

The Egyptians Thrown Into The Midst of the Sea  
Exodus 14:15-31  
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Read Exodus 14:15-31

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

### **Introduction: Frost/Nixon**

There was a movie made back in 2008 called *Frost/Nixon* that tells the story of David Frost, a journalist who was the first to secure an interview with Richard Nixon after Nixon had resigned from the presidency in the early 1970s. The format was four 2-hour long interviews that were spaced out for network TV. After the first three interviews, Nixon has not really talked about much of substance and Frost is frustrated that he has not been able to get much out of him. The night before the final interview, David Frost is in his hotel room when Nixon calls him on the phone and essentially tells him that for the last interview, the gloves are off: “I shall be your greatest adversary, I’ll come at you with everything I’ve got.” Which greatly motivates Frost; he works hard most of the night and comes in prepared to do his best to get Nixon to open up. There’s a principle here: sometimes our enemies bring out the best in us. Sometimes when we are up against the strongest challenge, we shine the brightest.

When you play a sport, do you feel better when you beat a weak team or a strong team? You might want to play a team that you know that you can beat because it feels good to win, but if you really want to show how good a player or team you are, you want to take on the best. I remember a football player, a quarterback, being asked on TV if he would give a ride to an opposing, rival player, a linebacker who sacked him all the time. If he was on the way to the game and the other player was broken down on the side of the road, would he stop and help him. And the quarterback said, “Yes I would because I want to play his team at their strongest and beat them at their best.”

Today’s text is about a strong enemy, probably the strongest enemy in the world at that time, coming after God’s people, the Israelites. And not only has God let this happen, He’s made it happen. Having the strongest enemy will show how great and powerful He is. The first part of His plan was parting the waters of the Red Sea.

### **I. The Waters Part (vv. 15-22)**

*<sup>15</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. <sup>16</sup> Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup> And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. <sup>18</sup> And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” <sup>19</sup> Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, <sup>20</sup> coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. <sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. <sup>22</sup> And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*

The end of last week's passage saw the Israelites starting to panic and complain that they were trapped and were going to be destroyed by Pharaoh's huge army. They have no idea what God has planned – they looked at the sea, probably though, “Hmm... no boats, there's no way out.” But God is creative, he gives them an escape route they never would have expected.

Verses 15 and 16 bring up an interesting question about prayer and human action. God says “Why are you still talking? Get these people moving, use your staff to divide the water.” There is always the question of “how much do I pray about something and how much do I just step out and do something about it?” I think most of us probably do way too little praying and too much doing, but there can come a time when you just need to step out in faith and move. Charles Spurgeon said, “Far be it from me ever to say a word in disparagement of the holy, happy, heavenly exercise of prayer. But, beloved there are times when prayer is not enough... when we have prayed over a matter to a certain degree, it then becomes sinful to tarry any longer; our plain duty is to carry our desires into action... without any longer deliberation or delay.”<sup>1</sup>

I'm reminded of the scene in “Fellowship of the Ring” where Gandalf has been leading the fellowship group through the Mines of Moria with his lit staff. When the monstrous Balrog comes up behind them, Gandalf has the group pass in front of him and he puts himself in between them and this enemy.<sup>2</sup> In verses 19-20 we find out that the pillar of cloud that has been leading the Israelites now functions as a barrier between them and the Egyptians. God stood between His people and the enemy. What verse 20 seems to be saying is that He kept it dark for the enemy but lit up the sky for His people. Don't be thrown by the fact that verse 19 says “the angel of God who was going before them” where earlier it had just said God. This has been the Bible's style for a while – in the burning bush account in chapter 3, one sentence says it was God and another says it was His angel in the bush. In the killing of the Egyptian firstborns on Passover night, one verse says that God would move through the land and take the actions while another verse says it was His angel. So here we have a description of the angel who was going before them, even though up to now it has been described as God Himself. His angel is interchangeable with Himself. Some preachers say that the angel is Jesus, the term is the “pre-incarnate Christ.” That's possible, but I don't think there's enough evidence. I think we can take at face value an angel was doing God's work. Sometimes Moses described it as the angel, sometimes God Himself.

There's a really cool parallel in verses 21-22 and the dividing the sea to the Genesis creation account. James Bruckner points out: “The imagery here... is from the creation of the world in Genesis 1. It is a re-creation of part of the creation event... Three phases allude to the creation: as God's spirit hovered over the waters (Gen. 1:2) so Moses was told to raise his staff over the sea; as God separated the water (Gen. 1:7) Moses' action divided the water; and as God made dry ground (Gen. 1:9) so the people would go through the sea on dry ground.”<sup>3</sup> God takes such care to have the strong wind blow all night and dry the ground for the Hebrews to walk through, with walls of water supernaturally suspended for them.

