

Exodus 15:1-21

'The Song of the Sea'

Helpless and Without Hope

Brian Keenan went to Beirut in 1985 for a change of scene from his local town – Belfast.

He became headline news when he was kidnapped by fundamentalist Shi'ite militiamen.

For four and half years he was held captive and shut off from all news and contact with anyone other than his jailers.

These are some of his thoughts on his time.

The world that has forgotten me has no meaning for me...

I am thrust suddenly into agonising torrents of tears.

I am weeping, not knowing from where the tears come or for what reason...

I am weeping and weeping is all that I am.

... How long have I wept for?

I drift into exhaustion and into melancholic sobs.

For many days now I have tried to scream, but nothing will come out of me.

No sound, no noise, nothing.

I am full of nothing.

My prayers rebound on me as if all those words that I sent up were poured back upon me like an avalanche tumbling around me.

I am bereft even of God.

Now while some of us have probably never experienced the loneliness and helplessness of this man in this prison, every one of us will have at some time experienced being helpless and without hope.

Helplessness, hopelessness – these words strike terror in our hearts.
For there is nothing so dehumanising as being without help and without hope.
And this is how Israel had felt in Egypt.
They too had felt God's absence.
They too had cried out to God.
And God heard.
God saw.
God remembered.
God knew.
God came down.
And God rescued them.

The Song of the Sea

Introducing a remarkable poem

Well, today we are going to move from chapter 2 of Exodus through to chapter 15.

For in chapter 15 they remember God's great rescue in song.

This song is possibly the oldest piece of sustained poetry in the Hebrew Bible.

Scholars uniformly agree that this is one of the most ancient, most radical, and most important poems in the OT.

This ancient piece of poetry is known as the 'Song of the Sea'.

It is a paean of praise to God.

A spontaneous, lyrical outpouring of emotion by a group of people who had experienced the great events of the Exodus.

Now, we are very restricted in time today and so we are not going to be able to delve into it too deeply.

However, I want to draw out one theme from it.

My own view is that this theme is one of the most potent theological themes in the Bible.

It is mentioned on page 1 of the Bible.

It is mentioned in the last few pages of the Bible.

And it undergirds so much in between.

So, let's get started and have a quick overview look at it.

A quick overview

- Why?

Verses 1 and 2 tells us the reason for this hymn.

It is a song of praise because God has triumphed.

It is a song of delight in God's great victory.

It is a victory that has brought him glory.

It is a victory that has brought his people salvation.

- Delight in the Warrior God and the Shepherd King

Now look at verse 3 – 'The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.'

This is battle imagery of the ancient world.

God is pictured as a warrior king fighting Israel's battles and defeating her enemies.

He holds out his hand in battle.

In his hand is a mace that shatters his enemy.

- The pinnacle of the poem

The pinnacle of the poem is reached in verse 11.

The Israelites are clear – no one can be compared to such a God.

He is above all other so called gods.

He alone is majestic in holiness.

He alone is awesome in glory.

He alone works such wonders.

- Parading into the promised land

Then, in the last section of the poem God is presented as leading his people.

Look at verses 13-18.

The language there is strikingly different to the first half of the poem.

No longer is God the warrior God.

Instead, he is the Shepherd King who leads his people to safety.

The journey to the promised land that is about to take place is presented as a victory march.

The passage of God's people will be like going through the waters of the sea.

Petrified nations will make ready a way for Israel.

As God rescued them from Egypt he will as easily bring them into the promised land.

He will be with them in that land just as he was with them as they passed through the waters.

He will plant them in the land.

He will be with them.

And he will reign over them forever and ever.

The Creator Who Redeems

Remembering where Exodus began

Now, having done all of this, I want you to remember back to where we started two days ago in Exodus 1.

Remember that I pointed out the creation allusions throughout Genesis 1 and 2.

Remember that I also pointed out that God's creative purposes appear to be focused on his people Israel.

And remember how I pointed out that Pharaoh is in opposition to these creative purposes.

Pharaoh is therefore an agent of anti-creation.

He wants God's creative purposes to stop.

He is a force towards chaos and disorder in God's world.

Creation allusions in the poem

Now with this in mind, I want you to have see the creation allusions in this poem.

Take a look at verses 5 and 8.

The words 'deep waters' are the same Hebrew words used in Genesis 1:2 to describe the deep chaotic waters that existed before God gave form to the world.

It is over these waters that God speaks and there is light and life and form and order.

In one sense, these waters are the enemy of God's order.

But in Genesis 1 God simply speaks and they are conquered and order is imposed on the world.

Can you see what the writer is doing here?

Pharaoh had sought to impose chaos.

He had sought to revoke God's ordering of the world.

He had broken God's creation order.

But God acted.

He divided the sea again just as he did at creation.

He defeated the forces of chaos.

He brought his people through the waters to a place where they might do what God intended them to do.

In other words, he did a creation event again.

But there are other allusions to Genesis in this passage.

Think back to Genesis 1.

What is the goal and purpose of God's creative work in Genesis 1?

It is rest, isn't it?

God works for six days and then rests.

He puts Adam and Eve in the garden and although he tells them to work the garden, it is clear that he wants them to rest in his presence.

The goal of God's creative work is that humans find rest and sanctuary in the presence of God like they did in the garden of Eden.

But this is not how things had been for Israel in Egypt.

