

## **YOU ARE INVITED TO THE DANCE**

**Exodus 13:17–15:21**

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Today we look at the theme of the leading out of the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt by God's great and strong hand. Our Scripture expands, chapter 13:17–15:21. There are several themes, which we will look at.

The first is setting out from Egypt. Verses 17–22. Then in 14:1–18 we will look at Israel's final test in Egypt—a test which, by the way, they failed miserably. But thank the Lord He didn't fail. Then a third theme is God's great deliverance, 14:19–31. Finally, the fourth theme of this particular passage is the song of praise to the Lord, 15:1–21.

### **I. Setting out from Egypt.**

We find the Lord giving the Children of Israel specific directions that they are not to take the quick route from Egypt into Canaan, which would be by way of the sea and would bring them into the coastal area where the Philistines lived. We know also from literature and archeology of the period that the Egyptians had many strong fortresses on that particular coastal route which led from Egypt to Canaan. The children of Israel are ordered by the Lord to take a more circuitous route to go down into the wilderness, to not take the easy way.

He leads them by means of the pillar of cloud, and the pillar of fire by night. What is learned from all of this is simply whom the Lord redeems He cares for. When the Passover lamb is slain, God does not provide salvation and then let His people go adrift. When you come to the Lord in salvation, He will guide you, He will care for you. Immediately also after redemption comes a time of great testing. We find this often true when we have first come to Christ or even in our experience in Christ, that there come tests along the way. The tests that Israel will face are very

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acute and will come up shortly after their redemption. Let no one be surprised at the fiery trial which is to come upon them. God cares for us, however, in the midst of that trial, and God cares for us even when we fail. And fail Him. After Egypt is let out from Egypt, the Lord uses a rather direct method of guidance. In the day, the cloud. At night, it was a pillar of fire. Even as ancient armies were led forward by fire symbols so people could see in what direction the troops were going, so God imposes His leadership upon Israel that they might know when to go and when to rest.

It is apparent that part of their marching was occurring during the daytime and part during the evening. No doubt, perhaps, because of the hot climate some marching in the afternoon would be prohibited. Part of it was being done in the evening.

The Lord, in telling them that they must take the longer route, was indicating to them that they were not ready for battle. Also, we learn later in Exodus another reason God wanted them to take the longer route: He wanted some time to meet with them in the wilderness. It would be in the wilderness that the Lord would give to them the law. God is gracious to us in not permitting us to endure trials more than what we're capable of bearing. Thus He knew that somehow Israel could bear the trial of being boxed in by the sea. He would make the way out. That would be His responsibility. But there would be other occasions when it would be their responsibility to stand and fight and they were not yet ready for that.

Israel goes out of Egypt, the text says at the end of chapter 13, equipped for battle. Probably this does not mean they were armed, but denotes they were going out marching abreast like armies would go. They were not going out of Egypt like a disorganized multitude. While they went out in array, in columns looking like they were fit for battle, God actually knew what was in their

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hearts. They were not ready for conflict. God is merciful in the times when we feel like we're up to a struggle and a battle and in fact are not up to it.

With Israel going out of Egypt are the bones of Joseph, a striking thing. The Book of Genesis ends with the theme that Joseph gives direction that when Israel comes out of Egypt at some future point they should carry his bones that he should be buried with his fathers. It's a poetic and dramatic end to the Book of Genesis, for the book begins with a great theme—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." By the time you come to the end of the book you see a man who lamentably gives instructions that his bones be taken when the Children of Israel come out of Egypt. What man does to God's creation is so eloquently described in that ending of the Book of Genesis. Life, which had begun in the garden, with the right environment and the best for man, ends in death. Yet in that death of Joseph there is a word of promise, a word of hope. Joseph breathes it.

Here it is again four hundred years later. His promise has been remembered. He is brought out. The end of Joshua will end with the subject of Israel coming into the land of Canaan and the very next to the next to the last verse in the Book of Joshua describes Joseph's bones being laid to rest finally in the land of Canaan. Hebrews enrolls him for this faith in the Heroes Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11. "By faith Joseph at the end of his life made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial."

