

Shepherd and Leader Moses

Exodus 14:1-18:27

Key Verse 17:15

“Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.”

At the beginning of this passage, the Israelites had just left Egypt, led by God’s pillar of cloud and pillar of fire (13:21-22). But God did not lead them directly to the Promised Land. In Exodus chapters 14-18, we see how God leads his people on a training course through the Red Sea, the desert, and through a battle, under the shepherding of Moses. This passage shows us very well what the life of faith, after salvation, is. It is a crash course in spiritual leadership. May God teach us through this passage the faith and life of shepherd Moses. Thank God who is working to grant each of us the deep personal confession of faith in him, “The LORD is my Banner.”

1. Israel crosses the Red Sea (14:1-15:21)

Let’s look at 14:1-2. Samuel Abraham Chang, can you read this verse? “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon.’” The Israelites had just set out for the Promised Land, but now God commanded the Israelites to turn back, and to stand in a dead-end before the Red Sea. Pharaoh’s heart was again hardened when he realized the economic cost of letting the Israelites go. He summoned 600 chariots and chased the Israelites in hot pursuit to bring them back. Now the Israelites were trapped, with the waters of the Red Sea lapping their feet, and the chariots of Pharaoh pounding at their backs. How did they respond? Very predictably. Let’s look at verses 10-12. The Israelites were terrified and cried out to God and to Moses. They were so hopeless, they thought they would die, and they complained that it would have been better to die in Egypt than here in the desert. They didn’t lean on the God who had just brought them out of Egypt. Their empty hearts were easy prey for Satan’s weapon of fear, and they became useless and helpless.

What did Moses do? Moses was in the same dilemma as the Israelites. But let’s read his response in verses 13-14, “Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.’” Wow! How could Moses react so differently from the people? Isn’t it amazing? Let’s keep this question in mind.

As we see this situation, we might have an even bigger question? “Why would God lead his people into such a situation?” Three times, God told Moses that he would “gain glory” for himself (14:4,17,18). God wanted to work his mighty hand and save his people against their enemies. God would do such a great thing, that the Israelites and even the Egyptians would have to admit that he is the LORD.

So let’s see what God did. He told Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind. Meanwhile, the LORD protected the Israelite army from the Egyptians by the pillar of cloud and the angel of the LORD. Finally the strong wind blew a dry path of land through the sea. Let’s look at verse 22. Somang Chung, can you read this verse? “And the Israelites went into the midst of the dry sea, and the water was a wall to their right and to their left.” Wow! Two million people walked through a sea on dry land between walls of water. They followed God’s direction to “move on” (15) and went through the Red Sea, only by faith in God, step by step. Then, at God’s command (26) Moses stretched his hand over the sea. The waters flowed back and swallowed up all Pharaoh’s pursuing army. When the people saw this, they feared the Lord, and they believed him and Moses his servant.

Then, Moses and Miriam helped all the Israelites to sing a song of praise to God. (15:1-21) Can all the men read 15:1-2? "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: 'I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.'" Now can all the women read verse 21? "Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.'" These songs of praise to God are their personal confession of their experience of who God is. It is a song that could only have come out after the terror and miracle of the Red Sea.

So now we return to our questions. First, why did God lead the Israelites into such a situation? This parallels a fundamental question in our life of faith. After salvation, we turn back to face the Red Sea of our struggle with sin. It is not at all smooth sailing, but a terrifying situation. Why doesn't God make it easy for us, and just get rid of all the struggle? Here we see it is because God wanted to save his people completely from the power of Pharaoh. He wanted to hurl Pharaoh and his chariots and army into the sea, once and for all. God wanted his people and also the Egyptians to know that it was God who had saved them.

I am reminded of Abraham Kim's life testimony confession, "The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him." Where did this confession come from? Abe was and is in a fierce struggle against his sins and sinful nature. But through this, he has met his almighty Saviour God. Thank God who so loves Abraham Kim and who saves him completely from the Pharaoh of sin and Satan. May God help him to live a new life of faith in his Saviour God, holding on to Romans 8:38-39 and Ro 6:13,14.

