

On the Bank of the Deep Red Sea

Exodus 13-14

Introduction

I want to turn your attention today, back to the book of Exodus. We are at chapter 13, as we continue to study the progression of the children of Israel in their exit out of Egypt. The episode that we will look at today, is the first that occurs in their lives after their exit from Egypt.

There are times in our lives that I think we will see paralleled in our study today; times when we are in a situation with our backs against a wall. There are a number of different phrases we would use for that experience; such as, “we are in a jam,” or “we are in a pickle”. We have periods in our lives when there is seemingly nothing we can do. It may be a situation resulting from an unwise decision or perhaps resulting from uncontrollable events. We find ourselves boxed in and wondering what in the world we are to do. I think we will find the solutions, in part, as we view the Israelites when they find themselves on the bank of the deep Red Sea.

God Leads the Hebrews With a Cloud

Let us begin by reading Exodus, chapter 13, verses 17 through 22.

Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, “The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.”

Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.”

Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness.

The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Let me stop for a moment, to point out a couple of things that are easy to overlook as we read this passage of scripture. If our minds were enlightened, we would find something profitable in every verse of scripture, but there are a couple of things that we would easily overlook in this passage.

Note: Joseph’s body is taken along

I would first like to point out the reference to Joseph’s bones. You may remember this if you joined us for our study of the life of Joseph. On his deathbed, Joseph asked the sons of Israel, or his brothers, to take his bones with them, as he prophesied, according to the word of the Lord, that they would surely leave Egypt. In Genesis, chapter 50, verses 24 and 25, he said,

. . . “I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised . . .” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.”

Two principles of the leading of God

Now the Israelites are leaving Egypt. I felt it possible to draw from this, a couple of principles that are so true of the leading of God.

When God is in control, speed does not degenerate into panic

1. The first point is, when God is in control, speed does not degenerate into panic.

I can imagine two and a half million Israelites ready to go. They are exiting Egypt after four

hundred thirty years of servitude. Yet, according to God's design, they are not panic stricken. Enough time is given for them to go and pick up the coffin with the four hundred or more year old bones of Joseph.

When God is in control, every detail of His promises are significant

2. The second point we can draw is, when God is in control, every detail of His promises are significant.

If I had been an Israelite, I would probably have said, "Now wait, we're getting out of Egypt. Four hundred and thirty year old bones, who cares? Let's go!"

God, however, is saying, "Every detail of My counsel is significant. Every detail."

His promise is fulfilled to the letter.

Let me make one more brief comment. Note that in verse 18, there is a reference to the Red Sea. That is interesting because the scoffers or critics of the supernatural element of scripture would say this is not really the Red Sea. Since the Hebrew is "yam cuwph," which could be translated "the sea of reeds," the critics say this is really talking about ankle or knee deep water; a marshy place. The literal translation is "the sea of papyri," and papyri was normally growing along the banks in Egypt. So there was really nothing supernatural to the parting of the sea, His east wind dried out a little spot and the Israelites went across.

Perhaps you have heard that thought. If so, you may have heard the rebuttal as well. To me, it is a little embarrassing to think that the Egyptian army would drown in knee deep water. You would expect them to be better swimmers than that.

We do, however, have a hard time pinpointing where this is. Perhaps this was the Gulf of Aqaba. Perhaps, as one thinks, this was one of the Bitter Lakes. We know it was deep enough that when the people of Israel got to the bank, they did not say, "Well, let's just wade across."

The Israelites had their backs, in a sense, to that water. God would lead them to a very difficult place, as we will see in a moment. This is an expanse of water, perhaps one of the Bitter Lakes, that will take a miracle to get across. And they did not know how God would do it.

Egyptian Soldiers Pursue With a Vengeance

Let us take a look at the way the Lord leads the Israelites. Look at verse 5 of Exodus, chapter 14.

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?"

