

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Crossing the Red Sea

Exodus 14:1-31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this chapter is one of the great salvation pictures of the entire Bible. The exodus is the Old Testament's defining act of redemption, and the Red Sea crossing is its climax: God alone, by His own power, brings a helpless and undeserving people out of bondage and into life. The aim is to let students see that salvation is the LORD's work ('see the salvation of the LORD'), accomplished by His mighty hand, while He still calls His people to a trusting, obedient, forward-stepping faith. We will handle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 carefully: the crossing is a God-given picture of deliverance through water from bondage to freedom, and Paul uses it that way, but we must not flatten the picture into the New Testament specifics of baptism for the forgiveness of sins, nor read those specifics back into Israel's experience. The picture teaches the pattern; Christ fulfills it.

This lesson also aims squarely at the spiritual formation of the student. Every believer knows the feeling of being pinned between an army and a sea, and the gut reaction to panic, to grumble, to wish for the old bondage back. The text presses us to a deeper trust: to stand firm, to be silent, to go forward, and to watch what God does when we stop trying to save ourselves. The goal is not merely that students learn the facts of the crossing, but that they grow into people who, when cornered, instinctively look to the God who fights for His own.

Finally, the chapter trains the heart toward reverent fear and faith. It ends not with a celebration of Israel's cleverness but with Israel fearing the LORD and believing in Him. Our teaching should land there: a God this powerful, this committed to His people, this able to make a road through the sea, is worthy of our awe and our absolute trust, and ultimately points us to the greater deliverance He has worked in Jesus Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 14:1-4. The LORD deliberately led Israel to camp in a place where Pharaoh would think them trapped, and He says it was so that 'the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.' What does this teach us about God's purposes even in the hard places He leads His people, and about His ultimate aim that He be known?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter opens by underscoring divine intention. God tells Moses to have Israel 'turn back' and camp by the sea at a specific location, precisely so that Pharaoh will misread the situation

and conclude that Israel is 'wandering in the land' and 'shut in by the wilderness' (14:3). The trap, in other words, was deliberate. God was not reacting to a crisis; He was staging a demonstration.

The stated purpose is repeated and weighty: 'I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD' (14:4). This is the same refrain that ran through the plagues. The exodus is not merely about Israel's comfort; it is about the living God making Himself known to a world that had forgotten Him. Even the deliverance of His people serves the higher aim that He be known and glorified.

For the student, this reframes the hard places God leads us into. Israel's dead end was not a navigational error or a punishment; it was a chosen stage for God's power. We should be slow to assume that a cornered, pressured place in our lives is proof that God has abandoned or misled us. It may be exactly where He intends to be glorified.

We should be careful, of course, not to claim that every difficulty is a divinely staged miracle in waiting. Scripture does not promise us a parted sea every time we are afraid. What it does teach is that God is sovereign over the hard places, that He is never surprised, and that His purposes there run deeper than our comfort.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereignty over the circumstances He leads His people into.
- The recurring purpose of the exodus: that God be known as the LORD.
- The danger of interpreting every hardship as evidence of God's absence.
- God's glory, not merely our comfort, as the ultimate aim of His acts.
- Trusting God's leading even when it appears to lead into danger.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Scripture so often tie God's saving acts to the goal that He be 'known'?
- How does knowing a hard place may be God-chosen change the way you pray in it?
- Where is the line between trusting God in hardship and presuming on Him?

Question 2

Student Question:

Read 14:10–12. When the people saw the army coming, they cried out in fear and turned on Moses, wishing they were back in slavery. How do you tend to respond when deliverance looks like it is about to fall apart, and what does your first reaction reveal about where your trust really rests?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Israel lifts its eyes and sees the Egyptians marching after them, the response is immediate terror, and the terror curdles into bitter complaint (14:10–11). They sarcastically ask Moses whether there were no graves in Egypt that he had to bring them out to die in the wilderness. The same people who had just walked out in triumph now want their slavery back.

Their words in 14:12 are striking: they claim they would rather serve the Egyptians than die in the wilderness. Fear has a way of rewriting the past. The bondage they had groaned under now looks safer than the freedom God is giving them. This is the recurring temptation of the redeemed: to romanticize the old life the moment the new way gets frightening.

Notice that their fear is not entirely irrational. The army is real; the threat is real. The failure is not that they felt afraid, but that their fear immediately concluded God had failed them and that the old bondage was preferable. Faith does not require the absence of fear; it requires that fear not have the final word.

