

DHW

LESSON 12

The Book of Exodus

Chapter 14

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been caught in a situation that you can describe it as “between the devil and the deep blue sea”? In such a situation, what will you do? Moses and the children of Israel were caught in such a situation. They had camped by the Red Sea, with the sea behind them and the wilderness in front of them, as God had directed. At that point of time, they also saw Pharaoh with six hundred charioteers and soldiers coming towards them. Their intention was clearly obvious. The fear of the Israelites on seeing Pharaoh and his army approaching was understandable. Their hope for deliverance from such a desperate and hopeless situation was utterly urgent. The account of this incident and its outcome was reported by Moses with considerable detail.

In the previous chapter, we are told that the LORD did not lead them *through the way of the land of the*

Philistines although that was near (a direct route to Canaan, the Promised Land). Instead *God led the people about through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea* (13:17, 18). The reason, as God had said, was that the Israelites might decide to turn back to Egypt because of war with the Philistines who would attack them. So God directed them to turn back and go in the south-east direction. Foreknowing how Pharaoh would act in view of the fact that he had been deprived of his enslaved work-force, God specifically directed the Israelites to a specific location where they should camp for the moment.

This chapter therefore gives the account of the encounter between Pharaoh with his army and the children of Israel. A diligent study of this chapter should accrue wonderful and valuable spiritual lessons for every Christian.

The following is an outline of the chapter:

- (1) The LORD directed the Israelites exactly where to camp on their way to the Promised Land (14:1-4);
- (2) Pharaoh pursued the Israelites with his whole army (14:5-9);
- (3) The Israelites murmured against Moses (14:10-18);

- (4) God protected and delivered His people from the enemy (14:19-22);
- (5) Pharaoh and his army were destroyed and drowned in the Red Sea (14:23-31).

STUDY THE WORD

The LORD Directs the Israelites Exactly Where to Camp

The LORD instructed Moses to lead the children of Israel to camp at the exact spot by the Red Sea. Today the exact location of the three places mentioned in verse 2 is very difficult to pin-point. However, the description of the places, Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal-zephon, is sufficient to ascertain that the Israelites were encamped before Baal-zephon with the sea behind them and the wilderness in front of them. Strategically this is a totally absurd move. The Israelites were literally sandwiched between the desert and the deep blue sea. They would be trapped if they were attacked.

One would naturally raise the question: Why would God lead His people into such a situation? Further reading of Moses' report in this chapter can give us an idea of why God led His people into such a situation. God wanted Pharaoh and the Egyptians to think that the Israelites were all

confused and did not know what they were doing. Pharaoh might decide to recapture the Israelites and bring them back to Egypt. But God had a plan to show to Pharaoh, the Egyptians and the Israelites that He was the LORD who was above all the gods of Egypt and that the Israelites could trust Him to protect them.

The LORD said to Moses *I will harden Pharaoh's heart that he shall follow after them* (v.4). Probably being informed that the Israelites were trapped by the wilderness and the sea, Pharaoh might decide to pursue the Israelites and bring them back to Egypt. He was tempted to do this because he now realized that all his Hebrew slave workers were gone and he needed them to complete his monumental projects in Egypt. God knew that Pharaoh was not a man of integrity, who said one thing but did another. His previous encounters with Moses in the plagues showed this very clearly. He never repented of his sins.

The hopeless situation that the Israelites were in was created by the LORD, who revealed His purpose. It was another opportunity to demonstrate to Pharaoh and the Egyptians that they might know *that I am the LORD* (v.4). Pharaoh had earlier said to Moses (5:2): *Who is the LORD, that I should obey*

His voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

Pharaoh had not learned his lesson in the last ten plagues. This last demonstration would change his attitude once and for all.

