

Lesson 2
Crossing the Red Sea
 Exodus 14:1-31

The children of Israel were on the move from Egypt to Canaan, the Promised Land. They had avoided the final plague of the death of the firstborn son, which fell upon every family in Egypt, by observing the Passover Feast. They moved out of Pharaoh's jurisdiction when they went from the city of Rameses, the rendezvous point, to Succoth. Apparently, Moses' plan was to take them on the northern route to Canaan through the land of the Philistines, which was about two hundred miles and a journey of four weeks for a nation of two million. They chose the northern route because it was the shortest way to Canaan, and logically, this was the way they should have gone, but God had other plans for His infant nation Israel. Apparently, when they arrived at Succoth, the pillar of cloud and fire joined the Israelites. God then supernaturally led them out into the desert because they needed to learn how to trust God and how to make war. God designed the Red Sea incident to test and prove the Israelites so He could prepare them for future battles. His directive will was to keep them in the desert for no more than two years for training, but because of their unbelief and hardness of heart, they roamed hopelessly in the desert for forty years, thirty-eight years were unnecessary.

In Exodus 14, God gave the Israelites their very first test in the art of trusting God. God deliberately led them into a trap. God had them camp by the Red Sea. It is very important that we locate where this supernatural event of crossing the Red Sea took place. First, it must be said that the exact location is uncertain. However, most scholars feel it was somewhere at the tip or north of the Suez section. There is good evidence that it took place in the Bitter Lakes region, which was the upper northern area of the Red Sea, not many miles from the Suez section. While we are not told in Exodus 14 the name of the sea, we are told the name in other places (cf. Exodus 15:4, Joshua 2:10; Deut. 11:4; Num. 21:4). The actual wording for Red Sea has been confused because of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). The Septuagint translates this "Red Sea," but the Hebrew text actually says "Sea of Reeds" (yam sup). The Sea of Reeds was the northern extension of the Red Sea, and historically was connected with the Suez Canal and The Gulf of Aqaba. ***"King Solomon also built a fleet of ships in Ezion-geber, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds), in the land of Edom"*** (1 Kings 9:26). While today the Sea of Reeds is quite shallow and marshy, at the time of the exodus this area was at least fifteen to twenty-five feet deep and at least two miles across. The Sea of Reeds was no swamp of six inches of water in biblical times. There was plenty of water for Pharaoh's armies to drown. What took place at the Sea of Reeds was a full-fledged miracle where the water stood up in walls and the children of Israel went across on dry land. In 3,500 years, a great deal of the northern end of the Red Sea has filled up with silt. Furthermore, if the Israelites crossed at the Bitter Lakes area, this would have led them immediately to the wilderness of Shur, and the journey to the area of Marah would have coincided with the three-day trip mentioned in Exodus 15:22-23.

THE DILEMMA OF ISRAEL Exodus 14:1-9

"Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the Sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea.'" While we cannot definitely locate these points of terrain, we think that Pi-hahiroth and Baal-zephon are two mountain ranges parallel to the Bitter Lakes area, forming a pass. Migdol literally means, "tower" and may have been an Egyptian outpost that could be occupied in a time of invasion from the east. At this time, Migdol was not occupied with Egyptian troops. The Israelites were to camp between these two mountains. God led them into this trap. Why did God do this? There was no logical reason, but there was a Divine reason. God wanted to test the Israelites and to judge the Egyptians. This test was absolutely necessary for the growth and maturity of the sons of Israel.

God often leads Christians into pressure situations to force them to operate on faith so they can grow spiritually strong and be blessed by God. Heartaches, pressure, frustration, and adversity are designed by God so that, through faith, a Christian honors and glorifies God.

"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials (testings), that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory"

and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6-9).

“For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’” Pharaoh undoubtedly received an intelligence report, either from some of the mixed multitude who turned back to Egypt or from military reconnaissance. Humanly speaking, this was a very stupid thing to do, and when Pharaoh heard the intelligence report, he concluded Israel was hopelessly lost in the desert and had placed herself in a very vulnerable military position. Israel became a “sitting duck” for Pharaoh and his mighty army. Israel was trapped on both sides by mountains and cut off by the Sea of Reeds to her front. This was a hopeless situation, for Israel had placed herself in a most precarious position.

