

The God Who Provides (Part 2 of 6)

Fear Not, Stand Firm, and See the Salvation of the Lord

Exodus 14:1-31

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"When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.'" And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."'" (Exodus 14:10–14, ESV)

The book of Exodus is not about Israel; it is not about Moses; and it is not about Egypt or Pharaoh. The story of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt is meant to tell you something about God. While Israel's suffering in slavery and their deliverance through the Ten Plagues is a significant part of the book of Exodus, the real storyline is the declaration that Yahweh ("I AM") is the one true God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a covenant-keeping God, and the powerful nation on the earth will not stand in God's way from drawing His people to Himself. God is going to glorify His name on the earth, and He will use Pharaoh and the Exodus in order to send a very clear message.

Israel, Pharaoh, and the Exodus are the canvas upon which God will display His glory. Exodus 6:6-7 states this clearly:

"Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.'" (Exodus 6:6–7, ESV)

God intends to deliver His people not only to relieve them from the injustice of their slavery, but also to make His name known the world. That is why our study of the book of Exodus is divided into various mini-series that connect us to what God is doing. In Exodus 1-6 we saw **The God Who Hears**, and in Exodus 7-12 we saw **The God Who Delivers**. We have watched as God reveals His plan to deliver His people, and then we marveled at God's ability to powerfully rescue His people through the plagues which were designed to directly challenge the gods of Egypt.

Our current mini-series is called **The God Who Provides**, and it is a remarkable section that brings us up to the foot of Mt. Sinai where God will give His people the Law. Chapters 13-18 will show us

the way in which God is able to deliver His people and provide for their needs. Remember that when they left Egypt, they left in haste and with only what they could carry. They plundered the Egyptians as they departed, but they did not have the necessary provisions in order to survive in the wilderness. This is by divine design. God aims to teach His people something very important through this season: **a God who delivers is a God who will provide.**

The people belong to God. They are “His” as Pastor Nate showed you last week. The consecration of the firstborn, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and especially the presence of God in the cloud and the pillar of fire are meant to demonstrate that Israel belongs to God. They are His precious possession. God did not deliver them in order to abandon them. He did not redeem them only to desert them. God is going to provide.

However, this is not an easy lesson to learn. Even though Israel has just witnessed the greatest deliverance in human history, they will still struggle with fear, panic, and a shaky faith. The dust of the Exodus hasn’t even settled yet, and Israel will face a huge test at the bank of the Red Sea. Can God be trusted? Will he really take care of us? Is He really going to help us? Was the Exodus an anomaly? Will God really provide?

My guess is that you can relate to those thoughts, can’t you? I know that I can. You see, even though God has proven Himself to be faithful over and over again, and even though God has done things in my life that seem nearly miraculous, it is still very easy to panic when things look bleak or difficult. There are times when I need to be reminded “...*fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.*”

So let’s look at the story of the Red Sea deliverance and see what we can learn about Israel, about ourselves and, most importantly, about God.

1. God is in control (vv. 1-4)

The first lesson we see in this text is the simple but important fact that Israel’s steps are being ordered by the Lord. There are no mistakes. There are no coincidences. Everything – even the difficult things – is part of God’s plan. God is orchestrating the events of their lives to serve a divinely designed purpose.

Chapter 13 left Israel “*on the edge of the wilderness*” (13:20) with the presence of God mediated through a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. But in chapter 14 we see that God redirect their path. They are told to “*turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea*” (14:2). Now we are not sure about the exact location of these areas. There is a variety of opinion about this, and even the specific location of the Red Sea crossing. The reality is that no one can identify these things with certainty.

However, what we do know with certainty is that God is the one who directed the specific place where Israel was to camp. If you look ahead to verse three, you will see that this location would have sent a message that Israel was lost and that they were a bit trapped. The spot of the camp communicated that “the wilderness has shut them in.” I wonder if as Israel was setting up their

camp, if a few of the more militarily-minded said, "You know, this is not a great spot to be. We have the wilderness on one side, the Red Sea on the other, and if we anything happens we will only have one way out."

What I find very interesting and helpful here is the fact that God had multiple goals with the choice of this location. First, He knows that word will get back to Pharaoh that Israel's journey appears to have taken a misstep. Secondly, this location will provide the context for what comes next – the second greatest deliverance of God's people. And third, the ultimate end-game is for God to glorify Himself.

"And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." And they did so." (Exodus 14:4, ESV)

Do you see how all of this converges in the simple choice of where Israel is to set their camp? This location will become the nexus of Israel's faith, Egypt's defeat, and God's glory. We can see the now when we look at the situation through the lens of biblical history, but at the time and in the moment the choice of this location must have seemed misguided or even a mistake.

Now I'm not suggesting that wisdom has no role in God's will and His purposes. In another situation God could have revealed His will through the wise counsel of someone who said, "I don't think this is a good place to camp." I'm not suggesting some sort of cavalier attitude that you can be reckless, foolish, or thoughtless while hoping that God will bail you out. But it is also important to know that there are many situations in life where the plan is not very clear or even a bit scary. However, a few years from now you will be able to look back at your life and you'll be able to see the hand of God in it all. But right now the circumstance of life can seem pretty scary.