Here we also find the answer to our second question, "How could Moses react to the Red Sea so differently from the people?" Moses had faith in God. So he could help the people to stand firm and to obey God, crossing the Red Sea step by step. One person of faith, Moses, is one nation. Because one person had faith in God to listen to God's word, and obey, the people could cross the Red Sea. One person, Abraham Kim, is a whole nation, a source of God's salvation for young people oppressed and hopeless because of game addiction, pornography addiction, and deception by human love. God has saved one person, Samuel Abraham Chang, from a dark and terrible past to be a shepherd to lead other young people through the Red Sea. Our God is our salvation. He is the salvation of the young people who are drowning in sin. May God help each of us not to give up before the Red Sea, but to have faith in God, and grow as leaders for young people of this time.

2. God's desert training (15:22-17:7)

So what happened next? In this section, God leads the Israelites to 4 deserts, and 1 oasis. Let's briefly overview the course:

- 15:22: Shur: 3 days' wandering, no water. Verse 15:22b says of Shur, „For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water.
- 15:23-6: Mara: bitter water. Dejected and desperate, the people grumbled against Moses, "What are we to drink?" (15:24) But let's read verse 25 a: "Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the wood became sweet. Moses was again in the same situation as the other Israelites. As he cried out to God, his lips were parched and his throat dry. He had no water and no idea where to get water in the desert. But when he prayed, God showed him a piece of wood that made the water sweet, and they were able to drink.
- 15:27: Elim: an oasis. Then God then led them to Elim, where there were 12 springs and 70 palm trees, giving them rest at an oasis in the desert. (15:27)
- 16:1-36: Sin: nothing to eat. Let's read verses 2-3 of chapter 16: "In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died

by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” (Ex 16:2-3)

How did God respond? God gave the Israelites manna and quail. Let's read verses 4a and 11-12: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. ...’ (16:4a) “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’” (11-12)

If we assume that each of the approximately 2 million Israelites received 2.25 kg a day (36), that was 4,500 tons of manna a day. That's 30 fully loaded large cargo planes every day. Over 40 years, that's 65 million tons of bread from heaven. God heard their grumbling (9-12). And God wanted to pour out his grace on the grumbling people. God wanted the Israelites to know that they could trust him. They could grow strong even in the deathly desert, by the faithful love and grace of God.

How could the Israelites receive the bread from heaven from God? Let us read verses 4-5 again: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day, they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” Through obeying God's instructions, they could live.

- 17:1-7: Rephidim: no water. “They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’” (17:1b-2a) “And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’” (17:7) “Then Moses cried out to the LORD, ‘What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.’” (17:4)

What can we see through this survey of God's desert leading? 1. We see the pattern of Israelites' grumbling. Every time they were thirsty or hungry, they complained. At the beginning of chapter 15, they sang a worship song loudly. At the end of chapter 15, they complained just as loudly. They even doubted, “Is the LORD among us or not?” (17:7) 2. We see how Moses handled the same crises, again, differently from the Israelites. At Marah and again at Rephidim, “Moses cried out to the LORD.” (15:25a) He was always in the exact same situation as the Israelites. But the thing he did differently was to cry out to God, rather than to curse him and the situation. 3. God answered. He showed Moses the piece of wood that made the bitter water sweet (15:25), he gave Moses instructions for the collection of the manna (16:4-5,28-29), and he told Moses to strike a rock so that water would come out (17:5-6).

Some of us might ask, why does God give the Israelites such desert training? In 16:4 we can see a clue. Noah Schweitzer, can you read 16:4? “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they follow my instructions.’” What God is interested in is their response to his word. He wanted them to experience that through obeying his word, they could live. Ester Cho, can you read Deuteronomy 8:2-3: “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. **He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**”

What can we learn from these verses? Because man does not live on bread alone, but on God's word, the world is a spiritual desert. Even with physical food and water, people starve and die of

thirst. This is the famine God spoke of in Amos 8:11-13, "not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. In that day, the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst."

