

## The Lord Overthrows the Egyptians

Exodus 14:15-31

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus 14. We're in the middle of this chapter. Two weeks ago we began the journey out of Egypt with Israel. It's an exciting story and we've already seen a couple of turns. It begins in Exodus 13 in verse 17 down to verse 22. With great expectation, great excitement the people of God are being led, in God's providential kindness, not by the way of the sea, which would have led them into direct conflict with mighty armies and enemies, but by another way so that God could spare His people the trauma of immediately running into the occupants of the land that He was going to give to them and vest to them, and which He was going to have to literally conquer Himself on their behalf. So, in His kindness He takes them a different way into the desert.

But soon we find that way has its own challenges because when we get to chapter 14 and we look at the first 14 verses of this chapter we find that the Lord actually turns them back a different direction after they have made their way out of Egypt and are making their way toward the way of the wilderness. He turns them back, perhaps in a southeastward direction and He plants them precisely in a situation where, from a military perspective they are utterly hemmed in. If you had been an adjutant, if you had been a lieutenant of some great military commander and he was about to make the move that Moses was making in leading the children of Israel to this spot you surely would have said to him, "Sir we are sitting ducks where you are placing us. We'll be run over by our enemies. We have no place to go. There is a body of water to our back; the watch tower cities of Egypt are in front of us. If the Egyptian army is following us and were to overtake us, we would have absolutely no place to go."

And suddenly in that setting, all of the joy and all of the expectancy is turning to an unraveling sense of doom amongst the people of God, and they begin to grumble and they begin to cry out to the Lord and they begin to complain against Moses. We begin to see just a little glimpse of something that we've seen before, all the way back in Exodus chapter 5 when the people grumbled about how Moses is going about bringing them out of Egypt, and what we will see again later on in the book of Exodus while they are in the wilderness and they began again to doubt God's providence in care for them. They began to grumble against the Lord and they began to grumble against Moses.

And it's in that context that we come to this great passage tonight. Exodus 14 verses 15 through 31 takes us to the climatic scene of God's victory over the enemies of His people, His victory over the Egyptians. From the beginning of this story God has been saying a number of things. He has been saying that He is going to make known who He is. He is going to make it known that He is the Lord both to the Egyptians and to the children of Israel and to the ends of the earth. He is going to make it known in what He does in the Exodus that He is the Lord. He's been making it clear that the heart of Pharaoh is in His hand, that He is the one that hardens Pharaoh's heart. He is the one who controls the destiny of Pharaoh, though Pharaoh may be considered a God in Egypt, he is no match for God the Lord, the God of Israel indeed, the God of all the Heavens and all the Earth. All of these things are going to coalesce in one compact passage. It is as if 430 years of frustration break free in this period of verses at the end of Exodus chapter 14 and God brings forth just a little bit of a glimpse into the display of His power and the display of His judgment and the display of His salvation.

Now, before we come to this passage let me go ahead and outline for you the passage now because my approach is not going to be to focus on different themes necessarily in different sections, but to show you how two overarching themes compound section after section in this part of the book of Exodus. In verses 15 through 18 you'll see the first section of this passage in which the time of redemption comes and God announces to Moses ahead of time what He is going to do, and He actually calls on Moses to call the people to a step of faith and we'll see what that step of faith is in just a few moments. There is the first section in which the time of redemption comes.

Then in verses 19 and 20 we see God Himself establish Himself as a barrier of protection for His people. The Egyptian armies had caught up and God must literally interpose Himself between the enemies of His people and His people in order to protect them.

The third section of this passage you'll find in verses 21 and 22 where the parting of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Red Sea are described.

The fourth section of the passage you'll see in verses 23 through 29. Here, the Egyptians pursue the Israelites into the waters of the Red Sea and are destroyed.

And then finally when you get to verses 30 and 31, Moses recapitulates and summarizes the whole story, and there he emphasizes the divine action of God and the results of that divine action, and the main results of the divine action, God's glory and the display of His grace. Those are going to be the two compounding themes you see in each one of these five sections as we work through it tonight. So, with that as a word of introduction let's turn to Exodus 14 beginning in verse 15 and hear God's word for us.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me?" Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. "And as for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. "And as for ME, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen." And the angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. And the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. And it came about at the morning watch, that the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like 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. And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

Amen. This is God's word may He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for this word, this grand display of the redemption of Your old covenant people, a foreshadowing of a redemption to come in the exodus of our Lord Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. We pray that as we survey it tonight we would do so with the eyes of faith and with hearts of praise.

