

Exodus 13:17-14:31  
Psalm 18  
1 Corinthians 10

“The LORD Goes Before You”

March 26, 2017

The story of the Exodus is the foundational story of the Old Testament.

It is as central to the OT as the cross of Christ is to the NT.

You cannot read very far in the OT without finding references and allusions to the Exodus.

Many of the Psalms retell the story of the Exodus –  
or the Triumph of the LORD at the Red Sea.

But many others use the imagery of the Exodus to speak of other events.

For instance, Psalm 18 is a Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD,  
who addressed the words of this song to the LORD  
on the day when the LORD rescued him from the hand of all his enemies,  
and from the hand of Saul.”

Plainly Psalm 18 is not a song *about* the Exodus.

It is a song about how God rescued *David*.

But listen to how David describes this rescue:

“The LORD also thundered in the heavens,  
and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.  
And he sent out his arrows and scattered them;  
he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.  
Then the channels of the sea were seen,  
and the foundations of the world were laid bare  
at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of your nostrils.  
He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters.  
He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me,  
for they were too mighty for me.”

This language is drawn in part from the song of the Sea –  
the Song of Moses in Exodus 15.

When David wants to talk about what salvation means,

he naturally thinks about God’s great victory at the Red Sea.

And so he tells his own story in language that echoes the story of the Exodus.

I want for you to think about that as you sing this.

How does the story of salvation redefine your story?

How does the history of God’s mighty deeds

help you see your own story more clearly?

Sing Psalm 18 – stanzas 1-5  
Read 1 Corinthians 10

In the same way that David sees his story participating in the Exodus story –  
so also Paul says that we should do the same thing as Christians.

Although it important to see how Paul does this!  
“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.”

The Exodus was the baptism of Israel.

Paul’s point is that the Exodus is *behind you*.  
Don’t think of your personal struggles as your “Egypt.”  
The Exodus does not tell you how God will help you deal with your trials right now.

Egypt symbolizes the estate of sin and misery.  
The Exodus prefigures God’s mighty deeds in Christ Jesus.  
And so the crossing of the Red Sea is the baptism of Israel.

Even as you have been baptized into Christ – by water and the Spirit,  
so Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

It’s tempting to turn this into a story of “Don’t be like the Israelites!”  
And there is a sense in which that is the point.  
Paul will say “Now these things took place as examples for us,  
that we might not desire evil as they did.”  
So it is *right* to say “Don’t be like the Israelites!”

But remember which side of the Red Sea you are on!  
If you have been baptized into Christ,  
then you are no longer in Egypt!  
You have been redeemed out of the estate of sin and misery.

You are no longer a slave to sin and death!

What does Israel do at the Red Sea?  
What do they contribute to their own salvation?

In Paul’s words,  
They are baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.  
In the words of Moses,  
“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD...  
The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to shut up.”

Our story begins with God leading Israel in a very strange direction.

**1. “The LORD Went Before Them” – Learning to Follow God (13:17-22)**

**a. “Lest the People Change Their Minds” – the Route of the Exodus (v17-18a)**

*<sup>17</sup> When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” <sup>18</sup> But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.*

The short way from Egypt to Canaan is along the coast.

There is a nice well-built road that goes along the coast.

It would be a relatively easy journey.

Of course, it would also lead past a number of Egyptian forts and cities –  
and then it would lead through the land of the Philistines.

The Philistines appear to be the “Sea Peoples” who attacked Egypt during the 13<sup>th</sup> century

We know that during the time of Ramesses II (1279-1213 BC)

the Egyptians started facing raids from “the Peleset,”

and during the reign of Ramesses III (ca. 1175 BC)

Ramesses III made a treaty that gave the coast of Canaan to the Peleset –  
establishing the Philistine state as a buffer zone.

No one is *quite* certain where the Philistines came from –

but recent discoveries in Turkey may suggest that the Philistines  
were refugees from the Trojan War.

(Not *necessarily* the survivors from Troy –

but quite possibly displaced by the conflict).

This is one reason why I mildly favor a 13<sup>th</sup> century date for the Exodus –

If Israel goes along the coast – they will “see war” –

they will be caught up in the Philistine raids

(or perhaps drafted by the Egyptians to fight to defend the border).

So instead, God led them by way of the wilderness to the Red Sea.

The Hebrew here is usually translated “Reed Sea” –

which many have found odd,

because papyrus reeds do not grow along the Red Sea!

So some have proposed one of the lakes in the delta as the location.

But there is another possibility.