They had not been resting in the presence of a good and generous king who was God.

On the contrary, they had been under the cruel bondage of a fierce king, Pharaoh.

With this in mind, look at how this poem ends in verses 17 and 18.

God will bring his people to a place like Eden.

He will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of his inheritance.

He will bring them to the place where he himself dwells.

He will grant them sanctuary and rest.

He will be in the midst of them.

And he will reign over them forever and ever.

Creation and Redemption – a suggestion

Okay, so there are some of the allusions to Genesis and creation.

There are more, but these are the ones that are most obvious.

Now let's ask ourselves why there are here.

Why is the writer so concerned about creation?

What is God telling us by using these allusions?

Well, let me explain it this way.

The Old Testament makes it clear that the Exodus is THE great act of rescue in Old Testament history.

It is God's great act of redemption.

In the Exodus, God redeems his people.

But what I want you to notice is HOW he redeems his people.

He redeems them by creating again.

Let's put it another way.

We can define redemption as 'the re-establishment of God's created order at a specific time and place.'

Let me say that again.

We can define redemption as 'the re-establishment of God's created order at a specific time and place.'

When God redeems, he is simply bringing a broken creation back into alignment with his purposes at one historical moment in the world.

Redemption is about returning things to God's norm.

It is about making them new again.

It is about bringing them back to the way God intended them.

It is about setting things right again.

Checking out our suggestion

Now, if I'm right then you'd expect to see this sort of thing in the rest of the Bible, wouldn't you.

Well, the point is that you do.

In the book of Isaiah God talks about bringing his people back from exile in Babylon.

He talks about redeeming them from Babylon.

And when he does, he talks about a new Exodus and a new creation.

He will make things new again.

But if I'm right, you'd also expect to see this sort of language in the New Testament, wouldn't you?

Well, let's check it out in three places.

First, let's turn to 2 Corinthians 4.

In this passage Paul is talking about his ministry.

He is saying that his ministry is to bring people to know Jesus.

And he talks about the opposition to this ministry from Satan.

Look at what he says in verses 3-6.

And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Notice what Paul is saying.

He is saying that Satan, who is the god of this world, has set himself up against God.

He has opposed God's purposes, which is to bring people into relationship with him.

He has blinded the eyes of unbelievers so that they cannot see the truth about Jesus.

Now, how does God go about changing this?

He changes it by doing a creation again.

He speaks his word like he did over the deep chaotic waters on the first day of creation.

He says, 'Let light shine out of darkness!'

And the word he speaks is the word about Jesus.

And this word brings light where there was darkness.

It brings life where there was death.

It brings order where there was chaos.

God redeems people by doing a creation again.

This is what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 5:17 when he says, 'If any one is in Christ they are a new creation, the old has passed away, the new has come.'

Becoming a Christian is all about going back to what God intended.

It is about returning to how things were meant to be.

Now I would like you to turn with me to Revelation Revelation 21:1-5.

In the previous chapters there has been a tremendous battle between God and the forces of evil.

God has triumphed over his enemies and the enemies of the people of God.

Let's read what the writer of Revelation has to say about the results of this triumph.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice coming from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new.'

It is a grand passage, isn't it?

Did you notice verse 1 that says there will no longer be any sea?

It is a way of saying that the forces of disorder and chaos will have been totally done away with.

But what I want you to notice is the larger picture.

You see, the larger picture tells us about God's purposes in his world.

His purposes are to return the world to the way he intended it.

It is to return it to a place where humans live with God and with each other in peace and harmony.

Well, in order to accomplish this goal, God will need to do a creation again.

He will need to act.

He will need to replace chaos with order, death with life, darkness with light.

In the New Testament he does this by sending his Son into the world to die.

It is through the death of his Son that Satan is defeated and that relationship with God becomes possible.

It is through the death of his Son that things are set right.

This is why the last pages of the Bible have the lamb in the midst of the garden city.

The lamb is the means by which God makes all things new.

Drawing things together

Okay, now let's try and draw things together.

What is the point of all of this?

How does it help us in a life of ministry?

How does it help us on the missionfield?

Friends, we live in a world opposed to God.

We live in a world of chaos and disorder.

We live as weak and helpless human beings.

We cannot bring in the kingdom of God.

We cannot convert people.

We cannot turn their darkness into light.

We can't turn their death into life.

But there is one who can.

And only he can.

You have seen him at work in Exodus 15.

It is he who is a warrior waging war on disorder and chaos.

It is he who wins.

He makes things the way he intends.

He creates and it is.

He speaks his word and things are done.

Now can you see why this doctrine is so important in Christian mission?

It is so important because it tells us how God will win the world.

He will do it by doing an act of creation.

And this act of creation is done by speaking a word about Jesus into the disorder of the world.

This alone will bring light where there is darkness and life where there is death.

Where this word comes, new worlds will be created that we could not create ourselves.

We cannot change the world.

But God CAN.

And God does as each of you bring the word of Jesus to the world.

As you do, God who said 'Let light shine into darkness' will shine into the hearts of those in darkness.

He will give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Friends, this is our God.

He was and is and will be the creator.

There is none like him.

So let's join Moses and all Israel and stand in awe and wonder of our creator king.

Let's get carried away with this God.

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?

Who is like you – majestic in holiness,

Awesome in glory.

Working wonders?

Who is like you?