### **II. As they're on the way out of Egypt there comes a final test in 14:1–18.**

We see they are trapped by an order of the Lord, Exodus 14:1–4. We find in verse 2 the names of the places where they are located being listed. These are places, which are now uncertain in terms of their geographical location. Where the children of Israel are at is probably not the Red Sea but in the Hebrew it would be the Sea of Reeds, perhaps an area known now as the Bitter

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Lakes. They would be boxed in by a wilderness or a hilly mountainous area on either side of them, the Sea of Reeds to the front of them, and an enemy approaching them from behind. So in four ways they are boxed in. They're in a cul-de-sac. God orders them there. He gives them directions that they are not to go by the easy route, up by the coastal area to the land of Canaan, but instead are to go down into the wilderness. In so going they are to walk into this cul-de-sac. Of course, the whole point of Exodus is that God saves in His own way. This would not be the way an ordinary expedition would set out. God continually through Exodus has demonstrated that He will save according to His purposes. Israel would not have chosen a Passover lamb to be the means of its salvation. Israel would not have chosen the length of the plagues. They would have gone for something more instant. Israel would not have chosen to be boxed in in the wilderness. Yet it is God's choice. So we are reminded continually through the Scriptures that salvation comes by a method which God appoints, which we do not select. Christ Himself allows Himself to be entangled. He tells His disciples that He is going to Jerusalem to die. That He is going to get boxed in by the cross, in the cul-de-sac of death. His disciples protest that He not do it. Yet it is the way that He has appointed to bring us salvation.

Paul so clearly reflects upon this when he declares in 1 Corinthians, "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to those who are being saved it is the power of God." If you're a Christian you understand something about the greatness of salvation because God has appointed a way whereby we can be saved. But if you're not a Christian you simply look upon the whole effect of Jesus' death as simply folly. Something you would not have done. No, it's not something you would have done or even dreamed of. But it is the way that God Himself has provided.

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The children of Israel were ordered into an entanglement that in that entanglement the great power of God might be seen. In the midst of their being trapped, the Lord declares to the children of Israel that once more He would harden Pharaoh's heart. It is striking when you read the text closely, in verse 5, we find that God does not harden his heart until once again Pharaoh has changed his own mind. When Pharaoh has seen the children of Israel in the cul-de-sac he says, "They are in such extremities I can easily take them back." He changes his mind. He disobeys God and God comes in and imposes the hardening of his heart upon him.

God honors our choices and He's continually saying to us, "Thy will be done."

Finally, the Lord indicates that the Egyptians will know the Lord. Verse 4 says, "The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." How many evidences does the Lord need to present in order for us to know Him? Would that we would know Him at the first whispering of His voice, rather than have to experience all the crashing thunder of His judgments.

In verses 5–9 we find the description of the pursuit of the Children of Israel by Pharaoh. The enemy does not want the captives to be free. Pharaoh in this way is a symbol of Satan. In fact, in Pharaoh we see the character of Satan. Satan, like Pharaoh, is a prince who will not admit to defeat. He will keep coming back and keep coming back. The Lord says when the seed of His word is sown, it falls upon the rocky ground or the beaten path and Satan will come and try to snap it up. It is his repeated attempt to not recognize that he is a defeated host. And he keeps coming back and coming back only to meet with final defeat.

In verses 10–12, we find the response of Israel to the surrounding now of Pharaoh. At their face is the sea and at their backs are Pharaoh and his armies and chariots. They become afraid. They were in great fear. Faithlessness to God produces fear. It is easy to be defiant when our enemies are not in sight. But when the enemies show up, what a different story that is. Exodus 14:8

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indicates that the people of Israel went forth from Egypt defiantly. That's before they saw the armies. As soon as they saw the armies of Pharaoh they were afraid.

It is one thing when life is well and health is good, and there are no trials or tragedies on the horizon to be defiant to. And it's quite another thing to keep that defiant faith in the midst of the breaking of the waters of adversity against our life. Indeed, the New Testament is very clear that the Old Testament is written for our encouragement, that we might have a word of hope in trial. That we might see how the ancient people of God failed in their trials so that we might have an example to succeed in ours. God wants our defiance to continue in the midst of the actual adversity of the situation itself.

