

Crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17-14:31)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from Previous Lessons

- a. The Hebrews have been in Egypt for 400 years, now suffering under the cruel oppression of Pharaoh. They have cried out to the Lord for deliverance, and the Lord has sent Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and back to Canaan, the land promised to Abraham's descendants.
- b. Moses and Aaron announce ten plagues in succession that come upon Egypt, to persuade Pharaoh to release the Hebrews from their bondage.
- c. In the previous lesson we discussed the final plague: the death of the firstborn male from every Egyptian household, which takes place at midnight. This was to be commemorated by the Jews each year in the Passover observance.
- d. We discussed how the details of the Passover (selecting one lamb without blemish for each household, sacrificing it at twilight on the 14th day of the month, blood of the lamb, roasting it over fire, eating in haste and with bitter herbs, etc.) foreshadowed the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus.
- e. With the death of the firstborn there is wailing throughout Egypt, and Pharaoh now demands that the Jews depart, taking their livestock with them. The Jews have asked their Egyptian neighbors for articles of gold, silver and clothing upon their departure, and thus "plunder the Egyptians".

II. The Journey Out of Egypt Begins

- a. Read **Exodus 13:17-22**.
- b. The unusual route out of Egypt
 - i. They don't take the normal, shorter route to depart Egypt, "by the way of the land of the Philistines". Instead they take a more southerly route, and head toward the Red Sea.
 - ii. The Lord says the reason for not going the normal way is "perhaps the people will change their minds when they see war", and will turn back.
 1. Seeking to learn more about ancient Egypt in connection with teaching this series, I have been reading James K. Hoffmeier's *Israel in Egypt*. The author was an Egyptologist with first-hand experience at relevant archaeological dig sites. He also is a Christian by faith, and one who has respect for the Biblical account of the exodus story.

2. In the book, Hoffmeier emphasizes that the topography of ancient Egypt was in many places quite a bit different than what we see today.
 - a. We should keep that in mind whenever we see maps suggesting possible Exodus departure routes. The proposed routes are typically superimposed over maps of Egypt that have been based on *recent* satellite imagery.
3. Things we have learned about Egyptian topography of this area within the past 100 years include:
 - a. The northern Egyptian coastline with the Mediterranean Sea was different in ancient (Biblical) times.
 - b. Along eastern frontier of Egypt, between Egypt proper and the Sinai peninsula, was a very large canal (70 meters wide) discovered in the early 1970's. This was wider than the original Suez Canal that the French built in 1875.
 - c. To the north of that was the main north road heading out of Egypt, running on high ground with marshes or lakes on either side. This route was guarded by a network of forts, including one massive fort.
 - d. (Source: James Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, Oxford University Press; chapters 7 & 8)
- iii. It makes sense that God would not have them take the "way of the Philistines" northern route out of Egypt.
 1. They would encounter the Egyptian military at major forts on that route, and would be essentially trapped (and would want to turn back).
 2. Pharaoh's army could pursue them on land and overtake them (as opposed to God's plan to destroy Pharaoh's army by drowning them in the Red Sea).
 3. They were actually heading to Mt. Sinai first, which is to the south, anyway. God had told Moses originally that he would bring the people to worship Him at Sinai. (**Exodus 3:12**)

- c. They take the *bones of Joseph* with them.
 - i. **Question:** Where else in Scripture does it speak about the bones of Joseph?
 - 1. We find these bones first discussed in the closing words of Genesis. Read **Genesis 50:24-26**
 - a. Before Joseph died, he put the Israelites under oath that when *their descendants return to Canaan*, they must take his bones with them.
 - b. Two things to note in this passage.
 - i. Joseph was a prophet here; he knew God would visit His people in the future and lead them back to their promised homeland.
 - ii. *Joseph cared* about where his bones would be deposited.
 - 1. **Question:** *Why was this so important to Joseph, and why is this mentioned so many times in Scripture?*
 - c. His body was embalmed after he died; and the story of the oath was passed on and taken seriously for five generations. This was passed on from father-to-son, generation after generation, for hundreds of years.
 - i. Consider that Joseph's preserved remains stood within the Isrealite community as an ever-present *reminder* to the people that *they would be delivered* out of Egypt.
 - 2. It speaks of the bones of Joseph in Wisdom of Sirach, in a discussion about honored men from the past.
 - a. "Neither has a man like Joseph been born, the leader of his brothers and the support of his people; and they watched over his bones." (**Wisdom of Sirach 49:15**)
 - 3. Read **Joshua 24:33** from the LXX (corresponds to **Joshua 24:32** in Bibles where Old Testament is based on the Masoretic Text).
 - a. Joseph's remains were buried in Shechem, in the north (in the territory of Manasseh, the oldest son of Joseph).