For the student, this is a mirror. Our first reaction when deliverance seems to be unraveling reveals where our trust truly rests. Panic and grumbling expose a heart that, under pressure, defaults to its own survival rather than to God's faithfulness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The human tendency to romanticize past bondage when freedom gets hard.
- The difference between feeling fear and letting fear conclude God has failed.
- Grumbling against God's appointed leaders as a symptom of unbelief.
- How our first reaction under pressure exposes the real location of our trust.
- God's patience with a fearful people even as He calls them higher.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so tempting to prefer a familiar bondage to a frightening freedom?
- What does your typical first reaction to crisis reveal about your trust?
- How can we feel real fear without letting it dictate our conclusions about God?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 14:13–14. Moses answers their panic with four commands: 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD,' for 'the LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.' What does this reveal about the kind of faith God was calling Israel to, and about who actually accomplishes salvation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses meets the people's panic with a remarkable answer (14:13–14). He gives them four imperatives: do not fear, stand firm, see the salvation of the LORD, and be silent. Every one of

them moves the people away from frantic self-rescue and toward watchful trust. 'The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.'

The phrase 'the salvation of the LORD' is central. This deliverance will be God's doing, not Israel's. They have no weapons to match Pharaoh's chariots, no military skill, no escape route. Their part is to stand and watch the LORD save. This is one of the clearest Old Testament statements that salvation belongs to God.

We should be careful in how we draw the line to ourselves. The text genuinely emphasizes that God saves; we cannot rescue ourselves from a power greater than us. At the same time, even here God does not call them to do nothing forever. In the very next verses He commands them to go forward. The stillness is a stillness of trust, not of passivity for its own sake. They stop trying to be their own savior, and then they obey His command to move.

For the believer, this is a profound discipline. There is a kind of striving that is really unbelief, a refusal to let God be God. To 'be silent' before the LORD is to confess that the outcome is in His hands. It is one of the hardest and most freeing postures of faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation as the LORD's work, not human achievement.
- The four commands: fear not, stand firm, see, be silent.
- The difference between trusting stillness and mere passivity.
- How frantic self-rescue can itself be a form of unbelief.
- Confessing God's lordship by leaving outcomes in His hands.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between trusting stillness and passive inaction?
- Where in your life is striving actually a refusal to let God be God?
- Why is 'see the salvation of the LORD' such good news for helpless people?

Question 4

Student Question:

Think about the call to 'be silent' and let God fight. In what specific situation are you still trying to be your own deliverer, and what would it mean to stop and let God work this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question presses the previous truth into the student's own life. The issue is not whether we believe, in the abstract, that God saves, but whether we live as people who have stopped trying to be their own deliverers.

Each of us has an area where we are still gripping the oars: a relationship we are trying to control, a reputation we are scrambling to protect, a future we are trying to secure by anxious effort. The call to 'be silent and let God fight' lands differently in each life.

The teacher should help students name the specific arena, not settle for generalities. 'Trusting God more' is too vague to obey. 'Stopping my constant anxious checking and entrusting this decision to God in prayer' is something a person can actually do this week.

Remind students that letting God fight is not the same as doing nothing. Israel was still called to go forward. The point is to surrender the self-saving frenzy while remaining ready to obey God's next command.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the specific area where we still play our own savior.
- Moving from vague resolve to concrete, obeyable action.
- The link between anxiety and a refusal to entrust outcomes to God.
- Surrendering control without lapsing into mere passivity.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific situation where you are scrambling to save yourself?
- What concrete step would 'being silent and letting God fight' look like there?
- How is letting God fight different from doing nothing at all?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 14:15–18. God tells Moses to lift his staff and the people to go forward, even as He promises to get glory over Pharaoh. How does God's command to 'go forward' into an impossible sea show us the partnership between His power and the active, obedient steps of faith He asks of His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God's reply to Moses in 14:15–16 is almost startling: 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.' There is a time to cry out, and there is a time to move in obedient faith. God commands Moses to lift his staff and stretch out his hand, and the people to walk forward into a sea that has not yet parted.

This shows the partnership between divine power and human obedience. God does the impossible: He divides the waters. But He calls the people to step forward in faith, and He uses Moses' lifted staff as the instrument. The miracle is entirely God's, yet it comes through obedient action, not through people standing frozen on the shore.

God again states His purpose (14:17–18): He will harden the Egyptians so they pursue, and He will get glory over Pharaoh and his chariots, ‘and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.’ The deliverance of Israel and the judgment of Egypt are two sides of the same display of God’s power and justice.