When we look at our response to adversity, is the response one of fear or is it one of faith? If we are responding in fear to adversity it is because we are more impressed by the things which can be seen. But if we are responding in faith it is because we are more impressed by the things which cannot be seen—the unseen hand and power of our God.

They cry to the Lord when they see the Egyptians. Verse 10 states, “The people of Israel cried out to the Lord,” but they do not wait for the Lord to answer. They're already evidently convinced that the Lord is not going to answer at all. Thus they take the complaint to Moses. And bitter complaint follows their prayer. They blame Moses with such words as “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert” (Exodus 14:11–13, NIV). They blamed their situation upon Moses and ultimately upon God.

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Blame is an inevitable product of bitterness. When you're feeling let down it is so easy to lash out against someone else. When you yourself have sinned and done wrong, instead of accepting the responsibility for your sin it is so easy to strike out and blame other people or other circumstances for why you have wound up in the shape you are in.

Israel winds up blaming the Lord. Instead of looking at their difficulty in light of the nature of God, they're looking at the nature of God through their difficulty. Their difficulty is causing them to say, "God doesn't care," rather than starting from the standpoint "God does care and therefore the difficulty is part of the way in which He is going to more adequately care for us." They are judging God only from their present-tense orientation. They are forgetting what He has already done and they are forgetting what He is going to do in the future, an inevitable thing when we go through trials.

We can so easily get locked in to the darkness of the present and forget what God has already done for us and forget the promises of what He is yet to do. Someone has beautifully said, "When a cloud becomes between us and the sun, it does not mean that the sun has ceased to shine. It means for a while we do not see the sun." So when a cloud of adversity or pressure or trial comes between us and our God, it does not mean that God has ceased to be. It only means that for a while our enjoyment of His full radiant presence is cut off. God has not gone away. We cannot judge the Lord by simply the present.

The reaction of the Hebrews is quite typical of us when we judge our spiritual perspectives by the present alone. We must have a consciousness and deep-rooted faith in God and what He has done in the past and we begin at Calvary and at the Resurrection. Then we take it back to our own life and see what God has done for us in our salvation. We become also people who look at the future and look at what God has yet to do.

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The children of Israel complained. In verses 13–14, Moses said, “Fear not. Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see you will never see again.” And indeed we read that the wars the children of Israel have are not with the Egyptians. They are with nearby enemies but that generation never had to entangle themselves with the Egyptians again. “The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be still.” What a word of affirmation Moses had here. We see as we’re reading through Exodus that real growth has occurred in Moses’ personality and his spiritual maturity. Isn’t it great to realize that you’re not the only person that is capable of growing? God’s saints didn’t start out full blown. They had some progress to make along the way.

Moses had a few times before this when he really blew it in adversity. I can think of some times when he cracked under pressure: Exodus 2 when Moses cracked under accusation by an Egyptian and took off to spend the next forty years in the wilderness. Do you recall how he folded in 5:3 when he met Pharaoh for the first time and Pharaoh seized the occasion and made a fool out of him? Do you recall how Moses folded when the Children of Israel were given heavy tasks to do and they had to not only now make bricks but produce their own straw for the bricks? They come and complain to Moses and he gets so uptight that he blames God for calling him and he wishes God had never sent him. Here again is an opportunity for him to really cave in. But he has begun to learn, begun to advance in his own spiritual development. Now he is standing strong.

Moses’ advice to Israel—stand still and see the salvation of God—is the whole essence of what it means to be saved. God tells us, tells our souls, to stand still and see His salvation. We are to stand still in Gethsemane or at Calvary amid its apparent desertion. To stand still in the garden sepulcher Easter morning and see the salvation of God. Stand still and recognize that all that is

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needed for our salvation God has provided. Israel is not to march out in the sea on its own. It is to march out under the great care and protection of God.

Moses faithful response is sheer faith. God has not yet said a word to him on how He's going to get them out of the cul-de-sac. But now God tells Moses what He's going to do. Verses 15–18 describe what God says to Moses. The directions are, "Moses lift your rod over the sea and the Children of Israel will march through the sea. The Egyptians will pursue you but I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts." The Lord, by the way, does not share his word of assurance with the unbelieving Children of Israel. He shares it with the person who believes. So it is that gospel principle coming true even in the Old Testament that as we move forward in faith God shares more of His nature with us. As we continue to move out and to trust, to lift our heart to Him in belief and to song, He pours more and more of His secrets and His nature upon our lives and hearts.