Remember, Pharaoh has two million slaves. This is a financial deal that he has worked out. He does not pay them, but they build his buildings. Now, when they have left and have taken most of the jewelry that belongs to the Egyptians, he is facing financial ruin and building has stopped. Continue to verses 6 and 7.

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 with officers over all of them.

The officer, in that day, would have been the other individual riding in the chariot, perhaps the bow man, while the other man would be the driver or the rider. Pharaoh sends six hundred of his select chariots; the elite core. They are going after this ragtag band of liberated slaves to capture them and bring them back. Continue to verses 8 and 9.

The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he 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.

It is interesting to note, with the help of those who know geography, and I am dependent upon their help, that God leads the Israelites to an interesting position. Note verse 2 of chapter 14, and in fact, underline it.

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.

The Hebrew name Pi-hahiroth is translated "the mountain of the caverns" and Migdol is a tower. This is perhaps, one of the Egyptian fortresses, at that particular juncture, that would impose their might upon anyone who thought they would invade Egypt.

There would be a select guard on that tower watching over that particular terrain.

God says, “Take them to the mountain of the caverns where the tower is.”

In addition, on the other side, opposite it, is the Baal-zephon; that is, the lord of the north, that vast desert region.

So there the Israelites are, in a perfect dead end. They are surrounded by a cavernous mountain, by the desert, and by the Red Sea. And coming toward them is the Egyptian army.

The Israelites respond

Now I wonder how we would respond if we were one of the Israelites? Moses has said, “Let’s stop right here and turn back, and let’s get boxed into this corner.”

We can note their response. We do not have to imagine.

Fear

1. The first response is fear.

Look at verse 10.

As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord.

Perhaps they could not see the soldiers, but they could see the dust bowl. They knew Pharaoh was sending his elite core. Perhaps a lookout had run back to Moses and said, “The chariots are coming!”

Somehow they knew; they sensed, and they were petrified; they were terrified. The Israelites were boxed in; they had nowhere to go.

Blame

2. The second response would be typical because they were not trusting God – they blame Moses.

Look at verse 11. Moses is about to get it.

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?”

I can imagine, when Moses gave the order to stop and turn around, that two million people said, “But wait, Canaan is *that* way, not this way. This is the wrong way.”

The Israelites had literally reversed the direction that would have taken them a hundred and fifty miles to Canaan. There were probably thoughts that Moses did not know where he was; that perhaps he was lost.

I can identify with Moses a little. You may have been in that predicament, especially the men. You are driving along with your wife and you know you are lost. I always know it when I start muttering to myself, “Oh, let’s see, turn left there. I turned right here. Another right.”

Sooner or later, if your wife is like mine, she comes out with the classic statement, “We’re lost.”

I do not know if your wives jump to the conclusions that my wife does but she says, “We’re lost.”

I say, “Well, no, we’re not lost. I know exactly where I’m going. Just because we made a couple of U-turns back there, that’s insignificant. I’ve got this sense.”

Her next question is, “Where’s the map?”

Who cares about a map? Maps are for wimps, right? You don’t need a map – you know where you’re going.

Then, the questions cease and the instruction comes. She says, “You see that gas station over there, the one we have passed two times in the last fifteen minutes, pull in there.”

Ladies, if you do not get anything else out of this sermon, get this – you are asking your husband to pull into a gas station and admit to a total stranger that he is not only lost, but he does not have the sense to bring a map along.

I cannot imagine, at this juncture with the Israelites, two million people saying, “Where are you leading us? We’re going the wrong way.”

Moses responds, “God wants us here.”

Then, they hear the rumble of the chariots and see the dust bowl kicked up from the steeds.

Despair

3. Thirdly, their blame then turns to despair.

Look at verse 12. The Israelites are speaking to Moses, “We told you, Moses.”

“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.”

Do you get this? They think this is it; they think they have two options, “We’re either going to return to Egypt as slaves or we’re going to die.”