What does this world really need? What kind of people does God want? The world needs shepherds and leaders who know what the true spiritual bread and water are. God taught the Israelites, through Moses, that life comes from obeying his word! God was raising them as a kingdom of priests, who can teach the way of life to others.

God is raising us as a kingdom of priests, who can lead people to the true source of life. Jesus said, "whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst." (Jn 4:14a) "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (Jn 6:35) God is raising us as people who know Jesus, who listen to his words and pass them on. Peter confessed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68) May God help us to love Jesus, listen to his word, and be used as sources of life, as Bible teachers for the dying young people of this generation.

We heard how God is raising the Bolivian Cho's as a kingdom of priests. M. Esteban Cho was paralyzed with fear because of material problem. He held on to God who provides as the basic faith in God. Through this, God raised M. Esteban and Paulina Cho as fearless mother and father for dying young people in Bolivia! God helped Ester Cho undergo desert training in Bolivia to teach her that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Dt 8:3) God is raising her as a royal priest, shepherd and Bible teacher for dying young people in Bolivia, Korea, and to the ends of the earth.

I know one outstanding medical doctor who decided to devote himself to be a Bible teacher and spiritual leader like Ezra, based on Ezra 7:10. He is even ready to give up his medical profession to be a Bible teacher. Who here wants to be a medical doctor? Can you understand his decision?? Why is it so? Because what Europe really needs is not more medical doctors or politicians. Europe needs Bible teachers! What does Europe really need? Bible teachers! What does North America need? South America? Asia? Middle East? Africa? Australia? Asia? Bible teachers! May God help us to grow through his desert training as life-giving Bible teachers and shepherds!

3. The LORD is my Banner (17:8-15)

Now we move on to training level 3. Let's look at verse 8. As the Israelites were encamped at Rephidim, the Amalekites made a surprise attack. They were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. This was the first war for the Israelites. Then Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." In this emergency Moses laid out a two-front strategy. He sent Joshua against the Amalekites with chosen men, even though they were unprepared, undisciplined and too weak. By faith, Joshua gathered the fighters and went with them into battle against the Amalekites. Meanwhile, Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to a hill to pray.

Peter Ryu, can you read verse 11 says, "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning." On what was the battle dependent? What was going on at the bottom of the hill, in battle, was dependent on what was going on on top of the hill, in prayer. Can all the Joshuas in the room read verses 12-13? "When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady until sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword." The victory did not come from Moses and not from Joshua, but, through beautiful coworking in prayer, from God.

Let us read verse 15: "And Moses built an altar and called it: The LORD is my banner". A banner is a sign of victory in warfare. "The LORD is my Banner" is Moses' personal confession, "The LORD is my victory! I trust in the name of the LORD. The LORD is my commander, I will obey him!" Verse 16 says, "He said, 'For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.'" This verse tells us that the LORD's battle is not over yet.

God's people live in spiritual warfare. No church of God can quietly serve God's work without attacks from Satan. Canada UBF started in Winnipeg, Canada. But as the missionaries fished and studied the Bible with students, they were slandered by local newspapers as a cult and driven out. Bonn UBF also experienced severe persecutions in the 1990s. How did they fight? Through prayers. They know the precious confession, "The LORD is my Banner." Now I, too, stand as an heiress of the spiritual heritage of Canada UBF and Bonn UBF. All of us are heirs of this spiritual confession. Will we fight? How? "The LORD is my Banner!" I repent that I fled spiritual attacks and persecutions, and wanted to live my own comfortable life. But instead may God teach me to fight through being a prayer coworker for God's servants. May God help us to fight in prayer for our siblings, our group members here at this conference, for our unbelieving friends at school and for the young people of our countries.

Through this passage, God is raising us as shepherds and leaders like Moses, who can lead the young people of this generation through the Red Sea, the desert, and through spiritual warfare. May God help us to fight with full trust in him, his word, and prayer! May God help each one of us to have the deep confession, "The LORD is my Banner".