This is the plot of land purchased by Jacob in **Genesis 33**.

4. The famous bones are also mentioned in the New Testament, in the famous discussion about what it means to have saving faith, in **Hebrews 11**. From that text:
 - a. “Now faith is the substance of things *hoped for*, the evidence of things *not seen*.” (**Hebrews 11:1**, NKJV)
 - b. “*By faith* Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ *concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” (**Hebrews 11:17–19**, NKJV)
 - c. “*By faith* Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, *and gave instructions concerning his bones*.” (**Hebrews 11:22**, NKJV)
 - i. If you were thinking about Joseph, and wanted to come up with the most compelling examples of things that showed *he was living by faith*, would you have thought to mention how he gave instructions concerning his bones?
 1. That would not have been on my “top ten” list, and *likely not on yours*, either!
 2. I think of *so many other things* Joseph did which certainly seem to demonstrate *greater faith in the Lord* than simply “giving instructions regarding his bones”
 - ii. **Question:** Why does it say Joseph gave instructions concerning his bones *by faith*?
 1. If saving faith is confidence in something we *hope for* but cannot yet see, *what was Joseph hoping for* here?
 2. It seems to me that *he was hoping for the same thing Abraham is held up as hoping for: the resurrection of the body, after death*. Why else would he care about where his bones ended up, unless he was anticipating something would happen to them later on?

3. Jesus said, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which *all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth*—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (**John 5:28-29**, NKJV)
 - a. Think about this passage the next time you pass by a cemetery!
4. In **Hebrews 6:1-2** it says that one of the six “elementary principles” of the Christian faith (along with faith, repentance and baptism) is belief in *resurrection of the dead*.
 - a. This refers to the foundational Christian doctrine of the *resurrection of the flesh*. The bodies of the dead will be physically raised from the grave on the Last Day.
5. Paul makes it abundantly clear in **1 Corinthians 15** that our bodies will be physically raised from the grave and transformed.
 - a. “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.” (**1 Corinthians 15:35-38**, NKJV)
 - b. “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” (**1 Corinthians 15:42-43**, NKJV)
 - c. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (**1 Corinthians 15:51-53**, NKJV)
6. I believe that Joseph gave instruction concerning his bones by faith because he believed, as Abraham had reasoned before him, that God could and would raise the dead physically, back

to life. I can see no other reason why he would care so much about the fate of his bones.

- a. Therefore for five generations and beyond, his embalmed remains were a monument to the fact that God would come to deliver his people and bring them back to Canaan; *AND*
- b. that God would raise the bones of the dead back from the grave, on the last day.
 - i. The resurrection of the dead, a cornerstone of the Christian faith, was later confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus, “the firstborn from among the dead”. (**Colossians 1:18** and **Revelation 1:5**)
- d. The pillar of cloud and fire leads them.
 - i. Cloud by day, fire by night; it will lead them for their entire 40-year time in the Wilderness.
 - ii. It appears only *after the Passover Lamb has been slain*.
 - iii. The cloud that led them out is described:
 1. “He led them out with silver and gold, and there was not among their tribes one who was feeble. Egypt was gladdened by their exodus, for fear of them fell upon them. He spread a cloud as a cover for them and a fire to give them light at night.” (**Psalm 104:38-39**, LXX, OSB; designated **Psalm 105:38-39** in Bibles where Old Testament is based on the Masoretic Text)
 2. In **Wisdom of Solmon** it describes this pillar of cloud and fire that led the people.
 - a. “She (*the Wisdom of God, personified*) guided them in a marvelous way and became for them a *shelter by day and a flame of stars by night*.” (**Wisdom of Solomon 10:17**, LXX, OSB)
 - b. “For Your holy ones did not harm those who previously wronged them. So they were thankful and begged for grace for being at variance with them. Therefore you provided a *flaming pillar of fire as a guide* for their unknown journey, and a *harmless sun* for their glorious exile.” (**Wisdom of Solomon 18:2-3**)

III. Egyptians Pursue; Second Thoughts by the Israelites

- a. Read **Exodus 14:1-12**.
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Pharaoh becomes aware that Israelites are “wandering in the land”, and are “closed in” by the desert.
 - ii. His heart is hardened, and he decides to pursue them with his powerful army, chariots, horsemen, cavalry, etc.
 - iii. Israelites see Egyptian army pursuing them, feel trapped and helpless. They are afraid, cry out to the Lord and blame Moses.
 1. They protest, “Didn’t we tell you to leave us alone to serve the Egyptians?” They are convinced they are going to be slaughtered in the desert.
 2. They say, “It would be better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.”

