

# Moses and Miriam Praise God

## Exodus 15:11-21

- <sup>11</sup> “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in splendor, doing wonders?”
- <sup>12</sup> You stretched out your right hand,  
the earth swallowed them.
- <sup>13</sup> “In your steadfast love you led the people whom you  
redeemed;  
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.
- <sup>14</sup> The peoples heard, they trembled;  
pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia.
- <sup>15</sup> Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;  
trembling seized the leaders of Moab;  
all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away.
- <sup>16</sup> Terror and dread fell upon them;  
by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone  
until your people, O LORD, passed by,  
until the people whom you acquired passed by.
- <sup>17</sup> You brought them in and planted them on the mountain  
of your own possession,  
the place, O LORD, that you made your abode,  
the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands have established.
- <sup>18</sup> The LORD will reign forever and ever.”

<sup>19</sup> When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

<sup>20</sup> Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. <sup>21</sup> And Miriam sang to them:

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

### Theme Statement

Moses, Miriam, and all the Israelites praise God's saving work. God has delivered them from slavery, crushing the powerful Egyptian army. Israel is now free to worship God and serve God's saving purposes for the world.

### Exploring the Word

*Exodus 15 comes at the momentous point when God's rescued people leave slavery behind and are brought into a restored relationship with God, one of worship and obedience. Exodus 15:11 expresses this and is one of the highlights of the entire book. This focus verse, our study text, and all of Exodus seek to explore these important questions in the life of God's people, Israel: Who is God? What has God done for us? Will we be faithful in our worship of this God?*

The book of Exodus came together over a period of centuries at the hands of different writers bringing together oral and written accounts. Material can be dated as early as the thirteenth century BCE, a historical time of Egyptian oppression and building (Exodus 1:11). Narrative, law, poetry, worship liturgy, and lament all play a part in telling this saving story of God and Israel.

### Exodus 15:11-18 Praise and thanksgiving for God's cosmic victory

All of Israel praises God after their dramatic deliverance through the waters of the Red Sea (15:1-10). Israel points to God as the one true God who works to save all creation. Verse 11 testifies that there is no one like the God of Israel. Later, in Exodus 18:11, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, hears the account of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. He exclaims before Moses that now he knows that “the LORD is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians.” This God is awesome in power and strength, even defeating the great Egyptian pharaoh and his powerful army (v. 12). This God has intimidated all other worldly powers (vv. 14-16). All the peoples of the earth have heard about what the God of Israel has done, and they are afraid and powerless. Israel's God is not just another local deity but has cosmic power and reign. Truly this God is worthy of worship and worthy of the song sung by Moses, Miriam, and all the Israelite congregation on the shore of the Red Sea.

Verses 16-17 testify to God's victory on behalf of the people as they crossed both the Red Sea and the river Jordan and were eventually settled in the promised land. This reference to the crossing of the river Jordan into Canaan is regarded as accomplished, even though it has not yet occurred. This reveals the work of a later editor in shaping this chapter. The mention of “sanctuary” may simply mean God's sanctuary in the heavens or may be the work of a later editor referring to the temple to be built later. This editing focuses Israel on the most important events in its salvation history. Finally, the section ends with God reigning forever (v. 18). God is intimately involved in history but not bound by history. The God who shared the suffering of the Israelite slaves is also the Creator God of the universe. Of course this God will reign forever!

Throughout these verses Israel praises God as the trustworthy cosmic creator and rescuer worthy of worship. Importantly, these saving deeds are not only for Israel's sake but for the sake of God's ongoing saving purpose. Israel has been delivered in order to serve God's goal: the salvation of all creation.

### **Exodus 15:19-21 Miriam and the women sing and dance**

God's gift of deliverance is the main theme here. God gives Israel a road out (exodus, exit) from slavery into a restored relationship with God. Israel is rescued and returned to its God-given mission as faithful witnesses to God in the world. Verse 19 accents God as creator who uses the powerful weapons of nature. Miriam, sister of Moses, is an ecstatic prophet who leads the women. This group was likely well practiced in leading dance and song. The whole congregation praises and gives thanks. In Israel, worship is not a private, individual exercise. God is the God of all Israel and calls all the people to worship and praise. Miriam's song is a victory hymn of all the people. Many scholars hold that Miriam's song predates most of Exodus 15, making it the earliest text of this Israelite victory hymn. The focus of the hymn is God's total victory over the destructive and chaotic power of the Egyptians.

## The Word Today

Most people agree that exercise is good for the human body and mind. It is good for the spirit too, right? Those neurotransmitters called endorphins are released in our brain, and we gain resilience, optimism, and clearer thinking. Long ago, in the 1500s, Martin Luther wrote about worshiping God that we keep God's day and word holy when "we make use of God's word and exercise ourselves in it" (Kirsi I. Stjerna, *The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther 1529*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016, p. 312). The

"exercise" of worship is good for us. Luther would argue that it is *essential* for us. Hearing and sharing God's word builds us up in mind, body, and spirit. The "us" is important. Worship is most often a communal activity. Being a part of a community can foster and enrich worship, just like a physical exercise *group* can keep participants involved and motivated. Concretely, this means hearing God's word in Christ preached and read in the context of a faith community. It also means exercising ourselves together in the study of God's word, in praying and singing. These are fundamental activities in the life of the faith community.

Reading Exodus 15 gives us a wonderful picture of such spiritual exercise. It involves praising God for what God has done, singing (and even dancing!) to God, and recounting and celebrating God's saving work. It focuses on the God who saves when we cannot save ourselves. Worship that focuses on God and God's saving deeds is a powerful witness to others and to the whole world. The story of God's saving deeds brought Jethro to faith long ago (18:9-12). Sharing this story through worship and witness today is just as powerful. It tells the truth: God is at work in our lives and in the entire creation to bring liberation, renewed purpose, and salvation.

## Questions for Discussion

### **Beginnings**

1. Name some ways that you celebrate God in your daily life. How about in your congregational life?

### **Exploring the Word**

1. Why did Moses and Miriam praise God?
2. What is God's purpose in rescuing Israel from slavery? (See Exodus 15:16-17 and Exodus 6:2-9.)

3. How would you complete this sentence based on Exodus 15:2, 11, 13, and 26? "God is the one who . . ."
4. What are the important ways Miriam worships God and leads in worship?

### The Word Today

1. In the space provided, mark whether you agree (A) or disagree (D) with each statement:
- \_\_\_ Bible reading, sermons, singing, and prayer help me exercise my spirit.
  - \_\_\_ Congregational worship is optional for a Christian.
  - \_\_\_ Congregational worship needs more variety and spontaneity.
  - \_\_\_ Worship through dancing and diverse kinds of music is overwhelming.
  - \_\_\_ Worship planning is essential in congregational life.
2. The "spiritual exercise" that is most meaningful to me now is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. In what ways does congregational worship witness to God? Help others to know God?

### Closing Prayer

*We praise you, God, for all you have made and for your continuing care for us and our world. Inspire us in our worship so we, like Moses and Miriam, may bear witness to your saving grace. Gather us around Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord, uniting us in praise and thanksgiving. May the Spirit of Christ continue to strengthen us in our worship and daily witness. Amen.*

### Further Study

Exodus 18:8-12; Isaiah 40

### Daily Reading

- |                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| M. Exodus 14:1-9   | F. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 |
| T. Exodus 14:10-20 | S. Exodus 15:1-10         |
| W. Exodus 14:21-31 | S. Exodus 15:11-21        |
| T. Luke 1:67-75    |                           |

### Memorization

#### Exodus 15:11

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?

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