They were looking all around – they did not think of looking up. Yet, there was that cloudy pillar that had led them thus far.

Whenever we doubt, whenever we lose sight of the fact that God is leading, it turns to blame. And He is the first one who gets the blame.

The problem with blaming God, ladies and gentlemen, is that ultimately, it will lead to despair. In despair, you will question the roots of your faith; you will question God. You may even come to the point where you say, “God, You must not love me. Maybe I don’t belong to You.”

Soon, the despair picks up and snowballs. We end up right where the Israelites ended up, “Oh, just let me die out here.”

Moses exhorts the people

Moses comes back and exhorts the people. This really will not help, but notice what he says in this four-fold exhortation.

Do not be afraid

1. The first exhortation is, “Do not be afraid.”

Look at verse 13a.

But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! . . .”

What a great leader. You see the chariots coming, your knees are knocking, and Moses’ word from God is, “Don’t be afraid.”

“Moses, wake up! Rub your eyes. Can you see?”

Ladies and gentlemen, I think it will take two things for us to not be afraid when our backs are against the wall.

- Number one, it takes an understanding that things do not happen by coincidence.

I do not believe it. I do not believe in it. Things do not happen by coincidence.

Romans, chapter 8, verse 28, has been abused and misused and thrown at people who are hurting, “Don’t forget . . .”

. . . all things . . . work together for good . . .

Because that verse is used inappropriately, we seem to forget it is in the Bible. It is there! It is great practical theology. All things *do* work out for the spiritual good of those who are loving God; who are being led by God. It is there and it gets rid of the coincidences of life. You are designed.

- The second thing that I think it takes to not be afraid is an acknowledgment that God is powerful enough to handle any situation.

Look at Exodus, chapter 14, verse 31.

And when Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord . . .

In other words, they had come to a point where they had forgotten that this is the *awesome GOD*. This is the God who took on the gods of Egypt and showed His power.

We forget and we question, “Lord, can You handle this one?”

So Moses says, “Don’t be afraid.”

Stand by

2. I like Moses’ next statement, the second exhortation, which is, “Stand by.”

Look at the next phrase in verse 13.

“ . . . Stand by . . .”

You could translate this, “Stand still.” That is the last thing you want to do – you want to run. “Let’s swim this Red Sea. Let’s expect a miracle and try to walk across. Let’s hide out in the caverns of this mountain. Let’s do anything but just stand here.”

You may remember the old adage, “Don’t just stand there, do something.” Moses is telling two and a half million people, “Don’t do anything. Just stand there; just wait. Don’t run.”

Watch

3. Along with that exhortation comes a perception solution to, “Stand still and watch.”

Continue in verse 13.

“. . . Stand by 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.”

“Stand still and see; watch; look; note . . .”

In other words, “Just stand there and let God have a chance to do what He can do.”

It is amazing what God can do without our assistance; it is amazing what He can accomplish without our help. God was bringing the people of Israel to a point where they would recognize, at the beginning of their spiritual journey, as it were, that He could accomplish what He wanted to accomplish.

Passover is the symbol of redemption. That is when they became the nation redeemed by the blood.

Now, these are the first few infant steps of their lives. God does the same with us. We come to the cross and He shows His power in salvation, in redeeming us. But what does it take – another week, another two weeks, and all of the sudden, we recognize that that was the starting point, that was the beginning.

God wants to reveal to the Israelite that He has the power to lead them through their journey, just as He has power to lead us. So, “Don’t be afraid, just stand there, watch.”

Be quiet

4. The fourth exhortation is very convicting, “Be quiet.”

Look at verse 14.

“The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.”

We talk too much. When we get into a difficult situation, the first thing we do is tell everyone we know and then, tack onto the end of it, “But God can handle it.”

Now, I am not suggesting that you not tell anyone if you have a difficulty. In fact, sometimes I am the last person to know some of the things that happen. If you go into the hospital and do not let me, your

pastor, know, that irritates me. I will let the air out of your tires so you cannot leave the hospital parking lot or something! There are people you should tell.

