

The Exodus: Present and Personal
Psalm 114
July 19, 2026

The title of this sermon is also its aim, that is, as we consider an event that occurred thousands of years ago, we see it as *both* present and personal.

As I thought about that goal last week, I was reminded of a biography I've mentioned before—Isaacson's bio of Steve Jobs. I brought it up before to talk about the author's blunt assessment of Jobs's character. But I bring it up today to talk about Steve Jobs's time in Memphis. Because history—even *recent* history—can become quite personal when the places mentioned are places you've actually been.

So, though I read that bio well over a decade ago, I never forgot the visit Jobs made to Sun Studio downtown. The description of it only takes up a paragraph, but the story goes that they arranged an after-hours visit for him; and then—during their tour—they were *so* impressed by the tour guide that Jobs said to someone, "That kid was really smart. We should hire him for iTunes." And then they did, in early 2009.¹ For a number of reasons, that paragraph stuck with me.

Then, a couple years ago my brother-in-law was in town. He's done a good bit of studio work in Nashville, but had never been to Sun Studio here. So, we went. And during our tour I kept thinking about that anecdote from the Jobs bio. And then *our* tour guide said she'd given tours there for a long-time, 15-plus years. So after our tour, I asked, "Have you ever heard this story about a guide getting hired on the spot by Steve Jobs?" Her face immediately told me she knew *exactly* what I was talking about. And then she said, "Yes, I know that story. Because I worked with that guy. I was *here* when it happened. In fact, I *still* know the guy. And he still works out there."

Even though that was recent history, in that moment it was history brought into the present. I might even say it became a little more personal. And I bring that up today because I think that's *some* of what the Psalmist does with the Exodus.

1. The History of the Exodus (vv. 1-4)

First, we need to—in some sense—*leave* our present day and enter into the past. That's what good historians do. In their mind, they *go* to the place and time they consider. And that's what verse 1 does: **When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language.** The first line of the song sings, "Rewind. Go back. Remember *this*." The house of Jacob—Israel—went out from Egypt. They went out from a people of strange language. That's *what* happened, in terms of pure bare facts.

But the Psalmist isn't *merely* concerned with *what* happened. He's also going to consider something else, something of the significance. What do the Scriptures say was the *result* of Israel going out from Egypt?² Between verse 1 and verse 2, note the dramatic change in status.³ Because Israel didn't merely *move*. They didn't just "go out." Also, God didn't *merely* show up to help Israel move, and then promptly desert them.⁴ He delivered, instead, so that He might *then* dwell.

¹ Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*, 487.

² Christopher Ash, *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary*, 211.

³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, TOTC, 438.

⁴ Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day*, 321.

Verse 2 details this. When they went out, **Judah became his sanctuary**. The Psalmist invites us to “go back” so that we might recall this change—in status. Because though they *were* slaves in Egypt, they were so no longer. Further, the Holy God made Israel His holy dwelling place.⁵

Verse 2 goes on to describe what *else* Israel became: **Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his dominion**. Maybe this pair of emphases reminds us of the verses we stopped at in Exodus, which are *also* the verses we’ll consider again in a few weeks. That is, what the Lord said in Exodus 19 to the people He’d just delivered: **and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation** (Ex. 19:6). The point is this: because He delivered them, because He was *among* them, they could no longer be as they *were*. They were now to be—as His sanctuary and His dominion—a visible sign of His holiness and His rule.⁶

Verses 1 and 2 take us back. But the Psalmist rehearses, not just the “what happened,” of history, but the *significance* of what happened. And if verses 1 and 2 summarize the “what,” verses 3 and 4 detail the “how.”⁷ Verse 3: **The sea looked and fled**.

If you were asked, “*How* did Israel go out from Egypt?,” maybe you’d answer, quite simply, “The sea parted.” But *how* is it that the sea parted? The language indicates that when Yahweh came near, the sea *saw* Him approach; and then that sea scurried—falling over itself,⁸ as it were—in terror. Now, is this imagery the Psalmist taking a little too much poetic license, being a bit melodramatic? If so, he’s not alone; Psalm 77 says something quite similar: **When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled** (Ps. 77:16).