The walls of water and dry ground must have looked inviting and reassuring to the enemy, until their chariots get stuck and then

## **II. The Egyptians Panic (vv. 23-25)**

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “Forward! Forward! Forward!” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1973), p. 10:13.

<sup>2</sup> Lucas McGarity's sermon “The Lord Triumphs Gloriously” from September 22, 2019, found at [firstfreewichita.org](http://firstfreewichita.org).

<sup>3</sup> James K. Bruckner, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 132.

*<sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. <sup>24</sup> And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, <sup>25</sup> clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."*

There are times in life when you've been heading one way and something happens to make you realize: I have made a big mistake. When we're not thinking clearly, when we're following the crowd or laboring under some delusion, at some point it dawns on us that this is not the smartest move ever. I've had those moments, like the time I got in a car my freshman year of college at Baylor because some guys were driving down to Texas A&M to steal street signs. (I hope the statute of limitations has expired on that one) I didn't really think through what that would look like, but at some point after arriving in College Station and these guys literally jumping out of the car and taking tools to unscrew signs to take back to their dorm rooms, I had the very clear thought: "I have made a big mistake. We are all going to get arrested, I am going to be thrown out of school if I don't go to jail. I need to get back to my own campus ASAP." Thankfully, they got tired of sneaking around after stealing a couple of signs and we headed home.

Verse 25 is that "Oh no, we have made a big mistake" moment for the Egyptian soldiers. They had pursued their former slaves all the way to the Sea that has opened up and let them across. Pharaoh and his commanders have assumed that if the Hebrews can cross through the sea while it's parted, so can we. But that turned out to be a bad assumption – I talked last week about how it initially looked like the Hebrews were trapped by the sea when the Egyptians were coming to get them, but really the trap was set for Pharaoh and his army and they've driven their horses and chariots right into it. I'm sure that they could look up into the sky and see the pillar of fire and cloud, and after their chariot wheels got stuck they started to put two and two together: "That God who made all of those plagues happen to us over these past few months, maybe He's still on their side. We need to get out of here."

But it's too late as the next six verses will show us.

### **III. The Lord Punishes and Preserves (vv. 26-31)**

*<sup>26</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." <sup>27</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. <sup>28</sup> The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. <sup>29</sup> But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. <sup>30</sup> Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. <sup>31</sup> Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.*

I remember someone once commenting off hand that they knew that the Israelites went through the Reed Sea, not the Red Sea. So it wasn't really a miracle that they were able to walk through because a sea of reeds would have only have ankle or shin high at the most. You might encounter this objection to the Exodus story. And there is some support for the idea that what most of the major translations call the Red Sea could be translated as the Reed Sea, the Hebrew is *yam suph*. *Yam suph* could mean "sea of reeds" or "sea of papyrus" and that would probably mean it's not the Red Sea. However, it could also be translated "sea of the end," which could mean the Red Sea because it

formed the southern border of Egypt, the end. Other people say that the Red Sea was farther north in Moses' day than it is now, and so it had reeds too; in that case there is no problem with the name. Red and Reed refer to the same body of water.<sup>4</sup> Whichever explanation and translation is correct, a miracle had to take place: if the Reed Sea was so shallow that the Israelites could walk through it, then there's still a miracle there – because how can a whole army drown in water that only comes up to their knees? I take the Scriptures at face value, though, I don't immediately write off the supernatural just because it's not my experience. And I also don't like calling Moses, who wrote this text under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a liar. I'm going to trust that he was there, he held out his hand over the water when God told him to, it divided and formed walls, and the Israelites walked on dry ground while the Egyptians were caught and drowned when the sea returned to *"its normal course"* (v. 27). Verse 28 says *"not one of them remained."*

Notice that the Egyptians are drowned in the middle of the day. God doesn't have this happen in the middle of the night, probably because the Israelites needed to see their dreaded enemy destroyed by God. *"Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians"* so they feared the Lord and believed in Him. Please remember that Egypt was the big, bad superpower and Israel had lived with a slave's fear of its abusive master. They got to see how strong the Lord was over the mightiest earthly power; it strengthened them for the long road ahead. It took a long time for Israel to trust God and Moses, and that trust will still waver from time-to-time, but it is a high point right here. And we've talked about how the punishment fits the crime for Pharaoh and his army – they had drowned the newborn Egyptian boys and so now the most fitting end of their lives is drowning. Pharaoh could have easily saved his army's lives, but he chose to pursue God's people. And this is what happens when you pick a fight with the Almighty. You may not lose in this life - there are plenty of tyrants and persecutors of Christians who have lived a long life; but either in this life or the next, they will pay for their assaults on God's people. Revelation 18 says that the city of Satan will be cast into the sea. God will punish His enemies and preserve His people, either in the course of this life or in the end.

