



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 28, 2009
Released on Wednesday, June 24, 2009**

“Finding and Giving Protection”

Lesson Text: Exodus 14:15–25, 30

Background Scripture: Exodus 13:17–14:30

Devotional Reading: Exodus 15:1–13

Exodus 14:15–25, 30

15 And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:

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.

17 And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten me honor upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

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:

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.

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.

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.

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.

24 And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians,

25 And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

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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.

LESSON AIMS:

Facts: to recall what God did for Israel when they were pursued by the Egyptians to the Red Sea.

Principle: to realize that God can intervene to deliver His people when they are helpless.

Application: to believe that when God begins a good work, He will finish it (Philippians 1:6).

INTRODUCTION:

Quicksand is not the dangerous natural threat that Hollywood makes it out to be. It simply is a mixture of a certain ratio of water to sand, possible anywhere in the world. Quicksand seldom accumulates more than a few feet deep. In extreme situations, like those caused by earthquakes or underground streams, quicksand may be deep enough to engulf an adult's body. However, since the human body can float in water, it floats even more easily amidst a mixture of water and sand, which is far denser. The key to survival is not panicking. One must relax, maintain composure, and allow the body to rise to the surface through small subtle movements.

Christians face many quicksands throughout life. These are moments when we feel helplessly trapped with no discernible end in sight. In a flash we imagine the worst. So we panic.

Panic may result in rash decisions, like throwing money we do not have at a problem in order to buy our way out of it. The result also may be excessive worrying, complaining, or even gossiping if we think someone else is to blame. We suppose that if we scramble fast enough we can reverse the problem, make it disappear entirely, or at least minimize the damage.

In such instances it is easy to forget that God is in control. We may forget that no problem we face is too big for Him. We may forget that He never calls His people to make rash or unholy decisions to right a perceived wrong. He calls us, instead, to be still, wait on Him, and trust that He will deliver us.

In today's lesson, the Israelites saw themselves to be sinking fast. They were trapped between Pharaoh's army and a large body of water, with no discernible way out. Their instinct was to panic. But God beckoned them to be still and to watch His promised deliverance.

LESSON BACKGROUND:

Time: about 1445 B.C.

Place: Egypt

By the time of today's lesson, God had showed His power over the mighty Egyptian empire in a sequence of stunning plagues. As a result, Pharaoh practically begged Moses to take the Israelites and leave (Exodus 12:31, 32). On top of this, the Egyptians themselves blessed the Israelites with parting gifts of clothing and precious metals (12:35, 36).

Though God triumphed decisively, He was not finished teaching a lesson to both Israel and Egypt. As the people approached the Red Sea, God called them to turn back a bit in order to provoke Pharaoh to pursue them (Exodus 14:1-4). That is exactly what happened. The Israelites turned, Pharaoh assumed they were confused and vulnerable, and he gathered his army to march after them. This was all part of the plan God disclosed to the Israelites.

But as the Egyptians drew near, the Israelites panicked. They cried out to Moses and God that it would have been better to remain slaves in Egypt than to be killed in the desert (Exodus 14:10-12). Moses tried to encourage the people, apparently to no avail.

So God intervened. The idea was both to assure the Israelites of His protection and to prove to them (again) that He alone could deliver them. It did not matter how deeply they thought themselves sinking in the quicksand of adversity; God was on their side.

THE LORD'S PLAN (Exodus 14:15-18)

1. What dilemma did the Israelites face immediately after leaving Egypt (Exodus 14:15)?

Led by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day (Exod. 13:21), Israel made their way out of Egypt and headed toward Mount Sinai. The people of Israel were finally free; their freedom, however, was not yet complete. The Egyptians, realizing that all their free labor had now departed, "turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" (14:5).

Before long, Pharaoh dispatched his army to overtake the fleeing slaves as they encamped near the Red Sea. Seeing the Egyptian army in hot pursuit, the Israelites cried out to Moses, sarcastically suggesting that a shortage of graves in Egypt had impelled him to drag them out there to die in the desert. Thus began a long history of murmuring among the Israelites as they journeyed in the wilderness.

