

Our Warrior Storm God
Exodus 15, Psalms 18, 77

Turn to Exodus 15 please. Ex 15. Here is a scene from the 2012 movie Avengers. I watched a one minute youtube clip to get the lines right. I know nothing about the rest of the movie.

This scene takes place in a military aircraft of some kind. Three or four superheroes are fighting each other inside, and then they throw each other out of the open door at the back of the plane, to continue the fight somewhere else. The one superhero still to leave is putting on a parachute. He looks like Captain America to me, but that's just a guess.

As he's putting on the parachute, the woman who's flying the aircraft says to him, "I'd sit this one out if I were you. Those guys are ancient legends, they are basically gods." He answers, "There is only one God, ma'am, and I'm pretty sure he's not dressed like that." Great line.

I want to introduce you to our God, the One God, who among other things is one of those ancient legends. Meet Yahweh, the Ancient Warrior Storm-God.

We're doing this because I want to preach on Habakkuk 3. I found out that Hab 3 uses a picture about God that comes up earlier in the OT, a picture to which I have paid little attention. This picture of God, the Warrior God, deserves teaching on its own. So Hab 3 is next week. This week we look at Scriptures that show us a side of God that we don't often hear about.

Two scenes in Israel's history showed the Israelites that Yahweh was their Warrior Storm-God.

First, God's Red Sea Rescue – Exodus 14-15

Israel had just left Egypt, a fleeing nation of slaves, and were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. This in Exodus 14. God caused a certain kind of wind, and the sea parted, and the Israelites walked through the middle of the sea, on dry land, water on both sides.

After they were across, Pharaoh's chariots and army followed, pursued Israel into this path through the Red Sea. And while the chariots and army were coming across, the sea closed up and drowned them all, that army was destroyed. And Moses and the Israelites sang their praise to God, and that song, in Exodus 15, is the classic Israelite "God is a Warrior" song.

We might picture God sitting on his Throne, telling the Red Sea to part, and then, once the army was walking through, telling the sea to close up again. That is not at all how Moses pictured this. Moses pictured God off his throne, showing up at the Red Sea in a rage against his enemies, destroying them with his breath and his hand, so he could rescue his people a Israel.

Let's read Exodus 15:1-6. That's enough to get the flavour.

I will sing to Yahweh, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.

² *Yahweh is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.*

He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

³ *Yahweh is a warrior; Yahweh is his name.*

⁴ *Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea.*

The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea.

⁵ *The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.*

⁶ *Your right hand, Yahweh, was majestic in power.*

Your right hand, Yahweh, shattered the enemy.

Let's go over these 6 verses again, more carefully.

Ex 15:1 *I will sing to Yahweh, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.* Picture God throwing, using arms and hands, to throw horse and driver into the sea.

² *Yahweh is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.*

He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

³ *Yahweh is a warrior; Yahweh is his name.*

“Yahweh is a warrior.” There you have it, folks, we can't make it any clearer than that. *Yahweh is a warrior; Yahweh is his name.* Not only is Yahweh a warrior, it is a part of what the name “Yahweh” means.

⁴ *Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea.* Again, God picks up chariots and army and throws them into the sea. *The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea.*

⁵ *The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.*

⁶ *Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy.*

What makes God's right hand majestic in power? His right hand shattered the enemy, that's what makes it majestic in power. Yahweh is a warrior, Yahweh is his name.

That's as far as we'll go in Exodus 15, that's far enough to get the flavour. God rescuing Israel at the Red Sea was the first great scene that showed them their warrior God.

Second, God on Mt Sinai – Exodus 19, Deuteronomy 5

The second great scene was God appearing on Mt Sinai, again to all Israel, three months later. That happened when God covenanted with Israel at Mt Sinai, and gave them the 10 commandments and some other laws. We find this scene in Exodus 19, and Deuteronomy 5.

Exodus 19 describes God on the mountain as much thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud, and a very loud trumpet blast. The people trembled. The mountain was covered in smoke, because God descended in fire. Smoke billowed up, like from a great furnace. The whole mountain itself shook violently. The trumpet kept getting louder. God spoke, and the people shook with fear.

In Deut 5, Moses looks back 40 years later and tells them again. Mt Sinai was ablaze with fire when God came. The voice of God came out of the dark cloud and out of the fire. The people were terrified. They said to Moses, “we don’t want God to speak to us. This great fire will consume us. Moses, you go listen to God. We will stay far away, so we don’t have to listen to God’s voice from the fire. You tell us what he says, and we’ll obey whatever you say.”

