

MARAH BETTER THAN ELIM

NO. 2301

A SERMON
 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 26, 1893
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
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*“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur;
 and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.
 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter:
 therefore the name of it was called Marah.
 And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?
 And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree,
 which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet:
 there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said,
 If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God,
 and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments,
 and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians:
 for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”*
Exodus 15:22-26

AFTER I had fallen down at Mentone, and was grievously ill, a brother in Christ called upon me and said, “My dear friend, you have now come to Marah.” I replied, “Yes, and the waters are bitter.” He then said, “But Marah is better than Elim, for in Elim the Israelites only drank of the water and ate of the fruit of the palm trees, and that was soon over. But at Marah we read that God, ‘made for them a statute and an ordinance,’ and that was never over. That statute and ordinance stood fast and will stand fast for Israel as long as they are a nation. There is much more benefit to be reaped from Marah than from Elim.”

I thanked my friend for that good word. I had found it true aforesaid. I have found it true since then, and you and I, if we are indeed the people of God, will find it true to the end, that Marah, though it be bitter, is also better. And albeit that we do not like it, yet in the end there shall be no bitterness in it, but an unutterable sweetness which shall be ours through time and eternity.

We have a long record about Marah, have we not? I have read you four verses concerning Marah. How many verses have we about Elim? Only one. Does Marah deserve to be talked about four times as much as Elim? Perhaps it does. Perhaps there is four times as much fruit to be obtained from the bitter waters of Marah than from the twelve springs of water, and threescore and ten palm trees at Elim. Who knows?

This I know, however, that we are very apt to talk more about our bitters than about our sweets—and that is a serious fault. It were well if we had fewer murmuring words for our sorrows and more songs of thanksgiving for our blessings. Yet Holy Writ seems here to speak after the manner of men, and to let us have the four verses for the trial, and the one verse for the delight. Still, as it speaks also after the manner of God, I gather that Marah is, after all, more noteworthy than Elim, and truly, there does come to God's people something better out of their troubles than out of their joys.

Certainly one thing is clear, Israel had no miracle at Elim. Wells and palm trees they had, but they had no miracle there, no miraculous change of the bitter into the sweet. And they had no statute, and no ordinance, and no promise, and no new revelation of God, and no new name for JEHOVAH there. All that belonged to Marah, “for there he made them a statute and an ordinance.”

And there He promised, if they were faithful and obedient, that He would put none of the diseases of Egypt upon them, and there He revealed Himself as JEHOVAH Rophi, “the LORD that healeth thee.” Oh, yes, there are many virtues and many blessings in the bitter waters of Marah! Often have we found it true that “Sweet are the uses of adversity.”

I hope that nobody here thinks that these Israelites experienced a small trial. We are not accustomed to traveling in the desert, but those who are, tell us that thirst in the wilderness is something awful to endure. For all that great host to go three days without water must have been a very trying experience. You would not like to try that even in this country, but what must it be to go three days in the wilderness, beneath a burning sky, without a drop of water to drink?

Then came the bitter disappointment at Marah. Probably the people knew that there were water springs ahead, so they hurried up to the place to drink, but when they stooped to taste the waters, they found that they were bitter. They could not drink of them and there they stood, in their desperation, with the long thirst parching their throats, and bitter disappointment adding to their agony. And they murmured against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” I say not this to excuse them, but lest you should think that they had only a small trial to bear.

Remember, also, that this was a new form of trial. They never lacked for water in Egypt—there were plenty of rivers and canals there—and they could drink as much as they chose. This was an experience to which they were quite unaccustomed and I should not wonder if they were greatly surprised at it, for they knew that they were the people of God.

They had just seen the Lord divide the Red Sea and drown their enemies—and now He has brought them out of Egypt to let them perish of thirst in the wilderness? They fancied that they were going to have one long triumphant march right into the promised land, or to be always dandled upon the lap of Providence, and indulged in every way, like spoilt children. They must have stood aghast at finding that, when the earth yielded water to slake their thirst, it was such water as they could not drink.

Well, now, this kind of surprise happens to many who have set out on the way to heaven. God has been very gracious to them—their sins are washed away and they think that the great joy which they have lately experienced will never be taken away from them and will never be even diminished. They reckon upon a long day without a cloud. God has favored them so much that they cannot imagine that they shall have any trial or any bitterness.

