

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 9/1–2 (1998): 44–47.
Article copyright © 2000 by Joel N. Musvosvi.

The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb

Joel N. Musvosvi
Ministerial Secretary, Eastern Africa Division

One of the noticeable features of the Book of Revelation is the singing of the heavenly family. We find in this book theology put to music. All the songs of this book would make a small songbook. Unfortunately, we do not have the melodies to go with the words, but perhaps once we have the words, we could come up with our own melody. Revelation features a widening circle of praise, from the four living creatures to the whole redeemed family

The Setting of the Song

The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb comes at the opening of the eschatological section of the book. It follows the three central chapters of the book (12-14) in which the great controversy theme has been played out. These three chapters show the origins of the great controversy (war in heaven, 12:7), its spread to earth (the Devil cast down to earth, 12:9-13), the key players in the drama (Christ and Satan, 12:7), the key issues of the controversy (worship 13:12 and 14:7), and the final results (14:1-3, 12). These chapters form the thematic center for the whole book and are crucial in opening our understanding to the whole book. It is in this setting that the song is introduced.

Identifying the Song

Students of Revelation have debated the number of songs involved here. At first it appears as if the writer is referring to two songs. But it appears that the victors really have one song to sing. The song of the Lamb is cast in the setting of the song of Moses. Revelation is rich in Old Testament allusions, and is best interpreted in the setting of the Old Testament. Our first task is to identify the song of Moses. Two songs are attributed to Moses in the Old Testament. Exodus 15:2-19 is a song that deals with the Red Sea deliverance. Deuteronomy 32 is a song sung at the end of Moses' life and recounts God's mercies in the wilder-

MUSVOSVI: THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE SONG OF THE LAMB

ness wanderings of His people. There is a possible third song, if we go by the superscription of Psalm 90. Psalm 90 is not seriously considered a possibility since it does not have any thematic or verbal parallels with Revelation 15. Deuteronomy 32 has been given some consideration by some, but the allusions to it are weak. Exodus 15 seems to have the strongest links with Revelation 15. Moreover, the general theme of both songs is similar, and the skeletal structure is similar.

Exodus 15	Revelation 15
1. Plagues of Judgment	1. Plagues of Judgment
2. The Red Sea	2. The Sea of Glass
3. Theme of Divine Deliverance	3. Theme of Divine Deliverance
4. Song of Deliverance	4. Song of Deliverance
5. Song by the Sea	5. Song by the Sea
6. Pillar of Fire through the Sea	6. Fire in the Sea

John seems to intend that we view the song of the Lamb in its Old Testament thematic background, Exodus 15. This may be the reason why he uses the double title. The first part of the title is the Old Testament contextual key to the New Testament passage. The duality of the title preserves a distinction between the two events while linking them in a typological relationship.

The Two Exoduses

The allusions and parallels found in these two chapters introduce the exodus motif. One feature of Revelation is the taking local of Old Testament events and replaying them on a cosmic scale. In this instance the local exodus movement of two million people becomes the cosmic exodus of all of God’s children in the final days. All the linkages we outlined above are exodus-related. In both exoduses God leads His people out triumphantly. In the first exodus Moses is the visible leader who leads Israel through crisis to victory. In the second exodus the Lamb is the cosmic leader who leads the saints to victory. In both the crisis was of such proportions that destruction seemed imminent. The enemy seemed to have God’s people under him. But God acted decisively on behalf of His people.

In the two exoduses there is no antithesis between Moses and the Lamb, between Law and Grace. There is a beautiful harmonious complementarity. The great deliverance under Moses forms the pattern, the type, of the greater deliverance by the Lamb. While in the first the controversy was with Pharaoh, the second exodus occurs in the setting of the Great Controversy.

The Song of Moses

This song of Moses had been incorporated into the Temple services. Ederheim points out that this song was sung at the evening sacrifice on the Sabbath. Philo mentions that this song was sung by an antiphonal group, with men sing-

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ing some lead stanzas, while the women sang the responses. The words were repeated often in song and in sermon. Children were taught the meaning of this song in their history, and made to feel a part of the history of their ancestors. In this way the people passed on to the next generation the essence of their faith.

