

## **“Moses’ Faith (Part 3)” – Hebrews 11:23-29**

Brandon Holiski  
Southern Oaks Baptist Church  
September 1, 2019

*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

Take a Bible and meet in Hebrews 11...

Today we are going to look at another one of the “by faith” statements found in this beloved chapter of Scripture. This one, like the last couple weeks, is associated with Moses and the Exodus story. In this case, the focus lands on the people that Moses led out of Egypt and the amazing miracle that marked that deliverance. We will follow our usual pattern for this chapter, which has been to see what the author of Hebrews says and then turn to the Old Testament story he is remarking on and see what we can learn there.

What have we learned so far about Moses and his faith from the writer of Hebrews? We learned that Moses possessed a...

### **Courageous Faith** ***We Must Recalibrate Our Fear***

We also discovered, through the institution of the Passover, that Moses’ faith was a...

### **Compliant Faith** ***We Must Recall Our Dependence***

Today, we will see that Moses, and at least some of the people he led out of Egypt, were gifted with a...

### **Conquering Faith** ***We Must Recognize Our Victory***

Look with me at just one verse in Hebrews 11. It’s verse 29. Let me read it to you. This is God’s Word...

*“By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.” (Hebrews 11:29)*

A couple of years ago we considered this event in great detail. We won’t get quite as deep into it this morning, but I would like to rehearse with you what it teaches us about the pattern of salvation for God’s people. To do so, we need to look at the story in its original context, so turn with me to Exodus 14...

Every good story has a climax, but it’s been said that the book of Exodus is such a great story that it has not one, but three climaxes. The first is the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (chapter 14), the second is the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai (chapter 19), and the third is the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle (chapter 40).<sup>1</sup> The writer of Hebrews sees the first of these climactic events as a picture of faith.

Take a look at the opening verses of Exodus 14, which set the scene...

*“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.’”* (Exodus 14:1-2)

Once again in the Exodus story we find God directing the people in a way that doesn't make sense at first glance. This is a detour.<sup>2</sup> God's plan would have the people camp between the sea and the desert, which would not be a good military strategy because it leaves them trapped. God seems to be leading the people into peril. They have no way of escape, if pursued. Migdol, one of the places named in verse 2, means, “tower,” so it may have even been the location of an Egyptian fort. They are vulnerable. But that's exactly what God wanted the Egyptians to think. The whole thing is a ruse.<sup>3</sup> Look at verses 3 and 4...

*“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.”* (Exodus 14:3-4)

There are a few lessons about God from Exodus 14 that I would like for us to consider this morning. They are lessons we have seen before because they are lessons that can be seen in many a text of Scripture. We will consider them as developing ideas, one building on another. Together they help us understand what is involved in the victory of our salvation, the salvation marked by a conquering faith. The first idea we see in these verses is that...

### ***God Seeks to Glorify Himself...***

Why did God put the people of Israel in this position? Why did He harden Pharaoh's heart? Why does He want the Egyptians to pursue His people? The answer we are given in this verse is clear—He desires to glorify Himself at their expense of Pharaoh and his soldiers. He says, *“I will get the glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD”* (14:4). He's said this before. He'll say it again in this chapter (14:18). He's doing it all for His own glory and this is a central theme in Exodus (and really the Bible as a whole).<sup>4</sup>

God is passionate about His glory. In the words of the Apostle Paul, *“from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen”* (Romans 11:36). There is a radical God-centeredness to God that stands behind everything He does. And this is actually good news for us (as we will see). So how is God going to glorify Himself in this situation? Let's keep reading. Verse 5...

*“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.”* (Exodus 14:5-9)

This is not the sort of thing you want to see on the horizon.<sup>5</sup> The most powerful army in the world at the time, equipped with the most powerful weapons of warfare in their day, bearing down on you in hot pursuit.<sup>6</sup> Chariots were the tanks of the ancient Near East. They were the “weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps then we can sympathize somewhat with the response of the Israelites. Look at verse 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. <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.’” (Exodus 14:10-12)*

This is not the Israelites greatest moment. It was precisely this kind of reaction that the psalmist was hoping to prevent later in history when he wrote—*“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God”* (Psalm 20:7). Israel would sing that song one day, but not in this moment. They do cry out to God and there are places in Scripture that seem to view that positively,<sup>8</sup> but it does not appear to be a pure cry of faith (at least not at this point). This is desperation. The proof can be seen on how they rush to Moses to lodge their sarcastic complaints.<sup>9</sup> *“Weren’t there graves in Egypt, Moses? Why drag us out here to die?”*