It is not so, beloved. A Christian man is seldom long at ease, no sooner does he start out on pilgrimage to heaven than he meets with difficulty, and as he goes on he finds out that the way to heaven is not a rolled pathway—it is up hill and down dale—through the mire and through the slough, over mount and through the sea.

It is by their trials and afflictions that the people of God are proved to be His children. They cannot escape the rod, whoever may—yet this experience does at first come as a very great surprise to them, so I want to talk tonight to some who have been lately brought to rejoice in the Lord’s pardoning mercy, but are now staggered because they have come to an encampment in the wilderness where their thirsty mouths are filled with bitterness.

I begin my discourse by saying that this experience was a great gain to Israel. Marah, with all its trials, was no loss to them. They made a decided advance in three things through having to endure this trial. They were gainers, first, by *examination*. Next, by *experience*. And thirdly, by *education*.

I. First, Israel’s trial at Marah was a gain to them by EXAMINATION. It was to that end that they were brought there, that they might be examined by the Lord—“There he proved them.”

Speaking of Israel at Marah, let me say, first, that *they were in a new position*. They were no longer slaves, they were not in Egyptian territory, the Red Sea rolled between them and their former lives and their former masters. But it is evident from their conduct that they were not altogether a new people. They had brought a great deal of evil out of Egypt with them.

When you heard them sing, you said, “It is strange that those poor slaves can sing such a jubilant song. Those women, so accustomed to carry heavy burdens of earth, how merrily they dance! How

joyfully they strike the timbrels! Israel has certainly become a new race. What a grand choir they make! What singing is theirs! Who would have dreamt that those who cried by reason of their taskmasters would ever sing like that?"

Yes, but when they were tried and tested, it was found that the old stuff was in them still—they murmured just as they had often done before when, in the land of Egypt, they had blamed Moses because their burdens were increased.

We, too, have entered quite a new state. Some of you, perhaps, have lately become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Between you and your old sins there rolls a deep, impassable sea—you will never go back to them again. Ah, but do not begin to flatter yourselves that you have left behind you all your old selves! There remains still, even in the regenerate, the old lusts of the flesh. They have had their heads broken, but they still live. They have been crucified, their hands and feet are fastened to the wood, crucified with Christ—but they live for all that. And they struggle on the cross, and you must not marvel, if, when you are tried and proved, you find that you are like these Israelites at Marah.

Notice, next, that the trial to which Israel was subjected was *the Lord's own test, which is searching and accurate*—"He proved them." We sit down and practice self-examination, which is a very proper thing. Beware, I pray you, of a faith that will not stand self-examination. If you dare not look into your own heart, it must be because there is something rotten there.

The tradesman who is afraid to inspect his books, or examine his stock, is going to the bad, rest assured of that. We are bound to examine ourselves very carefully, but after all, our examinations are very superficial, very partial, and we are very apt to make a mistake. In the case of Israel, the Lord proved them by that thirst in the wilderness, and that great agony on finding that the water they looked for was undrinkable. "He proved them."

The Lord may be bringing some of you into deep waters and great trials, because He is proving you. When the fan is in His hand, then does He thoroughly purge His floor. When He sits as a Refiner of silver, believe me, it is no child's play to be in the crucible. The Lord took Israel to those waters on purpose to prove them. Have you never prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts"? The Lord may answer you in a way of which you little dream—He may conduct you to some waters of Marah that He may test you and prove you.

Well, now, under the test, see what happened to Israel. *Their faith in God evaporated*. That question, "What shall we drink?" has not a trace of faith in it. I hear it shouted, in different tones, by men, and women, and children—and it all comes to the same thing, "We hoped to quench our thirst here, but we cannot drink this water; and now what shall we drink?"

As if God could not, having dried up the sea, turn the earth into a fountain of water! He that made them a path through the midst of the deep waters could make a path for waters to come to them. There was no trace of faith in the murmurers at Marah. They seemed full of faith at the Red Sea, did they not? Many dancers, but no doubters. Many singers, but no unbelievers. Yet the whole company had not more than a pennyworth of faith amongst them. Moses was the only one who truly believed God—but as for the faith of the rest of them, it was mere gilt—vener of faith covering a solid mass of unbelief.

Not only did their faith fail, but *their love to God was very feeble*. Did you not hear them three days ago? Why, you can almost hear the strain of their jubilant song, "He is my God and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him." Oh, how they love JEHOVAH, do they not? They were in the love of their espousals. They went after Him into the wilderness.

