

Exodus Lesson 5

Exodus 14--Egypt in the Rear View Mirror

In Exodus 12:29-42, in the dead of night a visitor came to all the homes in Egypt, and He had a deadly purpose. He was the angel of death on a mission from God. As he came to each house, he checked out the door for blood. Only on the doors of the Israelites was there blood, so for them he "passed over" because a sacrifice had been made for their sin. The blood was a public display of their faith and obedience to God. Up and down the Nile River the angel travelled visiting every town and claimed the life of the first born from every family, but God made a distinction between His people Israel and the unbelievers. From the time of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 until now He has made a distinction between His followers and unbelievers who reject Him. Rich or poor, kings or slaves, God only cares about belief and obedience in making this distinction, and of course the ultimate distinction between all people will be on the final judgment day when God separates those whose sins have been atoned for from those who stand on their own merit. What was God looking for? Exodus 12:13 quotes God, "When I see the (atoning) blood, I will pass over you".

After 10 devastating plagues capped off by the death of all the first born in Egypt, Pharaoh finally hollered calf rope and summoned Moses. Previously Moses had always commanded Pharaoh to let his people go, but now Pharaoh commanded Moses, "Get up, get up, go". Pharaoh had sworn he would never let them go, but now he orders them to go with his complete capitulation. In Exodus 12:35-36, the Hebrews requested gold and silver from the Egyptians at the direction of God, and thus Egypt relented and the Israelites "plundered the Egyptians". The great irony here is that for years the Hebrews had done all the work in Egypt for free, but now Egypt had to pay them big time just to leave. This also fulfilled the prophecy God gave Abraham about 600 years before that they would come out of Egypt with "great possessions" (Gen.15:13-14).

Great Expectations--Exodus 13:17-14:9

Naturally the Israelites assumed that their troubles were over because they were free, rich, and God was leading them to the Promised Land. If it was me, I would expect God to lead the in a direct route down the Mediterranean coast where there was a road, cities, and food and water. But God always has a strange (to us) way that has a reason that we don't understand at first. God knew the best way would be the long hard way where their faith would be constantly tested so they would learn to depend on Him. Even more disturbing, God led them in circles and had them camp in a sort of cul-de-sac where they would be vulnerable and trapped. Still more amazing, God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he brought the Egyptian army out to slaughter them in the wilderness. Why would God purposefully put them in harms way? Through this situation, God revealed that He was Lord alone, and the glory of the victory belonged to Him alone. God had one more miracle to do in order to crush Egypt and save Israel. Now that the plagues were over, and the king felt safe he changed his mind about letting his labor force leave. Pharaoh was like the shipwrecked real estate executive who begged God to help him by promising to give God all his buildings, apartments, and land. After he made it half way to shore, he said "Make that all my buildings and land", but when he got within a mile of shore he said "I meant just my land". Then when he got to shore he told God, "Never mind, I made it on my own".

The victory that God was about to give Israel was very much like the victory of Jesus on the cross. Jesus appeared to be completely vulnerable, trapped and the adversary thought he had Jesus; but it was a fatal mistake for Satan because the

cross turned out to be a complete victory over sin and death as Colossians 2:13-15 says "He made you alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our sins...and He has taken it out of the way having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the (evil) rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them having triumphed over them".

Between the Devil and the Deep Red Sea

You have heard all the cliches that describe Israel's predicament--between a rock and a hard place, in a jam, in a pickle, up a tree, cornered, trapped like a rat, and up the creek without a paddle. They were like an attorney who specializes in medical malpractice suits, who finds himself in need of major surgery. Why did God lead them into a trap? Two reasons are apparent--so that they "will know that I am The Lord", and to teach them lessons on the necessity of trusting God in spite of circumstances. If you think about it, the predicament of the entire human race is similar to Israel's Red Sea predicament. A terrible enemy is pressing us from one side, and we appear to have no way out but death. Their salvation was an event of divine intervention, just as our salvation involves divine intervention. God sent His son into the world (the incarnation) in order to atone for our sins, and by believing in Him we are saved from eternal death. Therefore the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea can be likened to the resurrection of Christ in the New Testament. The crossing over did not simply deliver them or us, it is the beginning of a new life. It formed them into a new people set apart by God.