IV. Crossing the Red Sea

- a. Read **Exodus 14:13-31**
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Moses reassures the people that God will save them (somehow). The Lord will fight for them.
 - ii. God gives Moses instruction: lift up your rod; stretch out your hand over the sea.
 1. The Lord sends strong wind all night that drives back the sea.
 - iii. The Angel of the Lord and the pillar of cloud relocate and go behind the Israelites, and then stand between Israel and the Egyptians all night.
 1. The Egyptians are cast in darkness, and do not approach the Israelites all night.
 - iv. The Israelites cross on dry ground, with a wall of water on left and right.
 - v. The Egyptians pursue, but axles of their chariots get stuck. The Egyptian soldiers start to fear the Lord, and want to flee.

- vi. Moses again told to stretch out his hand over the sea; water covers the Egyptians army and they drown.
 - vii. Israel delivered, Egyptian dead bodies line the shore; people fear God and believe Moses.
- c. **Question:** Why did the Lord choose this very *unusual way* to deliver Israel and punish the Egyptians?
- i. One reason: the Lord wanted to provide *the most appropriate punishment* for the Egyptians, in view of their past sins against Israel.
 1. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 18:5-8**.
 2. God punished the Egyptians *by the same means* that they sinned (in their killing the Hebrew babies by casting them into the river). God's justice results in appropriate payback to the Egyptians.
 - a. *First*, turning the water of the river to blood (**Exodus 7:14-25, Wisdom of Solomon 11:5-14**).
 - b. *Second*, by killing the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. (**Exodus 11 & 12:29-30, Wisdom of Solomon 18:10-13**)
 - c. *Third*, by destroying the sons of Egyptians by drowning their army in the water, just as the Egyptians had drowned the male infants of Israel (**Exodus 1:22, Wisdom of Solomon 18:5**)!
 - d. (Keeping in mind that I and many in this class session are from Church of Christ background, where there is very strong emphasis in teaching on baptism, let me throw out a *random question*.) **Question:** What is the *first example* of a baptism (that is explicitly *identified by the name of baptism*) in the Scriptures?
 - i. Some might think of the conversion of the *Ethiopian eunuch* baptized by Philip in **Acts 8:26-39**; or the *3,000 Jewish believers* baptized at Pentecost after Peter preached, in **Acts 2:36-41**.
 - ii. Others might think of the *baptism of Jesus*, or baptisms administered by *John the Baptist*, as found in the four gospels.
 - iii. Actually, the first place that the Greek word for "*baptism*" appears in Scripture is in the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX; the Greek version of the Old Testament generally quoted by Jesus and the apostles). This is

found in the account of Naaman the Syrian, who goes to the prophet Elisha seeking a cure for his leprosy.

1. Naaman is told to be immersed seven times in the Jordan River in order to be healed. (**2 Kings 5**, which is designated **4 Kingdoms 5** in the LXX).
2. It says in the LXX “And Namaan descended and *was baptized* in the Jordan seven times in accordance with the word of Elisha, and his flesh was turned to like the flesh of a small child, and it was clean.” (**4 Kingdoms 5:14**, LXX; designated **2 Kings 5:14** in the MT)
3. This is the first time that the Greek word for the verb “to baptize” (βαπτίζω) is found in the LXX. Note that it is the exact same Greek word used throughout the New Testament when referring to someone being baptized.
4. Early Christian writers saw great significance to us of this early reference to this cleansing that took place through “baptism”.
 - a. Irenaeus (c. 130-200 AD), bishop of the church in Lyons, in modern-day France, wrote:
 - i. “‘And dipped himself,’ says [the Scripture], ‘seven times in Jordan.’ (**2 Kings 5:14**) It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being *baptized*, but [it served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: ‘Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ (**John 3:3-5**)”
 - ii. (Source: Irenaeus, *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus*, chapter 34; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 574)
 - b. Tertullian (c. 160-230 AD), a Christian writer from Carthage in North Africa, wrote:
 - i. “The cleansing of [*Naaman*] the Syrian rather was significant throughout the nations of the world of their own cleansing in Christ their light,

steeped as they were in the stains of the seven deadly sins...