But now the cry is, "What shall we drink?" And they murmured against Moses. Theirs was a cupboard love, like yours and mine often is. They loved God very much for what they got out of Him and if He would not give them water to drink, what cared they for Him? If He would divide the Red Sea for them, then He would be their God and they would prepare Him a habitation. But if He let them suffer the pangs of thirst, there should be no blessings for Him on their lips.

Ah, me! how like ourselves were these people! When we test ourselves, we say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." And I hope that that is correct. But when the Lord proves us,

and we are very sharply tested, we are apt to say, “Nobody was ever tried as we are, nobody ever had the peculiar difficulties that surround us.” And then we begin murmuring. When we are thinking of how much we love God, it might be more profitable to consider how very little we really love Him after all.

And see, brethren, these people *were ready to break away from their God*. They murmured against Moses, because Moses was visible in their midst—but the real murmuring was against God Himself. They might ask, as long as they liked, “What shall we drink?” but they could not get a drop of water by repeating that question a thousand times.

Would they go back to Egypt? How would they cross the sea? What would Pharaoh and the Egyptians think of them if they did go back? Could they force their way forward through that terrible wilderness? There they stood, entirely dependent upon God, and yet with scarcely a particle of faith in Him, and their love all shriveled up—and all that within three days.

O Israel, it is early days to be falling out with your new Husband! They had just been married to the Lord by a new covenant and baptized in the cloud and in the sea—yet within three days they are ready to fling it all up and to say, as they did in their hearts—“Would to God that we had remained in the land of Egypt!” Oh, what poor, faithless, treacherous, deceitful creatures we are! It is only grace that makes us anything worth having. It is a wonder of mercy that the Lord puts up with us.

This, then, was Israel’s examination. “Well,” say you, “did they gain much by that?” Oh, yes! It is always a gain to a man to know the truth about himself. A captain must find his longitude and latitude, that he may know whereabouts his vessel is upon the sea. And this, I believe, is one of the things God would have His people do.

The Lord does not wish His children to live in a fool’s paradise and to fancy that they are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, when they are naked, and poor, and blind, and miserable. He sends us our Marahs, just to blow away our shams and get rid of our pretences, that we may build our house on the rock, that what is built may be founded on real granite and may endure even to the end.

So much for the examination of the children of Israel at Marah.

II. But now, beloved friends, these people gained much by EXPERIENCE. Experience cannot be the property of the beginner—he must acquire it. Now what did the children of Israel experience?

First, *they learned that the wilderness was the same to them as it was to other people*. It is well that young converts should know that this world is an evil world even to the man who is saved by grace. You are new, but the world is not. You love holiness, but the world neither loves you, nor loves holiness. You are in a wilderness—you are in the enemy’s country—you have not yet come into your rest. If you have not learnt this fact, yet, you will have to learn it.

They were to learn, next, that *they were wholly dependent upon God*. When they stood at the brink of the Red Sea, they saw that they were so, and that only God could lead them through the sea. But after that, they were just as dependent. They could not live longer without water, they must perish of thirst unless God supplied them.

It is a blessed lesson for us to learn that we are entirely dependent upon God for all things, but especially for spiritual things. You will not pray unless He gives you the Spirit of supplication. You will have no tenderness of heart unless He works repentance in you. You will have no more faith unless faith is constantly bestowed by God. We are just like these gaslights—a candle may depend upon its own resources, but this light cannot. Only cut the connection between it and the reservoir of gas and straightway out it must go.

We depend upon God every instant as much as we did at first, and all our old experience, all that we have learned, and known, and taught, will stand us in no stead whatever unless we continue perpetually to receive from God. That was the lesson Israel had to learn.

They also learned that *God and God alone would provide*. They might have to go very short of supplies at times and they might have a long thirst, but the Lord would not let one of them die of thirst. There is no record that even the tiniest babe in the camp, or even a sheep or goat in that mighty throng, perished for lack of water. God did provide.

He does not promise that there shall always be a dinner ready when the dinner bell rings. You have not such an appetite as you would afterwards have if you waited another hour, and sometimes the Lord may keep you waiting for His supplies that you may enjoy them all the better when they do come. He never is before His time, but He never is behind His time, though He may be behind your time. God will provide.

That day Israel began to understand that word of their father Abraham when He said to Isaac, as you remember, “My son, God will provide.” Now it began to come home to the children of the tribes that God would surely provide—and He did provide for them this great necessary gift of water when they were in the wilderness. That is something to learn. Some of you people of God here have learnt that lesson, for you have been in great straits, and you have been fed by the constant provision of God.