This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

The circumstances in which, and the methods by which, God delivers His people serve to exalt the glory of His person and manifest the sheer gratuity of His grace. Those two themes, the glory of God and the grace of God to His people echo throughout this passage, and the circumstances in which He delivers His people, and the methods by which He delivers His people all conspire, all serve to exalt the glory of His person and manifest the sheer gratuity of His grace. I want to show you in each of these sections here in Exodus 14 how God gets glory for Himself and how He shows grace to His people.

### **I. God gets glory and shows grace in predicting the future to His people.**

Let's start off in verse 15 through 18. Redemption is now. You've heard of *Apocalypse Now*, well this is redemption now. All the waiting is over. The time has come at last. The climatic battle is beginning. The time of redemption is now, but also the time of faith, and God comes to Moses in verse 15 and says something that I think is unique in all of the Scriptures. It may be the most enigmatic statement found with regard to this subject in all of the scriptures. Notice His words, the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me?" Now, this is an amazing thing. The children of Israel are surrounded by the Egyptians on one side and the sea on the other, and they begin to cry out to God for help. God's response is, "Why are you crying out to Me?" Now, if you had been there and if you had been in a light moment of irreverence you would have been tempted to say, "Ok is there something here that I'm missing? I think this is self evident why I am crying out." But the Lord's response to Moses is, "Moses, tell them to stop crying out to Me and to go forward." You see what God is saying to Moses. God is basically saying to Moses, "Moses, this is no time for prayer. This is time for action because I have already answered the prayer that you're trying to cry out to Me and I'm getting ready to show you how I'm going to answer it. So, your business right now is faith and your business is "Go forward." Now again, this is a little bit enigmatic. Moses says, "Ok, now which way is forward, dear Lord? Is that forward toward the Egyptians, or if that forward into the sea?"

And the Lord, of course, answers the question in the very next verse. In verse 16, He says, "As for you, lift up your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it." And so He commands Moses to divide the sea and He divulges to him in verses 16 that He is going to part the waters and He is going to bring the children of Israel across on dry land. You see what God has done here. In Exodus 14 verses 1 through 14 He has put them in the condition of maximal extremity. They are in the condition of maximum stress. They are in the condition of maximum anxiety and in precisely that situation the time of redemption comes. Even the situation that He puts them in serves to exalt His grace.

And so here in verses 15 through 18 God is going to get glory for Himself and He

is going to show grace to His people by telling them ahead of time what He is about to do to their enemies, to the Egyptians. This is the equivalent of that famed scene from the baseball mythology where the man walks up to the plate, he points to the 410 foot mark way out in center field and motions to the pitcher that he is going to knock the next ball out of the park and then he does it. This is exactly what the Lord does. He says, "Here's what I'm going to do, Moses" and He walks him through it. And He proceeds, one by one by one to do precisely what He says. He is showing the sheer display of His power and in so doing and in so telling ahead of time, and in so predicting, He is getting glory for Himself and showing grace to His people.

Moses serves as a divine instrument, he is to lift up the staff. This again is to emphasize that what is about to happen is not some amazing natural coincidence. This is not some amazing confluence of natural meteorological phenomenon combining to make low tide in salt marshes so that the children of Israel can walk across. You know the old story of the preacher who's preaching along in this passage and the liberal in the crowd begins to heckle him and he says, "Well preacher you're ignorant. You don't understand that this wasn't the Red Sea, these were salt marshes the children of Israel waded across in ankle deep and knee deep water." And the preacher responds to them, "Well praise God. God did an even greater miracle." And the man scratches his head and he says, "What do you mean?" "Well He drowned the entire Egyptian army in knee deep water." There is nothing in this passage to hint of anything of a naturalistic explanation and yet in commentary after commentary there is an attempt to naturally explain what is happening. Moses doesn't expect you to naturally explain it, and he emphasizes that in two ways. One, Moses stretches out his staff in order to produce this, and second of all God sends a divine wind in order to part the waters. In both those ways the action of Moses and God's sovereign control of nature shows us that what is happening here is more than natural, it is supernatural.

God is bringing this about and yet that's so hard for so many to believe. You know the little story of the boy who was in Hebrew school. He was eight or nine and he came home and his mommy said, "Son what did you learn in Hebrew school today?" And like a good little Hebrew boy he began to recite to her what happened and he said, "Well we learned the story of Moses leading the children of Israel across the Red Sea." And she said, "Well son, how did it happen?" and he said, "Well, the Egyptian army came up on the Israelites and right as they were ready to swoop down and destroy the Israelites, the Israeli Air Force came sweeping over and strafed the Egyptians and the Israeli engineers threw down pontoon bridges over the Red Sea and the Israeli army led the children of Israel across the Red Sea." She said, "Son, that's not how the story goes." He says, "I know Mom, but if I told you what the teacher said you'd never believe me." The point of the story is not that there is some sort of a natural explanation for what happens here. The very point of the story is that there is no way to explain what happens here unless God, the sovereign God of Heaven and Earth, who is the

