working (ch. 14:14) must not hold their peace now that it was wrought; the less they had to do then the more they had to do now. If God accomplishes deliverance by his own immediate



power, it redounds so much the more to his glory. Moses, no doubt by divine inspiration, indited this song, and delivered it to the children of Israel, to be sung before they stirred from the place where they saw the Egyptians dead upon the shore. Observe, 1. They expressed their joy in God, and thankfulness to him, by singing; it is almost natural to us thus to give vent to our joy and the exultations of our spirit. By this instance it appears that the singing of psalms, as an act of religious worship, was used in the church of Christ before the giving of the ceremonial law, and therefore was no part of it, nor abolished with it. Singing is as much the language of holy joy as praying is of holy desire. 2. Moses, who had gone before them through the sea, goes before them in the song, and composes it for them. Note, Those that are active in public services should not be neuters in public praises. 3. When the mercy was fresh, and they were much affected with it, then they sang this song. Note, When we have received special mercy from God, we ought to be quick and speedy in our returns of praise to him, before time and the deceitfulness of our own hearts efface the good impressions that have been made. David sang his triumphant song in the day that the Lord delivered him, [2 Sa. 22:1](#). *Bis dat qui cito dat—He gives twice who gives quickly*. 4. When they *believed the Lord* (ch. [14:31](#)) then they sang this song: it was a song of faith; this connection is observed ([Ps. 106:12](#)): *Then believed they his words, they sang his praise*. If with the heart man believes, thus confession must be made. Here is,

I. The song itself; and,

1. We may observe respecting this song, that it is, (1.) An ancient song, the most ancient that we know of. (2.) A most admirable composition, the style lofty and magnificent, the images lively and proper, and the whole very moving. (3.) It is a holy song, consecrated to the honour of God, and intended to exalt his name and celebrate his praise, and his only, not in the least to magnify any man: holiness to the Lord is engraven in it, and to him they made melody in the singing of it. (4.) It is a typical song. The triumphs of the gospel church, in the downfall of its enemies, are expressed in the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb put together, which are said to be sung upon a sea of glass, as this was upon the Red Sea, [Rev. 15:2, 3](#).

2. Let us observe what Moses chiefly aims at in this song.

(1.) He gives glory to God, and triumphs in him; this is first in his intention (v. 1): *I will sing unto the Lord*. Note, All our joy must terminate in God, and all our praises be offered up to him, the Father of lights and Father of mercies, *for he hath triumphed*. Note, All that love God triumph in his triumphs; what is his honour should be our joy. Israel rejoiced in God, [1.] As



their own God, and therefore their *strength, song, and salvation*, v. 2. Happy therefore the people whose God is the Lord; they need no more to make them happy. They have work to do, temptations to grapple with, and afflictions to bear, and are weak in themselves; but he strengthens them: his grace is their strength. They are often in sorrow, upon many accounts, but in him they have comfort, he is *their song*; sin, and death, and hell, threaten them, but he is, and will be, *their salvation*: See [Isa. 12:2](#). [2.] *As their fathers' God*. This they take notice of, because, being conscious to themselves of their own unworthiness and provocations, they had reason to think that what God had now done for them was for their *fathers' sake*, [Deu. 4:37](#). Note, The children of the covenant ought to improve their fathers' relation to God as their God for comfort, for caution, and for quickening. [3.] As a God of infinite power (v. 3): *The Lord is a man of war*, that is, well able to deal with all those that strive with their Maker, and will certainly be too hard for them. [4.] As a God of matchless and incomparable perfection, v. 11. This is expressed, *First*, More generally: *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods!* This is pure praise, and a high expression of humble adoration.—It is a challenge to all other gods to compare with him: “Let them stand forth, and pretend their utmost; none of them dare make the comparison.” Egypt was notorious for the multitude of its gods, but the *God of the Hebrews* was too hard for them and baffled them all, [Num. 33:4](#); [Deu. 32:23–39](#). The princes and potentates of the world are called *gods*, but they are feeble and mortal, none of them all comparable to Jehovah, the almighty and eternal God.—It is confession of his infinite perfection, as transcendent and unparalleled. Note, God is to be worshipped and adored as a being of such infinite perfection that there is none like him, nor any to be compared with him, as one that in all things has and must have the pre-eminence, [Ps. 89:6](#). *Secondly*, More particularly, 1. *He is glorious in holiness*; his holiness is his glory. It is that attribute which angels adore, [Isa. 6:3](#). His holiness appeared in the destruction of Pharaoh, his hatred of sin, and his wrath against obstinate sinners. It appeared in the deliverance of Israel, his delight in the holy seed, and his faithfulness to his own promise. God is *rich in mercy*—this is his treasure, *glorious in holiness*—this is his honour. Let us always give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. 2. *He is fearful in praises*. That which is the matter of our praise, though it is joyful to the servants of God, is dreadful and very terrible to his enemies, [Ps. 66:1–3](#). Or it directs us in the manner of our praising God; we should praise him with a humble holy awe, and *serve the Lord with fear*. Even our spiritual joy and triumph must be balanced with a religious fear. 3. He is *doing wonders*, wondrous to all, being above the power and out of the common course of nature; especially wondrous to us, in whose favour they are wrought, who are so unworthy that we had little reason to expect them. They were wonders of power and wonders of grace; in both God was to be humbly adored.



