

# The Red Sea and the Wilderness Exodus 15

by John Nelson Darby

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*Redemption brings believers into God's presence and enables them to experience joy in God, but it also requires them to go through trial and testing to learn dependence on God and have their flesh broken down.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 14:10

**Topics:** "Redemption", "Trials and Dependence on God"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby explores the profound lessons from Israel's journey through the Red Sea and into the wilderness, emphasizing God's grace and deliverance despite Israel's fears and complaints. He illustrates how the Red Sea represents full redemption, contrasting it with the Passover, and highlights that true joy comes from knowing God as our salvation. Darby explains that trials in the wilderness serve to reveal our dependence on God and to teach us about His healing power, ultimately leading to a deeper communion with Him. He encourages believers to embrace their wilderness experiences as opportunities for growth and to trust in God's provision and purpose. The sermon concludes with the reminder that through trials, we learn to rejoice in God Himself.

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## Transcript

It is easy to understand Israel's distress, - the sea before, shutting them in, and Pharaoh and his host pursuing, so that they were sore afraid, and cried unto the Lord, and said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Although, as we see, they had cried to the Lord, they had not in their hearts reckoned on His delivering them. It must, therefore, have been a wondrous thing to them when God was so publicly manifested to be on their side. And so is it with our hearts, when thus tested with trial on every side; shut in, as it were, with trouble of one sort or another, our hearts are often found buried under the circumstances, instead of calculating upon the God who is above them either to sustain us under them or deliver from them.

Israel, we can see, was dealt with in unqualified grace, whatever might be their murmurings, etc., till they reached Sinai, that they might know how entirely God was for them. Afterwards, through their folly in putting themselves under the law, which they ought to have known they could not keep, they brought upon themselves a different line of treatment. In the sixteenth chapter, when they murmured for food, God gave them quails (as well as manna) without any reproach, that Israel might know that God was feeding them on the ground of perfect grace. But afterwards, when they again murmured for flesh (being then under law), we read that, while it was yet in their mouths, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people,

and the Lord smote them with a very great plague. But God would first have them know how entirely bent He was on doing them good, bad as they might be.

It is well to distinguish, for our souls' profit, the difference between the Passover and the Red Sea. For a person may hear the gospel and receive it with joy, and be rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins; he may see the loveliness of Christ, and have his affections drawn out towards Himself; but if full redemption is not known, as typified by the Red Sea, if he does not know himself to be risen with Christ on the other side of death and judgment, he is almost sure to lose his joy when temptation comes and he feels his own weakness. The joy of chapter 15 is that God has absolutely redeemed them out of Egypt and brought them in His strength to His holy habitation. A very different thing from the joy of the Passover - being delivered from just and deserved judgment. In the Passover Jehovah had made Himself known to them as the God of judgment. The blood on the door-posts screened them from judgment; it kept Him out, and He did not come into their houses to destroy. Had He come in, it must have been in judgment. At the Red Sea it was another thing - even God coming in strength as their salvation. The Passover delivered them from His judgment, the Red Sea from their enemies. The moment His people are in danger from Pharaoh, He comes in. The very sea they dreaded, and which appeared to throw them into Pharaoh's hands, becomes the means of their salvation. Thus through death God delivered them from death; like as Christ went down into the stronghold of Satan, went down under the power of death, and, rising again from the dead, delivered us from death. Thus was there an end of Pharaoh and Egypt to them for ever. The Red Sea is redemption out of Egypt; God Himself is their salvation. He whom they had feared, and justly, as a Judge, is become their salvation. They are redeemed; no longer were hoping for mercy, but able to rejoice that judgment was past, and to sing His praises for having brought them to His holy habitation - to God Himself; in the light as He is in the light; and brought there before they had taken one step in the wilderness, or fought one battle with their enemies.

166 There is no conflict properly till redemption is known. They did not attempt to fight with Pharaoh, but only to get away from him. They groaned under his yoke, but did not combat against him. How could they? They must be brought to God first - be the Lord's host before they can fight His enemies or their own. And so it is with an individual soul. I have no power to combat Satan while I am still his slave. I may groan under his yoke, and sigh to be delivered from it; but before my arm can be raised against him, I must have a complete and known redemption. The Israelites are not only happy in escaping the pursuer: it is a full conscious redemption from Egypt and Pharaoh; and they can count on God's power for all the rest. "The people shall hear and be afraid, 11 the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away," v. 14, 15. Their joy does not arise from having no enemies, but from God's own divine power taking them up, and putting them in His own presence.