The words translated “Reed Sea” could also mean “Sea at the End” –

and since the Red Sea is the sea at the end of Egypt,  
that would make sense –  
the Red Sea is *also* at the end of the wilderness.  
From the perspective of the Israelites in the Promised Land,  
the Red Sea is at border with Egypt.  
Israel had “gone down” into Egypt –  
just like you “go down” into the grave.  
And now God is bringing his people *up* from Egypt –  
up out of the land of death and darkness –  
up into the Promised Land – a land flowing with milk and honey.

So there is no reason to doubt that it was, in fact, the Red Sea.

**b. Equipped for Battle – with the Bones of Joseph (v18b-20)**

*And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. <sup>19</sup> Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph<sup>[a]</sup> had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.” <sup>20</sup> And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.*

At the end of verse 18, we are told that the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt  
(Notice how it is always “up” out of Egypt – and “down” into Egypt!  
Part of it is geographical – Egypt is lower in elevation –  
but scripture *plainly* uses that geography  
to make a theological point!)

But they go up – “equipped for battle.”

God does not want them to “see war” – but they are equipped for battle!

What does this mean?

The phrase in Hebrew has to do with their organization –  
not with their equipment.

They are organized in companies.

They go up out of Egypt in military formation – and here’s the important part –  
they go up with the bones of Joseph.

After all, the bones of Joseph are a powerful weapon.

When Jacob had died, his sons took him back to Canaan  
to bury him in the Promised Land.

In its own way, that was a powerful statement of the *faith* of Jacob.

God has promised us the Land –

so I will be buried in the Land, awaiting the day  
when my sons will return to join me in the Land.

Here, the bones of Joseph make a similar point – but in the opposite way:  
I am so confident that God will raise Israel up out of Egypt,  
that I am willing to allow my bones to rest in Egypt for hundreds of years.

When Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4,  
that “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power  
to destroy strongholds,”  
he could well have been thinking of something like Joseph’s bones!

**c. The LORD Went Before Them in a Pillar of Cloud and Fire (v21-22)**

*<sup>21</sup> And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. <sup>22</sup> The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.*

And the LORD went before them.  
The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night  
was not simply a miraculous sign.  
This was the visible presence of God himself.

The same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush  
now appears to all Israel in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.  
Paul says that Israel was baptized into Moses *in the cloud* and in the sea.  
The cloud is the presence of God with his people –  
the presence of the Holy Spirit.  
The pillar of cloud and fire will eventually (later in Exodus)  
come to rest at the top of Mt. Sinai –  
and it will leave Sinai in order to fill the holy of holies in the Tabernacle.  
That same Spirit and fire will fill the church at Pentecost –  
as we are baptized by one Spirit into one body.

**2. “The LORD Will Fight for You” – Know that the LORD Is God (14:1-14)**

**a. “I Will Get Glory Over Pharaoh” (v1-4)**

*14 Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. <sup>3</sup> For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ <sup>4</sup> And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.*

I want you to notice what God is doing here at the beginning of chapter 14.  
He tells Moses to “turn back” – and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth,  
between Migdol and the sea.  
In other words, Israel is supposed to retrace their steps – part way.

They look confused – like they don't know where they are going.  
So that Pharaoh will say,  
“They are wandering in the land...”

In other words, the LORD is setting a trap for Pharaoh.

**b. The Chariots of Pharaoh in Pursuit (v5-9)**

*<sup>5</sup> When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” <sup>6</sup> So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, <sup>7</sup> and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. <sup>9</sup> The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.*

Why would Pharaoh be so willing to pursue Israel?

Hasn't Pharaoh seen enough?

Doesn't he know by now that Yahweh is *not* the sort of deity you mess with?!

But the ancient view of the gods was that gods are capricious.

Okay, sure, Yahweh got really mad at me – and my firstborn died.

But maybe he's tired of the game – and now I can recapture my slaves!

After all, Moses had said that they wanted to go three days journey into the wilderness –  
and now Israel has been gone far more than three days –

from Succoth to Etham (on the edge of the wilderness)

and now back to Pi-hahiroth – by the sea.

(All of these places are probably small villages on the fringes of Egypt).

To the Egyptian observers, it looks like Israel is wandering aimlessly.

Undoubtedly Pharaoh will see this as evidence that Yahweh is out of the picture,  
and now he can strike!

And here you see how the “hardening” of Pharaoh's heart

takes the form of allowing to Pharaoh to do what comes naturally to him:

Why have we let Israel go from serving us?!!