(2.) He describes the deliverance they were now triumphing in, because the song was intended, not only to express and excite their thankfulness for the present, but to preserve and perpetuate the remembrance of this work of wonder to after-ages. Two things were to be taken notice of:—

[1.] The destruction of the enemy; the waters were divided, v. 8. *The floods stood upright as a heap.* Pharaoh and all his hosts were buried in the waters. *The horse and his rider* could not escape (v. 1), the *chariots*, and the *chosen captains* (v. 4); they themselves went into the sea, and they were overwhelmed, v. 19. *The depths, the sea, covered them*, and the proud waters went over the proud sinners; they *sank like a stone, like lead* (v. 5, 10), under the weight of their own guilt and God's wrath. Their sin had made them hard like a stone, and now they justly sink like a stone. Nay, *the earth itself swallowed them* (v. 12); their dead bodies sank into the sands upon which they were thrown up, which sucked them in. Those whom the Creator fights against the whole creation is at war with. All this was the Lord's doing, and his only. It was an act of his power: *Thy right hand, O Lord, not ours, has dashed in pieces the enemy*, v. 6. It was with *the blast of thy nostrils* (v. 8), and *thy wind* (v. 10), and the *stretching out of thy right hand*, v. 12. It was an instance of his transcendent power—in *the greatness of thy excellency*; and it was the execution of his justice: *Thou sentest forth thy wrath*, v. 7. This destruction of the Egyptians was made the more remarkable by their pride and insolence, and their strange assurance of success: *The enemy said, I will pursue*, v. 9. Here is, *First*, Great confidence. When they pursue, they do not question but they shall overtake; and, when they overtake, they do not question but they shall overcome, and obtain so decisive a victory as to *divide the spoil*. Note, It is common for men to be most elevated with the hope of success when they are upon the brink of ruin, which makes their ruin so much the sorer. See [Isa. 37:24, 25](#). *Secondly*, Great cruelty—nothing but killing, and slaying, and destroying, and this will satisfy his lust; and a barbarous lust that is which so much blood must be the satisfaction of. Note, It is a cruel hatred with which the church is hated; its enemies are bloody men. This is taken notice of here to show, 1. That God resists the proud, and delights to humble those who lift up themselves; he that says, "I will, and I will, whether God will or no," shall be made to know that wherein he deals proudly God is above him. 2. That those who thirst for blood shall have enough of it. Those who love to be destroying shall be destroyed; for we know who has said, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*.

[2.] The protection and guidance of Israel (v. 13): *Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people*, led them forth out of the bondage Egypt, led them forth out of the perils of the Red Sea, v.



19. *But the children of Israel went on dry land.* Note, The destruction of the wicked serves for a foil to set off the salvation of Israel, and to make it the more illustrious, [Isa. 45:13–15](#).

