

LESSONS FROM EXODUS
YAHWEH: THE GOD OF POWER
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“Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.—‘Look, up in the sky,’ ‘It’s a bird,’ ‘It’s a plane,’ ‘It’s Superman. . . .’” Yes, it’s Superman, strange visitor from another planet who flew onto the television schedule in a non-network series that premiered in New York on ABC-TV at 6:15 in the evening on April 1, 1953. It began at 6:15 because, in those days, the evening news break was only fifteen minutes long.

As a youngster, I viewed every episode numerous times. Superman—He was so strong! He was so swift! He was so . . . super! He was my hero, because he could do anything! But alas, he was only a comic-book character come to life on a TV screen. He may have been super, but he was not real.

Today, we continue our study in the biblical Book of Exodus as we look at *Yahweh: The God of Power*. He *can* do anything! And *He is* real!

At 8:32 a.m. on May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens in the Cascade Range of Washington exploded with what is probably the most visible manifestation of the power of nature that the modern world has ever seen. The huge landslide that took place was the largest on earth in recorded history. The massive blast ripped 1,314 feet off the mountain and produced a column of ash and gas that rose more than 15 miles into the atmosphere in only 15 minutes. Over the course of the day, prevailing winds blew 520 million tons of ash eastward across the United States and caused complete darkness in Spokane, Washington, 250 miles from the volcano. The eruption cloud spread across the United States in 3 days; it circled the globe in 15 days. The landslide, traveling at a velocity of 70 to 150 miles per hour, covered 23 square miles and buried 14 miles of the North Fork Toutle River Valley to an average depth of 150 feet, with a maximum depth of 600 feet. The lateral blast of hot material accelerated to at least 300 miles per hour

with temperatures reaching as high as 660° F., and it covered 230 square miles, reaching 17 miles northwest of the crater. The blast blew down 4 billion board feet of timber—enough to build about 300,000 two-bedroom homes. The lateral blast released 24 megatons of thermal energy—7 by the blast, the rest through the release of heat. Let's put this into perspective. One megaton is the energy of almost 100 Hiroshima bombs. The explosion of Mount St. Helens was roughly equivalent to 700 Hiroshimas! Now that is power!¹

Perhaps you are wondering, “Royce, why are you going into so much detail about one act of ‘Mother Nature’?” Because I want to make a point: As powerful as the forces of nature are, they are merely instruments in the hands of our all-powerful God. Yahweh, the LORD God, is not only the sovereign creator of the universe, He is also the supreme master of all its power. Look with me at Exodus, chapter 3, verses 19 and 20. Speaking to Moses about the release of the Israelites, God says:

Now I know very well that the king of Egypt will not give you permission to go, not even under the pressure of a strong hand. So I will stretch out My hand, and I will strike Egypt with an array of My extraordinary deeds that I will accomplish right in Egyptian territory. After that, the Pharaoh will drive you out! (Exod 3:19-20).²

Next, verse 5 of chapter 7:

So the Egyptians will know by first-hand experience that I am Yahweh, when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it (Exod 7:5, my translation).

And then, chapter 13, beginning at verse 14:

In days to come, when your son asks you, “What does this mean?” say to him, “With a mighty hand the LORD [Yahweh] brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD [Yahweh] killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD [Yahweh] the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.” And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD [Yahweh] brought us out of Egypt with His mighty hand (Exod 13:14-16, NIV).

¹*U.S. Geological Survey Fact Sheet 036-00* (Online Version 1.0). Cited 26 October 2001. Online: <http://geopubs.wr.usgs.gov/fact-sheet/fs036-00>.

²Translation suggested by John I. Durham, *Exodus*, World Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco: Word, 1987), 35-36.

The Ten Plagues—God forcing Pharaoh to free the Hebrew people. Oh, how I could talk at length about the plagues as the wondrous works of Yahweh. But if I did that, you would accuse me of being like Pharaoh—not letting the people go! So, to be brief, note how the first and the ninth plagues assail the two great pivotal fundamentals of Egyptian life—the Nile and the sun—both of which were personified as deities in the Egyptian religion. And the tenth plague, it is a direct assault on Pharaoh himself. The entire story of the plagues is about a contest between the will of the Pharaoh and the will of the God whom only the Israelites recognized. The Pharaoh was a self-proclaimed god, the object of worship by his subjects. The doctrine of his divinity was part and parcel of the religious and political institutions of the Egyptian state. By means of the Ten Plagues, Yahweh’s masterful and mighty manipulation of the forces of nature, Pharaoh—“the god-king”—is humbled and humiliated.

And now, we come to the good part! The climax!—Exodus chapter 15. This victory song of Moses and Miriam is far more than merely a hymn of Yahweh’s triumph over Pharaoh and the Egyptians at the Red Sea. This poem celebrates Yahweh present *with* His people and doing *for* His people as no other god anywhere and at any time *can* be present to do. This song of praise may very well be *the theological heart* of the Book of Exodus. The whole exodus story began out of a question of power and the question of who it was, or who this God was, who confronted and challenged the power of Pharaoh over the Hebrew slaves. Now the answer to those questions is clear, and the answer becomes a form of praise. The LORD God is praised as like no other and so exalted, glorious, worthy of praise.