God’s plans often seem stupid to the unsaved world, but God has reasons for everything He does, and in turn, He makes the world look stupid.

“Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD. And they did so.” Moses was told once again that God would sovereignly harden Pharaoh’s heart. Apparently Moses knew of God’s plan but did not tell Israel. Moses kept the Jews in this trap until the Egyptians arrived. Israel had no idea that the test was coming or that God designed it so that all Egypt would know that God is God. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he could do nothing else but pursue Israel.

God purposely brings crisis into the Christian’s life to teach him lessons and to show the world the infinite power of God. Some of the most difficult tests come when the Christian does not know they are coming and cannot get prepared for them. Yet, God is somehow behind every crisis of life.

“When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants, had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, ‘What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?’” Pharaoh and his servants (probably military experts) held a counsel of war so as to pursue the Israelites to capture them and bring them back to the land of Egypt or annihilate them. Perhaps Pharaoh had understood that they were only going into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to Jehovah as they had asked to do before, but when he heard they were leaving the land of Egypt and were at the border, he was furious. Hatred again raged in his soul for Moses and Israel. He thirsted for revenge. Pharaoh’s image in Egypt had been marred. His kingdom had been weakened. His own son and millions of first-born Egyptians had been killed through the plague by the death angel. He had suffered an ignominious defeat at the hands of Moses and Jehovah. He became obsessed with retaliation. Pharaoh learned no lessons at all from the ten plagues and he once again pursued the sons of Israel.

“So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt, and chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.” Pharaoh called upon six hundred chariots of the royal guard and many other chariots in Lower Egypt, most of them probably at Rameses and other frontier garrisons near the headquarters of Pharaoh. Therefore, his armor division was probably eight hundred to one thousand chariots or more. He also had cavalry (horsemen) and some infantry (army), who may have ridden piggyback on the chariots over the desert and then marched on foot against Israel, following the chariots through the sea.

Pharaoh reasoned humanly but this could only result in folly for him. Pharaoh’s army (armor, cavalry, and infantry) was summoned to do battle against Israel. These were Pharaoh’s handpicked troops, and humanly speaking, there was no way Egypt’s army could lose to Israel who had no weapons of war and no trained soldiers. One or two thousand well-trained soldiers would easily destroy two million Jews under these circumstances, especially since they had absolutely nowhere to run.

This was an impossible situation. The sea was to the east. Mountains were on the north and south and the Egyptians were blocking the only way of escape to the west. Israel was in deep trouble. Her death was almost certain. Humanly speaking, this was an impossible situation. It could develop into a biblical “holocaust”. This was a test *par excellence*.

THE DISBELIEF OF ISRAEL - Exodus 14:10-12

“And as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them and they became frightened (frantic); so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD.” The Israelites could see the Egyptian army coming at a distance by the huge dust clouds in the desert, and as they drew closer they could see flashes of light as the sun reflected off shining pieces of armor. The Jews became terrified and panicked as they stared almost hypnotically at the pursuing Egyptians. They panicked and had their eyes on the circumstances rather than on God who has control of circumstances. They doubted and fell apart at the seams. They had seen God do ten miracles to get them out of Egypt, but they had lost sight of God’s promises and faithfulness. People have such short spiritual memories.

The Israelites had three failures that caused them to develop a human viewpoint: 1) they looked and beheld; that is, they had their eyes glued on the circumstances and not on God. They had their eyes on people rather than on the Lord. 2) They became frightened; that is, they panicked because they gave way to their emotions. This probably caused them to experience forms of hysteria. 3) They cried out; that is, they offered a prayer to God but this was the cry of fear and not of confidence in God. This was a carnal “bail me out” prayer.

“Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’”? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’” Doubting God turned to ironical and sarcastic murmuring and complaining on the part of the Israelites. There was nothing wrong with God or Moses, but the problem was within the Israelites’ own souls.