(3.) He sets himself to improve this wonderful appearance of God for them. [1.] In order to quicken them to serve God: in consideration of this, *I will prepare him habitation*, v. 2. God having preserved them, and prepared a covert for them under which they had been safe and easy, they resolve to spare no cost nor pains for the erecting of a tabernacle to his honour, and there they will exalt him, and mention, to his praise, the honour he had got upon Pharaoh. God had now exalted them, making them great and high, and therefore they will exalt him, by speaking of his infinite height and grandeur. Note, Our constant endeavour should be, by praising his name and serving his interests, to exalt God; and it is an advancement to us to be so employed. [2.] In order to encourage them to trust in God. So confident is this Psalmist of the happy issue of the salvation which was so gloriously begun that he looks upon it as in effect finished already: *“Thou hast guided them to thy holy habitation*, v. 13. Thou hast thus put them into the way to it, and wilt in due time bring them to the end of that way,” for God’s work is perfect; or, *“Thou hast guided them to attend thy holy habitation in heaven with their praises.”* Note, Those whom God takes under his direction he will guide to his holy habitation in faith now, and in fruition shortly. Two ways this great deliverance was encouraging:—*First*, It was such an instance of God’s power as would terrify their enemies, and quite dishearten them, v. 14–16. The very report of the overthrow of the Egyptians would be more than half the overthrow of all their other enemies; it would sink their spirits, which would go far towards the sinking of their powers and interests; the Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, and Canaanites (with each of which nations Israel was to grapple), would be alarmed by it, would be quite dispirited, and would conclude it was in vain to fight against Israel, when a God of such power fought for them. It had this effect; the Edomites were afraid of them ([Deu. 2:4](#)), so were the Moabites ([Num. 22:3](#)), and the Canaanites, [Jos. 2:9, 10](#); v. 1. Thus God sent his fear before them (ch. 23:27), and cut off the spirit of princes. *Secondly*, It was such a beginning of God’s favour to them as gave them an earnest of his perfection of his kindness. This was but in order to something further: *Thou shalt bring them in*, v. 17. If he thus *bring them out of Egypt*, notwithstanding their unworthiness, and the difficulties that lay in the way of their escape, doubtless he will bring them into Canaan; for has he begun (*so begun*), and will he not make an end? Note, Our experiences of God’s power and favour should be improved for the support of our expectations. *“Thou hast, therefore, not only thou canst, but we trust thou wilt,”* is good arguing. *Thou wilt plant them in the place which thou has made for thee to dwell in.* Note, It is good dwelling where God dwells, in his church on earth ([Ps.](#)



27:4), in his church in heaven, [Jn. 17:24](#). Where he says, “This is my rest for ever,” we should say, “Let it be ours.” *Lastly*, The great ground of the encouragement which they draw from this work of wonder is, *The Lord shall reign for ever and ever*, v. [18](#). They had now seen an end of Pharaoh’s reign; but time itself shall not put a period to Jehovah’s reign, which, like himself, is eternal, and not subject to change. Note, It is the unspeakable comfort of all God’s faithful subjects, not only that he does reign universally and with an incontestable sovereignty, but that he will reign eternally, and there shall be no end of his dominion.

II. The solemn singing of this song, v. [20](#), [21](#). Miriam (or Mary, it is the same name) presided in an assembly of the women, who (according to the softness of their sex, and the common usage of those times for expressing joy, with timbrels and dances) sang this song. Moses led the psalm, and gave it out for the men, and then Miriam for the women. Famous victories were wont to be applauded by the daughters of Israel ([1 Sa. 18:6, 7](#)); so was this. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, it is said ([Micah 6:4](#)), *He sent before them Moses, Aaron, and Miriam*, though we read not of any thing memorable that Miriam did but this. But those are to be reckoned great blessings to a people who assist them, and go before them, in praising God.

Verses [22–27](#)

It should seem, it was with some difficulty that Moses prevailed with Israel to leave that triumphant shore on which they sang the foregoing song. They were so taken up with the sight, or with the song, or with the spoiling of the dead bodies, that they cared not to go forward, but Moses with much ado brought them from the Red Sea into a wilderness. The pleasures of our way to Canaan must not retard our progress, but quicken it, though we have a wilderness before us. Now here we are told,

I. That in the wilderness of Shur they had no water, v. [22](#). This was a sore trial to the young travellers, and a diminution to their joy; thus God would train them up to difficulties. David, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, reaches forth towards God, [Ps. 63:1](#).