No matter what humanity often assumes, nor what our hearts might occasionally whisper to us, the God revealed in the Scriptures is far from a push-over. In fact, the God of the Scriptures is the God who rules *over* creation. And when He speaks, in *whatever* He purposes, all things bend their knee. We don’t have to look very far in the Psalms to see this reiterated. On the next page, the Psalmist sings, **Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases** (Ps. 115:3).

And thousands of years ago, He was pleased to bring His people *out* of Egypt. And what He purposed was not thwarted. In fact, the **sea looked and fled**. Verse 3 describes *another* instance of creation’s obedience, when a few years later the **Jordan turned back**. There, that particular body of water stopped its flow so that God’s people could finally enter the land God promised them.

The Red Sea fled. The Jordan turned back. Then, verse 4 continues doubling down on creation’s submission: **Mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs**. While mountains are some of the most solid parts of the created order, the language is clear: even *they* jump out of the way.⁹

So, first, the Psalmist recounts a bit of history. It’s a bit of God’s people’s history. It’s a bit of creation’s history. When we read it, we somewhat leave our present and enter that past.

However, the Psalmist doesn’t *leave* that history there. He actually drags it into the present.

2. The History of the Exodus Brought into the Present (vv. 5-6)

How do we know that’s what he does? Because he keeps talking about the *same* thing, but makes sure to change the tense of the verbs.¹⁰ So, though it *was*—in verse 3: **The sea looked and fled**, now—in verse 5 it’s: **What ails you, O sea, that you flee?** Or, though in verse 3 it was, **Jordan**

⁵ Motyer, 321.

⁶ Kidner, 438.

⁷ Ash, 213.

⁸ Kidner, 438.

⁹ Ash, 214.

¹⁰ From perfect forms to imperfect forms. Ash, 214

turned back in verse 5 it's **What ails you, . . . O Jordan, that you turn back?** Verse 6 continues this shift to the present, **O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?**

Why point this out? Because the change in tense gives the impression that all this is happening *right in front* of the Psalmist.¹¹ To him, the events of verses 1-4 are not locked into the past;¹² they're not *merely* something that occurred in 1446 B.C. Instead, it's as if the Psalmist *continues* to watch it happen.

And that approach is both significant and helpful for us. Because to refuse to lock those events in the past is to see the power of the Exodus as a continuing power.

Of course, this connection of past to present was something we noticed *before* the crossing of the Red Sea. In Exodus 12, when the children asked, "What does this mean?" the parents were instructed to say, **It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes** (Ex. 12:27). In their future, *after* they crossed the Red Sea, even after they crossed the Jordan—in *that* future—the past was still to be brought into the present.

And though we'll talk about this more in a moment, don't miss that the historical was also there made *personal*. In the years ahead, even though *they* themselves were *never* in Egypt, they still were to say that He spared "our" homes.

The history of Israel was considered in the present. And because they believed the One that delivered *still* delivers, they could ask the sea, **What ails you . . . that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?** Maybe you say, "That *almost* sounds like a taunt."¹³ Well, some have said that the mocking questions of 1 Corinthians 15 have the same feel about them.¹⁴ How could someone conclude that? Should we also make that kind of leap?

Well, we've said *throughout* the Exodus study that some of its purpose was to point toward a better Exodus. We've also noted *throughout* the Exodus study—even on Easter Sunday—that we too have passed safely through water. That kind of reading of Scripture is, in part, what it means to bring the Exodus not *only* into the New Testament, but also into our present.

But we could go further in seeing parallels between Psalm 114, the Gospels, and our day. Because not unlike the mountains, hills, and sea of Psalm 114, later revelation tells us that creation itself convulsed on a Friday in Jerusalem. That is, when the Lord purposed to save, the sun stopped and rocks split (Matt. 27:51). And then, three days later, Matthew records that early on Sunday morning the earth quaked (Matt. 28:2).

And it's with all *that* in mind—in fact it's *only* because of *that* history, when our King came and conquered our enemy—that we might join the taunt, and ask, "O Death, where is your victory?" In confidence, in our *present*, we can be sure: the Jordan we intend to cross will too grant passage.

So, is the power of God merely historical to us? How present tense is our theology?

We bring the past into the present because the God of the past is *still* exactly who He was. He's the One who calls Himself, "I AM."

