

Proper 19
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Exodus 14:19-31

The movie image of Moses (*e. g.* Charlton Heston in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, 1956) parting the waters of the Red Sea may be the abiding image of the event described in this passage for many, but the Hebrew Bible calls the body of water the Sea of Reeds (*yam suf*), not the Red Sea (*eruthruthre thalassa*) as does the Septuagint. It was the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible that mistranslated *yam suf* as Red Sea. Following the information in the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites' route into the Sinai Peninsula would have gone through the marshland around Lake Timsah. Crossing this marsh would have been in many ways just as miraculous—if not as photogenic—as the Greek version. JE's vivid account of the drowning of pharaoh's army is later than the Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1b-18) that describes the event in a language that was already ancient by the time JE used it.

Psalm 114

Our Prayer Book Psalter follows the Greek Bible (Septuagint, LXX) in making the *Halleluja* of Psalm 113:9 into the first word of Psalm 114. *Hymns* of praise ordinarily celebrate God's creation and providence. The present hymn, however, celebrates a historical event: God's saving of Israel from bondage in Egypt. It is for this reason that Psalm 114 is sung along with Psalm 113 just before the Passover meal in Jewish homes

OR

Exodus 15:1b-11, 20-21

Exodus 15:1-19 is called the "Song of Moses" and found its way into the Greek Book of Canticles as Canticle 1. A portion of that canticle (15:1-6, 11-13, 17-18) comprises Canticle 8 in our *Book of Common Prayer*, page 85. The present reading picks up only some of the verses in the Song of Moses, but it also includes the introduction to the Song of Miriam (15:20) as well as the song of Miriam itself (15:21). Miriam's song reiterates the refrain in 15:1b. These songs may be the earliest account we have of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, and W. F. Albright claimed that they were our earliest examples of classical Hebrew.

or

Genesis 50:15-21

The Elohist (E) here reiterates the theme from his account of Joseph's revelation of his identity to his brothers. E often shows God's action in history through the success of unworthy people who, nevertheless, are progenitors of the children of Israel. A prime example is Jacob's defrauding Esau of his birthright and his deception of his father in Genesis 25-27. In Genesis 45:1-8 the arrogant behavior of Joseph toward his brothers as a lad and their selling of him into slavery come full circle because, as Joseph says, God sent him to Egypt to "preserve life" (45:5, 7). The repetition of this theme at the end of Genesis underscores E's historical theory of God's oblique but unmistakable presence in Israel's story.

Psalm 103: (1-7), 8-13

This *hymn* is an *enthronement psalm* that celebrates God's kingship over all things. The psalm joins the refrain of heavenly beings with that of humans to celebrate the quality of justice and mercy by which God exercises divine rule. Although a hymn in structure, many interpreters have pointed to the similarity of this psalm to the *thanksgiving* psalms, especially in verses 103: 3-18.

Romans 14:1-12

One of the major difficulties Paul faced in Galatia was that Christians were adopting certain Jewish customs as to diet and calendar and even circumcision. As a Pharisee, Paul had learned well the lesson that God had not intended the Jewish law for all nations but only for Israel and that trying to observe the Jewish law would become a stumbling block for non-Jews that would lead them into trespass. So in Galatians Paul warned that those who accepted circumcision would lose any benefit from Christ (Galatians 5:2). In Rome, however, where the congregation had a large number of people who were born Jewish, Paul asked only for tolerance from Jewish Christians about the differing practices of Gentile Christians.

Matthew 18:21-35

This parable reminds us of the teaching on forgiveness in Ecclesiasticus 27:30-28:7 and may be dependent upon it. Forgiveness of debts meant just what it sounds like: not collecting those debts, giving up any claim to them. Such forgiveness was a characteristic of the Jubilee Year described in Leviticus 25; and Jews of the first century, aware that Israel had never actually celebrated a Jubilee as required by the Torah, thought of the coming age as a final Jubilee in which all debts among people would be wiped out. Matthew's text of the Lord's Prayer, invoking the spirit of the Jubilee, asks God to forgive us our "obligations" (Greek: *ta ofeilemata hemon*, Matthew 6:12) to the extent that we forgive the obligations of others. The parable of the Unmerciful Slave (18:23-34) did not originally illustrate Jesus's answer to Peter because it advances the idea found also in Matthew's Lord's Prayer (6:12) that God withholds forgiveness from those who will not forgive others. The point of the answer to Peter is that one ought to forgive copiously. Nevertheless, the author of Matthew has put the answer and the parable together to create a thorough teaching about forgiveness.

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