The Israelites were also to learn, in the next place, that *God could make their bitters into sweets*, and He could do that in a very simple way. But He *could* do it—and He could bring good out of evil, and satisfy them by that which formerly nauseated them. Have you learned that lesson yet? Some of you people of God, when you get bitter waters, want to throw them away. Do not throw a drop of it away, for that is the water you have yet to drink. Accept your afflictions. They are a part of your education. Accept your afflictions.

When Job could say, “The LORD gave,” it was easy to add, “and blessed be the name of the LORD.” But he also added, “and the LORD hath taken away.” That was the bitter water, but he drank it, and it was sweet to his taste, and he blessed the name of the Lord for the taking as well as for the giving.

God means to bless some of you by the enemy’s curse. Though you do not know it, you are to be lifted up by those who are trying to pull you down. I noticed some of the papers writing unkindly of our dear friend, John McNeill, and saying all manner of hard things of him—and I rejoiced in my heart. I hoped that they would go ahead at that work.

I remember how they did it to me—all the bitterness they could invent, in years gone by. Every form and fashion of abuse was heaped upon me—and what a wonderful advertisement it was! What a kindness they were doing me without intending it! Let them alone and depend upon it, God will make the wrath of man to praise Him and the remainder of that wrath He will restrain.

Next, notice, that *God works by His own means*. The Lord showed Moses a tree and when he cast that tree into the waters, they became sweet. I think, if I had been there, I should have suggested that Moses should use that rod of his. Did he not divide the Red Sea with it? Why not just put his rod into the water and stir it up, and make it sweet?

Oh, yes, you know, we are always for running to old methods! But God is a Sovereign and He will work as He pleases. There was a tree growing there, perhaps the wood of it was bitter, certainly it had no efficacy for making bitter water sweet, but God bade Moses cast that tree into the waters—and as soon as it was done the waters were made sweet.

Now, you have just to believe that God will help you. You do not know how He will do it and perhaps He will not help you in the old way. Do not despair because Moses does not bring out his rod, for the Lord can relieve you without that. That dear friend who has helped you so many years is gone. Well, but God is not gone and He is not dependent upon that one person, nor upon any other. Therefore leave God as a King to do as He pleases, for His pleasure is the wisest—and let His pleasure be your pleasure.

Israel also learned by experience that *God Himself was to be looked to, and nobody else*. If there were waters beneath their feet, they were of no value until God spoke sweetness into them. If Moses himself stood there, he could do nothing but pray to the Lord. God Himself must come and by a miracle must make the water fit to drink.

Brethren, it is always a gain to us in our experience when we get farther and farther away from every dependence but the Lord. You may have friends forsaking you and they who used to praise you may now be speaking evil of you, and you may come at last to feel that you have nothing but God to depend upon. Then is the time that faith really comes into exercise.

I could not help laughing when I read the story of a good Christian lady who spoke of our friend, Mr. Hudson Taylor—"Why," she said, "there is no Society to take care of him! Poor man, he has nobody but God to depend upon!" You may well smile. "*Nobody but God to depend upon*"—but that is everybody to depend upon.

Oh, if we could only be brought to that experience, Marah's waters would indeed be a heavenly tonic to us! The child of God who has learned this truth experientially can say, "My soul is weaned from all the nether springs, but she drinks from the upper spring that flows from beneath the throne of God, and she finds every drop to have a heavenly sweetness in it."

Thus Israel gained by experience as well as by examination.

III. Now comes the third point—Israel gained by EDUCATION.

The Lord was not going to lead a mob of slaves into Canaan to go and behave like slaves there. They had to be tutored. The wilderness was the Oxford and Cambridge for God's students. There they went to the University, and He taught and trained them, and they took their degree before they entered into the promised land. There is no University for a Christian like that of sorrow and trial.

Now the Israelites were educated by Marah, first, in *self-distrust*. How could they ever trust themselves again when, three days after singing that jubilant song, they caught themselves murmuring against Moses? If they had been intelligent, as they were not, they would each one have said to his fellow, "Behold the boastfulness of our evil hearts." What a terrible drop it is from "I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea," to "What shall we drink?" That is just how you and I come down when we are left to ourselves. Thus Israel learnt self-distrust.

Next, they learned, as I have told you before, *daily dependence*. They learned that they must depend upon God even for a drop of water. That is the dependence of a Christian man. He has nothing and he can do nothing without his God. We have no bread, no water, no anything, except as God shall give it to us. A blessed lesson was this for Israel. They were educated well at Marah.