Pharaoh Pursues the Israelites with His Whole Army

And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled (v.5a). This report to Pharaoh was not accurate when it is compared with the divine writer's report that *the children of Israel went out with an high hand* (meaning, "boldly"; v.8). Now thinking that the Israelites were trapped, Pharaoh and his officials were resolved to force the Israelites back to Egypt to serve them. Accordingly, Pharaoh prepared six hundred of his best chariots. One chariot was manned by three charioteers – the driver, the soldier and his attendant, who held his shield. Apart from these selected chariots, Pharaoh also got all the other chariots. In fact, he took his whole army in pursuit of the children of Israel (about two million).

Once again it is stated that *the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt* (v.8). Another way to understand this hardening of Pharaoh's heart is that there was "a strengthening of Pharaoh's resolve" to recapture the Israelites. Pharaoh and his Egyptian

soldiers pursued after the Israelites together with all their chariots and their horsemen, and his army, and they *overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon* (v.9). Pharaoh and the Egyptians did not realize that they were entering into a trap. They would experience chaos and defeat and be destroyed.

The Israelites Murmur Against Moses

When Pharaoh and his army drew near, the Israelites *lifted up their eyes* (v.10). The Israelites were very afraid. They cried to the LORD and immediately we could see that their cry was not a cry of faith believing that God could save them as when they were in Egypt. But it was a cry of fear and panic. They rebuked Moses. They charged Moses for leading them to die in the open wilderness; they accused Moses for ulterior motives for the way he dealt with them. Worst still, they would rather return to be slaves in Egypt serving the Egyptians (vv. 11-12). The Israelites were so sure that they would be slaughtered in the wilderness and their dead bodies left to rot in the open or be consumed by the vultures.

The Israelites seemed to know better what Pharaoh would do to them than what the LORD God would do for

them. The Israelites, really, had no excuse. They had just witnessed the stupendous power of God in delivering them from bondage in Egypt. God had revealed His relationship to them through Moses. Their behaviour and complaints were inconsistent. They had so quickly forgotten the stupendous miracles which God had wrought in Egypt. And only a few days ago they had seen the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians. And the reason why they behaved like this was because they lacked faith. They looked to men rather to the LORD their God.

Moses' response to the complaints of the children of Israel was the right attitude to have. In a situation in which the Israelites were completely hopeless and helpless, Moses called upon them, first, *fear ye not* – not to be afraid. Then he told them to *stand still*, - to be calm, and thirdly to *see the salvation of the LORD* – to trust and see the deliverance work of the LORD to save them from their enemies. Moses comforted and assured them that they would never see the Egyptians again (v.13). Moses assured them that the battle was the LORD'S and He would fight for them. They should remain calm and have peace in their heart (v.14).

The LORD, who watched what transpired between Moses and the

people, immediately responded. He told Moses to speak to the children of Israel *that they should go forward* (v.15). He told Moses to lift up his rod and stretch it over the sea. It would divide the sea and the children of Israel would march forward *on dry ground through the midst of the sea* (v.16).

The LORD would strengthen the determination of the Egyptians that they would chase after them into the sea. The LORD revealed that He would gain honour upon Himself on what He would do to Pharaoh and his army of chariots and soldiers. In this the Egyptians would know that He was the LORD (v.18). This verse is the key verse of the chapter. This chapter was recorded and preserved as a testimony of the uniqueness, sovereignty and power of the LORD God Almighty and there is none else. Did not Pharaoh once arrogantly say to Moses (5:2): *Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.* God remembered what he had said, and now this was the answer to him; and it was not to him only but also to the whole world especially those who would reject and oppose Him. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God.

God Protects and Delivers His People from the Enemy

In that moment of dire danger from the approaching Egyptians, the Angel of God, who went before the children of Israel in the Pillar of Cloud moved and stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians. On the side of the Egyptians the Pillar of Cloud cast a shadow of darkness but on the side of the Israelites it gave light. Moreover, no one could go near to either side. In other words, the Israelites were protected from the invading Egyptians.