God was not angry with them in any way. He loved them, and wanted them. He was there to make a covenant with them. But they needed to know who they were dealing with, and we need to know as well. Imagine our God, the one we pray to, and sing to, saying to us, “In three days, I want to meet your church outside, at such and such a place, so you can see me more clearly.”

And in three days, God showed up like all of this. I would be just as terrified as the Israelites. Dark billowing cloud, blazing fire, blasting trumpet, ongoing earthquake, thunder and lightning, and above it all, the voice of God himself. I would say, “God, I don’t want to meet you like this again. I would just like to meet with my brothers and sisters in our little room, and we’ll sing and pray, and read the Bible, to find out your words.” And God would say, “OK, we can do that.”

The movie character said, “there’s only one God, and I’m pretty sure he’s not dressed like that.” How *does* the One God dress? Not always the same. But one basic appearance is this scene at Sinai, not an angry God, just God introducing himself to people he loves, wearing: dark billowing cloud, blazing fire, blasting trumpet, ongoing earthquake, steady thunder and lightning.

Now, we need to put these two scenes together, the Red Sea rescue, and the Mt Sinai appearance, and picture an Ancient Warrior Storm-God who shows up like this when he comes to rescue his people. Moses did this first in Exodus 15, and Deborah begins her song in Judges 5 like this. And in Revelation, of course, God the Warrior is back. And Pss 18 and 77 (and 68, but not 68 today).

Rescued by the Warrior Storm-God Ps 18:6-19

David, at the end of his life, pictured the God of Mt Sinai, the God we just learned about from Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 5, as his Deliverer and Rescuer. God did not show up on Mt Sinai for war, but David sang about the God of Mt Sinai as a Warrior God, who came down from heaven to rescue him.

These warrior songs use mostly the Red Sea rescue, and God on Mt Sinai. But they use other stories as well: the Flood in Noah’s day, fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, the ground opening up to swallow a few rebellious Israelites in Num 16, the sun standing still for Joshua, and the plagues on the Egyptians. All of it shows Yahweh the Warrior, defending his people.

This is David, summarizing God’s help through his whole life. David has not seen any of these great storm episodes, as we have not. But he knows that God has helped him, and in his mind, this Warrior God has been his helper and protector all along. We’ll read Ps 18:6-19.

Ps 18:6 - *In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help.*

From his temple, he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.

⁷ *The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled, because he was angry.*

⁸ *Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it.*

⁹ *He parted the heavens, and came down; dark clouds were under his feet.*

¹⁰ *He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.*

¹¹ *He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—the dark rain clouds of the sky.*

¹² *Out of the brightness of his presence, clouds advanced, with hailstones, and bolts of lightning.*

¹³ *The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.*

¹⁴ *He shot his arrows, and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning, he routed them.*

¹⁵ *The valleys of the sea were exposed, and the foundations of the earth laid bare, at your rebuke, Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.*

¹⁶ *He reached down from on high, and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.*

¹⁷ *He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.*

¹⁸ *They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support.*

¹⁹ *He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me.*

God did not actually do the Red Sea or Mt Sinai for David, not in a way he could see. But David knew that that very Warrior Storm-God was behind his success against the odds. That God, Yahweh the Warrior, had showed himself in David's life by different kinds of help. David thanked the Warrior of the Red Sea rescue, and of Mt Sinai, for helping him.

Israel remembered these great events, and they sang songs about this God, because he would act like this again. Knowing what God had done in the *past* is the first step to knowing what he will do in the *future*. Knowing the past is the foundation of prophecy. If God showed up like this before, to make things right for his people, he will do so again. So they sang these songs.

What do you fear? What enemies of your body or soul could destroy you? Psalm 23, Yahweh is my Shepherd, is one kind of invitation to be confident in God. This is a different invitation to the same trust. Imagine *you* pray for help, as David did, and this Warrior Storm God comes down, in a rage against your enemy, to rescue you, on the day of your disaster. That I like very much. That God comes down from on high to take hold of *us*, and pull *us* out of deep waters.

