

The ten plagues had already demonstrated to the Egyptians and the Israelites that the LORD was superior to Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. However, the LORD had an even greater demonstration of His power in mind when He orchestrated the deliverance of the children of Israel and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army in a single event.

Exodus 13:1-16: The LORD has Moses tell the children of Israel that the firstborn males of Israel, whether it be man or animal, belongs to the LORD. This was because the LORD spared Israel the night He slew the firstborn throughout Egypt (Num. 3:13) and thus He declares that the firstborn of Israel must be redeemed with a lamb. If you wanted to keep unclean animals such as donkeys then you must also redeem it by offering a lamb, otherwise its neck must be broken. Moses also reminds them that the passover must be celebrated every year for a memorial of how the LORD delivered them from bondage and their children are to be taught the importance of the passover.

Exodus 13:17-20: These verses describe how that as the children of Israel began their journey toward the land of Canaan, the LORD did not lead them the short route through the land of the Philistines that bordered the Mediterranean Sea in order to avoid war with the Philistines. Instead, He led them into the wilderness so that they can go to Mt. Sinai to meet with the LORD. Moses also took the bones of Joseph, who had predicted the exodus and had the children of Israel swear to take his bones with them.

Exodus 13

21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: 22 He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, *from before the people.*

These two verses describe the method the LORD used to lead the children of Israel on their journey after leaving Egypt. His presence was manifested as a pillar (or column) of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. The Israelites would break camp and follow this pillar whenever the LORD indicated that it was time to move to the next location. The cloud could easily be seen in the daytime and the fire would illuminate their way when they traveled at night (perhaps to avoid the heat of the day). This pillar was always present and did not cease to lead them until they entered the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

Exodus 14:1-9: The LORD prepares for the final showdown with Pharaoh by purposely doing two things: (1) He leads the Israelites to encamp next to the sea where they will be trapped by the Egyptian army approaching from behind (vs. 1-2); (2) He hardens the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants, causing them to regret allowing the immense slave labor force of Israelites to leave Egypt (vs. 3-5). Pharaoh leads 600 of his best chariots along with horsemen and his army in pursuit of the Israelites with the intention of bringing them back into Egyptian bondage (vs. 6-9). The LORD is orchestrating this showdown in order that He might be honored by defeating Pharaoh and his army and thereby demonstrate to the Egyptians that He is the LORD (v. 4).

Exodus 14

10 And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD.

The children of Israel looked behind them and saw in the distance that Pharaoh and his army were approaching. These people had lived all their lives in bondage to the Egyptians and were easily intimidated by them. They became “sore” (exceedingly) afraid and began to cry out to the LORD for help. However, this was not a cry of faith but of desperation as we see in the next verses. People will often turn to God in times of distress. Church attendance briefly increased in the aftermath of 9/11 but once the fear subsided, the interest in seeking God also subsided. We can see that the Israelites were not sincerely calling on God by how quickly they transitioned to blame and criticism.

11 And they said unto Moses, Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?

The people accuse Moses of wanting to kill them, as if he had to bring them out to the wilderness in order to have enough room to bury the entire population of Israelites. They ask what motivated him to bring them out of Egypt and endanger their lives like this.

12 *Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.*

“Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?” – It’s possible that they may be referring to what they said when their workload was increased following Moses’ initial confrontation with Pharaoh. **Ex. 5:21** “*And they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us.*” They had forgotten (or were ignoring) the fact that bringing them out of Egypt was not Moses’ idea but was the will of the LORD.

“For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness” – The people were looking at the situation with natural eyes and not with eyes of faith in their God. They quickly transitioned from crying out to the LORD to complaining to and blaming Moses. They said that if they were still in Egypt then they would still be in bondage but at least they would be alive.

13 And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, 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.

Moses directs the people’s attention to the LORD, which is where it should already have been. The LORD had demonstrated His power while they were in Egypt with the 10 plagues so they should have been ready to see what the LORD was going to do next. Instead, Moses has to exhort them to not be afraid and watch the LORD bring salvation to them. He declares that the Egyptian army that they fear so much will never be a problem to them again because the LORD will dispose of them.

Verses 14-20: The LORD instructs Moses to stretch out his staff over the Red Sea so that the waters will part and the children of Israel can cross on dry ground. The LORD will then harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue even into the sea so that the LORD can get glory over Pharaoh and his army. The pillar of cloud (the presence of God) then moved between Israel and the Egyptians to hinder the Egyptians and help Israel. It became dark on the Egyptian side to slow them down and gave light on the Israelites' side at night to help them.

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.

When Moses obeyed, the LORD caused a strong east wind to push the sea back, dividing the water and exposing dry land. Critics have suggested that the wind was a natural event and that it merely caused the water to become shallow enough for the Israelites to wade through. Such suggestions are ridiculous since wind strong enough to do that would certainly blow the Israelites and their belongings away. Rather, this wind was a miraculous manifestation of the power of God that caused the sea to divide and create walls of water on either side and exposed dry ground to make it easy for the Israelites to travel across. The ground had to be dry because it was necessary for the LORD to cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off in order to hinder them (v. 25). Marshy and/or muddy ground would have been difficult or impossible to traverse with chariots, making sabotage of the wheels unnecessary.

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.

The hardness of the hearts of Pharaoh and his men is evident, for they ignored the obvious fact that the divided sea was a miracle. Pharaoh commits his entire army of horses, chariots and horsemen to pursuing the Israelites into what they should have seen as questionable circumstances.

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.

“And it came to pass, that in the morning watch” – The morning watch was the last of three 4-hour watches (2:00 am – 6:00 am) and so this was before sunrise. Apparently traversing the Red Sea took many hours. Verse 20 spoke of them traveling at night and now it is morning so they must have traveled all night crossing the sea.

“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” – The LORD began actively hindering the Egyptians by causing trouble for them, both to prevent them from reaching the Israelites and to prevent them from escaping the sea.

“And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily” – He started causing the wheels to come off Egyptian chariots so that they dragged on the ground, making it impossible for the chariots to continue the pursuit.

“so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians” – A few chariots out of the 600 losing their wheels might be understandable, but when all of Pharaoh's chariots began losing their wheels the Egyptians realized that this was not poor maintenance or coincidence. They realized that it had to be the LORD, the God of the Israel, fighting against them.

26 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. 27 And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

Once the Israelites had finished crossing the sea, the LORD instructs Moses to stretch out his hand (presumably holding his staff) over the sea, thus causing the waters to return to normal and overwhelm the Egyptian army. As Moses obeys, the Egyptians attempt to flee but the LORD does not allow any of them to escape being drowned as the water covers them.

Verses 14:28-31: These verses summarize the events of the preceding verses, declaring how that the LORD saved Israel that day by enabling them to cross the Red Sea on dry ground and then rescuing them from Pharaoh's army by drowning every one of them in the same sea. The chapter concludes by stating how that Israel learned that day to fear and believe the LORD as well as believing Moses as the LORD's spokesperson.

Exodus 15: Verses 1-21 record the words to a song of praise that the Israelites sang to glorify the LORD for rescuing them from the armies of Pharaoh. In the remainder of the chapter (vs. 22-27), Moses then leads the children of Israel three days into the wilderness but they had found no water. When they came to a place called Marah they did find water but it was not safe to drink (bitter). The people started complaining and criticizing Moses but he prayed and asked the LORD what to do about the water. The LORD showed him a tree to toss into the water that would cure the water of its bitterness. Then Moses reminded the people that obedience to the LORD would insure that the LORD would not punish them with diseases like He did with the Egyptians.