How Big a Miracle was it in Exodus 14?

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Cropped screenshot of Charlton Heston from the trailer for the film The Ten Commandments. (Photo credit: Wikipedia)[/caption]

The first thing we need to do in analyzing this miracle is to forget the Charlton Heston movie. First of all consider that there was about 2-3 million people considering that there was 600,000 Jewish adult males, then put in a factor for all the women and children, and also there was a "mixed multitude" of other people (proselytes) that crossed over (Exodus 12:37-38). If three million people walked in pairs, they would form a line about 800 miles long, and it would take 35 days to cross over, yet they crossed in one day. Therefore, they probably marched 5000 abreast, and the width of dry land was at least three miles wide, unlike the movie which made it look more narrow. Many theologians have tried to give the parting of the Red Sea a naturalistic cause. For instance, one accepted answer is that they crossed at a site that was shallow, only eighteen inches deep. If a 40 knot wind blew for ten hours it is scientific fact that it could push eighteen inches of water up to a mile wide. The problem is that the text says it was a huge wall of water on each side and it happened when Moses stretched out his arm and ended when Moses stretched out his arm again. That reminds me of the joke about the College professor that told his class that there was a simple explanation that the water was only 18" deep. A student raised his hand and said, "that makes it an even bigger miracle that the entire Egyptian army drowned in 18 inches of water."

God did a Three Stooges Move on the Egyptians

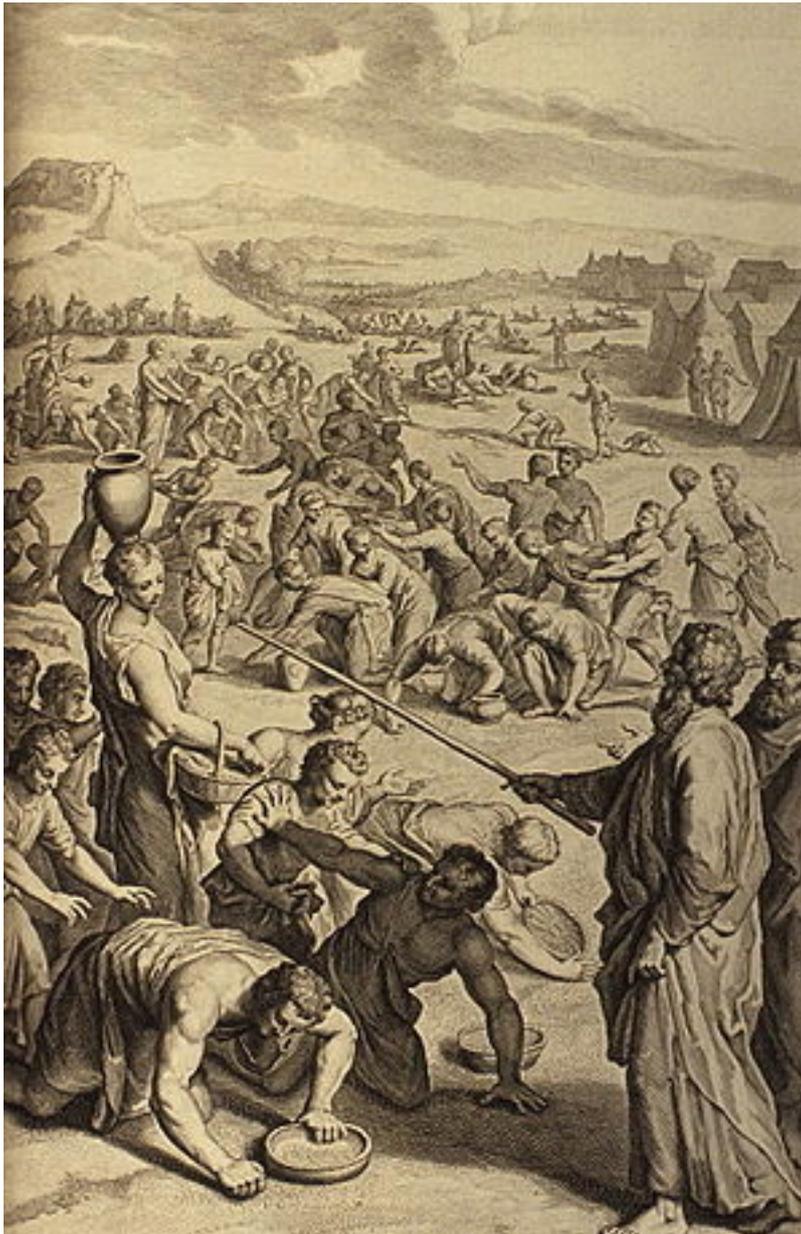
In Exodus 14:6-9, Pharaoh had a change of heart, and he led his army out to the wilderness where Israel was camped along with 600 chariots which were the equivalent of modern day tanks. They would be able to run right through the Israelites. When Israel saw them coming, they became very frightened and cried out to Moses and The Lord, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to the wilderness? We told you back in Egypt to leave us alone, so now look what has happened." This just shows how quickly people can change their mind when confronted with disaster. But Moses reacted differently in faith in the promise of God and said, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of The Lord..for the Egyptians you have seen today, you will never see them again forever". The angel of God who had been leading the Israelites with the pillar of cloud, moved between the Israelites and the Egyptians so they could not see them. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and The Lord swept back the sea and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. As I said, I think the dry land was about three miles wide.

