

The Song of the Sea

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[0 : 00] Friends, while you remain standing, let me pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We pray today that as we learn about this great reflection on your mighty works, that we might learn more about you and know how to respond appropriately.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We have an outline, you should have an outline in front of you on the other side of that Bible reading.

Brian Keenan went to Beirut in 1985. He went so far a change of scene from his local town, Belfast, and he became headline news. When he was kidnapped by fundamentalist Shiite militiamen, and for four and a half years, he was held captive and shut off from all news and contact with anyone other than his jailers.

Now these are some of his thoughts about his time. The world that has forgotten me has no meaning to me. I'm thrust suddenly into agonising torrents of tears.

I am weeping, not knowing from where the tears come or for what reason. I'm weeping, and that is all that I am. How long have I wept for?

[1 : 23] I drift into exhaustion and into melancholic sobs. For many days now I have tried to scream, but nothing will come from me.

No sound, no noise, nothing. I am full of nothing. My prayers rebound to me as if all those words that I sent up were just poured back upon me like an avalanche tumbling around me.

I am bereft even of God. Now friends, while some of us have probably never experienced loneliness and helplessness like this man in this prison, every one of us I think has probably at some time experienced being helpless and without hope.

Helplessness, hopelessness, they are words, aren't they, that strike terror into our hearts for there is nothing so terrifying as being without help and with being without hope.

And that is to some extent how Israel felt in Egypt. You see, they too had felt God's absence. They too had cried out to God in their anguish and urged Him to help.

[2 : 34] And God had heard. God saw. God remembered. God knew. God came down. And God rescued them.

And God brought them up. Now today we are going to move from the beginning of Scripture to the end. And sandwiched in the middle, we are going to have a look at Exodus chapter 15. In Exodus chapter 15, what we do is hear about how Israel remembers what God has done, remembers His great rescue of them in song.

This song that we are looking at today is probably the oldest piece of continuous poetry in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars agree that this is one of the most ancient, most radical and most important poems in the whole of the Old Testament.

This ancient piece of poetry is known as the Song of the Sea. It is an outburst of praise to God as Israel waited on the edge of the sea. It is the sort of spontaneous outpouring of emotion by this group of people who had seen what God had just done.

Now we are very restricted in our time today so we are not going to have time to dwell into it too deeply but I want to draw one theme from it. As I give an overview of it, I want to concentrate on one theme for my view is that this theme is one of the strongest themes in the Bible.

[3 : 57] It is mentioned on page one of the Bible, it is mentioned on the last two pages of the Bible and it undergirds nearly everything that comes in between. So let's get started.

Let's have a look at our passage together and let me give you a quick overview of it. And as we do, I want to talk about tenses. Now tenses are somewhat difficult in Hebrew.

That's the most I can tell you. They strictly don't have tenses like we have past, present and future. They sort of form words in such a way that you can understand the tenses but they don't formally have tenses like we do.

But our English versions capture some of the tenses of Hebrew. I want you to have a look first at verses 6 to 10. These verses, if you have a look, are cast and our version has captured what I think is there, the past tense.

God's hand was majestic in power. God did something in the past. Now look at verse 11. Verse 11 is in the present tense. God is majestic in holiness.

[4 : 58] He is awesome in glory. Now look at verses 13 to 21. These verses are set not in the past or the present but the future tense. God will do something.

He will lead his people and nations will hear of what he has done. In other words, can you see what's going on? This poem is carefully crafted so that it portrays, conveys a sense of past, present, future.

It is about God's past actions for his people. It is about his present actions for his people. It is about his future actions for his people. So this is not only a poem about God and his rescue.

It is about God's past, present and future for his people. It is about his incredible plans for his people. So let's now have a look at the content.

First, we're told at the beginning who sang it. We're told that Moses and the Israelites sang which probably means everyone burst into this thing. But have a look at verse 20.

[5 : 59] For we are told that Miriam and all the women sang. So what does that mean? If everyone's singing but only the women are singing, how does that all work out? Well, we don't know exactly. We do know that it could mean that all Israel sang and then the women sang or it could be a sort of responsive singing.

Those of you who are older Anglicans know all about this, don't you? You know where you're reading through the Psalms and the person at the front reads a line and you read a line and so on.

It could be that sort of thing. It could be a responsive sort of singing. What we do know is that this great event is celebrated with all of Israel bursting into song in this great outburst of both music and of voice.

And verses 1 and 2 tell us why. They tell us the reasons for this hymn. It is a song of praise because God has triumphed. It is a song of delight in His great victory.

It is a victory that has exalted Him and brought Him glory. It is a victory that not only has done this but has also brought His people salvation.

[7 : 09] Now look at verse 3. Verse 3 says, The Lord is a warrior. Yahweh is His name. Now really I think probably in today it's not very politically correct language, is it?