### **Conclusion:**

Why does God let this whole incident happen? Well, let me re-phrase that: why does God make this happen? Because God is moving all the pieces around and continuing to harden Pharaoh's heart, which was a huge theme of chapters 5-11. This is going to be the last time that Pharaoh changes his mind, goes back on his promise to Moses and Israel, and hardens his heart toward them. There's a little phrase back in verse 4 that explains why this is all happening: *"I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."* This idea of God getting glory is repeated here in verses 17: *"I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host"* and in verse 18: *"when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh."* This idea is kind of hard to miss: God will work things out to bring Himself glory, which is the highest aim of everything in the universe! God had gotten glory throughout the events of the plagues, and He was to be glorified for bringing His people out of slavery in the aftermath of the Passover, but there is more glory for God to gain: He will make the final conflict between Egypt and Israel go His way, and prove decisively that He is greater than Pharaoh and his army. There are two ways God can be glorified in someone's life: by showing them mercy, bestowing on them grace, and saving them; or by judging their sins as a just and holy God. Either way, one aspect of God is shown and He is glorified. This is the idea behind Romans 9:22-23: *"What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory..."* There are two kinds of people: those

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), pp. 391-392.

who will prove God is a God of power, righteous judgment, and wrath, and those who prove that God is merciful and loving. And it's specifically applied to Pharaoh five verses earlier (Romans 9:17): *"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'"*

If you keep reading Israel's story in Exodus and the later books, you see that God continues to guide the people as a pillar of cloud and fire for the whole forty years that they are in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. He doesn't just lead them for the first stretch, until Pharaoh and his army are dealt with, and then abandons them to figure it out the rest of the way. No, He stays with His people and guides them every step of the way. Sometimes we wish we had that kind of guidance, don't we? Wouldn't life be so much easier if we saw God's guidance when we had to make big decisions? How many of us have agonized over whether to take a certain job, whether to marry a certain person, what college to go to? How nice would it be to have God just show up as a pillar of fire to point us to the right choice? But that's not been my experience and I'm guessing it hasn't been yours. But we do have God's divine guidance. It's His moral will contained in the words of the Scriptures and it's His Holy Spirit living inside of us.<sup>5</sup> Between studying the Bible, praying for God's guidance, and being sensitive to His Spirit's direction, I'm confident that I can make godly decisions in life. Notice I didn't say "the right decisions," because I don't think there's always a "right decision." There could be multiple "right decisions."

If I had become the pastor of another church, that might have been the "right decision," even though becoming the pastor here ended up being the "right decision." And you could have hired a different pastor and that could have been the "right decision." Unless he wasn't a true believer or didn't want to go to seminary or get ordained, then it would have been the wrong decision. When Miles was choosing between Covenant College, Messiah College, and Grove City College, I think any of the three would have been the "right decision." None of those choices violated any Biblical commands, but he felt led to go to Grove City. I counseled a man one time who needed to choose between two jobs – one would not have paid as much but kept him close to home, the other was much more lucrative but would have involved a lot of time away from his family. I challenged him to think through how the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit would guide him: Do the Scriptures put a higher priority on loving our families or money? Did he think the Holy Spirit was pressing him to spend more time with his kids who were teenagers and he wouldn't have a lot of time left with, or to go chase the best paying career he could get? There's a lot longer discussion we could have about the declarative and permissive will of God, but the bottom line is that He still guides us with His truth and His Spirit, and when we make decisions in line with His will, we can't lose. God is still a pillar of cloud and fire leading us.

How does the Apostle Paul describe this event? 1 Corinthians 10:1,2 says, *"For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."* Paul describes the Israelites coming through the parted sea as a baptism. That's an interesting way to describe it, isn't it? I mean, the Israelites didn't even get wet, how was that a baptism? Baptism is the symbol of our being brought from death to life, from slavery to sin to freedom in Christ, from being condemned to being saved. And the escape from the Egyptians is the defining moment for the Israelites that they are now truly free. Not only have they left the land of their bondage, but their enemies are dead, defeated. And so this baptism sets them off on their journey to follow God's will on the way to the Promised Land – they come out of the water having crossed over from death to life.

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), p. 382.

And Jesus guarantees that for us as well: John 5:24 says, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”* Jesus, as we’ve noted several times in this sermon series, is the new and greater Moses. Jesus didn’t lift up a staff to send water crashing down to defeat our enemies like Moses did, He lifted up something else.<sup>6</sup> He Himself was lifted up and nailed to a cross to win deliverance for us. There at the cross, God’s victory over death was secure. Your sins and my sins are forgiven when we are in union with Jesus and His payment for sin on the cross applies to us. If you are unsure if that is true of you, I would beg you to talk to me or someone else that you know understands the good news of the Bible and Christianity – you too can come to understand the great power of God, believe it and celebrate it with us. Amen.

#### Benediction

Philippians 4:19-20

*“And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

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<sup>6</sup> David Strain’s sermon “A Way Through” from February 8, 2015, found at [fpcjackson.org](http://fpcjackson.org).