Before we read, I need to note two things. First, I will be reading my own translation of this marvelous hymn. Now the translation of poetry is no easy task. One reason for this is that poetry is often the chosen method for a message precisely because the messenger is attempting to express the inexpressible and to describe the indescribable. How *do* you describe what God did to Pharaoh and the Egyptians? How *do* you express who God is? It is the power of poetry that permits the poet to express and to describe that which is beyond words. Second, How many of you have seen either of the movies—or maybe both—*The Mummy* or *The Mummy Returns*? In the first movie, do you recall how the violent sandstorm took-on the actual face of the menacing priest? And then in the

second movie, how the raging waters took-on the actual face of this same maniacal priest? What incredible scenes! The wind and the water seemed to be alive as agents of destruction. Now, think of what God did with the Red Sea. Since I am not certain how we could depict the face of God, I want you to think of the waters taking on the form a hand—the mighty, outstretched hand of Yahweh that clutches and then crushes the Egyptians. Ok, let’s read! (By the way, we find reference to this hymn in Rev 15:3 where the seven angels sing “the song of Moses . . . and the Lamb.”)

At that time, Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Yahweh, in these words:

I will sing to Yahweh, for He has vindicated Himself victoriously
[lit.: risen risingly];
horse and chariot alike He has hurled into the sea.

My strength and my song is Yah[weh];
He is my salvation.
Such is my God, and I will enshrine Him;
the God of my father, and I will exalt Him.

Yahweh, the Warrior—
Yahweh is His name!

Pharaoh’s chariots and his armies
He has cast into the sea;
the elite among his commanders
are drowned in the Sea of Reeds.

The watery abyss covered them over;
they went down into the depths like stone.

Your right hand, Yahweh—magnificent in might!
Your right hand, Yahweh—shattering the enemy!

And in the vastness of Your majesty You throw down those
who rise against You;
You unleash Your fury, it consumes them like stubble.

At the blast of Your breath [lit.: nostrils] the waters piled up,
the surging waters stood straight like a wall,
the watery abyss hardened in the heart of the sea.

The enemy boasted,
“I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will share the spoils;
my battle-lust will gorge itself on them.
I will bare my sword—
my hand will subdue them.”

You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them over!
They sank like lead in the mighty waters!

Who is like You, O Yahweh, among the gods?
Who is like You? You who are magnificent in holiness,
awesome in praiseworthy deeds, doing that which is extraordinary!

You thrust out Your right hand,
the earth swallowed them.

With Your loyal-love, You have led the people You have redeemed.
By Your mighty power, You have guided them to the dwelling-place
of Your holiness.

The peoples have heard—they tremble.
Agony has gripped those who live in Philistia.

Now the chieftains of Edom are terrified;
the leaders of Moab, trembling has gripped them;
all who live in Canaan are aghast [lit.: have melted away].

Terror and dread have fallen over them;
by the greatness of Your arm, they are struck silent as stone—
Till Your people pass by, O Yahweh,
till this people pass by whom You have ransomed.

You will bring them, and You will establish them, on the mountain
that belongs to You,
the place fixed for Your dwelling that You made, O Yahweh,
a holy sanctuary, O Lord, Your hands have firmly founded.

Yahweh reigns forever and ever!

When Pharaoh's horses along with his chariotry and cavalry came into the sea, Yahweh brought the waters of the sea crashing down on them. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the middle of the sea. Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went along after her, with timbrels and dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

Sing to Yahweh, for He has vindicated Himself victoriously;
horse and chariot alike He has hurled into the sea (Exod 15:1-21).

Yahweh is the God of power! Yahweh—He is absolutely and awesomely sovereign over nature and over history. Yahweh—triumphant! Incomparable! Extraordinary! The rescuer and the redeemer of His people! *The Sovereign who reigns is the Savior who redeems!* Even the neighboring nations cannot deny His deeds of deliverance. They are paralyzed with fear, for they know that their gods are no match for Yahweh.

There are those who debate and dispute the historicity of the Exodus. “What *really* happened?” they ask. Well, I will tell you my answer. What *really* happened defies

description. It is too wonderful for words. You can no more explain the existence of Old Testament Israel as a nation apart from the Exodus from Egypt than you can explain the existence of the New Testament church apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The historical consequences of both are undeniable. And I submit to you that the one and only adequate cause for these consequences is Yahweh—the God of power! The Exodus . . . the Resurrection—the two primary, purposeful, and powerful outpourings of God’s saving strength. It is Yahweh, and Yahweh alone, who has the power to rescue us, to redeem us, to ransom us. Power . . . but more than that . . . it is the power of love. This world—the world in which you and I live out our lives—this world will be a better world *only* when the power of love replaces the love of power.

Lois Cheney, in her book *God Is No Fool*, offers this meditation.

Moses said, “Oh Come on now! Be sensible! Not me! I’m a terrible speaker. They’d never listen to me.” And God said, “Oh, for crying out loud! O.K., I’ll use your brother to help with the speaking.” And Moses led God’s people out of disintegration.

Jonah said, “Oh Come on now! Be sensible! Not me! I’m not the type.” And after a rather unexpected vacation in a fish, just thinking things over, he talked to God’s people, and led them God’s way.

And Zacharias said, “Oh Come on now! Be sensible! Not me! My wife and I are too old to have any kids.” And God said, “Oh shut up!” And he did shut up—for nine months. And John was born, and the way for the Christ opened up.

And I heard a child say,
“I can’t serve God, I’m too young.”

And I heard a boy say,
“I can’t serve God, I’m not good enough.”

And I heard a woman say,
“I can’t serve God, I’m not skilled enough.”

I wonder if God ever gets any new problems.³

Hmm . . . so . . . What’s your excuse? What’s my excuse? Who or what is holding you in bondage? With God, there can be an exodus. Who or what is robbing you of life? With God, there can be a resurrection. Only the LORD is able to lead you and to lead me to liberty and to life.

³Lois A. Cheney, *God Is No Fool* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 130-131.

Sing to Yahweh, for He has vindicated Himself victoriously;
horse and chariot alike He has hurled into the sea.

Yahweh reigns forever and ever!

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