Perhaps he was receiving reports that the royal building projects were behind schedule.

Pharaoh is not used to other people dictating his schedule!

When Pharaoh speaks, people listen – and obey!

A few months of bizarre, unprecedented events

are not enough to overcome centuries of Egyptian tradition!

The word of Pharaoh is final!

(Who is Yahweh, that I should listen to his voice!)

And so Pharaoh orders his chariots out in pursuit.

Pharaoh Ramesses II fought in one of the largest chariot battles of all time –  
the Battle of Kadesh, probably in the year 1274.

The Hittites had expanded their sphere of influence into Syria and northern Canaan,  
so Ramesses invaded with his army and his chariots.

The Hittites were able to surprise Ramesses at Kadesh,  
and nearly destroyed his army.

They thought that they had won the day – and so they started to plunder the camp –  
but then the Egyptians counter-attacked.

After several reversals and chariot charges,  
the Egyptians pinned the Hittites back against the Orontes River –  
where many of the Hittites abandoned their chariots and tried to swim.

Ramesses had won a great victory.

And he celebrated his great victory by setting up pillars all over his realm  
with a poem declaring his mighty deeds.

If Ramesses II is the Pharaoh of the Exodus,  
then we are now only a decade or two removed from the Battle of Kadesh.  
Ramesses remembers how he drove the Hittites into the Orontes River.

It would appear that the author of Exodus is quite familiar with the Battle of Kadesh,  
and the poem celebrating Ramesses great victory –  
because the way the story is told demonstrates that the God of Israel  
does to Ramesses many times over what Ramesses had done to the Hittites.

At the Battle of Kadesh, the Egyptians were surprised by the Hittite chariots –  
now, at the Red Sea, the Israelites are surprised by the Egyptian chariots.

At Kadesh, Ramesses prays to his god (Amun)  
who replies, “Forward, I am with you, I am your father, my hand is with you!”  
At the Red Sea, Moses cries out to the LORD, who replies,  
“Tell the people of Israel to go forward...”

In the Kadesh poem, then Ramesses becomes a god-like figure  
who is abandoned by his army and single-handedly defeats the Hittites,  
driving them into the Orontes River.

Now, at the Red Sea, it is the LORD who fights for his people –  
driving the chariots of Pharaoh into the Sea!

Everyone who knew the story of the Battle of Kadesh  
would see that God is doing unto Pharaoh what Pharaoh had done to others!

“And I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host,  
and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.”

**c. “Stand Firm and See the Salvation of the LORD” (v10-14)**

<sup>10</sup> When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘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.” <sup>13</sup> And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

So often we approach the Christian life with the attitude,  
“Don’t just stand there, *do something!*”

But Moses says to Israel,  
“Don’t just do something, *stand there.*”

This is harder than it sounds!

After all, the people of Israel do not *want* to stand there.

They do not want to be silent!

They want to grumble and murmur!

It requires faith to stand firm.

After all, the Egyptian chariots move *a lot faster* than you do!

The Israelites knew all about the Battle of Kadesh!

These are the chariots that slew the Hittites!

We aren’t warriors and heroes – we are laborers and slaves.

We cannot withstand the chariots of Egypt!

We are tempted to surrender.

We are tempted to think that the LORD will *not* fight for us –  
so we have to take care of it ourselves.

We have to do the prudent thing –

we must surrender and go back to Egypt.



As the chariots of Egypt approach –  
as the world closes in –  
we are tempted to go back to Egypt and return to our slavery to sin.

It is so much easier.  
It is so much more comfortable.

Isn't this how temptation works on us?

When the present is *hard* –  
when you are dealing with something that is difficult and painful –  
it is tempting to seek relief in old habits.  
If you were thinking *straight* you would know better –  
but that's what pain does to us –  
we aren't thinking straight!  
We just know that it hurts – that it's hard – that it's not fair –  
and so we lash out – we shut down...

We return to that old, comfortable slavery.

“When the present seems unbearable...the miserable past suddenly looks like the good old days”  
(Stuart, 336).

But there is *nothing* that you can do to defeat sin, death, and the Devil.  
All you can do is stand there – and shut up!  
(‘be silent’ is a rather polite way to translate it)

### **3. The Victory at the Sea: Learning to Fear and Believe (14:15-31)**

#### **a. “I Will Get Glory Over Pharaoh” (v15-18)**

<sup>15</sup> *The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me?”*

Indeed, in verse 15 God rebukes Moses.