Next, they learned *the power of prayer*. Will you kindly fix your eyes upon those two verses, twenty-four and twenty-five? "And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD." Moses did not answer them. He did not upbraid them. He did not, even, begin to argue with them. But he cried unto the Lord and thus the people learned the power of prayer.

They might have gone on murmuring until now if they could have lived so long—and the waters of Marah would have been as bitter as ever. But Moses cried unto the Lord and that prayer did what all the murmuring could not do. Were half the breath we vainly spend in going round to our neighbors, asking their sympathy, spent in going directly to God in prayer, we should sooner get out of our troubles. "Straightforward makes the best runner," and he that runs straight to God in every time of adversity shall soon find relief.

Again, at Marah the Israelites began to learn *their separateness from Egypt*. The Egyptians never drank these bitter waters, but the Egyptians had foul diseases and terrible plagues. Now, the Lord tell His people that He will not put upon them any of the diseases of Egypt. God turned the rivers of Egypt into blood, but here He turns the bitter waters into fresh streams. His miracles were for Israel and against Egypt—and they began to clearly perceive that they had nothing to do with the Egyptians. They were a separated people.

It is a valuable piece of education for a young Christian to find out that he does not belong to the world. The tendency is to think that, though you are in the church, you can be in the world, too, and that you belong, in a measure, to both. That will never do. The Lord means to fetch His people right out of the world—and He will have them out.

And if any of you try to be like the mouse behind the wainscot and only come out and feed in the dark—I mean that you come to Christ for a little food when nobody sees you, and then go and hide away with the world—there will be a black cat after you before long. Some trouble or other will happen to

you. That game will never please God and never profit you. Therefore drop it, I pray you, or else some bitter Marah will teach you that you are not of the world.

Israel had next to learn *the position of obedience*. Will you kindly notice this? God did not say, “Do this and I will bring you out of Egypt.” No, but after He brought them out, He said, “Hearken to my commandments, and keep my statutes.” Salvation comes first and then obedience. Saved first, brought through the Red Sea with the high hand of God’s gracious power, and after that, become His obedient people. Obedience follows after redemption and deliverance. First the blood of sprinkling on the doorposts and after that, you shall give ear unto the voice of the Lord your God and diligently hearken to Him.

Israel also learned the *nature of obedience*. Obedience does not merely do what it knows it should do, but it finds out what it ought to do. Oh, you Christian people, do you make a practice of reading God’s Word to see what He would have you do? I am afraid that there are some who make a point of not seeing some of the duties which are not pleasing to them. There are some who half shun portions of Scripture because they would trouble their consciences. Let it not be so with any of us, but let us listen diligently to the voice of the Lord our God. If you are saved, the kind of obedience that you are bound to render is that of a willing heart, which cries like Saul, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

Then, Israel learned the *promise made to obedience*—“If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians.” For you there shall be no plagues.

God may try you, yet it will be not in anger, but in His dear covenant love. Everything shall be changed for you. If sickness comes, it shall be overruled for your spiritual health. When death comes, it shall only introduce you to eternal life. The Lord will be very gracious to you. He that forgives our sins also heals all our diseases. His name is JEHOVAH Rophi.

What an education it is for us when we feel that the God that healed the waters heals us and heals everything that has to do with us—changes the aspect of all things about us, takes the sting out of the wasp, and turns it into a bee, takes away the venom from the serpent, and gives us its wisdom, that we may be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves! Oh, the wonderful cure-alls of God, the heavenly catholicon of the cross, the universal remedy of a dying Savior! May our experience educate us in the knowledge of that gracious healing!

The hour has struck and I must therefore cease. Only I must say that this is the one lesson of tonight—dear people of God, trust your God. Trust your God not only when your mouth is full of honey, but when it is full of gall. “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him,” for He in whom you trust will bless you.

But if you are not trusting Him, then shall plagues, like those of Egypt, come upon you. Darkness and all manner of evils shall waylay you, till, at last, there shall be heard in your house a bitter cry, for the destroying angel will overtake you, and plunge his avenging sword into your guilty hearts. God save you from that terrible doom, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

EXODUS 15 AND JEREMIAH 7:21-26

Exodus 15:1. *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*

Note, that they were singing, singing a very loud and triumphant song, and you would have thought that they would have kept on singing for the next forty years. It was such a triumph, such a deliverance, God’s arm was made so bare before their eyes that you would have thought that their jubilation would

have lasted throughout a lifetime, at the least. On the contrary, it lasted a very little while. Yet what a song it was that they sang. “I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”

What a song of triumph that is which is sung by souls saved from sin, and death, and hell by the great atoning sacrifice of Christ! Oh, when we first realize that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we do, indeed, “feel like singing all the time,” for our sins are washed away and we have a notion that we shall always keep on singing till we join in the song of the glorified in heaven. So it ought to be, but alas, from sad experience we know that it is not so!