Moses, however, assured the people of Israel, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever" (Exod. 14:13). "Salvation is used here in its literal sense of saving life, or of victory instead of defeat in war (cf. 1 Sam. 14:45). As the Old Testament moves on, 'salvation' will gain a more spiritual and less material sense (Ps. 51:12), although the Hebrew was not conscious of any sharp contrast between the two" (Cole, *Exodus*, InterVarsity).

2. How did God respond to Israel's cries of doubt and panic?

God hears Israel's desperate pleas, but with little sympathy. What more does He have to do to show them that Pharaoh is no match for Him? He has squashed Egyptian power through dramatic signs and plagues. He has led the Israelites out of Egypt with a supernatural flame and cloud (Exodus 13:21, 22). He has just used them to lure Pharaoh into a trap. But as the trap begins to work, the Israelites still doubt and panic.

The fact that God asks Moses *Wherefore criest thou unto me?* may indicate that Moses shares in the doubt and panic. God has the cure: *go forward* (Exodus 14:15). There is a time to pray and a time for action. Knowing the right time for each is important. It's now time for Moses and the Israelites to stop crying out to God. It's time to get moving!

3. What object did Moses use in dividing the Red Sea? (v. 16)

God commanded the Israelites to go forward, but with the Egyptians closing in behind them and the Red Sea before them, this seemed an impossible command. Moses was then directed to lift his staff and stretch it over the sea. It is not clear whether this was the staff used in previous miraculous signs. Even so, the power was not in the staff but in the Lord!

In previous encounters with Pharaoh, God caused the staff of Aaron to become a serpent (Exodus 7:10); turned water into blood (7:20); drew frogs out of various waters (8:5, 6); made lice of the earth's dust (8:17); brought thunder, hail, and fire from Heaven (9:23); and called on the east wind to blow in a horde of locusts (10:13). Now God calls on Moses with his staff (*rod*) to work one of the most memorable miracles in Israel's history: the parting of the Red Sea.

4. What resources are available to Christians when circumstances start to turn bad or when the situation seems impossible?

We do not have a magic rod to take obstacles out of our way—and neither did Moses! What we have is the power of God. We draw on this power through prayer, relying on strength from the Holy Spirit, finding support from fellow Christians, visualizing how this struggle can lead to spiritual strength and/or an effective witness, sharing in the suffering of Christ, and remembering the final goal—Heaven.

When we do not use these assets, there is a danger that disappointment will turn to disillusionment. Despair can then follow. Discuss with the students how they have found their spiritual resources helpful during difficult times.

5. What are some debatable issues regarding the Red Sea crossing?

The location where Israel crossed the Red Sea cannot be precisely determined by the details given in Exodus. Since the Hebrew for "Red Sea" (*yam suph*) can be translated "Sea of Reeds," some have conjectured that the Israelites actually crossed one of the many shallow, marshy lakes that were in the region. The fact that the Egyptians drowned pursuing Israel does not fit that scenario, though. Also, the fact that *yam suph* is later applied to the Gulf of Aqaba, where Solomon's ships docked, indicates a significantly deep body of water (cf. 1 Kings 9:26).

The identity of this sea is not given in this verse, but it is clearly stated in Exodus 15:4 as the Red Sea. It is not until the third century B.C. that a Greek version of the Old Testament translates this as Red Sea. This leads some students to speculate that it is not the Red Sea as we know it today that is parted. However, Acts 7:36 and Hebrews 11:29 follow the Greek translation and identify this body of water as the Red Sea. Furthermore, the details of two walls of water in Exodus 14:22 hardly fit any body of water in the area other than the Red Sea. Therefore the Red Sea is the same as the Sea of Reeds.

6. What was another purpose of God, besides delivering Israel, in the events at the Red Sea? (vs. 17-18)

As God had hardened Pharaoh's heart during the visitation of the plagues (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:27), so now the entire Egyptian host would experience a similar hardening (cf. Rom. 9:18). Instead of simply letting Israel leave for good, the commanders pursued the Hebrews into the midst of the sea. This would prove to be a fatal mistake for Pharaoh's forces. Once the Egyptians were in the sea, the waters would come crashing down upon them with not a single one escaping (Exod. 14:27-28).

These actions were not designed merely to chastise Pharaoh for his recalcitrance, however. The ultimate purpose was to bring glory to God. "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Rom. 9:17; cf. Exod. 9:16). In both good events and bad we need to ask, "How is God glorified through these things?"