Notice how a human viewpoint caused these people to think irrationally and unbiblical. They would rather go back to the devil’s Egypt than go to God’s land of Canaan. They would rather be slaves under a tyrant than free men under God. Anything for them, they reasoned, was better than death. Yet, who said they were going to die? Neither God nor Moses ever said this. In fact, it was God’s will that the sons of Israel should get to Canaan, the Promised Land. The person who operates from a human viewpoint stops operating on faith, gives way to his emotions, and begins to imagine things that are not true. Surely Israel failed the test and refused to believe God.

When the Israelites felt God had forsaken them, they took their unbelief out on their leadership. Moses became the object of attack because of the people’s unbelief. Moses had done a brilliant job, but unbelieving people are quick to find fault with everything but themselves. Leadership must always be ready to take criticism from people, for nothing is unlovelier than God’s people out of fellowship.

THE DECLARATION OF MOSES - Exodus 14: 13-14

“But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear! Stand by (firm) and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.’” -- Israel’s faith had faltered. The people had digressed spiritually, but Moses, the leader, was strong in faith. At this point, Moses’ task was to convince the people that if God had delivered them supernaturally from Egyptian bondage, He would also supernaturally deliver them from Pharaoh and his army, for it was God’s will for the Jews to get to the Promised Land. Moses gave three keys to victory: 1) Do not fear; that is, they were to stop fearing, for all fear is a failure to trust God. Fear and faith are mutually exclusive, for a believer obsessed and possessed by fears becomes a spiritual casualty. Fear always paralyzes faith in the living God. ***“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee”*** (Psalm 56:3). 2) Stand by (firm); that is, they were to wait on God and use no fleshly, human means to solve this problem. They were to trust wholly in God by resting in His promises. God does not “help those who help themselves”, but He helps those who are helpless and who trust totally in God for deliverance. God gives mental rest to those who trust in Him.

“The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in Thee” (Psalm 26:3).

“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline (sound mind)” (2 Tim. 1:7).

3) See the salvation; that is, they were to trust the Lord and watch Him work for them. The word “see” actually means to anticipate. They were to anxiously expect God to work supernaturally for them. Unless they expected God to act, He would not act.

“The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.” They had to learn that the battle is the Lord’s. He would fight for them. Their responsibility was to keep silent, trust God, and watch Him work.

Do we understand that the Lord will fight for us in our problems? Are we convinced, as Christians, that God can and will work supernaturally for us? Have we learned the lesson of keeping quiet and waiting patiently on God? It is possible to run ahead of God by taking matters into our own hands. Faith trusts God to work out the problems according to His perfect will.

THE DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL - Exodus 14:15-21

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.’” Moses was apparently praying silently to the Lord when God told him to have Israel move forward. This tells us there is a time to pray and a time to stop praying and to move out for God. When Israel stood fast, expecting God to work, God gave the command to move forward. The children of Israel had to claim the promises of God and move forward towards the sea. ***“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned”*** (Heb. 11:29). Faith always results in activity. They rested in the promises of God on the inside, which resulted in mental stability, but also in obedience they went forward physically. If they had not moved by faith-obedience, the sea would never have opened up.

Are we, as Christians, moving forward? We are to always be going forward for God in our personal lives and the life of the local church. To doubt God, to fear men, to look at circumstances, always means a regression spiritually.

“And as for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.” Moses’ rod was a symbol of divine power. Moses had the responsibility of the raising of the staff and if he had failed to do this act by faith, the sea should not have opened up.

“And as for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and horsemen.” God humiliated the Egyptians by sovereignly hardening their hearts so as to cause them to go through the corridor of water to pursue the Israelites. This, of course, was not a good military maneuver but they were blinded by hate and the smell of victory. God received honor through this because it showed that Jehovah was Almighty God.

“And the angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.” The angel of God is probably the Angel of Jehovah, the pre-incarnate Christ, who was with the children of Israel all through the wanderings in the desert. Also, the pillar moved to the rear of the Israelites.