However, the song of Moses and the children of Israel goes on—

2. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

The heart is prompted by gratitude to think of doing something for God. It thinks of preparing Him a habitation, but what habitation shall we prepare for Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain? All that we can possibly do is too little for the greatness of His grace and His glory. “Thou didst well that it was in thine heart,” said the Lord to David, though he might not prepare God a habitation.

It is well that it is in our heart today to do some little thing for the glory of God. As an old Puritan says, we give for love-tokens a cracked sixpence or a flower that soon fades. It is accepted as a love-token, not for its intrinsic value, but as an emblem of what our heart feels and would do if it could. Even so it is with the Lord and the service His people seek to render to Him. He takes our trifles and makes much of them.

3-5. The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.

And this is what has happened to all the powers that were against us. Our sins, where are they? Has not the Lord cast them into the depths of the sea? Yes, blessed be His name forever! We, like Israel on the other side of the Red Sea, praise the Lord that we have escaped out of the hand of the oppressor and that Pharaoh holds us as servants no longer. To the Lord alone is due the glory of our deliverance.

6-8. Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

What cannot God do? The liquid becomes solid. Nature itself changes when the God of nature puts forth His power. Trust in God and He will do wonders for you also, as He did for His ancient people Israel.

9. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

How the powers of darkness rage and rave! What a flurry they are in! What big words they speak! What cruel designs they harbor against God’s people! See how still and calm is the Lord amid all their raging.

10. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

God has only to use His breath to blow upon them and away they go, and all their boastings, too. One word from the mouth of God can destroy all our doubts and fears. The breath of His Spirit can sink all our enemies and make us sing for joy of heart at our great deliverance.

11-13. Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

The song becomes prophetic. All joy gets to be prophetic—at least, the joy of earth when once it is touched with the live coal from off the heavenly altar. We begin to praise God “for all the grace we have not tasted yet,” as Israel here does. They praise the Lord for leading His people through the wilderness and bringing them unto His holy habitation, even while they are only at the beginning of their journey.

14. *The people—*

That is, the Canaanites—

14-15. *Shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.*

When they hear of the great things that JEHOVAH has done for His people, they shall feel that the day of their doom is come. Who can stand against so mighty a God? Yet there are some, in our day, whose hearts are stouter and harder than the hearts of the dukes of Edom and the mighty men of Moab. They hear of God’s judgments upon the wicked and of the terrible doom of the ungodly, and yet they dare to defy the Lord and to continue in their evil ways.

16-18. *Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.*

How grandly that last note must have pealed forth from the hundreds of thousands of male voices! The women must also have sung it with the utmost conceivable joy as they struck their timbrels and danced before the Lord.

19-22. *For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.*

At first, they were afraid of too much water, from the waves of the sea. Now they are afraid of too little. Will their songs be over in three days? Ah, yes! At the end of the third day they came to some springs of water, but they were brackish or bitter.

23-24. *And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured—*

Ah, these singers had sadly changed their notes! Where are the timbrels now? “The people murmured”—

24-27. *Against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee. And they came to Elim,*

They did not stay long at Marah, probably only a few hours.

27. *Where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.*

That Elim must have been prepared on purpose for Israel. Twelve springs of water—that was the number of the tribes. Threescore and ten palm trees—that was the number of the elders. I do not wonder that Moses noted these numbers. It must have seemed remarkable that, long before they came there, there were the wells and there were the palm trees all ready for their encampment.

It was most significant that these things should have been prepared according to the number of the children of Israel, but everything else is arranged by the same rule. When the Lord divided the people, He set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel. It is by this line that He builds His church still. It is according to His thoughts of His own people that He rules everything in His providence.

There are a few verses in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, at the seventh chapter, which we will read concerning this subject.

Jeremiah 7:21-22. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices:*

You have heard what God said to them when they came out of Egypt.

23-26. *But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers.*

God grant that these words may never be a truthful description of us! Oh, may we keep the covenant of our God and walk before Him with a holy, reverent fear, and serve Him all our days! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—731, 746, 743

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