

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 14:5-18

To understand more about the parting of the Red Sea.

Read the Text:

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?" 6 So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, 7 and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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. 11 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? 12 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." 13 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. 14 The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." 15 The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. 16 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. 17 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. 18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." (Exodus 14:5-18, ESV)

Study the Text:

The Chase Is On

Verses 5 through 18 set the stage for what is perhaps the most well-known portion of the Book of Exodus. The people of God have left Egypt, have set up camp "at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon" (Ex. 14:9). After a small amount of time passes, Pharaoh and the Egyptians have a change of heart and begin to pursue the Israelites to recapture them, and thus begins the so-called "Parting of the Red Sea" narrative. Below is a breakdown of some of the key details.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF REPENTANCE

One interesting detail that emerges at the beginning of this passage is the terminology of a "change of mind." Verse 5 says, "the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed towards the people" which leads them to begin to think: "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" It's almost as if they had been under a spell and were sobering up to reality. What's fascinating, though, is that in the New Testament, the concept of repentance is similarly defined. The Greek term μετανοέω (metanoēō) means something like, "to undergo a change in frame of mind or feeling." When someone repents, they undergo a change in mind or feeling towards the sin they have committed. What once seemed "ok" is now suddenly "not ok" due to this change in mind. So in some sense of the word, the Egyptians "repent" of their willingness to let the Israelites go. And if you know anything about repentance in the New Testament, it entails action. It isn't imply a change in mind, but a change in mind that leads to action, and that is what occurs in this passage.

The Egyptians have now decided, due to this shift in thinking, that they should not have allowed the Israelites to freely leave, and Pharaoh begins to mount the attack.

CORNERED

Recall in the previous lesson that because the Israelites made camp where they were, it led Pharaoh to think that they were entrapped by the wilderness. While not totally accurate, they were tactically trapped in that they had no real place to go to escape the impending attack from the Egyptian army. Again, what seems sometimes aimless or miscalculated to us is intentional and purposeful to the LORD. They are precisely where He wants them; pressed up against the Red Sea.

CHARIOTS

As Pharaoh prepares to pursue the Israelites, he “made ready his chariot” and also brought “six hundred chosen (or choice) chariots” along with the remaining non-choice chariots (Ex. 14:6-7). That he had “choice” chariots means that these were not merely soldiers, but something likely more akin to special forces. They were trained and skilled with the chariot. Chariots were also a considerably faster mode of transportation. The Israelites had likely several days ahead of the Egyptians to travel, but it wouldn’t matter because of the disparity in speed between the two groups.

Chariots in the ancient world were also a formidable weapon in war and soon became one of the primary instruments with which to engage others in battle. Douglas Stuart notes: “Solomon built up a large chariot force for defensive purposes. David, however, never used chariots. He disliked them because they had been used to oppress the Israelites, who were foot soldiers.”¹ Of course, much of the territory that David fought in was during his conquest of the holy land, which was primarily mountainous, rendering the chariots useless. Chariots also struggled greatly in wet or soggy terrain (like, say, the ground at the bottom of the Red Sea). That the Israelites were in Pi-hahiroth, however, means that Pharaoh and his men had no reason to believe that terrain would be an issue for them.

Fear

Verse 10 indicates that when the Egyptians became visible, the Israelites “feared greatly” which then prompted them to “cry out to the LORD.” Moreover, they began to complain 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? 12 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” (Ex. 14:11-12). This is a remarkable shift in conviction. Just a few days prior to this, the people of God left Egypt after the tenth plague struck every single Egyptian home. The Israelites saw the true power of the LORD. Yet now, they wonder if by following Moses, they have followed him to their graves.

Faith

Moses, however, meets their fear with a call to faith: “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. 14 The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Ex. 14:13-14). The LORD comes to Moses to inquire why the Israelites “cry” to Him (Ex. 14:15). Their prayers indicated a need for saving, and yet God has already given ample evidence that He will not let any harm come to them.

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 333.

It is here that God tells Moses: “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” (Ex. 14:16). If the LORD can do the previous ten plagues, what prevents Him from doing this? Further, it is God’s intention to continuously harden (or, give strength to) the Egyptians’ hearts, that they might follow the Israelites into the divided sea on their horses and chariots. The divided Red Sea is a way of escape from entrapment for the Israelites, but a trap for the Egyptians for which there is no escape.

What About Now?

One takeaway is our need to replace fear with faith. The people of God had seen God move in a number of extraordinary ways while in Egypt, and yet here they seemingly lose trust in God and give themselves over to fear when they see the approaching Egyptians armies. Moses’ response to this is to remind them that God can be trusted; to have faith in He who brought them out of Egypt to begin with. Often, when we face difficulty or danger, it’s easy to give ourselves over to fear. We have to remember that God is faithful and that He does not forsake His people. Wherever there is fear, we must replace it with faith.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 14:5. What happened to the minds of Pharaoh and the people of Egypt? What did they begin to say to themselves?

2. Read Exodus 14:6-7. What did Pharaoh do to make ready for war? Who else did he prepare to bring with him?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 14:8-9. What did the LORD do to Pharaoh? What did Pharaoh do in response to this? Where did the Egyptians overtake the Israelites?

2. Read Exodus 14:10. What did the Israelites begin to do when they saw Pharaoh and the Egyptian army arrive?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 14:11-12. In your own words, write down what the Israelites said to Moses.

2. Read Exodus 14:13-14. In your own words, write down what Moses said to the Israelites.
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Day Four

1. Read Exodus 14:15-16. What did the LORD say to Moses? What did He tell Moses to tell the people of Israel? What did He tell Moses to do with his staff? Why?
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2. Read Exodus 14:17-18. What did the LORD tell Moses He would do to Pharaoh and the Egyptian armies? What would be the result?
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Discuss the Text!

Week 33 Discussion: Faith and Fear

One theme throughout this passage is the need to replace fear with faith. The Israelites, though they had seen God act in numerous ways on their behalf, were struck with fear when Pharaoh and his army showed up. Moses came to them and reminded them to trust God, that He would fight for them, and that they had nothing to fear. Talk as a group about the importance of being reminded of God's faithfulness in your life when you face circumstances that fill you with fear.

1. Icebreaker: What's the most recent circumstance you've faced that filled you with fear?
2. Are you generally a fearful person?
3. How does being reminded of God's faithfulness in your life counteract fear? Or does it?
4. How has God been faithful to you?
5. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:3 and Hebrews 10:23. What do these verses teach about God's faithfulness?
6. Read 1 Peter 4:19. What does this verse teach about God's faithfulness, particularly when we suffer?

Takeaways:

1. The Egyptians have a change of mind concerning the Israelites, and Pharaoh begins to pursue them.
2. Pharaoh traps them in the wilderness with chariots, and this incites fear in the hearts of the Israelites.
3. God tells Moses to calm the people and then stretch out his staff and divide the Red Sea to make passage for them.
4. God tells Moses He intends to trap the Egyptian army in the divided Red Sea as well.