Faith in the Warrior Storm God - Psalm 77

David sang Ps 18 to celebrate what God had already done. That's what Moses did in Exodus 15, and what Deborah did in Judges 5. Ps 77 also celebrates our Warrior Storm God, but in faith and in hope. Our God is like this, he will do this again.

Ps 77 is a lament, Asaph is in trouble, and God is not helping. So Asaph decides to remember the past, and he tells himself again about the Warrior Storm God.

It can sound like he just wants to distract himself with happier thoughts, but that's not what's going on. He remembers the past to get hope for the future. I will read right through Psalm 77.

Ps 77:1 I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. ² When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted.

³ I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.

⁴ You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

⁵ I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;

⁶ I remembered my songs in the night. My heart meditated and my spirit asked:

⁷ "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?"

⁸ Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?

⁹ Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

¹⁰ Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.

¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

¹² I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds."

¹³ Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God?

¹⁴ You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

¹⁵ With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

¹⁶ The waters saw you, God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.

¹⁷ The clouds poured down water, the heavens resounded with thunder;

your arrows flashed back and forth. ¹⁸ Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked.

¹⁹ Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. ²⁰ You led your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Here are verses 10-13 again. This is another psalm that teaches us how to think, when it seems that God has left us. God says, think like this: (77:10) *Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand. I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds."* *Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God?*

David, in Ps 18, looks back on God's help in his life, and praises Yahweh the Warrior Storm God for past help. Asaph, in Ps 77, cannot see God's help, at all, in his life. He's asks himself awful questions: *Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?*

Then he makes a deliberate choice to remember the God of Exodus 15, and Ps 18. *Then I thought: "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works, and I will meditate on all your mighty deeds."* We call ourselves "believers." Faith means we have choices about what we tell ourselves. God is urging us here to talk to ourselves like this, and put our trust in him again.

The Warrior Still to Come – Revelation 19

Yahweh, the Warrior Storm God is truly an ancient legend, and it can seem to us that this God properly belongs only back there. Some voices would say that this is not the God for civilized people in the 21st century. Watch out for voices that domesticate God. The voices can tame God and shrink him down all they want. That's been happening a long time. But he's not changing.

And voices in the church would say perhaps the same, that this was the OT God, and in the NT God is not like that anymore. Maybe we hope that is true, and maybe we hope it is not true. In any case, it is not true. We can find this Ancient God in the words of Jesus, and of Paul, and Peter. We don't read those parts, because they are not comforting, but they are there.

But in Revelation, the Warrior Storm God is back in full force. He is common there. I will read just one paragraph from the last half of Rev 19, which talks about Jesus our Lord, who has scars in his hands and his feet.

Revelation 19:11-21 *I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges **and wages war**.¹² **His eyes are like blazing fire** ...¹⁴ *The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.*¹⁵ *Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter."* *He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.*¹⁶ *On his robe, and on his thigh, he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.**

¹⁹ *Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army.*²⁰ *But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf... The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.*²¹ *The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.*

We will see the Warrior Storm God in action. So let's imitate David and Asaph. Like David in Ps 18, when you survive what feels like the day of your disaster, thank the Ancient Warrior God for hearing your cry, and parting the heavens, and coming down to fight on your behalf.

Like Asaph in Ps 77, when all the evidence says God has left you, and your prayers are not doing anything you can see or feel, remember the God of the Red Sea, and the God of Mt Sinai. *I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works, and I will meditate on all your mighty deeds.* Amen.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, Yahweh the Great Ancient Warrior Storm God, I hardly know what to do with this side of you. A part of us delights in the picture of Psalm 18, of you in your heavenly temple hearing our prayer, and coming down in a stormy fiery rage to rescue us. Is that even possible? It surely is, and our present age will end just like that.

And I'm frightened. What happened at Sinai is for me now just words on a page, but if I were at the foot of that mountain, on that day, I would want so much to be anywhere else. On other days, O God, like Ps 77, I want you to show up like this, but you don't.

But God, you are like this every day, and we are your covenant people every day, and you are with us. So we bow before you, we worship you as the Warrior God, we remember your great actions, we thank you for how you defend and rescue your people. We are so glad you're on our side, that you have brought us to yourself.

Ps 77 ends like this: *You, that Mighty God, led your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.* For the most part, God, that's more our style. Keep leading us your flock like that. What could be better? Amen.

BENEDICTION: The God of peace will soon crush Satan under our feet. May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 16:20; 15:13). Amen. Go in God's peace, to love and serve the Lord.