3. The History of the Exodus Brought into the Present and Made Personal (vv. 7–8)

In verse 7, the confidence of the believer continues. And the One in whom he or she is confident is finally named: **Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob.**

¹¹ Motyer, 322.

¹² Ash, 215.

¹³ Kidner, 438.

¹⁴ Ash, 215.

When the Psalmist tells the earth to tremble, he uses a strong word, one that means to writhe in terror, in awe, or anguish.¹⁵ Here is yet *another* taunt—a bold one. And the Psalmist wrote this, Israel would go on to sing in this way, because of **the presence of the Lord**. More specifically, or more historically grounded, the earth was to tremble at the presence **of the God of Jacob**.

Now, is this the first time in this Psalm we've considered the presence of God? No, of course not. Recall the first couple verses, when the Psalmist declared: **When Israel went out from Egypt . . . Judah became His sanctuary**. So, yes, the earth was to writhe in terror because of His presence. But *where* is the place of His dwelling in fullness? It's with His people. This is *why* these former slaves could sing so boldly. To be clear, it was *not* because of anything intrinsic to the Hebrews, but because Yahweh was beside them, on their side. He was for them. Who could be against them? (Rom. 8).

And they sang with this kind of confidence because they knew who He was. The Exodus had made clear that He, for example, protects His own. On the shore of the Red Sea, the Egyptians sent hundreds and hundreds of select chariots filled with skilled soldiers wielding weapons upon defenseless and untrained Hebrews. Yet, in *that* moment, the God who was making Himself known, moved from *before* the people—leading them—to behind—guarding them. And **the one did not come near the other all night** (Ex. 14:20–21).

He'd revealed Himself to His people. And not only did they know who He was and *is*; they know that He was, and is, that for *them*. History wasn't merely history; it had become present and personal. The One able to protect *continues* to protect. So, they sing: tremble, earth, **at the presence of the God of Jacob**. He's among *us*.

But not only does He protect those He delivers, He also provides. Which is what we've seen in the wilderness chapters of Exodus. And it's what the people of God would *continue* to sing of. What does the God of Jacob do? Verse 8: He **turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water**.

They had to learn this, of course. They'd wondered, **Is the LORD among us, or not?** (Ex. 17:7). But at Marah, at Rephidim, and then again and again and again—day after day—He proved that He was *indeed* among them by providing for them. They were His sanctuary. And dwelling among them meant His storehouses were available as well. Even when it seemed as if all was lost, parched in a desert, surrounded by nothing but rock and flint.

But there, instead of the people dying of thirst, *the* Rock was struck, and the people drank. They didn't get over that. In fact *after* that, for centuries, the people sang of that event: what the God of Jacob did; and, further, what He does: He **turns the rock into a pool of water, and flint into a spring of water**.

How do we know He *continued* to do that? That He *continues* to provide in this way, even today? Because Paul would later tell us that the Rock was Christ. And He said that if anyone is thirsty, we're to come to Him and drink (John 7:37–38).

So, we might move one more step, and ask, “If my theology is present, is it also *personal*?” That is, as we head into another week, will His presence and provision matter on Monday? Am I convinced He's *with* me, and *for* me?

Conclusion

In conclusion, we should talk about *when* the Hebrews would sing this particular Psalm. Maybe you know this, but Psalms 113–118 are called the Hallel Psalms. These are the Psalms Israel would've sung as they celebrated the Passover.

¹⁵ Ash, 215.

Further, according to custom, the first two Hallel Psalms (113–114) would've been sung *before* the meal, and the remaining four after it.¹⁶ I hope you're putting this together, but consider what would *eventually* happen surrounding the celebration of the Passover. Psalm 114 very likely would've been one of the Psalms Jesus sang during the most important week in human history.

Further, if Passover was celebrated in its customary way, this particular Psalm would've been one of the two sung right *before* He instituted what we're about to observe.

History isn't *merely* past tense. At this table—that which Passover prepared His people for—we consider what the Exodus pointed to, the better one Christ accomplished in Jerusalem. Which occurred *after* this Psalm was written, but thousands of years *before* today. And yet here, in this meal, God brings it out of the past and pulls it into the present—by His Spirit.

And He does so that it all might be made personal.

His body, for you.

¹⁶ Kidner, 436; Nancy deClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT, 850.