Then a stupendous supernatural phenomenon took place. Moses held his rod 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* (v.21). The east wind must be very strong and it divided the waters of the sea forming two walls of water on the left and right. The Israelites then walked across on dry ground of the sea bed and yet was not affected by the strong east wind. This was a stupendous miracle. Nothing is impossible with God for He is the Creator of the universe. He can use secondary means or by sheer word of command from Him like in the day of Creation, when He created everything out of nothing! The children of Israel

thus escaped to the other side of the sea. This was wonderful and marvellous!

Pharaoh and His Army Are Destroyed and Drowned in the Red Sea

The Egyptians pursued with their chariots charging into the midst of the sea on the dry ground of the sea bed. All of Pharaoh's best charioteers and horsemen were in hot pursuit of the Israelites. The LORD looked into the Egyptian army through the Pillar of Cloud. The LORD *troubled* the Egyptian army (v.24). The word *troubled* means "threw the Egyptian army into disarray and confusion". The wheels of the chariots of the Egyptian army were not functioning properly as they should, and the chariots could not move easily in the sea bed. The Egyptians abandoned their chariots and fled before the Israelites acknowledging that the God of the Israelites fought against them (v.25). This was the first time Pharaoh and the Egyptians recognized that the LORD, the God of Israel, was all powerful. At this time, the LORD ordered Moses to stretch his hand over the sea. And the wall of waters on the left and right returned to its original position drowning the Egyptians on their chariots and their horsemen (v.26). The water of the Red Sea returned to its original strength.

The Egyptians were defeated not by the Israelites but by the LORD who overthrew them. There *remained not so much as one of the Egyptians* (v.28).

On the other hand, the children of Israel were saved from the hand of the Egyptians on that day by the LORD. The Israelites saw the Egyptians died on the sea shore. The Israelites saw the great work of the LORD against the Egyptians. And the children of Israel *feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses* (v.31). The Israelites witnessed their own salvation.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The coming out of the Israelites from Egypt who numbered about two million was the beginning of the birth of a nation – the Nation of Israel. The LORD God was their Creator. Read the account of the creation of the world and this chapter, and try to identify some of the similarities of things and words used in these chapters. For instance, there were the presence of God, the Pillar of Cloud and the division of water. More importantly is that the children of Israel witnessed their deliverance and had a right attitude and knowledge of the LORD their God – *they feared the LORD and believed the LORD and His servant Moses*. We too must learn this as we serve God in a church in which

we all truly and reverently fear Him and believe and obey Him, and not the least to trust in His servant(s) who serve Him in shepherding the flock.

God had been gracious and patient with His children. Whenever we are in a difficult and desperate situation, it does no good at all to panic and worst to complain against God and His servant Moses. They chided Moses saying that they would rather remain in Egypt under bondage, given three meals a day, a place to sleep and a roof over the head. Disappointingly, they preferred to serve their Egyptian taskmasters who treated them cruelly. They had forgotten what the LORD had done for them. They had forgotten all the great works that the LORD had wrought in Egypt in order to free them from slavery. The only way to explain this is the depraved nature of men. As born-again Christians we must not act like that. The only way not to act like that is to read and study God's Word. The more we increase our knowledge of God and what He requires of us to do for His glory, the more we are better off. There will be less problem relating with other godly fellow Christians especially leaders of the church. We will have the same wave-length in our thoughts and aims in life.

As a leader, Moses exemplified himself. When he was rebuked by the

Israelites, he did not lose his cool. He was patient and he spoke of the salvation of God. He did not defend himself against the people's accusations and sarcasm knowing that these things were not true. Moses' response is exemplary. Do not be afraid. Trust the LORD our God, for He is great and good. He demonstrated that in the most powerful and dramatic way how He preserved and saved His people. The LORD God is the same yesterday, today, and forever! He taught the Israelites to fear Him and believe in Him. We ought to do the same: fear Him, and wholly have faith and trust in Him and the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God the Father sent to deliver us from the bondage of sin and Satan. Our faith in God is fundamental and vital. If our faith is weak, if there is a trace of doubt or unbelief, we cannot act in accordance with the will of God. We will easily be swayed by the winds of deceitful philosophies and doctrines. Guard our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God without wavering and be steadfast. AMEN