God being a warrior but that is exactly what is being said here. This is battle imagery of the ancient world. This is a battle song. This is a victory after a battle.

This is a picture of Yahweh, the Lord. And He is portrayed here as a warrior king fighting Israel's battles, defeating Israel's enemies.

He holds out His hand in battle perhaps with a mace or a sword in it and His hand is glorious in power. It shatters the enemies. Here is God the warrior.

The pinnacle of the poem is reached in verse 11. The Israelites are clear. In view of what God has done for them no one can be compared to their God. He is a God above every other so-called gods.

[8 : 14] He alone among the gods is majestic in holiness. He alone is awesome in glory. He alone works such wonders. Can you see the phrasing? Who is like you among the gods?

Who is like you, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders? Then notice the last section of the poem.

God is presented as leading His people. Look at verses 13 to 18. The picture is so starkly different in one sense from the first part. The language is very different. No longer you see is God the warrior king with mace in hand.

No, instead He is the shepherd king who leads His people to safety. You get this idea that here He is shepherding His people into the promised land.

The journey into the promised land is to take place as a sort of victory march. The passage of God's people will be like going through the waters of the sea. Terrified nations will sort of part and give way just as the sea had and Israel will pass through their midst.

[9 : 21] They sort of watch on just as the sea had watched on. As God rescued Israel from Egypt, He will easily bring them through into the promised land and He'll be with them just as He was as they pass through the waters.

He will plant them in this new land. He will be with them and He will reign over them forever and ever. Now with this in mind, having done all of this, I want you to remember back to where we started with Exodus 1.

I can't remember whether Exodus 1 was back earlier this year or late last year but perhaps you remember Exodus chapter 1. Do you remember that I told you when we got to Exodus 1 that it was full of creation language?

Do you remember how God's creative purposes were focused in on His people Israel? Do you remember that they were multiplying and increasing? And do you remember that Pharaoh wanted to stop that?

He saw this multiplying people. He wanted to prohibit it. He wanted to oppose God. He was therefore a man of anti-creation.

[10 : 26] He was anti-multiplication. He was trying to stop God's creative purposes which were now narrowed in on His people. He is an anti-God agent in Exodus chapter 1.

With that in mind, I want you to now look at Exodus 15 again and I want you to hear the creation language. I'm only going to show you some of it but let me show you a little bit.

Look at verses 5 to 8. Do you see the word floods there? It is the same Hebrew word that is used in Genesis 1-2 to describe the watery depth that existed before God gave shape to the world.

It is over that watery depth that those floods that existed before that God gave form to the world. God spoke over those floods and He ordered order.

Over those waters He spoke and there was life and light and form and order. In one sense, you see, those waters represented were the enemy of God's order but in Genesis 1, God simply speaks and they are conquered and order is imposed upon the world.

[11:45] Now I wonder if you can see what the writer is doing here by using this sort of language at this point. You see, what Pharaoh wanted to do was to reverse God's order over his world. He had broken God's creation order.

God had acted. God divided the sea again just as He did at creation. You see, do you remember in creation that the waters are separated? Some are put here, some are put there, some are put there, some are put here.

Do you remember how He does that in Genesis 1? So He does here. You see, what He does is He parts the water. He defeats the forces of disorder. He brings through that disorder, through those waters, His people, that they might do what God intended them to do.

In other words, God does a creation event again. But there's other allusions to Genesis here. Think back to Genesis 1 if you can for a moment. Ask yourself, what is God's goal and purpose of His creative work in Genesis 1?

Where is God heading as He starts and creates? What is His goal? Well, it's rest, isn't it? For that is what day seven is about.

[13:00] God works six days and then enters into His rest. He puts Adam and Eve in the garden and He tells them to work the garden. But it's clear that what He wants most for them is rest in His presence in the garden.

The goal of God's creative work is that humans rest in His presence like they did in the Garden of Eden. And that is why the book of Revelation ends up in that very situation where humans rest in the presence of God for that is God's goal for His creation.

But that is not how things have been for Israel in Egypt, is it? Think through where we've been to at this point. Were God's people resting in the presence of a good and generous King who was God?

No. On the contrary, they were under the cruel bondage of a fierce king, Pharaoh. With that in mind, look at how the poem ends, verses 17 and 18.

Can you see what God is doing? God will bring His people to a place like Eden. That is, He will bring them to Him. He will plant them on the mountain of His inheritance.

[14:10] He will bring them to the place where He Himself dwells. He will grant them sanctuary and rest. And He will be in the midst of them reigning over them forever and ever. So there are some of the hints of creation and Genesis just in here.

There are many more that I could show you. But these are the ones that are the most obvious. Now I want you to ask yourself, why? Why has the author done this?

Why is the writer so concerned about creation in Exodus? Why is God telling us these strange hints in this song? Let me explain it this way. The Old Testament makes clear that the Exodus, this event that has just happened, is the great act of rescue and of salvation in Old Testament history.