However, so often we are so busy talking that we do not listen. We go to everyone but the right one. God says, “You just stand there and watch. I’ll fight for you. And while you are watching, just zip it up.”

God knows that when we talk, we tend to doubt. We verbalize our doubts, which deepens them in our hearts, and we begin to believe what we say. And what we say is not true.

God Performs His Miracles With Power

Now God will perform His miracle. Look at verses 15 through 16. God has an option that the Israelites had not considered.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 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.”

Continue to verses 17 through 18.

“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 his horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord [Yahweh], when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen.”

God’s miraculous power is demonstrated by four things

In this miracle, God’s miraculous power is demonstrated by four things.

The cloudy pillar moves between the two camps

1. The first manifestation of God’s power is that the cloudy pillar moves between the camp of the Israelites and the camp of the Egyptians.

Look at verse 19.

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.

This accomplished a couple of things. The cloudy pillar that was leading the people, now stopped and shifted so it came behind the two and a half million Israelites and the Egyptians. This blocked their vision so the Israelites could not see the Egyptians and be even more terrified and the Egyptians could not see what was going on. While this pillar was there, God was opening the sea and the Israelites were walking through it.

God then, dissipates that cloud and moves it again in front, at the right time, so the Egyptians can notice and say, “Hey, they’re going through the sea! We’d better catch up and follow them in.”

So first, the cloudy pillar moves between the two camps.

A strong east wind arises

2. The second demonstration of God’s miraculous power is in a strong east wind that arises.

Look at verse 21.

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, . . .

It is interesting that this was the same east wind that brought the locusts into Egypt. This is the same east wind that brought the storm upon the ship in which Jonah was fleeing from God. God uses this east wind throughout the Old Testament.

This wind came and dried the land; that is, the riverbed. It dried it up so the Israelites could take their wagons and their cattle and all of the people and go through.

The Red Sea is divided, leaving a path

3. Thirdly, of course, the Red Sea is divided, leaving a path.

This is an incredible miracle. Look at the last phrase of verse 21.

. . . so the waters were divided.

Continue to verse 22.

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.

Now let me stop for just a moment, because you have a Sunday school picture of this event in your mind. You think of Moses with a long beard and long hair and he looks like Charlton Heston. He has his staff and he is walking through the dry river bed with a couple of people beside him and is followed by a long funnel of people walking through the Red Sea. They can reach out and say, “Oh, look at that fish there.” and “Oh, I can touch this side here.”

Thanks to the expositors, who are something of mathematicians, they have figured out that, if you took two million plus people and put them in a line ten abreast and, if that was as wide as that dry riverbed, the line of people would stretch a hundred and ninety miles. The first person through would have entered Canaan before the last person ever got into the riverbed. The point is, there is a pathway that was perhaps, a mile wide.

The text tells us, this pathway was accomplished during the night watch. For two million people to move through, this path was a mile or perhaps even two miles wide.

I will throw in one other thing too, either God would stop the current from flowing or the particular wall of water into the which the current is flowing, is getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

This is a different picture. There are wagons and people going through that riverbed, perhaps a couple of miles wide. And, it is all being done in a split second.

God’s miraculous power widens this riverbed, not ten feet, but perhaps as wide as two miles. So the Israelites start going through the riverbed.

The Egyptian army is defeated

4. The fourth miracle, of course, occurs when the Israelites get through the Red Sea – the Egyptian army is defeated.

Look at verses 23 through 25.

Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. At the morning watch, the Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into

confusion. 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 [Yahweh] is fighting for them against the Egyptians."

