



## Exposition

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# The Exodus

## A commentary on Exodus 1–15

### H. Victory at the Red Sea (Exodus 14–15)

#### Part 1: The narrative account—14:1-31(ii)

Mark Vincent

#### The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **sub-sections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

14:19 And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them:

14:20 And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.

#### Comment

It now transpires that Israel's 'standing still' to see the salvation of God (v. 13) does not involve standing still at all, but rather continuing forward (v. 15). In metaphor they are standing still, since God will accomplish the deliverance for them, but they are to be His accomplices, at least, by obeying His commands. They must not stand rooted to the spot in terror, but instead continue forward in faith.

This constitutes a double challenge, in the sense that not only must they steel themselves to move in the first place, but they must now do so without the leadership of the pillar of cloud and fire. The pillar now goes behind them, which is fine for those at the back (although they must have wondered just what the Egyptians were up to now that they were obscured from view), but means that for the first time Israel must forge ahead apparently unguided—and into the most frightening terrain of all, a dried-up sea bed with walls of water on either side. They had to move forward in faith, not knowing whither they went,

#### God reveals His plan

14:15 And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me?<sup>1</sup> speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:

14:16 But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.

14:17 And I, behold, I<sup>2</sup> will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get Me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

14:18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten Me honour

nor what was going on behind. Those at the front presumably had no idea whether the rear was being swallowed up by the Egyptians. All they could do was trudge on, perhaps fearing the worst.

Assuming its new role at the rear of the host, the pillar of cloud and fire takes on two functions. At one and the same time it provides light to the Israelites and darkness to the Egyptians. It is simultaneously a judgement and a blessing, at one and the same time a source of revelation and a source of covering, a blacking out. This two-sided nature of God's presence reflects His character (the goodness and severity of God), and is reminiscent also of Paul's words about his preaching in 2 Corinthians 2:15,16; to the unbelievers a "savour of death unto death", but to the faithful "a savour of life unto life" (compare Philippians 1:28).

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### **The sea divided and Pharaoh slain**

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- 14:21 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.
- 14:22 And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.
- 14:23 And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.
- 14:24 And it came to pass, that in the morning watch<sup>3</sup> the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled<sup>4</sup> the host of the Egyptians,
- 14:25 And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily:<sup>5</sup> so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.
- 14:26 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.
- 14:27 And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD

overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

- 14:28 And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.
- 14:29 But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.
- 14:30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.
- 14:31 And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses.<sup>6</sup>

### **Comment**

As it was so often in the plagues, so it is again here; division is the order of the day. God divides between the camp of Israel and the camp of Egypt by stationing His pillar between them. He divides the sea, and its waters part to form a way. He divides between a way of life for the Israelites and a way of death for Egypt.

Creation echoes are very much in evidence also, just as had been the case in the plague accounts. There is the language of the waters going back and the dry land appearing, and then the reversal of this process echoing the Flood account as far as Pharaoh was concerned. God's power to transform substances, so that nothing is as it originally seems, is utilised to marvellous effect. The walking through the middle of the sea on dry land is reprised by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels as he goes to meet his disciples (note verse 29 in particular).

In one sense it is a remarkable thing that Pharaoh ever enters the sea at all. One would have thought that he had seen enough strange phenomena and bizarre circumstances already back on his home turf to be at the very least doubly cautious as he sees the seas roll back to form an inviting pathway. Would he not consider what the implications of such a happening might be? Would he not sense that he might be entering a trap? The fact is that, when one is driven by sin, possessed or controlled by its sweeping and engulfing force, one does not notice such things. Pharaoh is so bent on his chase, so intent on devouring his prey and satisfying his lust, that

even such a thing as this does not make him stop to consider. He is sin personified, after all.

But then God takes things a stage further. In what is almost a euphemism, so delicately is it described, God 'looks' through His pillar out over the host of the Egyptians and 'troubles' them. Quite what this involves is not made clear, but the effects are telling. The chariot wheels, once a symbol of military prowess and technical supremacy, simply fall off (or rather, God 'takes them off', causing them to be removed or turned aside!). Now the riders are being driven into the ground even as they whip their horses, as once they had whipped the Israelites and driven them into the ground. Now the Egyptians know: "... so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians" (v. 25).

But it was too late. Perhaps Pharaoh saw Moses stretch out his hand on the far bank of the crossing; if he did, it would be for the last time that he saw it. Pharaoh, his chariots, his horsemen—all are now overthrown in the heart of the sea, their bodies left to float to the shore like flotsam in morning's light. Egypt has now lost her males in the water, just as she had once sought to lose the Israelite males at the opening of the book.

Once again it was a night-time deliverance, just like Passover. But, in that dark night of death for sin, hope was renewed, a new life born, and a new beginning begun: "And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses" (v. 31).

1. **v. 15 Wherefore criest thou unto Me?** There is no record that Moses *had* cried to the Lord, only that the Israelites had (v. 10), and that they had accused Moses (vv. 11,12). On the contrary, verses 13 and 14 show Moses answering the people as though he had full trust in God and was himself in control of the situation. Perhaps there is dislocation, and verses 15-18 should be

assumed to fall between verse 12 and verse 13; perhaps Moses himself had doubted at this point and taken the Israelites' complaint to God. Or again, perhaps the 'thou' of verse 15, though singular, is to be taken as referring to Israel as a whole (God thus responding to the 'provocation' mentioned in Psalm 106:7), or to Moses as their representative (however, the imperative that follows this phrase is certainly addressed to Moses and not Israel). Perhaps God's words are simply a 'hurry up!' to Moses: 'Don't let's stand here talking about it—begin the deliverance, Moses! Tell them to go forward, and as for you, take your rod and get busy dividing the sea!'

2. **v. 17 I, behold, I.** A very emphatic expression which emphasises the control of God over Pharaoh and his hosts. It is God Who will do the hardening, and will achieve the ends He wishes; there is none who can stop Him. The expression emphasises the personal involvement of God (the first person pronoun, already an emphatic element of the sentence since it is not needed grammatically, plus the word 'behold', followed by the first person pronominal suffix). Other occurrences are Genesis 6:17; 9:9; Jeremiah 26:14; 40:10.
3. **v. 24 the morning watch.** The night was divided into three 'watches', and "the morning watch" probably refers to the last of these, between 2 am and 6 am.
4. **v. 24 troubled.** The root *hamam* seems to have to do with making a noise or commotion, and hence has the derived sense of 'trouble', 'discomfit'. In most of its occurrences in the Old Testament it refers to military destruction or the disturbance/disquiet which immediately precedes it for the losing army.
5. **v. 25 heavily.** A form of the root *kabad*, elsewhere used to describe the hard heart of Pharaoh. See also the note on verse 4 under 'honoured' ([previous issue](#)).
6. **v. 31 His servant Moses.** This is the first time Moses is called God's servant, and the expression 'His/My/Thy servant Moses' occurs seven times in total, in five separate passages.

### Introduction to the books of the Bible

Brother James Granter of Sydney has produced a two-page introduction to each of the books of the Bible. These are available free of charge but only as email attachments, either from Brother Granter at [jgranter@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jgranter@optusnet.com.au) or from the Gospel Publicity League at [gpl@acay.com.au](mailto:gpl@acay.com.au). Once obtained by this means they may be printed out and freely used.