This is God's act of redemption. In the Exodus, God redeems His people. He rescues them. He brings them to Himself. Now what I want you to notice is how He does it.

He redeems by doing what? He redeems by creating again. That's what all those allusions to creation are about in this poem. He redeems by creating again.

[15:21] Now let's put it to you another way. You can redefine redemption in this way or define redemption in this way. If you've got a pen, you might want to write it down. What is redemption?

It is the reestablishment of God's created order at a specific time and place. Okay?

A redemption is the reestablishment of God's created order at a specific time and a specific place. Now, in other words, when God redeems, what is He doing?

He's saying, look, this is broken. I am bringing this broken creation back into alignment with my purposes and I'm doing it here and now.

Redemption is, in other words, about returning things to God's norm. It's about making things new again. It's about bringing them back to the way God intended them. It's about setting things right again, about reestablishing His created order at a specific time and place.

[16:26] Now, if I'm right, then you would expect to see this sort of thing in the rest of the Bible, wouldn't you? And you do.

For example, if you read through the book of Isaiah, you'll notice that when God talks about redeeming His people, about bringing them back from exile, do you know the language He uses? He says, I'm about to do a new creation.

I'm about to do a new exodus. I'm about to redeem. I'm about to set things right. I will make them new again. Now, if I'm right, you'd also expect the same sort of language in the New Testament, wouldn't you?

Because they are influenced by the old. Let's check it out. Open your Bibles now at 2 Corinthians chapter 4. So, in your Bibles, 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and I'll find a page number for you somewhere.

939. So, let's have a look at it together. Now, just to give you some context, Paul is talking about his ministry, and he's saying that his ministry is to bring people to know Jesus, and he talks about the opposition that he experiences in his ministry from the evil one, and look at what he says in verses 3 to 6.

[17:42] He says this, And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

for we do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, who has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Did you notice that language? See that last verse? For it is God who said, do you remember when he said it? He said it in Genesis 1, Let light shine out of darkness, who has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Before I went to theological college, when I was about 19, 20 years old, I worked as an orderly in a home for people with incurable diseases. And I met there a guy who had multiple sclerosis.

He was a guy who in many ways had experienced the tough things of life. He had been at the height of his career and found himself struck with MS.

[19:08] And he said the one good thing that came out of his whole experience was that a friend of his had explained the gospel to him. And he said, Andrew, I can remember graphically how it happened. I was sitting in my office and this guy explained to me what had happened with Jesus.

And he said, it was as though someone had lifted the blind in my office that they'd let it run up and suddenly the light had come flooded in, had come flooding in.

In other words, the God who said, let light shine out of darkness, had shone into his heart and created a whole new being. Can you see what Paul is saying?

He's saying that Satan, the God of this world, has set himself against the true God of this world and he has opposed God's purposes which is to bring people into relationship with their creator.

He has blinded the eyes of unbelievers so they can't see the truth about Jesus. So how does God go about changing this? How does he do it? He does creation again.

[20:12] He speaks a word like he did over the chaotic waters in the first day of creation and he says, let light shine out of darkness and that word he speaks is the word of the gospel.

It is a word about Jesus and this word brings light where there was darkness and life where there was death and it brings order where there was chaos. God redeems, you see, by doing a creation again.

Now, just flip over to chapter 5 verse 17 and look at what Paul says there. He says this, so, if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation.

The old has passed away. See, everything has become new. Can you see what he's saying? He's saying becoming a Christian is like going back to what God intended.

It is about returning to the way that things were meant to be and this happens when the word about Christ is spoken into receptive hearts. With that in mind, let's turn to Revelation 21.

[21:24] I'm not going to tell you the page number because if you can't find it, there's something really wrong. Just go to the end of the Bible and flip back one page and you'll be right. So, Revelation 21 and I'm going to read verses 1 to 5.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See, the home of God is among mortals and he will dwell with men and they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them and he'll wipe every tear from their eyes death will be no more mourning and crying and pain will be no more for the first things have passed away and the one who was seated on the throne said, See, I'm making all things new and also he said, Write these for these words are trustworthy and true.

It's a magnificent passage, isn't it? And can you see what is happening? Did you notice that verse 1 says there will be no longer any sea? In the Old Testament the sea was an agent of chaos and disorder and feared by Jews and what is being said when it says there's no sea it means all forces of disorder have been totally done away with.

They're gone. No sea anymore. No disorder anymore. But what I want you to notice is the larger picture. You see, the larger picture tells us that this is God's purpose for his world and his purpose is to return the world to the way he intended it to a place where humans live with God and live with God in order and peace and harmony and with each other in peace and harmony.

Well, to accomplish this goal God will need to do something. What will he need to do? He'll need to burst into creation into this world and do a creation again. He'll need to act.