Even in the final moments of their lives, the pursuing Egyptians would be brought to the realization that the God of Israel was the only true deity. Once word reached Egypt concerning what had become of their army, all of the Egyptians would be brought to a similar conclusion. What is more, forty years later, the miracle at the Red Sea would still be remembered and cause a harlot named Rahab to cast her lot with Israel (Josh. 2:8-13).

THE LORD'S PROTECTION (Exodus 14:19-20)

7. Who is the Angel of God? (v. 19)

Although the Egyptians were closing in on Israel fast, God was going to prevent them from catching up with the escaped slaves too soon. He would give Israel time to cross the Red Sea before the pursuing Egyptians could engage them in battle. While the fleeing slaves were formidable in number, they were not trained for warfare and were ill prepared to defend against such an armed foe. Considering their propensity to complain (Exod. 14:11-12) and their desire to return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4), Israel would have likely surrendered to the Egyptians and willingly returned to bondage.

Concerning the "angel of God" (Exod. 14:19) or the "angel of the Lord" (3:2), there are a variety of opinions. Sometimes in Scripture the Angel of the Lord is indistinguishable from the Lord Himself (Exod. 3:2-4; cf. Gen. 22:11-12). Since Paul identified Christ as the one who was with Israel in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:4), some believe that this Angel was the preincarnate Son of God. Other texts seem to distinguish the Angel of God from the Lord Himself (Gen. 24:7). Since the phrase "angel of God" in Exodus 14:19 uses the general

term for God instead of the uniquely Israelite term "YHWH" (LORD), Cole suggests that the phrase should be translated as 'divine messenger.'

Whatever the case, the Angel of God was going to be with Israel and aid in their deliverance. Instead of leading them, the Angel moved and went behind the people of Israel, standing between them and their foes.

8. How did the pillar of cloud aid Israel in their deliverance? (v. 20)

Identified with the Angel of God was the pillar of cloud that now came between Israel and the Egyptians. In this new location, the cloud takes on a new purpose: protection. *The Egyptians* are gaining ground on the Israelites. The relocated pillar provides light for the Israelites while at the same time covering the Egyptians with a *cloud of darkness*. A cloud is often a symbol of God's presence in Scripture.

"The angel shifted from guide to guardian! All through that night the pillar of cloud, which also had moved to the rear to be between the two camps, brought such darkness that military advance was impossible for the Egyptians" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

At the same time the cloud was slowing down the Egyptians, it "gave light by night" (Exod. 14:20) to the escaping Israelites. This being so, the Egyptians were unable to catch up in spite of having fast-moving chariots (v. 17).

THE LORD'S POWER (Exodus 14:21-25, 30)

9. What natural force did God use to provide a path through the sea? (vs. 21-22)

As God had commanded (v. 16), Moses stretched out his staff over the sea. As he did, God sent a strong east wind all night to push the waters back, providing a pathway to the other side (v. 21). In speaking of this event, the psalmist suggested that a violent storm occurred when they crossed the sea: "The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound. . . The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook" (Psalm 77:17-18).

As with the plagues visited upon Egypt, God used natural forces to perform His will. While strong winds can cause the waters of an ocean or a lake to churn, winds do not provide a pathway as depicted here. This was divine intervention, not merely Israel being at the right place at the right time.

It is impossible to ascertain the depth of the waters through which they traversed. Suffice it to say, it was of such depth that the water appeared as a wall on either side of the escaping Hebrews. It was also of sufficient depth that the pursuing Egyptians sank in the returning waters and were drowned (Exod. 15:4-5).

10. What happened to the Egyptian chariots when they tried to follow Israel? (vs. 23-25)

The rescue of Israel at the Red Sea occurred on the day after the Egyptians had been slowed down because of the pillar of cloud standing between them and the Hebrews. While the Scriptures do not give us the total number of slaves who left Egypt, the men numbered 600,000 (Exod. 12:37), not including women and children. Some estimate that the total number of those leaving Egypt was about two million. Even if the number was smaller, it would have taken considerable time for all the people and their livestock to cross the Red Sea.