For the student, ‘go forward’ is a word for those who are waiting for God to remove every obstacle before they will move. Sometimes the sea parts only as the foot touches the water. Faith steps toward the impossible at God’s command, trusting Him to make the way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The partnership of God’s power and the obedient steps of faith.
- God’s command to ‘go forward’ before the way is visibly clear.
- Moses’ staff as the instrument of a miracle that is wholly God’s.
- The deliverance of Israel and judgment of Egypt as one display of God’s glory.
- Faith that acts at God’s word rather than waiting for all risk to be removed.

Discussion Prompts

- When has God asked you to ‘go forward’ before you could see the way?
- How do God’s power and our obedience work together in this scene?
- What does it mean that the sea parted only as Israel moved toward it?

Question 6

Student Question:

When God says ‘go forward’ but the way ahead still looks impossible, what ‘first step into the water’ is He asking of you right now, and what fear is holding you back from taking it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the command ‘go forward’ toward the student’s present obstacles. The aim is to help each person identify the specific ‘first step into the water’ God is calling for, and to name honestly the fear that holds them back.

Often the obstacle is not a literal sea but a hard conversation, an act of obedience, a costly confession, a step of generosity or service that feels risky. The pattern holds: God frequently makes the way clear only after the obedient step begins.

The teacher should resist letting this stay abstract. Encourage students to name both the step and the fear. Naming the fear out loud often shrinks it; naming the step makes it actionable.

Reassure students that ‘go forward’ is never a reckless leap into our own plans. It is obedience to what God has actually commanded, taken in trust that He will be faithful. The courage is not in us; it is in the One who calls us forward.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the concrete 'first step' God is calling for.
- Naming the specific fear that resists obedience.
- The frequent pattern that the way opens as we step out.
- Distinguishing obedient faith from reckless presumption.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'first step into the water' is God asking of you right now?
- What specific fear is holding you back from taking it?
- How does it help to name the fear out loud rather than carry it silently?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 14:19–20. The pillar of cloud and fire moved from in front of Israel to stand between them and the Egyptian army, giving darkness to the enemy and light to God's people. What does this picture teach us about God's guiding and protecting presence with those He has redeemed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Between the two armies God positions the pillar of cloud and fire (14:19–20). The angel of God and the pillar move from before Israel to behind them, taking up a position between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. The same pillar is darkness to the Egyptians and light to Israel through the night.

This is a vivid picture of God's guiding and protecting presence. The God who had led them by the pillar now interposes Himself as a shield. He stands, quite literally, between His redeemed people and the enemy that pursues them. The same presence that is light and guidance to His people is darkness and obstacle to His enemies.

Throughout the wilderness journey, the pillar represents God's faithful, visible accompaniment of His people. They never had to wonder whether He was with them. Here that presence becomes their defense in the most dangerous hour of the night.

For the student, this speaks to the protecting nearness of God. While we should not expect a literal pillar, the truth that God places Himself between His people and their foes runs through all of Scripture and finds its fullest expression in the One who is Immanuel, God with us. His presence guides, and His presence guards.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pillar as a sign of God's guiding, accompanying presence.
- God interposing Himself between His people and the enemy.

- The same presence as light to God's people and darkness to His foes.
- God's protection in the darkest hour of the journey.
- The trajectory from the pillar to Immanuel, God with us, in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God Himself stood between Israel and the army?
- How does God's accompanying presence both guide and guard His people?
- Where have you sensed God's protecting nearness in a frightening season?

Question 8

Student Question:

When have you sensed God's presence standing 'between you and the enemy' in a season of fear? How does remembering His protection in the past strengthen you to trust Him now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question invites students to recall times they sensed God standing between them and danger, and to let memory feed present faith. Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to remember His past deliverances as fuel for present trust.

Memory is a discipline of faith. Israel was commanded again and again to remember the exodus. When we forget what God has done, fear grows unchecked; when we deliberately recall His faithfulness, the present threat shrinks to its true size.

The teacher can help students articulate specific past moments, an illness brought through, a provision that came just in time, a protection they only recognized later. These become personal pillars of cloud and fire, evidence of a God who has stood between them and harm before.

Encourage students to build remembering into their walk: to write down, rehearse, and give thanks for God's deliverances, so that the next time the chariots appear, faith has something solid to stand on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Remembering past deliverance as a discipline that feeds present faith.
- How forgetting God's works lets fear grow unchecked.
- Naming specific personal evidences of God's protection.
- Building intentional remembrance into the Christian life.

Discussion Prompts

- When have you sensed God standing between you and an enemy or danger?
- How does recalling that deliverance change how you face today's fear?

