

EXODUS

From Slavery to Service

7. The Red Sea

Singing the Song of Victory

(Exodus 13:17 – 15:21)

References

- **Exodus (from series Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)** Terence E. Fretheim, Westminster / John Knox Press, 1991
- **From Slavery to Service: A Study of Exodus**, by Diane L. Jacobson, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 1996 ISBN 0-8066-2978-9 (out of print)

Providence and Planning

- Read Ex. 13:17-22
- God takes into account Israel's sociological situation
- Shows concern for optimizing possibility of success
 - Flip side is that there is a chance of failure

Providence and Planning

- Pillar of cloud and fire
 - Will later be associated with God's revelation (Ex. 19:9)
 - Signifies God's presence in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38)
 - The people experience God's presence through their senses

Providence and Planning

- Return of Joseph
 - May appear disconnected
 - Joseph was the means God used to preserve Israel at the end of Genesis (Gen. 45:5-7)
 - Once again, God's providence is preserving Israel

The Sea Crossing

- Read Ex. 14:1-31
- May be narrative derived from the poem found in chapter 15

The Sea Crossing

- Exodus 14 is bracketed by liturgical material
 - Passover liturgy of chapter 12
 - Song of the Sea of chapter 15
 - Placement implies that the narrative of chapter 14 has liturgical and theological import
- “The two events keep redemption and creation firmly together.” (Fretheim)
 - God’s cosmic victory over the forces of chaos

The Sea Crossing

- Translation note on *yam sup* (Ex. 13:18; 15:4, 22)
 - Most often translated as Red Sea
 - Literal translation is Sea of Reeds or Sea of the End
 - Same words used elsewhere when Red Sea is clearly intended (I Kings 9:26, Ex. 23:31)
- Historical crossing may have been at smaller body of water; Red Sea crossing necessary to make the cosmic theological point

The Sea Crossing

- Egyptians go from battle waging to the stillness of death
- Israelites go “from fear and doubt to stillness to faith and worship” (Fretheim)

Divine and Human Preparation

Exodus 14:1-18

- God engages in military strategy
 - Directs the Israelites to wander a bit
 - Traps the Egyptians into a belief that the Israelites are trapped or wandering aimlessly in the wilderness

Divine and Human Preparation

- God's purpose is to set up a proper relationship with the Egyptians
 - God will harden (from *kabed*) the heart of Pharaoh and thus gain glory (*kabed*) for himself over the Egyptians (Ex. 14:4)
 - In the midst of their defeat, the Egyptians honor God (Ex. 14:25) – *The LORD fights for them.*
 - Egyptians wager their entire military arsenal against God – all their chariots, all Pharaoh's horses
 - “God's hardening activity does not occur in a vacuum; it is not contrary to Pharaoh's (or the Egyptians', 14:17) own general will about the matter. God intensifies a well-ingrained proclivity.” (Fretheim)

Divine and Human Preparation

- Israelites cry out to God by complaining to Moses
 - Have more knowledge of the Egyptians' behavior than God's
 - Characteristic of peoples oppressed for a long time
 - Moses responds to the people with words of gospel (14:13-14)
 - *Do not be afraid*
 - *Stand firm*
 - *Keep still*
 - Israelites are called on to observe God's victory on their behalf

Through the Sea to Dry Land

Exodus 14:19-31

- Liturgical use of Red Sea crossing may have been at the Jordan River (Joshua 3:16-17; 4:22-24)
- God uses nature (clouds and darkness) as a sign of his presence
- God uses the human being, Moses, to initiate and conclude the division of the Red Sea
- “An act of creation” (Fretheim)
 - Dry land from chaos as in Genesis 1:9-10
 - Language of new birth through water implied

Through the Sea to Dry Land

- Israelites respond by faith
 - Using the dry land canyon with walls of water is an act of faith
 - The Egyptians follow, seeing the possibilities, only to have creation turned against them
 - Too late they recognize God's greatness
- With the defeat of the Egyptians, created order is re-established
- Israelites respond with appropriate fear of Yahweh and belief in Yahweh and his servant Moses

A Cosmic Victory

Exodus 15:1-21

- Exodus began with women acting on behalf of God, here women sing God's praise
- Song of Miriam (verse 21) most likely predates the longer Song of Moses
 - Both extremely old – the foundational roots of the Bible
 - Greeting the returning warriors was the women's work (I Sam. 18:6-7) – from Rita Burns

A Cosmic Victory

- Pattern of Exodus 1-15 (Fretheim)
 - Oppression and cries of distress – Ch. 1-2
 - God responds with word (3:1 – 7:7)
 - God responds with deed (7:18 – 14:31)
 - God is praised (Ch. 15)
- Follows the pattern of many psalms (Ps. 32 & 34)
- Westermann says this is the way Israel understands its history with God
- “The songs themselves are the product of a new experience, an experience of both God and people as liberator and liberated. This is a new moment for God as much as for the people; God has never been such a liberator before.” (Fretheim)

A Cosmic Victory

- Praise of the people makes God's deeds known
- This praise is appropriate – “meet and right”
- Praise accomplishes God's stated purpose in 9:16 – *So that my name may be declared throughout all the earth*”
- “God himself is affected by the praise, not simply those who speak praise or respond to it. God is ‘enthroned on the praises of Israel’ (Ps. 22:3); it makes a difference to God that God is praised. For this means that God's name or reputation is enhanced within the world.” (Fretheim)
- Verses 14-15 give impression that the word of God's actions have even preceded Israel's praise

A Cosmic Victory

- “A simple report of a group of slaves escaping from Egypt would have put the fear of God in few, if any. But if that escape is interpreted in terms of the worldwide purposes of a Creator God who is about the business of setting a chaotic, oppressive world straight, then all perpetrators of injustice might well melt away. Only such an interpretation makes it clear *what actually happened* at the sea.” (Fretheim)
- Miller and Cross have pointed out similarities with the role of chaos in ancient creation myths

A Cosmic Victory

- Is. 51:9-10 and Ps. 74:13-14 refer to these myths while re-framing them in terms of God's creative activity
- Throughout Exodus the Egyptians are identified with the anti-creation force of chaos

A Cosmic Victory

- God defeats the Egyptians by calling on chaos to turn against them
- “The mythic configuration of divine combat and victory provide the symbolic prism for disclosing the primordial dynamics latent in certain historical events (like the exodus), and so generate the hope for their imminent recurrence.” (Fishbane)

A Cosmic Victory

- Cosmic victory of God relegates “holy war” traditions to second place
 - God fights without traditional weapons and Israel is commanded not to fight
- “Egypt symbolized evil in the form of humiliating oppression, ungodly exploitation, and crushing domination” (Martin Luther King)

A Cosmic Victory

- “It is called redemption (v. 13) because it is the reestablishment of the created order of justice at a specific time and place (hence the importance of law for Exodus; cosmic order and social order are symbiotically related). God brings the broken creation back into alignment at one historical spot in the world...God reigns forever and ever, not just over Israel...but *in the midst of Israel over the entire cosmos.*” (Fretheim)