167 "Thou shalt plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance," v. 17. This was yet to be done; but they were already with Him in His holy habitation - not theirs but His. And thus are we in His presence, brought to God, though not yet in the place prepared for us on high. So, in Ephesians 1, the apostle prays "that they may know what is the hope of His calling, and the glory of His inheritance in the saints." It was God's land they were to dwell in the Father's house in which our home shall be. It is His glory, and He will bring us into it. No fear of the enemies by the way: to faith they are powerless. Full confidence belongs to redemption. Is it then, as men would say, all plain sailing now? In no wise. It is the wilderness, and there is no water; and, mark, it was by the Lord's command they pitched in Rephidim.

Does this make redemption uncertain? Not at all. Yet it is a dreadful thing to have no water; it was certain death in those countries. Had He then brought them through the Red Sea and unto Himself to kill them

with thirst? When at length they did come to water, it was bitter. But this was to prove them, and bring out what was in their hearts. The bitter water did not shew what was in God's heart (redemption had shewn that); but in their hearts lay much that had to be manifested and corrected. They must drink into the power of death. Being redeemed for ever, they must learn that there is nothing for them in the wilderness. All supply must be from God Himself. This is the very effect of redemption, and there is so much in us to be brought out and corrected. But He makes the waters sweet.

We must all learn death (being redeemed we have life) and it cannot be learnt in Egypt. They had no Marah in Egypt. It is wilderness experience. Redemption must be known first, and the effect will be death to sin, to selfishness, to one's own will; and all this is very trying. A person might be tempted to say, All this trial comes upon me because I have not redemption. Not so; it is just because you are redeemed. We may seek to avoid the bitter waters of Marah, but God will bring us to them. He must break down all that is of the old man, and then, in His own good time, He will put in that which sweetens all. But because God has brought me to Himself, He is putting His finger on everything (be it love of the world, setting up self, my own will, or whatever it may be) that hinders complete dependence on Him, or my soul's full enjoyment of Himself. But count it not strange, though it be a fiery trial which is to try you; for as surely as you are redeemed, so will He break down your own will. Yes, beloved, God will make you drink of the very thing (death) that redeemed you.

168 And now Israel is going on with God, and He is dealing with them. He gave them statutes, etc. He did not do so before He had redeemed them. They had been troubled before by Pharaoh, but now it was from God. This was the effect of having to do with God, and now they learn God in a new character - "the Lord that healeth." A different thing from His promise, that if obedient He would bring none of the diseases of Egypt upon them. They are exercised by God, but it is that they may know Him as the Healer: it is for this that the whole heart has to be brought out before God. We cannot escape it. He will so order circumstances as to bring it about. Sometimes we are humbled before men: this is very trying and bitter water; but then what a wretched thing it was to be seeking to magnify oneself! As soon as the tree (the cross) is in the waters, they refresh the soul. This is joy in tribulation - joy in redemption first, but now in the healing. First, God makes us to sing in the knowledge of redemption; and then, if we are to have the practical effect of redemption, which is the enjoyment of God Himself in our souls, the flesh, which would always hinder this, must be broken down in whatever form it works. It was to prove them. God knew what was in their hearts; but they did not, and they must learn it.

After this they come to Elim. Now they experience the natural consequence of being with God - the full streams of refreshment - as soon as they were really broken down. Had Elim come first, there would have been no sense of their dependence on the Lord for everything, and nature would have been unbroken. But trial produces dependence, and dependence, communion. It is only for this that He delays, for He delights in blessing His people. The numbers 12 and 70 are different figures of perfection: perfect refreshment, perfect shelter, and all this in the wilderness, and rest then.

They must be exercised at Marah, that they may fully know and enjoy Him at Elim. Redemption brought them indeed to God, but now it is joy in God. And so it is with us. Although we are redeemed, we cannot have these springs from God Himself, flowing through our souls, with unbroken flesh. But whatever trial we are in, however deeply we may have to drink into death, there is resurrection as well as death: and when we see God's hand in it, when we see the cross of Christ in the bitter waters, we understand God's mind and purpose in them, and they become sweet to us. We cannot walk in the way of faith without faith, so we must be put to the test. Not that, for the present, tribulation seems joyous, but grievous; but

afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits unto them that are exercised thereby.

169 Flesh is not faith. If I lose my trust in God for one minute, that very minute the flesh comes in, under some form or other. Whenever I feel perplexed or at a loss, the eye is not single: it shews I am out of communion' otherwise I should know what to do. If the eye were single, the whole body would be full of light. Or there is something yet to be detected in us, something we have not yet found out in our own hearts. It may not be wilful sin; but there is something He will exercise our hearts about, something as to which He will manifest Himself as Jehovah the Healer. Thus we learn to rejoice in tribulation also, and then to rejoice in God - finding springs of joy, refreshings in the wilderness in that God who brought us there. Let us, then, not count trial a strange thing; for we know its purpose, even that we may joy in God Himself.

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