“So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.” A supernatural cloud protected the Jews at night and made it pitch black in order that the Egyptians could not see their hand in front of their faces. This was done so they could not see the Israelites. The pillar also provided a supernatural light at night. It had a searchlight effect as bright as the sun.

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind

all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided.” God sent a supernatural east wind and performed a mighty miracle, allowing Israel to cross the Reed Sea at the northern end of the Red Sea. God performed this miracle in response to Israel’s faith. We can be absolutely sure that had not the people believed and obeyed, the waters would not have rolled back.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EGYPTIANS Exodus 14:22-29

“And the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” The waters of the sea rolled back with walls on both sides so as to make a long, narrow corridor with the sea bottom absolutely dry. Israel moved toward the sea. It is even possible that the first ranks had to step forward before the waters divided. The Israelites went across dry land. This was a miracle for there should have been hundreds of feet of silt that would have been like quicksand. When God does a miracle, He does it right.

“Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and horsemen, went after them into the midst of the sea. And it came about at the morning watch, that the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the Egyptians into confusion. And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said ‘Let us flee from Israel for the Lord is fighting for them against the Egyptians.’” A little before 6:00 a.m., Pharaoh moved his army to pursue the Israelites. When the Egyptians went onto the corridor across the sea, they were at first on dry ground, but then the ground began to moisten because of a sudden cloudburst (Psalm 77:17-19) and seepage of underground water. Their chariot wheels began to swerve so that their armor, cavalry, and infantry bogged down in the midst of the corridor of water. The Egyptians realized immediately that God was with Israel and was fighting against Egypt, but it was too late. They could not retreat. Their doom was sealed..

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and horsemen.’ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” -- Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea in obedience to God’s command and the sea closed up; consequently the Egyptians were destroyed. Pharaoh’s handpicked army was drowned. We cannot be sure if Pharaoh died with his armies, but it seems reasonable that he did, for archeological studies show that the Pharaohs of Egypt were in the vanguard of their armies and therefore led them into battle. In Psalm 136:15, it says, ***“But He overthrew (shook off) Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds) . . .”*** which implies Pharaoh drowned as well.

THE DELIGHT OF ISRAEL Exodus 14:30-31

“Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.” Every last Egyptian was dead, and God gave Israel a complete victory. Josephus, the Jewish historian, suggested that after Israel crossed the Sea a west wind set in. This wind, assisted by the current, drove the bodies of the drowned Egyptians to the eastern shore thus providing weapons and armor for Israel to equip an army.

So complete was the destruction in Egypt after the Red Sea incident and the plagues that Egypt declined as a world power for about fifty years and never became a problem to the Israelites until they were securely in the land of Canaan.

“And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.” A few hours before, the people feared the Egyptians, but now, after seeing this mighty miracle, they feared God and believed in Him. They were convinced (at least temporarily) that God is God.

This was a great victory for God, and it was also a great victory of faith for Moses. Israel would have never crossed the sea unless Moses had had the patience of faith. The people identified themselves with Moses, their

leader, and God, through his leadership, took them across the northern part of the Red Sea. ***“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized (identified with) Moses in the cloud and in the sea”*** (1 Cor. 10:1-2). God, through good leadership, delivered Israel from what seemed to be a humanly impossible situation.

Christian, do you believe God can deliver you from hopeless situations? You will never learn this until you operate on faith, and you will not operate on faith until you are tested. When you are tested, do not fail the test or you will lose the battle and dishonor God.

CONCLUSION

God judged unbelievers (Pharaoh and Egypt) and delivered believers (Moses and Israel). Why? Israel trusted in God; Egypt spurned God. The application is clear. Those who believe in Christ shall be saved. Those who reject Christ shall be judged. ***“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him”*** (John 3:36).

Have you believed in Christ as your Lord and Savior? If not, your fate will be the same as Egypt--death and judgment! Trust Christ and you shall be delivered from the guilt of sin and the penalty of hell. You cannot cross the sea to the promised land of heaven unless God does the miracle of the new birth in your soul and you believe in Christ.