

## **Bible Study # 24 Exodus 14.15–31 03–06–2021**

The first move on the way to Canaan was simply to commence the journey, and so Moses was told to issue the order for it. Moses' staff, already used in earlier events in this book (see 4:2, 4; 7:17, 20; 8:5, 16), was again employed as a symbol of God's power, stretched out over the water in order to create dry land on which the Israelites were to walk.

While mention was made earlier to the Lord hardening Pharaoh's heart, now the reference is to the hearts of the Egyptians being so hardened that they would follow the Israelites into the dry sea bed. The trap was laid for them. Victory over Pharaoh and his troops would result in glory to the Lord (see the earlier use of this expression in 14:4), with the double use of this expression drawing particular attention to the idea.

The purpose of this was to demonstrate to the Egyptians that the salvation of the Israelites and the destruction of their army were indeed from God. They would come 'to know' that the Lord was God, i.e., to have experiential acquaintance with Him and His power. The declaration, 'I am the Lord' takes on special meaning, not just as a self-assertion of God's existence. He 'the Lord', the covenantal, redeeming God.

The angel of God (v. 19, synonymous with 'angel of the Lord') was earlier identified with the burning bush (Exod. 3:2). Now he is mentioned as having had a role in leading the Israelites as they left Egypt, and then as a defense at their rear, being joined there by the pillar of cloud that served as a barrier between Israel and the Egyptians.

The whole contest between the Lord and Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt came to a climax at the Sea of Reeds (yâm sūf). The Lord's supremacy over Egypt was displayed in the destruction of the pursuing troops and in the salvation of Israel.

As God had commanded, Moses stretched out his rod, and a strong east wind blew all night, and what had been water turned into dry land. The Israelites were able to pass through with the water as a wall on the left and the right. Not surprisingly, this momentous event formed part of the hymnology of Israel.

Psalms 78:13 reads: 'He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall', while Psalm 106:8-9 describes the same event: 'Yet he [the Lord] saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known. He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert'.

The earlier references to the Egyptian pursuit of Israel (vv. 8, 10) are supplemented at this point with the graphic reference to all Pharaoh's troops following into the midst of the sea. They were not just at the edge of the water, but right into it. The next morning God looked down on the situation and caused havoc in the Egyptian camp.

The wheels of the chariots became 'heavy' and so the Egyptians were slowed up in their attempt to recapture the people of Israel. They were the ones now in danger. Their reaction was to get out of the dangerous situation with the utmost haste.

They acknowledged the presence of Israel's God, the Lord (yhwh), who was fighting against them. There is no way of deciding how much understanding they had of the Lord, or of His ability to rescue His people. However, the fact that they clearly knew that Israel had left their country to serve the Lord would have been sufficient for them to make the connection between what they knew previously and their present experience.

The procedure set out earlier for parting the waters (v. 21) is now reversed. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the waters returned as they had been previously. The Egyptians attempted to escape from it but by

divine action they were swept into the sea. Israel had to learn that salvation was a work of God, not one the people themselves could perform.

The account stresses the completeness of the victory, as Pharaoh's whole army was destroyed, without a single chariot or horseman surviving. The Egyptians were routed completely. However, no mention is made of Pharaoh perishing, nor that every single Egyptian soldier died. The principle of divine judgment needed only representative numbers to display punishment on a disobedient people.

These verses contain the summary account of the crossing of the Israelites on the dry seabed, together with a theological comment concerning the nature of this event ('the Lord saved Israel'). Again, mention is made of the wall of water on the right and the left (cf. v. 22). What happened was a display of God's saving power, the verb 'save' being used for the first time here when God is the subject and Israel the object.

He had saved His people so that they became known as 'a people saved by the Lord' (Deut. 33:29). A later song rejoiced in the fact that God had saved his people at the Red Sea for his name's sake, and to make his power known (Ps. 106:8-9). Here, the text notes that Israel saw His 'great power', 'a mighty hand', (cf. the earlier expression), feared God, and trusted in Him and His servant Moses.

They were witnesses to the victory over the Egyptians, and this confirmed them in their assured confidence in the Lord and in His servant, Moses. But mingled with trust was fear as they assimilated in their minds all that had been promised through Moses and now fulfilled in such a powerful way. Their constant grumbling and complaining show how often their fears overcame their faith. That is why this story is so important for us.

Next: Exodus 15.1-18.