[23:31] He'll need to replace chaos with order, death with life, darkness with light and in the New Testament we know he does this by sending his son into the world and through the death of his son Satan is defeated.

Relationship with God becomes possible. Things are set right and that's why at the very last pages of the Bible the Lamb is in the midst of the garden city.

The Lamb is the means by which God will make all things new. God's means for making everything new and right again is Jesus. So, with that all done, now, it would be very easy at this point for you to say, oh, Andrew's sort of taken us on this long theological excursus that's got absolutely no point.

But, on the contrary, it has every point and if you understand it, it will transform how you think about Christian living. What is the point of all of this?

why is it so important to understand what might seem like at first count being some esoteric theological point? Is this simply one of Andrew's academic theological excursions or does it have some practical relevance?

[24 : 44] Well, what I want to say today is that this doctrine of redemption through creation is one of the most practical and comforting doctrines of the Bible and if I did not believe it, I would be in great trouble.

Let me explain. You see, the Bible says that my deepest desire and your deepest desire, if I could put it this way, is to be independent from God. We are sinful like Adam and Eve and my experience of life tells me that the Bible is right.

I find it very hard to do what God wants. In fact, I find myself helpless to do what God wants. Even if I wanted to, I know that I couldn't.

I know that the experience of Adam and Eve and all of Israel who could never get it right is one, to some degree, like my own. I cannot make myself pleasing to God.

I cannot of my own please God. I cannot stop of my own being sinful. The painful reality of living as a human being is this.

[25 : 53] And that's where this doctrine comes to help me and it comes into play. Do you remember Exodus 15? Let me ask you, apart from the Israelites sort of standing on the edge of the sea or walking through it and apart from the Egyptians sort of standing there, the rescue itself, were there any humans active in it?

Were any humans present doing the rescuing? Were there any swords raised in the hands of the Israelites? No. In fact, leading up to it, God said, you just, you just, watch.

Look. Look and see. Don't raise a hand. You do not need to. No, God did it all himself.

He restored things to the way he intended and he didn't need any help. He waged war on disorder like this mighty warrior and he won. And he will lead his people without their help into the promised land.

And what about Genesis? On that first day of creation, were there any humans present? Did God need humans to make his world? No, he didn't.

[27 : 09] He made things the way he intended and did not need any help. He waged war on disaster and chaos like this mighty warrior and won. He created and it was.

He spoke his word and it popped into place. Now you can see why this doctrine is important. It is so important because it tells us how God can make us right with him.

He can make us right with him by doing an act of creation. By speaking his word into Jesus into the disorder of our lives.

By bringing light where there is darkness and life where there is death. Friends, I'm a preacher by trade. If I did not believe this, I would go home now.

Because what I believe happens in the act of preaching is that you take scripture and you bring it to people and God promises that where his word is spoken new worlds will be created.

[28 : 15] New existence is forged. That is what preaching does and that is what scripture does. God speaks his word and new worlds come into existence.

God brings as his word about Jesus comes into the world, he brings light where there is darkness and life where there is death. By creating new worlds within us that we could not create ourselves.

We cannot make ourselves pleasing to God. We cannot make ourselves what God intends us to be. No amount of trying to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps will do it.

We cannot do it but God can and as we trust in Jesus and hear God's word about Jesus he will. God will make us new creations.

The old will pass away and the new will come. As we trust in Jesus God will bring this broken creation in us back into alignment with his purposes.

[29:19] He will make all things new. He will make me like the Lord Jesus Christ a phenomenal impossible thing if it were not for God being the creator who can create new worlds.

This is a wonderful truth isn't it? If God is a creator he can make things new. Do you see now why Genesis begins the Bible begins the way it does?

Do you think it begins because creation was first so therefore you start with first things first? That is chronologically first? No, no. You start with first theological things first. You start with creation because if you've got creation down you'll understand and know how God can do everything from there on.

That's why you have it on page one. If God can make creation creation and if God can create he can make me holy and he can make us what I am me what I am not by nature.

He can make you what you are not by nature. He can do it because he's a creator. Now you can see why the Israelites got so carried away on the other side of the sea can't you?

[30:33] They got so carried away because God was for them. God was a great warrior who fought for them. He was a great king who would give them rest from their enemies. He was God their saviour and because God was his God and they were his people everything had a future.

God was God. He alone was God. There was no other God like him and if we believe that friends through Jesus we can get carried away with them.

Who is like you among the gods? Who is like you glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders?

Who is like you Yahweh? Who is like you and your son Jesus Christ? Let's pray. Father God, who is like you among the gods?

who is like you glorious in holiness, revered with our praises, the performer of wonders? Who is like you and who is like your son?

[31:49] Father, we thank you for the redemption that you have won for us without our hand lifted. We thank you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.