The “you” here is singular.  
The people had cried out to the LORD (v10),  
and Moses had called them to stand firm and wait.  
And then God rebukes Moses.

What is going on?

Moses is learning what it means to be a mediator between God and man.  
The mediator identifies with his people.  
He not only *represents* them.  
He *embodies* them.  
Their guilt becomes his.

Moses only does this partially.  
But Jesus will do this fully and finally.

Of all the men who have lived,  
only our Lord Jesus received greater honor than Moses.  
We have already heard that the LORD made Moses ‘a god to Pharaoh’ –  
now, in verse 16, the LORD says,  
“Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it.”  
Who divides the sea?  
In verse 16, it is Moses.  
In verse 21, it is God.

Plainly it is God’s power.  
But God’s power becomes so closely associated with Moses and his staff  
that God can say that *Moses* will divide the Sea.  
God is teaching his people the importance of the mediator.  
The Mediator will not only represent man to God –  
but he will also represent God to man.

*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.”*

And so the LORD commands Israel to go forward.  
And the LORD repeats his claim that “I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host.”  
“And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD...”

#### **b. The Chariots of Pharaoh Cast into the Sea (v19-29)**

*<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<sup>[b]</sup> without one coming near the other all night.*

Verses 19-29 then recount the parting of the Red Sea.  
The angel of God – namely, the pillar of cloud –  
the presence of God with his people –  
moved from the front to the rear –  
coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel.  
Verse 20 is a little unclear,  
but it would appear that on the Egyptian side, it was cloud and darkness,  
and on the Israelite side, it lit up the night,

so that the Israelites could begin their crossing of the Sea.

There is another point to be seen here:

which was the ninth plague?

The ninth plague was *darkness*.

This is God's symbolic warning to the Egyptians:

You know what darkness means.

After darkness comes death.

*<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. <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<sup>[e]</sup> 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."*

All night, the Israelites are crossing the sea.

By morning, when the Egyptians realize what is happening,

they see a dry path through the Sea – and the Israelites still in the midst of the Sea.

Some have wondered – why would they pursue?

Well, they have been ordered to capture the Israelites –

and there is dry land in the middle of the Sea!

Chariots do well on dry land!

Their chariots can catch up to the Israelites long before the Israelites get through!

Except that once they get down into the midst of the Sea,

their chariot wheels get clogged – or perhaps “come off.”

Whether the dry land wasn't as dry as it appeared,

and their chariots are getting stuck in the mud –

or whether God is sabotaging the chariots by removing their wheels,

the result is abundantly clear to the Egyptians:

“Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.”

As one commentator puts it,

God “strikes at the Egyptians at their symbol of power – their mighty chariots...

There they are, stuck in the middle of the sea, unable to proceed or retreat,

and it finally dawns on them that they are, literally, in over their heads.”

(Enns, 277)

But it was too late!

(Read)

<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<sup>[d]</sup> 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.

Even as Egypt had drowned the Israelite children in the Nile River,  
so now Egypt’s army is drowned in the Red Sea.

**c. “Thus the LORD Saved Israel” (v30-31)**

<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.

One note about translation:

In verse 30, the LORD saved Israel from the hand of the Egyptians.

In verse 31, Israel saw the *great hand* that the LORD used against the Egyptians.

It’s true, that Israel saw the great power of the LORD –  
but if you are going to say that in verse 31,  
then you should also say that the LORD saved Israel from the power of the Egyptians!

Israel saw the mighty hand of the LORD against Egypt.

And so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD  
and in his servant Moses.

Why does the text highlight this?

Because the crossing of the Red Sea is the baptism of Israel –  
as Israel passes from death to life –  
going up out of Egypt,  
like one rising from the dead.

And so as Israel passes through the waters of judgment –  
as Israel passes through their baptism into death –  
they also are raised to newness of life –  
and thus they fear the LORD – and they believed in the LORD  
and in his servant Moses.

Faith is *always* the means by which we receive the blessings and benefits of Christ.  
God has performed his mighty deeds – in the Exodus (in the cross of Christ),  
but we receive the blessings and benefits of Christ only by faith.

And that's why Paul urges us not to be like the fathers in the wilderness.

*Because* God has saved you –

because he has delivered you from bondage to sin and death –  
therefore do not put Christ to the test.

Don't go back to Egypt!

Don't grumble – don't think for a moment that a life of sin and misery  
is better than your new life in Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:11-13

When you face temptation, remember that God is faithful.

He will always provide a way of escape.

And Paul tells you what one of those chief ways is:

Read v14-17