Moses is going to learn (as the child of God who is really in Christ will learn) that God's presence *in* the trial is better than exemption *from* the trial. Moses would rather have God in the midst of his trial and be successfully able to face the trial than to not have God and not have the trial.

**III. In verses 19–31 we see the text telling us of God's great deliverance, the greatest act of the power of God in the Old Testament.**

This is the unit by which all other things are measured in the Old Testament. Even as in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have in the New Testament the greatest demonstration of God's power revealed. God's deliverance is wrought in the Passover, in the passing through, even as salvation in the New Testament is wrought in the cross of Jesus Christ and in the Resurrection. The Passover is the Passover of Jesus in the cross. The Old Testament exodus

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through the Sea of Reeds or the Red Sea is equivalent to the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. Both the Passover and the Exodus are essential if Israel is to be saved. Belief in both the suffering of Jesus Christ for our sins and in His resurrection from the dead are essential for our salvation as well.

Israel faces the sea and they're to go into the waters of the sea which congeal up on either side of them. It's evident that the going through the sea by Israel is in the night time, for it is in the morning watch between about three and six in the morning when the host of Egypt are destroyed in the sea. So it is in the nighttime they march through the sea, the waters being piled high.

Yet our coward hearts so often shrink from the great waters. We prefer to carry on our lives in the shallow pools. As a result of being in the shallows, we do not see the great works and the great wonders of our God, for they can only be seen by those who go into the deep. There in the depths you see the great wonders of the Lord. It is in the trial and difficulty we experience something of the deep and untold blessedness of being able to count upon our Lord. It is when the people of God are brought into the greatest straits and difficulties that we are favored with the finest displays of God's character. For this reason, He often leads us into a trying position in order that He might more markedly show Himself. We frequently lose sight of this great truth and consequently our hearts give way in the time of trial. If we would only look upon a difficult crisis as an occasion of bringing out on our behalf the sufficiency of God's grace, it would enable us to preserve the balance of our souls and glorify God even in the deepest waters. "They that go down into the depths shall see the wonders of our God."

**IV. In Exodus 15:1–21, they are safely through the sea and the army that opposed them are now destroyed.**

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Miriam, we read in verse 20–21, leads Israel in song and dance of praise to the Lord. This is the first time we read of Israel singing to God. Up until now we've only heard of their cries and their groaning. No singing. They have begun to praise God when the victory has already been won.

From a New Testament perspective, we learn that we may praise God in song before the outcome has been assured. We can lift a song to God in the presence of the trial, not simply when the trial is over.

Paul and Silas in jail at the midnight hour when their backs are raw and bleeding and their feet and hands are in the stocks lift a song of praise to God at midnight. The trial is not over, the outcome is not certain, but they lift a song of praise. So God would have our songs *in* the trial, not simply *after* the trail.

But look at this great victory: We do turn to song in times of great emotional excitement and stirring when ordinary words and ordinary prose seem flat and unequal to express what we feel when we have just celebrated a great victory. The joy that fills our hearts not only lifts us to song but also to physical movement and to dance as Miriam expressed. There is a response to God's great salvation even as three times in the Book of Revelation in heaven the saints are described as breaking out in song, God having brought them safely through.

Picture yourself safely through the waters of death, safely through the waters of this life into the presence of God. What do you think you're going to do when you look back and it's all won, and it's all complete, and life has been won, and your eternity with Christ has been revealed and you have seen Him with the hosts on the other side? Do you think you will break out in singing? Do you think you'll start jumping up and down? You might be sedate. I'm normally very calm but I think I'm going to be absolutely out of my mind with joy. Move some of that joy into the present as well, recognizing indeed here is the future that awaits the people of God.