Meanwhile back at the Egyptian army front, they tried to pursue the Israelites, but God did a three stooges act on them. Their chariots collided with each other and their wheels came off, and there was mass confusion (Ex.14:23-26). Then after the Israelites had crossed over The Lord told Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea again, and the Great Wall of water came back down on the Egyptians and wiped them out. In Exodus 14:30-31, the Israelites now on the east side of the sea, looked down and saw how God had saved them and destroyed the Egyptians. Their reaction was just as God had predicted, "the people feared The Lord, and they believed in The Lord and in His servant Moses."

What Have You Done for Me Lately?

Exodus 15:1-21 is all about the people praising and thanking God for saving them and destroying the Egyptians. As fickle as human nature is, we might ask, "How long is this euphoria and praising God going to last?" The answer is that as soon as they get thirsty and hungry, and the harsh desert wilderness makes conditions difficult, they will become grumblers and unappreciative complainers. In Exodus 16, after only about six weeks, the whole congregation grumbled against Moses saying "you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill us all with hunger and thirst". This does bring up a very difficult dilemma--How do you feed and provide water for three million people in the wilderness? Remember how spread out that huge number of people would be. Even if they had food, how could you distribute it to all of them every day especially since they were always on the move? God's method of provision and distribution was supernatural, brilliant, and affective. God said, "I will rain bread from heaven for you, and the people will go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them". Therefore, every morning God would provide miraculous bread for them, and then at night swarms of quail would fly through the camp to provide plenty of meat. The text says, "At evening the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew (that became heavenly bread) all around the camp". In this way God provided daily food for them wherever they were, and they would learn to trust Him every day for a new batch of bread. When the people gathered the miraculous bread they looked at it and said, "What is it?" which in Hebrew was "manna".

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The Israelites Gather Manna in the Wilderness (illustration from the 1728 Figures de la Bible) (Photo credit: Wikipedia)[/caption]

The distribution system was perfect because the food came to them directly. This was good because it is estimated they would have needed 1500 tons of food per day. Normally, this would require a train pulling box cars two miles long. Concerning water, they would have needed about eleven million gallons of water every day. For this, God told Moses to strike a big rock, and water poured forth like a river flowing throughout the camp.

It's All a Test

In Deuteronomy 8, Moses told the people why God led them through the harsh barren waste land for forty years, "that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. he

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humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of The Lord".

This makes me wonder if we could apply this passage to all the difficulties of life. How else could our faith be tested? How could we (a proud people) be humbled and made to be totally dependent on The Lord? Do we live for the stuff in the world, or do we live in obedience to the revealed Word of God? Do we believe all the lies of the world, or do we believe His promises? Kind of makes me think--HmMMMM.

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