In its historical setting the song of Moses was sung by the shores of the Red Sea as a spontaneous response to miraculous deliverance. Israel had almost perished at the hands of Pharaoh and his mighty, angry army. And their deliverance was a deliverance from above. This a song of Moses, even though it was sung by everybody, for it was Moses who led them to victory. It was Moses who led them through their Red Sea crisis. Moses was the leader. This is a song of redeemed people. It is a song of experience. Every stanza flows out of a grateful heart. The words and the music flow together, composed in the moment of deliverance. No stanza could be omitted in the singing of this song.

The Dimensions of the Song

The Song of Moses is three-dimensional:

1. It recalls the past, celebrating God's mighty deeds. It refers to God's triumph over the enemy. Pharaoh's army had been cast like a stone into the sea. It describes how the waters which parted for the deliverance of His people became the very means by which the enemy was destroyed. Mercy and judgment harmonize in this song (vs. 1, 4-10, 12).

2. The song deals with the present, affirming faith in God. First person pronouns are used to describe the relationship with God—"He is my God . . ."—and first person pronouns are used in utterances of praise: "I will praise Him . . ." (vs. 2-3, 11).

3. In the last section the song looks to the future, anticipating future divine guidance of God's people. It anticipates the movement into Canaan, the victory over their future enemies, and the settlement there (vs. 13-19).

The Song of the Lamb

John has just portrayed the Lamb leading the victorious saints on Mount Zion (14:1-3). As He has led them in triumph they have sung a song which no one else could sing. Have remained faithful in the face of the persecuting powers of the leopard-like beast, the lamb-like beast, and the image to the beast. There has been a death decree against them, but they have chosen to worship God, rather than the beast. Now here in Revelation 15:1-4 they are portrayed as standing by the Sea of Glass, reminiscent of the Red Sea in the old exodus. The Great Controversy theme is very evident, for it forms the backdrop of this scene. The conflict with the beast powers must be kept fresh in mind. The singers are portrayed as having been victorious over the beast, his image, and the number of his name (15:2). Victory is a major theme in Revelation. The picture is that of fighters fresh from the battlefield standing in celebration. The song they sing is a song of victory—god's victory for His people.

MUSVOSVI: THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE SONG OF THE LAMB

The words of the song are fragmentary phrases and clauses drawn from the Old Testament. The works of God are described as “great and marvelous,” (words which describe this vision at the beginning of the chapter). These words may be drawn from Psalms 92:5 and 139:14. Other allusions in the song may be from Isaiah 66:23; Jeremiah 10:7; Amos 4:13, and others. There are no direct quotations, just words and concepts that are the same. John does not intend for us to go fishing for these different verses. His mind is filled with the language and thought patterns of the Old Testament, so his vocabulary is drawn from this rich heritage.

This Song Is Also Three-Dimensional

1. The song recalls God’s past mighty deeds on behalf of His people (“Great and marvelous are your works”; “Your judgments have been revealed”). These mighty works and judgments are the great acts of God in delivering the saints from the beast and his image. The focus is on God as the One who has accomplished our salvation.

2. The song describes the saints’ present relationship with God. (“Just and true are your ways”; “For you alone are holy”). In this part of the song the victorious saints acknowledge their indebtedness to God. The divine vindication of His people is alluded to, as is the judgment on their enemies.

3. The song focuses on the future and celebrates God’s final victory. (“For all nations shall come and worship before You”). This part of the song anticipates the ending of the Great Controversy and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom, wherein righteousness dwells. It views that future time when all nations, kindred, tongues, and people will be under God’s righteous rule, and there will be no alien powers. It foresees the time when the controversy will be ended and sin and strife shall be no more.

The song of the Lamb reminds us that the final stages of the Great Controversy are near, and the people of God are to prepare by being anchored in the truth. It is a song reserved for those who overcome in Christ.