Do you know what is comforting about Exodus 14? It is really helpful to know that even the hard places have divine purposes behind them. In other words, God is always orchestrating the events of our lives, even putting us in situations which are going to be difficult or even scary. And while we may never fully understand all the reasons behind the circumstances of our lives, we can certainly take comfort in the fact that nothing – even the trials of life – are out of God's control. You may not understand why God has you where you are right now, and it may be frightening. But even though you are not in control, you can rest knowing that God is. I have often taken comfort from this thought: "God, I don't know how this fits into Your plan for my life, but I'm going to rest in the fact that You are in control of what is going on right now. This fits Your purposes for me somehow."

2. Do not panic (vv. 5-12)

The second thing that emerges in this text is the way in which Israel so quickly embraces a heart of fear and panic. This will be a pattern we will see repeated throughout our study of Exodus. When difficulties come, they are quick to jump to an unhelpful and even sinful mentality. Fear can quickly compromise faith, even though you know better and even though you've seen what God can do.

In Israel's defense, the situation that they confront is not good. Verses 5-9 tell us that Pharaoh regretted letting Israel go, and therefore he summoned his army to bring the people of God back. Verses 6-7 provide a summary of what happened:

"So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them." (Exodus 14:6-7, ESV)

Now you and I don't have any emotional reaction to the word "chariot," but if you were a person in the Ancient Near East during the time of the Exodus, you surely would. The chariot was a significant military weapon, and the Egyptians had a well-developed chariot army. The flat terrain allowed a soldier to travel very quickly while maintaining an active fighting position. So the force coming after Israel is a formidable army with enormous military might. Verse seven tells us that there were 600 hundred chosen chariots and *"all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them."* This was a large fighting force, and it was understandably intimidating.

But verse eight reminds us that God is working behind the scenes. Once again we see that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. His pursuit of Israel to the bank of the Red Sea was a symptom of his rebellion against the God of Israel. So this military force with all of its earthly might is still being orchestrated by God's command.

All of this is to set up the context for what comes next. The focus of the text shifts from Pharaoh to the emotional response that happens in the heart of the people of God. Verse ten tells us what happened:

"When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD." (Exodus 14:10, ESV)

Note this pattern: 1) they saw, 2) they feared, and 3) they cried out to the Lord. Now the use of the word "cried" here has to be by design. When we started our study of Exodus we discovered an important verse in Exodus 2 which said:

"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." (Exodus 2:23-25, ESV)

This verse serves as the signature text for the book of Exodus. This book is about God's response to the cry of His people. But this book is also about the way God's people forget how responsive God has been in their lives. You see, even though Israel has just watched Egypt be totally humiliated through the Ten Plagues, they quickly fall into a panic.

What they saw with their eyes caused fear in their hearts. And no matter how great or how near the deliverance of God was in their lives, they were prone to despair. Even though God was working behind the scenes, even though God had proven Himself to be trustworthy, and even

though He had fulfilled every one of His promises, what they saw was powerful enough to trump all of that.

Israel's fear quickly becomes an irrational blame-game. They turn on Moses, and they say things that seem ridiculous. However, this is what fearful panic will do. It will tempt you to lose your emotional and spiritual moorings. Verses eleven and twelve give us three sarcastic questions and a summary of what is happening in their soul:

1. "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?"
2. "What have you done in bringing us out of Egypt?"
3. "Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'?"

These are not questions. They are panicked statements. "We're going to die!" "You have killed us!" "We told you this would happen!" Faced with the looming threat of Pharaoh's army, any memory of the God's prior victory is gone. It can evaporate that fast!

But the reason they are saying all of this is because of what is written in the last part of verse twelve: *"For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."* This is a loaded statement because the confrontation between God and Pharaoh regularly revolved around the issue of whom Israel should serve. In Exodus 4:23, God said to Pharaoh *"Let my son go that he may serve me..."* Therefore, the people are suggesting that serving God is going to lead to their death, and it would be better to serve Pharaoh.

Don't miss the implications of that statement because it is what often happens when what you see leads to fear which leads to panic. Being afraid is one thing, but there are times when fear can cross a line, and I think we see it here. The circumstances of the moment do not look good, but it is important to learn from Israel's failure. There is a reason why this is recorded in the Bible; it is to remind us that God is worthy to be trusted.

I'm sure that you have times in your life when it is really tempting to give in to fearful panic. I've faced seasons and situations like that for sure. In those moments I find it helpful to do a few things:

1. I remind my soul that just because I feel something doesn't make it true. The older I get, the less I trust my feelings or emotions. I try to remind myself that I've been here before and "freaking-out" isn't helpful. In fact, it can be sinful.
2. I rehearse what God has done. This begins with rehearsing the Gospel – the greatest moment of deliverance in my life. But it also involves rehearsing the ways God has taken care of me in the past. My journal records many lists of the ways God has answered prayer, but those lists are there because I need to be reminded about what God has done.
3. I choose, by faith, to believe that God has purposes for me beyond what I can see. And while the circumstances may not be easy, they are always for my good.