Presumably, as the last Israelites were stepping out of the Red Sea to safety, the entire Egyptian army was completely surrounded by the walls of water as they went down into the Red Sea in hot pursuit of the Hebrews. Before the Lord allowed the walls of water to come crashing down upon them, He threw them into confusion. This took place just as night was fading and the light of a new day was dawning. Indeed, the darkness of oppression was finally ending, and a new day was beginning in God's plan for Israel.

Realizing that their hopes of military success were quickly fading, "the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them" (Exod. 14:25).

The Egyptians do not write off their collective misfortune to fate or to the military skill of the Israelites. They confess, at last, that Israel's God is fighting *for them*, just as Moses said He would (Exodus 14:14). They acknowledge God's existence, recognize His authority, and fear His power. Their only recourse is to attempt to *flee*.

Verses 26–28 (not in today's text) record that Moses once again stretches out his hand, and the waters collapse over the *Egyptians*. All drown. Though the Egyptians' fate had been sealed previously at Mount Sinai and during the plagues on Egyptian soil, the conflict ends decisively in the midst of the Red Sea.

With the Egyptian army's chariots stuck in the sand, God commanded Moses to stretch forth his hand over the sea once again (v. 26). As he did, "the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them" (v. 28). That day the Lord decisively and dramatically saved Israel from her enemies. This was the culmination of events that began when Moses implored Pharaoh to let the people go. So memorable was this experience that it is alluded to centuries later (Neh. 9:11; Ps. 106:7-12; Isa. 10:26; Heb. 11:29).

11. How did Israel respond to the destruction of the Egyptian army?

As a result of this great victory over their adversaries, both Moses and his sister, Miriam, led the people in a song of praise and in exuberant worship for their salvation (Exod. 15:1-21). Similarly, our redemption in Christ should call forth both words and songs of praise (cf. Heb. 13:15; Rev. 5:13).

As Paul reflected on the events in Israel's rescue from bondage, he saw them as typical of our experience in both conversion and Christian living (1 Cor. 10:1-11). He wrote, "All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (vs. 1-2).

Israel put their faith in Moses when they followed him out of Egypt. They further submitted to his leadership by going into the Red Sea at his command (Exod. 14:31). Similarly, those who trust in and receive Christ as Saviour (Acts 16:31) willingly submit to His lordship in baptism (v. 33). However, we are not baptized into Moses; rather, we are "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

PRACTICAL POINTS:

- 1.** When things seem impossible, that is often the time to step out in faith (Exodus 14:15-16).
- 2.** Our most vexing circumstances are an opportunity for God to show His power most spectacularly (vs. 17-20).
- 3.** Faith in God can take us places we never imagined it was possible to go (vs. 21-22).
- 4.** What looks like a great opportunity to evildoers may be the very snare that leads them into judgment (vs. 23-25).
- 5.** What results in deliverance for God's people can become the instrument of judgment for His enemies (v. 30).

CONCLUSION:

We sometimes find ourselves helplessly enslaved by terrible situations, don't we? Our enslavement may not be like the physical slavery of the Israelites. Many are bound, instead, by life-sapping addictions such as substance abuse, gambling, and Internet pornography.

Other folks are held in captivity by less acknowledged but equally destructive habits such as gossiping, overeating, or manipulating others into getting one's own way. Still others are hemmed in by oppressive people who make life miserable. These can be overbearing bosses, greedy landlords, devious coworkers, or controlling parents.

In some cases it is appropriate to stop and cry out to God. There may also be "Red Sea moments" when God wants us to go forward in faith. The one thing we must not do is try to go forward only in our own strength.

Whether or not we experience earthly deliverance in any given situation, we know that eternal deliverance is certain. We must follow Israel's example (the good parts, that is) and walk forward in faith.

PRAYER:

Mighty God, Who delivered Israel from Egypt and Who raised Jesus from the dead, we call on You to increase our faith. We believe in Your power, but we often convince ourselves to rely only on our own strength. Teach us to trust You always and to trust in You alone. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:

Trust God to deliver you.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Next week's lesson is "Accepting God's Rules for Living." The Ten Commandments have long been the basis for law systems in the Western world. It is interesting that the Bible has two sources for them – Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21. Note that the first four commandments have to do with God and the latter six with people. Study Deuteronomy 5:1-27.

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