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This hymn which Israel sings is really divided into two parts: verses 1–12 looks to the past, 13–18 looks to the future. Then finally there's a summary in verses 19–21. Three great things the Lord is to us—our strength, our song, and our salvation. Basically the first twelve verses describe what God has done. God's great acts are rooted in a moment in history. They are not simply vague concepts. They don't simply tell us God is great and then provide no demonstrations of that greatness. Rather the demonstration is provided. All of Israel, all the people of God for ages to come, are to find themselves in this event singing praise unto God for great deliverance. But it is also a look to the future—verses 13–18.

In Numbers 13:31, you find Israel a few months down the road and they're given an opportunity to see everybody's hearts tremble. And you know what their response is. It's a low point of the Old Testament. "We are not able to go up against this people for they are stronger than we." How easily we forget the victories. How easy it is to walk out from a time where we have been blessed of God, or felt a particular deliverance of God, and the next battle that comes down the road we forget God brought us through before. It's so easy to forget. Israel in the moment of worship after this great deliverance from the Sea of Reeds is able to sing great praises to God. Yet moments will come down the road where their faith will falter. Again the Scriptures are written for our encouragement and strength and edification that we might as well remember that we can praise God. Even if there is a space of time which occurs between our last victory and our next victory or last trial and next trial. God is for us. You can look to the future with faith or you can look to the future with fear.

I don't know what stares you in your future but you can look at it in one of those two ways: If you look at it with fear you're going to look at it on the basis of what you can see, what you can feel, what you can hear. If you look at it, however, from the basis of faith, your confidence is not

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in anything which can be seen. But your confidence is in the unseen hand of God, in whom you trust and in whom you have placed your life.

The song is summarized in a narrative fashion in verses 19–20. Miriam is called “the prophetess,” the first time the term is used in the Scripture. She takes a tambourine in hand and begins to dance with the women of Israel and repeat Moses’ song. In the New Testament this theme, this song that is such on the other side of the sea is picked up and used to describe a scene in heaven—Revelation 15:2–4: “I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: ‘Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed’” (NIV).

The song of Moses and of the Lamb. What’s been added? Those who make it through to the other side and who stand on the shores of heaven sing two songs. The song found in Exodus 15, “Great is the Lord. He has overthrown the enemy in the midst of the sea,” but also the song of the Lamb, “Praise to our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What is similar to the song in heaven and the song that is sung on the other side of the sea? The similarities are these: In both the Old Testament and the New Testament there is a sea to cross. In the Old Testament the sea is the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds. In the New Testament, from the standpoint of Revelation, the sea which is to be crossed is the pathway of death, or of martyrdom, the distance that separates man from God. There’s sea which can be crossed, and thank God, because of Jesus Christ it is crossed. There’s not only a sea to cross but there is an

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enemy who cannot make it through the sea. Pharaoh cannot make it through the sea to the other side, with all of his hosts. Neither can Satan, the enemy, the antichrist, and all of the forces which are against God make it through to the presence of God. In both the Old and New Testament, when the people of God are safe on the other side, there is song. That's why singing is such a characteristic of heaven. There we shall sing and rejoice. Our souls shall be beside themselves with delight and joy.

As you look at your own life, these past two Sundays, we've looked at two themes—Christ's sacrifice for us as memorialized in the Passover. Something which He does which we respond to in faith. He says, "I will give you salvation. Only take the blood of the lamb and apply it over the doorposts of your life. When the death angel comes through I will pass over you, having seen the blood." The salvation is salvation which he provides, which is received as you respond in obedience and faith. Having saved your soul, he will deliver you completely. He will not leave you in Egypt. He will not leave you in the clutches of the enemy. He will safely bring you through. When we come together for worship we simply in our worship not only talk about matters which relate to this time—how to get along with people, how to live successfully, how to be a fulfilled person, how to be successful in the Lord and all these kind of things; but we come continually to those emphases which speak to us of eternity, because it is so possible that any one given moment of time any of us will simply slip from here to there. The most basic rope to which we cling is the rope of God's salvation provided for us in Jesus Christ. There comes a time when all the emphasis upon relationship to other people must fade into the distance and we must face the most basic question of all—our relationship with God. God has so carefully prepared a way in which we could be certain of that relationship and come safely through the sea, safely through the time of death, safely through the barrier which separates us from God, safe in His presence

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forevermore. Picture yourself among the number that goes safely through the sea and not among the number that is destroyed in the midst of the sea.