But, of course, they are delusional. First of all, they are delusional about the past. They claim that they told Moses to leave them alone so they can serve the Egyptians in peace, but that’s not how I remember it.<sup>10</sup> Here was the scene in chapter 4, when Moses and Aaron came from the wilderness and told the people about God’s intentions to deliver them from Egypt:

*“Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. <sup>30</sup> Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. <sup>31</sup> And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.” (Exodus 4:29-31)*

That’s a far cry from *“Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians”* (14:12). They’re delusional. But they are also delusional about the present. Their assessment of the situation is missing something. Something is missing in their calculus—God! One would think that a reasonable person might look at the situation and think, *“This looks bad, but we have just seen God bring ten miraculous plagues on the land, He’s given us ample evidence of His power and His commitment to us, He has repeatedly brought the most powerful nation in the world, the one that’s pursuing us, to it’s knees, so I think we are in good hands. I wonder what the eleventh plague is going to look like?”* But that’s not what they say. When God’s not in the equation, we aren’t thinking reasonably. When God’s not in the equation, there’s no ground for hope and freedom.

But God is in the equation, as it turns out, even if they have not factored Him into their calculus. Pharaoh is playing checkers, but God is playing chess and positioning players on both sides of the board for a climactic finish. It looks dire, but as John Flavel, an English Puritan, once said, *“Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.”* So Moses calls them to take heart. Look at verse 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. <sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.’” (Exodus 14:13-14)*

What is that? Faith. Quite a contrast between Moses and the Israelites, wouldn’t you say?<sup>11</sup> Now the Lord speaks. Verse 15...

*“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.’” (Exodus 14:15)*

This may seem like a surprising response. Doesn’t God want His people to cry out to Him? Yes, but *“God is not pleased with prayer when it becomes an excuse for inactivity.”*<sup>12</sup> That seems to be the people’s issue here. They have the promise of God and ample reason to trust Him. Now they need to get moving. So God says, *“go forward.”* There’s just one problem. There’s no place to go. The command requires them to do the impossible.

But God always supplies what He commands.<sup>13</sup> Remember that lesson from the life of Abraham? Well, here it is again. “Get moving,” God says. Then He makes a way. Verse 16 continues God’s instruction to 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. <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.”* (Exodus 14:16-18)

Again we see God’s desire to glorify Himself. But notice *how* the text keeps saying God will glorify Himself. He’s going to “*get glory over Pharaoh*” and his men. In other words, He is going to glorify Himself by bringing judgment onto Pharaoh and Egypt. So we see, second, that...

### **God Seeks to Glorify Himself through Judgment...**

Keep reading. Verse 19...

*“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. <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.’ <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.”* (Exodus 14:19-29)

Wow. Can you imagine this? The pillar of fire and cloud creating separation.<sup>14</sup> The waters of the sea separating before your eyes. Dry ground emerging for you to walk through on.<sup>15</sup> You get to the other side and look back on the Egyptians in pursuit. Moses stretches out his hand and the walls of water come crashing down upon the Egyptian forces. Then the waters grow calm. God kept His word. You’re safe on the other shore.<sup>16</sup>

Philip Ryken, the president of Wheaton College, writes,

“Some may think it was harsh for God to drown an entire army, but it was right and just. Pharaoh and his soldiers were cruel men, bent on destroying God’s people. Was it not right for God to punish evil men for killing innocent children? It was especially appropriate for them to die by drowning because they had once tried to drown the children of Israel in the Nile. What happened to them at the Red Sea was divine retribution. These men deserved to be punished for their sins. And God is glorified when he judges people for their sins because this displays his divine attribute of justice.”<sup>17</sup>

This is one of the reasons justice matters to the people of God. We are called to act justly and pursue justice in society because this can glorify God when done in a godly way. Justice glorifies God because He is a God of justice. But we also have to remember what our responsibility is and what God's responsibility is. We are called to do things like defend the cause of the widow, orphan, and alien. We are called to come to the aid of the defenseless, even as we may be called on to turn the other cheek when our own dignity is on the line. We are called to support those who suffer and bind up the brokenhearted. We're called to pursue justice for the abused and exploited and stand for racial equality. But we are *not* called to the vengeance of judgment.

Perhaps this is a timely reminder for us given the various kinds of unrest in our society. It's easy when faced with so many examples of wicked or anti-gospel activity—mass shootings, white supremacy or any other claim toward racial-supremacy, terrorism domestic and abroad, persecution of Christians—to return evil for evil, acting out in vengeance, responding in kind. But this is not God's will for us.