- ii. “Seven times, therefore, as if once for each, did he wash in Jordan; both in order that he might celebrate the atonement of all seven [*sins*]; and because the virtue and fulness of the one baptism was thus solemnly imputed to Christ, alone, who was one day to establish on earth not only a revelation, but also a baptism, endued with bountiful effectiveness.”
- iii. (Source: Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, Book 4, chapter 9; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 356)
- iv. However, Paul points to a *baptism* that took place *even earlier* than that of Naaman!
 - 1. Paul told the Christians in Corinth, “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea; all were *baptized into Moses* in the cloud and in the sea,” (**1 Corinthians 10:1-2**, NKJV)
 - 2. Here Paul says that the Red Sea crossing (with wall of water on each side and the cloud guiding and protecting them) was a “baptism” as well.
 - a. Note that the water depth was over their heads (there was a wall of water on each side as they passed through on dry land). The water was deep enough to drown their Egyptians foes.
 - b. Paul says they were all baptized “in the cloud and the sea”. This reference by Paul points to what Jesus said in **John 3:3-5**, namely that His followers must be spiritually reborn of...
 - i. *water* (= the Sea), and
 - ii. *the Spirit* (= the cloud).
 - c. Passing through the water was *the only way out* of Egypt (= the kingdom of darkness).
 - d. Passing through the water marked the start of a new life, a new journey. However after crossing through the

water they were not yet at their destination (the Promised Land); they still had far to go.

- i. A time of testing followed, which they had to pass through faithfully if they were to reach their ultimate goal of Canaan (as we must faithfully persevere through our own time of testing and trials to attain our goal of heaven).
- e. The forces of the enemy were destroyed in the water.
- v. Some have claimed that Christian baptism was borrowed from earlier practices of other religions; for example, from the Mandaean religion or from pagan mystery-religion initiation rites.
 1. Actually, we can see that Christian baptism goes back *much earlier*, since it is rooted in (and foreshadowed by) the **Exodus** story, *1400 years before Christ!*
 2. The Red Sea crossing out of captivity in Egypt was the first event directly described as a “baptism”, as we have seen, by Paul in **1 Corinthians 10**.
 3. Note that Peter points to the water in Noah’s flood as a type of Christian baptism, in **1 Peter 3:20-21**)

V. Further Thoughts on Crossing of the Red Sea

- a. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – 395 AD) was from a prominent religious family in Cappadocia (part of the Roman Empire, today in eastern Turkey). He became bishop of the small town of Nyssa, and a respected theologian. In his *Life of Moses*, Gregory discussed the significance of the story of Moses, for Christians.
 - i. In some areas Gregory goes beyond what Paul wrote in developing the parallels between the Exodus story and the Christian life. While he is not writing under direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit (as was the apostle Paul), I found many of Gregory’s insights reasonable and interesting. Selections from that work regarding the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, and the pillar of cloud and fire, follow.
 1. “In this crossing the cloud served as guide. Those before us interpreted the cloud well as the grace of the Holy Spirit, who guides toward the Good those who are worthy. Whoever follows him passes through the water, since the Guide makes a way through it for him. In this way he is led safely to freedom, and the one who pursues him to bring him into bondage is destroyed in the water.

