

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 9: Crossing the Red Sea -- Exodus 14:1-31

Picture it. You finally walked out of Egypt with your head high, the dust of four hundred years of slavery still on your sandals. You are free. And then, on the third or fourth night out, you look back over your shoulder and see them: chariots. Hundreds of them. The whole armored might of the most powerful empire on earth, churning across the desert toward you, the morning sun flashing off their bronze. In front of you stretches a sea you cannot cross. Behind you comes an army you cannot fight. You are pinned. That is exactly where God led His people, and it is exactly where He sometimes leads us.

There is a detail in this chapter that ought to stop us cold. God did not lead Israel into this trap by accident. He told them to turn back and camp by the sea so that Pharaoh would think they were wandering, confused, hemmed in. The cul-de-sac was on purpose. The dead end was a divine appointment. Sometimes the place where you feel most cornered is the very place God has chosen to show you what He can do. He was not surprised by the chariots. He was waiting for them.

And what does God ask of His terrified people in that hour? Not a strategy. Not a counterattack. Not even a brave face. He asks them to stand still. 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD.' 'The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.' There is a kind of trust so deep that it stops scrambling and simply watches God work. Most of us have never been that still. We are too busy managing our own rescue. This chapter invites us to lay the oars down.

Then the wind blows all night, the waters stand up like walls, and a whole nation walks through the middle of the sea on dry ground. By morning the army that terrorized them is silent under the waves, and Israel stands on the far shore, soaked in salvation, fearing the LORD and believing Him. Centuries later the apostle Paul would look back at this very crossing and say the people were 'baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.' This is not just ancient history. It is a picture of how God saves: He brings His people through the water, out of bondage, into a new life that belongs entirely to Him.

Group Discussion: When Israel was trapped between Pharaoh's army and the sea, God told them to be still and watch Him work. Where in your life right now do you most need to stop scrambling for your own rescue and trust God to fight for you?

Personal Reflection: Is there a 'dead end' in your life that you have assumed is a mistake or a punishment, when it may in fact be the very place God has chosen to reveal His power? What would it look like to stand firm there this week instead of running?

Read Exodus 14:1-31

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Joshua 4:21–24, Israel’s children are to be told how God dried up the sea so all peoples would know His mighty hand; Psalm 77:16–20, a poetic remembrance of God leading His people through the waters like a flock; Isaiah 43:1–3, God who made a way through the waters promises to be with His redeemed when they pass through deep waters again; 1 Corinthians 10:1–13, Paul reads the crossing as both a picture of salvation and a warning to remain faithful; Hebrews 11:29, the crossing is listed as an act of faith, ‘By faith the people crossed the Red Sea.’

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