My mind often goes Romans 12, where Paul says, "*Abhor what is evil.*" But he also says things in that chapter like "*bless those who curse you*" and "*Repay no one evil for evil*" and "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*" and "*never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'*" and "*if your enemy is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.*" This last thing is probably a reference to bringing about repentance in an enemy's life. That's the goal, which is why Paul closes the chapter with "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" That's the way of Jesus. If it's not your way, then you are worldly and, perhaps, a follower of Jesus in name only. God is not fooled. And He will not be mocked.

We have to keep these things in mind when we see evil in the world and when we pursue justice for those who have been hated or victimized. There is a right way and a wrong way to work for justice and vengeance at our hands is the wrong way.

But this text also gives us hope that God will make things right one day. God tarries for the sake of bringing about repentance and heart change in the lives of sinners, but He will not tarry forever. One day His judgment will fall. He will settle the accounts. The evildoers will reap what they have sown. The tables will be turned. The judgment will be fair. We may have to wait a long time for this justice, like the Israelites did. But vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will repay. We can rest in knowing that justice will come because God will have the final word. And this knowledge can free us from the grip of hatred and retribution to instead love our neighbor as ourselves. This is how we overcome evil. We overcome evil with good. And if that doesn't work, God will one day overcome evil with judgment to the glory of His great name.

God seeks to glorify Himself. God seeks to glorify Himself through judgment. And, finally...

### **God Seeks to Glorify Himself through Judgment *that Brings Salvation***

Look at verses 30 and 31...

*"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."* (Exodus 14:30-31)

In this way God glorified Himself. In the words of Nehemiah, God "*made a name for [Himself], as it is to this day*" (Nehemiah 9:2). Or as Isaiah put it, God "*caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name*" (Isaiah 63:12). The Israelites were under the sentence of death, with the Egyptians in hot pursuit. When they crossed through the waters, they were set free from that sentence and given a new life. But how did God bring about that glorious salvation? Through judgment.

This is a huge theme in the Bible. In fact, if you want to read about 600 pages on this subject, let me recommend a biblical theology by James Hamilton called, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*. The title is pretty self-explanatory. Hamilton seeks to show that the purpose of God is that He seeks to be glorified in salvation through judgment, displaying His glory in both His saving and His judging work. He traces that theme through each book of the Bible.

So, for example, consider when the theme of salvation is first introduced in the Garden of Eden. The first humans sinned against God and are banned from His presence. But in the midst of that exclusion, there is a word of hope, and glimmer of good news, the first Gospel. God says to the serpent, Satan, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel*" (Genesis 3:15). God is promising that this cosmic struggle between Eve's descendants and the descendants of the evil one will linger, but one day one of Eve's descendants will deliver a mortal blow to the serpent. That descendent is Jesus. What will this mean for us? Salvation, through an act of judgment.

A bit later in Genesis, we have the story of Noah. Noah and his family are delivered in the ark, while the rest of humanity is washed away in the waters of God's judgment. What is that? Salvation through an act of judgment. Here it is again in Exodus. We will see it again with the Canaanites. With the Amalekites. And so on. Then there is the way the Psalms speak of salvation and judgment. We can trace the theme right on through the Old Testament and ultimately to Christ.

On the cross, He substitutes Himself in the place of sinners and absorbs the judgment that they deserve. Through faith in Christ's death and resurrection for us, we are freely given salvation because He willingly took our judgment upon Himself. We are delivered through a decisive act of judgment. Salvation through judgment. Did you hear that? You don't have to get swept up in the waters of God's final judgment because there is Savior who went into those waters for you on the Cross. He came out victorious over the sentence of death. He is risen! And you can share in that victory, but only if you admit your need, confess your sin, and trust in Christ to forgive through His work on your behalf. That's how we pass through the waters of judgment. Salvation through judgment. The judgment of another. A substitute. And one day, He's going to come back and usher in a new heaven and new earth, delivering His people fully and finally through an act of judgment that will do away with evil fully and finally. Salvation through judgment.

In it all, God is glorified. And this text of Exodus 14 is part of this remarkable trajectory that gets us to Christ and His work. It is absolutely glorious. And we've only scratched the surface.