So I try, God helping me, to move beyond what I "see" and "feel" to what I "believe." I try to not let my eyes direct my emotions or my emotions to direct my heart. And that leads us to the third lesson from this text.

3. Live by faith (vv. 13-14)

Exodus 14:13 is one of my most favorite verses in the Bible. It was an anchor text to me in 1996 when I was being considered for the pastorate of my last church. I was twenty-five years old, there were lots of emotions, the twins had just been born, and there were lots of reasons to fear. But this verse was one I went back to over and over.

“And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”” (Exodus 14:13–14, ESV)

Moses issues a clarion call for faith in the midst of fear and panic. The charge here is for the people of God to replace their despairing perspective with firm trust in the Lord. Therefore, Moses tells them to do three things:

1. **“Fear not”** – I find it enormously helpful that Moses didn’t focus on the ridiculous things the people said. Instead, He dealt with the core issue – fear. He confronted the root issue.
2. **“Stand firm”** – The idea here is for the people to stay right where they are. In other words, they are between the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army. And even though it is scary, they are right where they should be. They have perfect seats for what God is going to do.
3. **“See the salvation of the Lord”** – Their eyesight had led them into fear, but Moses calls them to wait on the Lord because they are going to see something even greater. They are going to see the way the Lord will deliver His people.

Israel is looking at the armies of Egypt as a serious threat to their safety. But Moses hints at the fact that they are about to witness the destruction of this military threat. God is giving them a gift. He is providing the opportunity to witness the final defeat and humiliation of the Egyptian army.

I love verse 14: *“The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be silent.”* What a statement and what a lesson to learn! The story-line of Exodus and the entire message of the Bible is that God is the one who delivers His people. In other word, God is the one who fights for us. The amazing story of the Bible is that God rescues people who could not rescue themselves. Against impossible odds and a situation that looks hopeless, God intervenes.

We see that in Exodus, but it is most clearly displayed in the cross. The Bible paints a dark and hopeless picture of the condition of humanity. We are unable to save ourselves from ourselves. We are powerless to change our spiritual condition until God rescued us. Colossians 2:13-15 links our dead condition, God’s deliverance, and the statement those things make:

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” (Colossians 2:13–15, ESV)

So the hope of the gospel is that God is able to fight my battle. And what is my role? My role is to receive His work and trust in Him. My role is to put my hope in God's ability to be God! That begins at conversion, but it extends into every arena of life.

It is the hope of Romans 8:31-32.

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32, ESV)

Exodus 14 and Romans 8 are in the Bible in order to help us when what we see leads to panic – which can tempt us to become weak in our faith. God call us trust Him. He calls us to live by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

God is going to glorify Himself through the destruction of the Egyptian army, but He is also going to glorify Himself through His worthiness to be trusted. God is declaring His power and His grace to the world through this moment.

4. Watch God move (vv. 15-31)

What follows in the remaining section of Exodus 14 is the amazing deliverance of God's people through the parting of the Red Sea. It is remarkable to note here that the deliverance of Israel was going to come by God creating a path through the very thing that they thought was an impossible barrier. Verses 15-18 show us that the dividing of the Red Sea will simultaneously be a means of deliverance for Israel and judgment for Egypt.

But before the Red Sea is divided, God's presence moved in a protective position between the army of Egypt and the people of God. The movement of the cloud is a foreshadowing of the many times when God will stand between His people and their destruction. God's deliverance often involves Him standing in the gap.

Moses did as he was commanded, stretching out his hand over the sea, and God miraculously drove back the sea and divided the waters. Can you imagine the scene in verse 22?

"And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left." (Exodus 14:22, ESV)

With that one verse, we see the beautiful deliverance of God. The people of Israel walk through the Red Sea by a providentially appointed path, while at the same time God protects them by preventing the Egyptian army from pursuing them.

Verses 23-25 tell us what happened next:

"The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their

chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians." (Exodus 14:23–25, ESV)

The Egyptians sense that they are in danger and that, once again, the Lord is working on Israel's behalf. And the scene ends with a definitive difference between Egypt and Israel:

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained." (Exodus 14:26–28, ESV)

And in that signature moment, God made a statement:

"But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore." (Exodus 14:29–30, ESV)

God saved His people yet again. Once again He showed His power and might. Once again God showed that He is worthy to be trusted.

"Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses." (Exodus 14:31, ESV)

This moment will not last forever in Israel's heart. They will be tested in trusting the Lord again. And they will struggle to not give in to what they see and what they feel – just like you and me.

But the Red Sea crossing will become a defining moment in the history of Israel – almost as significant as the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is in the New Testament. This moment, like the cross, is meant for God's people to be reminded that in the midst of their greatest fears, **the God who delivers is the God who provides.**

So don't fear. Stand still. And see the salvation of the Lord. Again!

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