2. "No one who hears this should be ignorant of the mystery of the water. He who has gone down into it with the army of the enemy emerges alone, leaving the enemy's army drowning in the water.
3. "For who does not know that the Egyptian army – those horses, chariots and their drivers, archers, slingers, heavily armed soldiers, and the rest of the crowd in the enemies' line of battle – are the various passions of the soul by which man is enslaved? For the undisciplined intellectual drives and the sensual impulses to pleasure, sorrow, and covetousness are indistinguishable from the aforementioned army..."
4. "...So all such things rush into the water with the Israelite who leads the way in the baleful passage. Then as the staff of faith leads on and the cloud provides light, the water gives life to those who find refuge in it but destroys their pursuers.
5. "Moreover, the history teaches us by this what kind of people they should be who come through the water, bringing nothing of the opposing army along as they emerge from the water. For if the enemy came up out of the water with them they would continue in slavery even after the water, since they would have brought up with themselves the tyrant, still alive, whom they did not drown in the deep.
6. "If anyone wishes to clarify the figure, this lays it bare: those who pass through the mystical water in baptism must put to death in the water the whole phalanx of evil – such as covetousness, unbridled desire, rapacious thinking, the passion of conceit and arrogance, wild impulse, wrath, anger, malice, envy and all such things. Since the passions naturally pursue our nature, we must put to death in the water both the base movements of the mind and the acts which issue from them.
7. "Just as unleavened bread was eaten in the mystery of the Pascha (which is the name of the sacrificial victim whose blood prevents the death of the one using it), even so the Law now commands us to eat unleavened bread at the Pascha (unleavened would be unmixed with stale yeast).
8. "The Law gives us to understand by this that no remnant of evil should mix with the subsequent life. Rather we should make a totally new beginning in life after these things, breaking the continuity with evil by a radical change for the better. Thus also he means here that after we have drowned the whole Egyptian person (that is every form of evil) in the saving

baptism we emerge alone, dragging along nothing foreign in our subsequent life. This is what we hear through the history, which says that in the same water the enemy and the friend are distinguished by death and life, the enemy being destroyed and the friend given life.

9. "Many of those who receive the mystical baptism, in ignorance of the commandments of the Law, mix the bad leaven of the old life with the new life. Even after crossing the water they bring along the Egyptian army, which still lives with them in their doings.
 10. "Take for instance the one who became rich by robbery or injustice, or who acquired property through perjury, or lived with a woman in adultery, or undertook any of the other things against life which have been forbidden for the gift of baptism. Does he think that even after his washing he may continue to enjoy those evil things which have become attached to him and yet be freed from the bondage of sin, as though he cannot see that he is under the yoke of harsh masters?
 11. "For uncontrolled passion is a fierce and raging master to the servile reasoning, tormenting it with pleasures as though they were scourges. Covetousness is another such master who provides no relief for the bondsman, but even if the one in bondage should slave in subservience to the commands of the master and acquire for him what he desires, the servant is always driven onto more.
 12. "And all the other things which are performed by evil are so many tyrants and masters. If someone should still serve them, even if he should happen to have passed through the water, according to my thinking he has not at all touched the mystical water whose function is to destroy evil tyrants."
 13. (Source: Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, translated by Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, Paulist Press, 1978; sections 121-129, pp. 82-85)
- ii. This explanation by Gregory of Nyssa helps me to appreciate an often-overlooked aspect of Christian baptism.
1. Many things happen in baptism, including: forgiveness of sins, receiving the Holy Spirit, being buried with Christ, spiritual rebirth, entry into the kingdom of God, becoming part of the church, being clothed with Christ, etc.

2. However, in the “baptism” in the Red Sea we see other important things that take place:
 - a. *liberation from Satan’s kingdom of darkness*, and
 - b. *the destruction of the enslaving forces of evil* in the waters of baptism.
3. Let us always remember that Satan (like Pharaoh) is the great enslaver, and God is the One who wants to liberate us from our bondage to sin and our controlling passions.
4. Also, despite what many churches teach today, as Moses showed us (and Jesus and the apostles later explained), *there is only one way* out of the land of slavery: it involves passing through the waters of baptism.
 - a. Of course we must *also* have faith in Jesus, commit to loving and obeying Him, and repent of our sins.
- b. In closing, let us recall also what Eusebius said in *Proof of the Gospel, Book 3* regarding the **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** prophecy regarding the miracles of Jesus. Eusebius understood from this prophecy that we should expect to see the signs and miracles performed by Jesus both (a) *similar to*, yet also (b) *greater than* those performed by Moses.
 - i. With that in mind, let us consider the unusual way that Moses crossed the water, suspending the normally-operating laws of physics. This also reminds us of a famous, somewhat similar miracle of Jesus.
 1. Moses had a very unusual way of crossing the sea, and even taking others with him. (**Exodus 14:25-31**)
 - a. Moses walked *through the midst of the water* on dry ground, with a wall of water on either side.
 - b. He also brought with him all the Israelites.
 2. Jesus had an *equally unusual, but even more spectacular* way to cross the sea. (**Matthew 14:22-33**)
 - a. Jesus walked *on top of the water*.
 - b. He even brought another (Peter) along, with Him!