- What practice could help you remember God's past faithfulness more often?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 14:21–31, and then read 1 Corinthians 10:1–2, where Paul says Israel was 'baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.' Israel's passing through the water was a real, historical deliverance from bondage to freedom under God's leadership, and Paul later uses it as a picture of salvation. What timeless truths about how God saves do we see here, and how does this point us toward the salvation God offers in Christ, while being careful not to read the specifics of Israel's experience and our own back into each other?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the great climax and the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. Moses stretches out his hand, the LORD drives the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and the waters become walls on the right and left as Israel walks through on dry ground (14:21–22). The Egyptians pursue into the seabed, God throws their host into confusion, and at dawn the waters return and cover the army (14:23–28). Israel is saved; not one of the enemy remains. This is a real, historical deliverance: a whole nation brought from bondage to freedom through the water, by the power of God alone.

Centuries later, Paul looks back on this very event in 1 Corinthians 10:1–2 and writes that the fathers 'all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.' Paul is drawing a deliberate picture. Israel's passage through the water, under the cloud, marked their decisive separation from Egypt and their binding to God's appointed leader and to the covenant life that lay ahead. It is a God-given pattern of salvation: a people brought out of bondage, through the water, into a new life that belongs to the LORD.

We must handle this picture with real care, in two directions. First, we should not read the specifics of New Testament baptism back into Israel's experience. Israel was not being baptized for the forgiveness of sins in the New Covenant sense; they were not yet under the gospel of Christ. Their crossing was a physical, national deliverance that God Himself later uses as an illustration. Second, we should not empty the picture of meaning. Paul clearly intends it as instructive for us. The timeless principle stands: God saves by bringing His people through the water, out of slavery, into a life under His leadership, and this pattern points forward to the salvation He has accomplished in Christ.

The right way to teach this is to let the picture point forward without collapsing the distinctions. The exodus shows us the shape of redemption: helpless people, a mighty God, a passage through water, a decisive break with the old bondage, a new identity as God's own. In Christ that pattern reaches its fulfillment, and the New Testament unfolds for us how God now saves

through the gospel. The crossing whets our appetite for that greater deliverance; it does not replace or pre-empt the way God has revealed He saves us now.

Finally, hold up the wonder of it. A nation walked through the heart of the sea. The waters that became a wall of safety for God's people became a grave for those who set themselves against Him. The same act that is salvation to the redeemed is judgment to the rebellious. This is the God we serve, mighty to save, just in judgment, and worthy of awe.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The crossing as a real, historical, national deliverance by God's power alone.
- Paul's use of the event in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 as a picture of salvation.
- Not reading New Testament baptism for forgiveness anachronistically into Israel.
- Not emptying the picture of the instructive meaning Paul gives it.
- The timeless pattern: through water, out of bondage, into life under God.
- How the picture points forward to the fuller salvation in Christ.
- The same waters as salvation to the redeemed and judgment to the rebellious.

Discussion Prompts

- What is Paul teaching by saying Israel was 'baptized into Moses' in the sea?
- How can we honor the picture without reading our own specifics back into Israel?
- What does this crossing show us about the shape of God's saving work in Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 14:31. After the crossing, 'Israel saw the great power of the LORD, and the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD.' Looking back across this whole chapter, name one specific way the Lord is using this account to deepen your own reverent fear of Him and your trust in His power to save.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter ends not with a war chant but with worship and faith: 'Israel saw the great power of the LORD, and the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses' (14:31). The proper response to seeing God save is reverent fear and deepened trust.

Notice the order. They saw God's power; that sight produced fear, a holy awe before a God this mighty; and that awe produced belief. Genuine encounter with God's saving power does not leave us casual. It humbles us into reverence and draws us into trust.

This is the capstone of the lesson, and the question asks the student to look back across the whole chapter and name one specific way the Lord is deepening their own fear of Him and their

trust in His power to save. The aim is personal and concrete, not a general nod toward God's greatness.

The teacher should help students see that reverent fear and loving trust are not opposites but partners. The God who is awesome enough to part the sea is the same God who fights for His people in love. To know Him rightly is to stand in awe and to rest in trust at the same time, and ultimately to see that same saving power supremely revealed in Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reverent fear and faith as the proper response to seeing God save.
- The order: seeing God's power, fearing Him, then believing.
- How genuine encounter with God produces awe, not casualness.
- Holding reverent fear and loving trust together.
- Tracing the chapter's saving power forward to its fullness in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does seeing God's saving power rightly produce both fear and faith?
- How are reverent fear of God and trust in God partners rather than opposites?
- Name one way this chapter is deepening your awe of God and your trust in Him.