Creator and the providential sustainer and the ruler and the Redeemer is the one who has intervened here in an extraordinary way. There is nothing like the Exodus in all of the Old Testament. Over and over again this is the point to which the psalmist, the prophets point back to as the quintessential Old Testament representation of God coming to the rescue of His people. And it is precisely the extremity of His people and their inability to help themselves in any natural way that serves to do what? To exalt His grace. He's going to give them the law in a few chapters. It is vital that they understand before they receive the law in stone that they understand that the very reason they're receiving that law in stone is because of the grace of God and the very reason that they are the people of God, is because of the grace of God. Not because they were clever, not because there was some amazing natural confluence of events that allowed them to sort of coincidentally escape, but because God Himself had intervened and this passage emphasized this.

In verse 17, once again God shows His sovereignty by emphasizing that He is going to harden the hearts of the Egyptians. This is explicitly emphasized in the second half of verse 17. He even tells you why He's doing this. Why is it that He is going to harden the heart of Pharaoh? Why is He going to draw Pharaoh right into the bowels of the Red Sea? Because He is going to display His glory. He is going to get honor from Pharaoh; He's going to get honor from His army. He's going to get honor from His chariots. He is going to get honor from Egypt. God gets glory for Himself and shows His grace to His people, in this instance, by prediction.

Now, I just want to pause right here and note, if you look at verse 18, "then the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and through his horsemen." That of course means that when God displays His sovereignty over Egypt in judgment then they'll know that He's the Lord. Let me take that down even closer. What does it mean to know that God is the Lord? It means to know that He is sovereign. Now, you see that phrase occurs over and over in the Old Testament and when it's said this way, and "then they shall know that I am the Lord," it may be possible for us English speakers to skirt around the reality that that is an explicit assertion and admission of the sovereignty of God. But there is no way when you are looking at verse 18 that you can skirt around the sovereignty of God. To know that God is the Lord is to know that He is the sovereign one and any diminution of His sovereignty is a failure to know Him as He is. He is the sovereign one.

Now, one last thing about this first section. Here the command to 'go forward' is a command to exercise faith because there is a sea in front of them, and the author of Hebrews knows this and that's why he says in Hebrews 11:29 that "by faith Israel passed through the Red Sea." It's an amazing moment when God says to Moses, "Ok Moses, lead them forward." Moses looks out and there is just a big sea in front of them and God says, "Go forward," and by faith the people of God believed God's word, believed God's sovereignty and they start walking.

## II. God gets glory and shows grace in His protection.

Second section, look at verse 19 and 20. Here God gets glory for Himself and shows grace to His people by His protection. His people are trapped. The Egyptian armies are upon them and so now the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud that had been leading them and guiding them circled around to the back of the camp and plant themselves between the Egyptians and the Israelites, and God Himself becomes the bulwark of His people.

Isn't it interesting the language that's used in verse 19? "The angel of God, which had been going before the camp." Now there is a lot there and we can't cover it. Notice how the angel of God is identified with the pillar of cloud. Now, there are a couple of reasons there. First of all, the children of Israel know the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire are not some sort of inanimate magical objects that are the source of their protection. They are visible representations of the presence of God with His people, but to emphasize that they are the visible representation of the presence of God with His people, the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud are identified here as the angel of God. Now, they are identified as the angel of God at least for this reason: The people of God know that God is not visible, He's a spirit and He has not a body like man, says our *Shorter Catechism*. They learned that in their catechism too. And yet they know that the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud are the manifestation of the one true God who is invisible, and so they identify it as such. The angel of God moves around the camp, it's not just that this inanimate impersonal pillar of fire and pillar of cloud moves around behind them, this is the action of God directly intervening for His people and He places Himself in-between, He interposes Himself in-between them and their enemies. Isn't that a glorious picture of God's protection? Right at your moment of greatest need He is planting Himself right in between you and the enemy of your soul.

But you know, there is a greater enemy that God has interposed for. The enemy of your soul is sin and the consequence of sin is that you deserve the judgment of God. And one day on the cross, God interposed Himself between His judgment and your interest with His son and took and meted out the punishment that you deserved upon His Son so that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. And so we new covenant believers have seen God interpose Himself for us even as God did for the children of Israel. Israel didn't need guidance at this point, they needed protection and God puts Himself in-between His enemies and His people. He provides an impenetrable shield for them and He makes a distinction and protects them.