But what I want you to see is that on one side of the Sea there was only death and on the other side there was life. Nothing could be done in human strength to transport the sinner from death to life. No amount of effort could bridge that chasm. It was the work of another—almighty God Himself—that could make a way and He has through the work of Jesus Christ. He died for our sin. He was raised that we might stand before God made righteous. And He alone graciously brings us to the side of life as we trust Him to save us. Just like the Israelites, we must trust that God is our Conqueror. He alone can defeat our enemies—not Egypt, but sin, Satan, and death. He can bring us through, untouched by the waters of judgments. And He freely applies that victory—His victory—to us through faith.

And remember, it's not the strength of our faith that saves. It's the object. Some of those Israelites could have marched through the walled up waters of the Sea with their heads held high, in full confidence and assurance. Others may have inched forward with their hearts racing in terror, contemplating from time to time turning back. Still others somewhere in between that spectrum. But the walk on dry ground was a walk of faith. It was a conquering faith. And what made the difference was not the strength of faith, but the object of their faith. Would they trust in God and His means of salvation or not? That was the question. And it's no different for you. Will you trust in God and His means of salvation? In both cases His name is Jesus. And He alone can plant our feet upon the shores of victory.

The whole Exodus story was meant to point to the New Exodus that Jesus, one greater than Moses, would achieve and administer to His people. One of our small groups for those in their 20s and 30s was studying some of this New Exodus language in the prophet Micah recently (p.s. you're invited). Let me close today with the words the prophet closes his Old Testament book with:

*“As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvelous things... Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.<sup>19</sup> He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”* (Micah 7:11, 18-19)

Do you hear that Exodus language? Through faith in Christ our enemy too is drowned in the depths of the Sea of God's judgment—not the Egyptian armies, but the sin that has brutally enslaved us. In Christ, we have conquered and we must remember the victory of faith, the victory that Micah celebrates as our God *“casts all our sins into the depths of the sea.”* He has glorified Himself through a judgment that has led to our salvation.

And all God's people said? Amen!

Let's pray...

---

<sup>1</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 389.

<sup>2</sup> It's difficult to pinpoint where all these cities are on a map and precisely where they camped out. Those debates are not really the best use of our time. I probably should say something though about the sea. This sea mentioned in verse 2 has historically been identified as the Red Sea, which is a large body of water that separates Africa from the Middle East. Some scholars have called that identification into question today. The Bible calls the sea *yam suph*. In Hebrew, *suph* means “reeds” and is sometimes used to refer to a plant known as papyrus (e.g., 2:3), so some chose to render the location as “the Sea of Reeds” or even “the Papyrus Sea.” The problem is that papyrus doesn't grow in the deep waters of the Red Sea, though it was common in the marshlands of Northern Egypt. So some speculate that one of these northern lakes is probably in view and not the arm of the Red Sea (Ryken, 391-392). There are, however, problems with that view. Perhaps the biggest one is that there are other places in the Bible where *yam suph* clearly does refer to the Red Sea. The Greek translation of the Scriptures that was common in Jesus' day also translates the expression “Red Sea,” showing that this interpretation is quite old. Perhaps the best explanation I have seen is put forth by James Hoffmeier, who shows that in the past the water levels of the Red Sea were higher and this meant that the arms of the sea would have extended farther north. There seems to have been times when the Gulf of Suez (which is one of the arms of the Red Sea) actually connected to some of those northern lakes. It stands to reason, then, that the Red Sea could have had associations with reeds of papyrus and been referred to as *yam suph* at this time (James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* [Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999], 207–215. Cf. Colin J. Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus: A Scientist's Discovery of the Extraordinary Natural Causes of the Biblical Stories* [New York: HarperCollins, 2003], 172–205).

---

<sup>3</sup> A. W. Tozer once wrote, “To the child of God, there is no such thing as an accident. He travels an appointed way....Accidents may indeed appear to befall him and misfortune stalk his way; but these evils will be so in appearance only and will seem evils only because we cannot read the secret script of God’s hidden providence.” A. W. Tozer, *We Travel and Appointed Way* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1988), 3.

<sup>4</sup> As Dorian G. Coover-Cox notes that there is an ironic play on words at work in Exodus. “The Hebrew word translated **glory** (related to the idea of being-heavy) is related to one of the words describing Pharaoh’s ‘hardened’ heart (8:15, 32; 9:7, 34; 10:1). The Lord would receive glory from Pharaoh’s refusal to give glory.” CSB, Study Bible, 110 n. 14:4.

<sup>5</sup> “Pharaoh’s change of heart shows that he never truly repented of his sin. He had been given every opportunity to set his captives free. Time after time Moses had told him to let God’s people go. First he refused. Then as the plagues started to come, he began to negotiate. He bargained and bickered. He asked for prayer, even begging Moses to give him God’s blessing. But he never let go. When, finally, he said that he would do what God wanted, he immediately changed his mind and went right back to his sins.” Ryken, 384-385.