I cannot imagine this horror of judgment, ladies and gentlemen. I cannot imagine being an Egyptian soldier, driving my chariot with all of the confidence in the world after these ragtag slaves, and getting out in the middle of that pathway and a chariot wheel falls off. Then, those with me begin to bog down as that dry riverbed miraculously begins to turn to mush and licks and grabs at the wheels. And all of a sudden I realize, as I am surrounded by a huge wall of water a mile away and another one perhaps, a half a mile to a mile away, "Yahweh is doing this. Uh-oh."

I can imagine the mad scramble, as these six hundred elite soldiers plus the commanders make a mad dash back to the bank, knowing what is going to happen. They feel and hear the rumble of water. This is a tidal wave as it comes together with crashing force.

My friend, this is a tremendous picture of, "I want to be part of the people led by God. I want to be redeemed because *God does judge.*"

Those who refuse God's name will face that judgment, and it will be horrible.

The Egyptian army is defeated. In fact, we know from historians, it was twenty-three years before an Egyptian ever came near the Red Sea. They were terrified of it because that is where God had manifested His power on behalf of the Israelites.

Application – Standing On the Bank of "Our" Red Sea

This is a familiar story, but let me draw some applications for us today. You and I have times when we stand on the banks of our own Red Sea. Let me give three thoughts.

Predicaments are designed by God to develop trust

1. The first thought is that predicaments are designed by God to develop trust.

Verse 31 says,

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 . . .

The Israelites revered the Lord; they had a trusting awe of their God when they saw what He had done to the Egyptians. In fact, it says in verse 30b that,

. . . Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

The Israelites had an undeniable, irrefutable evidence of God's power.

What would that do to you, if you had been an Israelite? Where would the doubts be? Gone! Vanished! You would trust in the power of Yahweh.

Did you underline verse 18 of chapter 13 in your text? I think it is crucial to this point. The first phrase of that verse says,

Hence God led the people . . .

Isn't it interesting that God led the Israelites out of Egypt and into difficulty? He led them into a corner. That is not what we hear today. We hear, "Hey, if you're following God, you'll be happy, wealthy, healthy; everything will be taken care of."

God, however, walks the Israelites right into a box. Why? As one of my seminary professors used to say over and over again, "It is because God designs to make us holy, not happy."

Oh, there is happiness in Jesus Christ, do not misunderstand me – I love to laugh. But He has designed the predicaments to develop depth, and it takes a Red Sea to do that.

Those who are willing to trust, eventually see God's power revealed

2. Secondly, those who are willing to trust, eventually see God's power revealed.

The problem, men and women, is that we rarely give God the chance. We have plan A and plan B and plan C and maybe, when those fail, we say, "Okay, Lord, what's the option?"

We are so busy running, talking, planning everything that we fail to go to Him and trust. It is so hard for us to wait.

When God's power is revealed, our ultimate response is praise

3. Thirdly, when God's power is revealed, our ultimate response is praise.

Look at chapter 15, verse 1.

Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord . . .

The Israelites are ready to sing! They are on the other side of the Red Sea! So they compose a beautiful hymn. Look at verses 1b and 2.

. . . I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will extol Him.

This is great because when you are boxed in, what do you think? "Is my God here? Is He capable?"

When He pulls you through and you are on the other side, however, then you boast, "This is my God."

I love being in that position. Continue to verses 3 and 4.

The Lord is a warrior; the Lord [Yahweh] is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea . . .

Skip to verse 6.

Your right hand, O Lord, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

Look at verses 11 through 13a.

Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders? You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them. In Your loving kindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed . . .

Skip to verses 17 and 18.

You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever.

When we see God move, when we allow Him the opportunity to work, and He does, do you know what our response is? It is praise to God for His majesty.

I do not know where you are, my friends, but some of you are right on the bank of the Red Sea. Some of you may be facing great difficulty; some of you may be facing decisions to be made. You may have details to decide and many questions.

God is our God and He is the same God as that of the Israelites. If we will wait and watch and keep quiet, there is no telling what His alternate plan may be; what His option may be. Let us not get in His way.