Can I point to one very interesting thing in verse 20? It's a very hard verse to translate. The best translators struggle at it, but what's clear is that in the manifestation of the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud the children of Israel saw the fire and had light whereas the Egyptians were in darkness. Joshua 24 verse

7 recalls the very fact that the Egyptians were kept in darkness.

Now, there are a couple of things going on there. Notice first of all God once again making a distinction between His people and those who were not His people. His people were in the light; those who were not His people were in the darkness. Secondly, remember that Egypt worshiped Ra the god of the sun, and yet Israel has light and Egypt is in darkness. God is displaying His sovereignty over the gods of Egypt yet again.

### **III. God gets glory and shows grace in leading His people through the sea.**

Now we move to verses 21 and 22, and God shows His sovereignty, He gets glory for Himself and He shows grace to His people by the parting of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Red Sea. So He's shown His glory and shown grace by His prediction in verses 15 through 18, by His protection in verses 19 and 20, and now by this parting of the Red Sea. Remember again as this parting occurs, what happened in Genesis 1? When God was creating the world, what did He do? He separated the sea from the dry land. Now, look at what God is doing in redemption, He is separating the sea, and making dry land for His people to go through. We are seeing a new creation in God's redemption. Moses is deliberately harkening back and asking us to think back on what God did in the creation and He's showing us how in redemption God is at the business of repairing that which was marred in His original creation and bringing about a new creation in the very work of redemption of His people.

So, Moses stretches his hand, and we're told in verse 21 that the Lord sends an east wind. Now, think about that for a minute my friends. Where are the children of Israel? They are on the west bank of the Red Sea. Where does the wind come from? From the east. They have to stand there, how long? Most of the night and watch the sea part from the other side. God demands an exercise of faith, watch it unfold, look over your shoulder, look who's behind you, look who's standing in between and watch Me part the waters from the other side. And then when the time comes, go through. Go through on dry land.

Again, everything in this passage indicated the miraculous nature of it, but it's not instantaneous. It takes how long? Well, we're told, well into the night. Well into the night it is before the Egyptians themselves will attempt to follow the children of Israel into the waters. The language in verse 21 is, "the Lord swept back the sea by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land." So, God shows His glory and He shows His grace through parting the Red Sea.

None of the children of Israel could ever have said that they did something in order to earn their deliverance to get their own deliverance through the Red Sea. God had put them at a point where there was literally nothing that they could contribute to their salvation. They simply had to believe and go.

#### **IV. God gets glory and shows grace to His people by destroying their enemies.**

Fourth, if you look in verses 23 through 28 you'll see God get glory for Himself, and grace to His people by the pursuit of the Egyptians, He's going to destroy the Egyptians. Of course, as soon as the sea is opened and dried, the Egyptians are permitted to resume their pursuit and they pursue Israel right down into the sea. Somewhere between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., that's the morning watch, somewhere between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., the Lord God, we are told, looks down from that pillar of fire and pillar of cloud and He says, "Now I am going to deal with the Egyptians" and He confuses them. We don't know exactly what He did. Did He cause the wheels to fall off? Did He cause them not to work in a regular rotation? Did He cause them to bog down? Whatever the case was, they were not able to drive their chariots. Then He turns to Moses and He says, "Moses bring the water back on them." My friends, do you hear the illusion there to the flood of Noah? The children of Israel spared like Noah and his family, and suddenly the judgment of God upon the Egyptians as the water swallows them and consumes them. God has brought His judgment on the Egyptians.

I want you to notice that as this judgment begins in verse 25, a fulfillment of a prediction that God had made all the way back in Exodus chapter 4 comes to pass. Who are the first people to worship God in the Exodus? The Egyptian charioteers. "Look, turn back for the Lord is fighting for them against us." Those words will basically be the words that Moses and Miriam sing back to God in Exodus 15, but God has ordained the wrath of men to praise Him. So the Egyptian army is the first to sing the praises of the Lord God in the Exodus, because as Psalm 76:10 teaches us, "He makes even the wrath of man to praise Him," and He has shown His glory, and manifested His grace in the pursuit and the destruction of the Egyptians.

Finally in verses 30 and 31, He manifests His glory and He shows His grace by His power. The Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the sea shore, and when Israel saw the great power of the Lord, there are two responses. They fear Him and they believe Him. When you have seen the salvation of the Lord, it always produces holy awe and faith. And so in manifesting His glory, and in showing His grace, God produced a holy fear, a holy awe in His people, and a faith that His word can be trusted. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we can scarce do justice to the glory of Your redeeming work, but we ask O God that we would be eyes of faith, that we would see the salvation of the Lord and praise you for what You have done for us in Jesus Christ, as well as longing to see the earth filled with the knowledge of the sovereign Lord as the waters covered the sea. This we ask in Jesus name.

Amen.

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