<sup>6</sup> Many Christians have seen in this pursuit an analogy for Satan’s own tactics in our lives. When a person begins to walk with God or in God’s direction, Satan does not let them go without a fight. As Charles Spurgeon has said, “The great tyrant has not forgotten you, and he designs your capture and re-enslavement.” In a book called *The Red Sea Rules: The Same God Who Led You in Will Lead You Out*, Robert J. Morgan writes, “Consider the parallels between Pharaoh and Satan. Both are unyielding enemies, coveting the power of God for themselves. Both have been plundered by the Almighty, and both are enraged beyond endurance. Both have assembled vast armies for the destruction of God’s people—yet neither seems to realize how utterly defeated he already was and is...Satan doesn’t surrender his prey without a fight. He comes racing after the converted soul, chariot wheels churning the dust, seeking to discourage you, to defeat you. He pursues you with the intensity of Pharaoh. He may use your old friends, a spot of persecution, or discouraging responses of family. He may show you a hypocrite in the church or afflict you with a general slacking of zeal. He may launch a missile of temptation right at your heart or fire a volley of trials and troubles into your life. He tries to trap you in difficulty, to entangle you in trouble, to corner you in impossible situations, to lure you into temptation. If you’re in a tough situation right now, suffering pain, worry, anguish, or illness, the devil is undoubtedly behind it to a greater or lesser degree. Acknowledge Satan’s activity, but don’t be intimidated by him. You can resist him in the power of God and by the blood of Jesus Christ. In fact, our Commander in chief enjoins you to such resistance” (Morgan, 33-35). Similarly, Philip Ryken writes, “This is another place where Israel’s exodus is a picture of our own deliverance from captivity to sin. The Bible says that “these things”—meaning the events in Exodus—“occurred as examples” (1 Cor. 10:6). This particular example shows what happens whenever God rescues his people from bondage: Satan tries to grab us before we can get away. No sooner do we make a commitment to follow Christ than we face doubt and discouragement. Satan is riding furiously after us, tempting us to give up and turn back. Jesus taught about this in the Parable of the Sower. He said that when some people hear the message of salvation, “the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown” in their hearts (Matt. 13:19). Others fall away when they suffer persecution or when they are worried by the troubles of life. It is a spiritual battle, and Satan never surrenders without a fight. This is not surprising because we were once his valuable servants, and he would like nothing better than to have us back under his employ. Like a slaveholder coming north to hunt for a runaway slave, Satan wants to drag us back to the plantation of sin. But there is no “fugitive slave law” in the kingdom of God. Once God has set us free, Satan has no right to take us back. So what should we do when he is chasing after us? Not what the Israelites did...” (Ryken, 385-386).

<sup>7</sup> Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 83.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Joshua 24:6, 7; Nehemiah 9:9.

<sup>9</sup> “People often do this when they are under spiritual attack: They blame their spiritual leaders. In this case the Israelites said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?’ (Exod. 14:11a). Thus began a long tradition of Jewish comedy! What gave their sarcasm its bite, of course, was that there were graves all over Egypt—like the Great Pyramids, to give just one example. They also said to Moses, ‘What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?’” (vv. 11b, 12a). In other words, ‘We told you so!’ Maybe the Israelites did tell Moses to leave them alone, but if they did, the Bible does not mention it. Probably they were just sulking, the way people usually do when things don’t go their way.” Ryken, 386.

<sup>10</sup> This yearning to go back to Egypt is a recurring motif throughout their wilderness journey and it’s always associated with their unbelieving hearts (15:23-25; 16:3; 17:3; Num. 11:1-6; 14:1-4; 16:13-14; 20:2-5; 21:4-5); see T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus* (TTCS; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 67.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Spurgeon had the following remarks related to Moses’ counsel: “These words contain God’s command to the believer when he is reduced to great straits and brought into extraordinary difficulties. He cannot retreat; he cannot go forward; he is shut up on the right hand and on the left; what is he now to do? The Master’s word to him is, ‘Stand still.’ It will be well for him if at such times he listens only to his Master’s word, for other and evil advisers come with their suggestions. Despair whispers, ‘Lie down and die; give it all up.’ But God would have us put on a cheerful courage, and even in our worst times, rejoice in his love and faithfulness. Cowardice says, ‘Retreat; go back to the worldling’s way of action; you cannot play the Christian’s part, it is too difficult. Relinquish your principles.’ But, however much Satan may urge this course upon you, you cannot follow it if you are a child of God. His divine fiat has bid thee go from strength to strength, and so thou shalt, and neither death nor hell shall turn thee from thy course. What, if for a while thou art called to stand still, yet this is but to renew thy strength for some greater advance in due time. Precipitancy cries, ‘do something. Stir yourself; to stand still and wait, is sheer idleness.’ We must be doing something at once--we must do it so we think--instead of looking to the Lord, who will not only do something but will do everything. Presumption boasts, ‘If the sea be before you, march into it and expect a miracle.’ But Faith listens neither to Presumption, nor to Despair, nor to Cowardice,