II. That at Marah they had water, but it was bitter, so that though they had been three days without water they could not drink it, because it was extremely unpleasant to the taste or was likely to be prejudicial to their health, or was so brackish that it rather increased their thirst than quenched it, v. [23](#). Note, God can embitter that to us from which we promise ourselves most satisfaction, and often does so in the wilderness of this world, that our wants and



disappointments in the creature may drive us to the Creator, in whose favour alone true comfort is to be had. Now in this distress, 1. The people fretted and quarrelled with Moses, as if he had done ill by them. *What shall we drink?* is all their clamour, v. 24. Note, The greatest joys and hopes are soon turned into the greatest griefs and fears with those that live by sense only, and not by faith. 2. Moses prayed: *He cried unto the Lord*, v. 25. The complaints which they brought to him he brought to God, on whom, notwithstanding his elevation, Moses owned a constant dependence. Note, It is the greatest relief of the cares of magistrates and ministers, when those under their charge make them uneasy, that they may have recourse to God by prayer: he is the guide of the church's guides and to him, as the Chief Shepherd, the under-shepherds must upon all occasions apply. 3. God provided graciously for them. He directed Moses to a tree, which he cast into the waters, in consequence of which, all of a sudden, they were made sweet. Some think this wood had a peculiar virtue in it for this purpose, because it is said, *God showed him the tree*. God is to be acknowledged, not only in the creating of things useful for man, but in discovering their usefulness. Or perhaps this was only a sign, and not at all a means, of the cure, any more than the brazen serpent, or Elisha's casting one cruse full of salt into the waters of Jericho. Some make this tree typical of the cross of Christ, which sweetens the bitter waters of affliction to all the faithful, and enables them to rejoice in tribulation. The Jews' tradition is that the wood of this tree was itself bitter, yet it sweetened the waters of Marah; the bitterness of Christ's sufferings and death alters the property of ours. 4. Upon this occasion, God came upon terms with them, and plainly told them, now that they had got clear of the Egyptians, and had entered into the wilderness, that they were upon their good behaviour, and that according as they carried themselves so it would be well or ill with them: *There he made a statute and an ordinance*, and settled matters with them. *There he proved them*, that is, there he put them upon the trial, admitted them as probationers for his favour. In short, he tells them, v. 26, (1.) What he expected from them, and that was, in one word, obedience. They must diligently *hearken to his voice, and give ear to his commandments*, that they might know their duty, and not transgress through ignorance; and they must take care in every thing to do that which was right in God's sight, and to *keep all his statutes*. They must not think, now that they were delivered from their bondage in Egypt, that they had no lord over them, but were their own masters; no, therefore they must look upon themselves as God's servants, because he had *loosed their bonds*, [Ps. 116:16](#); [Lu. 1:74, 75](#). (2.) What they might then expect from him: *I will put none of these diseases upon thee*, that is, "I will not bring upon thee any of the plagues of Egypt." This intimates that, if they were rebellious and disobedient, the very plagues which they had seen inflicted upon their enemies should be brought upon them; so it is threatened, [Deu. 28:60](#). God's judgments upon Egypt, as they were



mercies to Israel, opening the way to their deliverance, so they were warnings to Israel, and designed to awe them into obedience. Let not the Israelites think, because God had thus highly honoured them in the great things he had done for them, and had proclaimed them to all the world his favourites, that therefore he would connive at their sins and let them do as they would. No, God is no respecter of persons; a rebellious Israelite shall fare no better than a rebellious Egyptian; and so they found, to their cost, before they got to Canaan. “But, if thou wilt be obedient, thou shalt be safe and happy;” the threatening is implied only, but the promise is expressed: “*I am the Lord that healeth thee*, and will take care of thy comfort wherever thou goest.” Note, God is the great physician. If we be kept well, it is he that keeps us; if we be made well, it is he that restores us; he is our life, and the length of our days.

III. That at Elim they had good water, and enough of it, v. 27. Though God may, for a time, order his people to encamp by the waters of Marah, yet that shall not always be their lot. See how changeable our condition is in this world, from better to worse, from worse to better. Let us therefore learn both how to be abased and how to abound, to rejoice as though we rejoiced not when we are full, and to weep as though we wept not when we are emptied. Here were twelve wells for their supply, one for every tribe, that they might not strive for water, as their fathers had sometimes done; and, for their pleasure, there were seventy palm-trees, under the shadow of which their great men might repose themselves. Note, God can find places of refreshment for his people even in the wilderness of this world, wells in the valley of Baca, lest they should faint in their mind with perpetual fatigue: yet, whatever our delights may be in the land of our pilgrimage, we must remember that we do but encamp by them for a time, that here we have no continuing city.