---

nor to Precipitancy, but it hears God say, ‘Stand still,’ and immovable as a rock it stands. ‘Stand still;’—keep the posture of an upright man, ready for action, expecting further orders, cheerfully and patiently awaiting the directing voice; and it will not be long ere God shall say to you, as distinctly as Moses said it to the people of Israel, ‘Go forward.’” Spurgeon, “July 24 (Morning)” in *Morning and Evenings* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2016), 418.

<sup>12</sup> David Strain, “A Way Through,” a sermon preached on February 8, 2015, to First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, and accessed online at: <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/a-way-through>.

<sup>13</sup> That’s why Augustine famously prayed, “Lord, command what you will and give what you command.”

<sup>14</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, “Verse 19 links the ‘pillar of cloud’ with the ‘angel of God,’ and there is good reason to view them as one and the same. A similar identification occurs in 3:2, where the ‘angel of the LORD’ appears as ‘flames of fire.’ As in Exodus 3, the ‘angel’ is a manifestation of God himself. In the light of 14:24, it seems likely that ‘the pillar of fire and cloud’ is a theophany.” Alexander, 67.

<sup>15</sup> There have been some attempts to explain away this miracle as some sort of natural phenomenon (For examples of these propositions, see Ryken, 392-394). I once heard the story of a visiting preacher walking through these verses with a congregation that invited him for a special service. When he read the text, someone from the congregation shouted, “Praise the Lord! Takin’ all them children of Israel from the deep waters. What a mighty miracle!” The minister was pretty theologically liberal and didn’t believe in miracles. He began to explain to the people, rather condescendingly, that the Israelites were probably in a marshland and this was merely an ebbing tide, meaning the Israelites only had to wade through about six inches of water. The same voice shouted out again, “Praise the Lord. Drownin’ all them Egyptians in six inches of water. What a mighty miracle!” (Tim Chester, *Exodus for You* [The Good Book Company, 2016], 101.)

In the end, seeking natural explanations for what the text actually says has the feel of special pleading. The text says that it happens as Moses stretches out his hand. So it’s happening on demand. And, second, it’s described as “walls” (which is the same word for city walls) on both sides, so it hardly can be explained by some ordinary wind. Then there’s the dry ground. The waters crashing down at just the right moment to spare the Israelites and claim the Egyptians. If we take the text seriously, these events are impossible to explain apart from the supernatural. Wherever or however it happened, it was a miracle (Ryken, 392-396).

<sup>16</sup> If this were a classroom setting, we might take some time to really explore the creation language that is used in this account. In the creation account of Genesis 1, the water separated to create dry ground, just like here at the Red Sea. It’s the same language. In both instances, God separated the waters through a “wind” or “Spirit” (same word in Hebrew). The wind working on the waters of the Red Sea calls to mind the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at creation. This is an interesting allusion that suggests that the reader ought to view this act of judgment as an act of “un-creation.” The water and land un-separate, just like in the judgment of Noah’s day.

It’s also worth noting that the polemic against Egypt’s idols is still in play. He’s not just judging Egypt. He’s judging Egypt’s gods, exposing them as powerless and false. So we might note that that the Egyptians are drown “in the morning watch” (14:24), which ended at daybreak. This is when Ra, the sun god, should have risen to the aid of the Egyptians. But Ra is unable to save and the Egyptians perish.

The other literary connection is with the eighth plague. There we saw Moses stretching out his staff over the land and God bringing a morning, east wind, which carried in the locust. When the plague was over, God carried the locust out of the land by a wind and drown them in the Red Sea (10:13, 19). There are other connections in the language used to describe both miracles. It’s as if the text is saying that it was “no more difficult for the Lord to defeat Pharaoh and his army than to dispense with a horde of insects” (Coover-Cox, 111 n. 14:21-28).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ryken, 396.