

## Exodus 13:17-15:21 The Red Sea Crisis

### Intro:

What gives you the confidence to trust in someone who's leading you? They may be your lecturer, manager, team leader, or spouse. What gives you the confidence to trust that they are leading you in the right direction or taking you where you want to go? Our confidence in someone usually comes from their track record, doesn't it?

When we climb on a bus, or step on a train, we implicitly trust that the driver has a driver's licence; that he or she has experience, that they know where they're going, and have been to that destination many times before. However, you'd be more hesitant if the driver seemed lost, wouldn't you?

If the driver was flicking through the pages of the street directory before the ride, and at every hundred metres stopped the whole bus

full of passengers to flick through their directory again, you might be tempted to get off that particular bus and wave down a taxi.

### 1. God Led Israel on a Strange Route 13:17-18, 14:1-4

(a) In the book of Exodus, God takes His people on a journey. He takes on a new role in leading Israel out of Egypt.

Israel had been a nation of slaves, serving under an oppressive Egyptian king, but God, faithful to His promises to Abraham, had *rescued* Israel from that slavery. He did this through great acts of power; through the ten plagues unleashed on Egypt, and through the Passover, Pharaoh was forced to let the Israelites go.

In chapters 13 and 14, God takes on the role of a shepherd and a guide. He is *leading* them and *guiding* them out of Egypt, towards the Promised Land. We're told that by day God leads them by a pillar of cloud and by night He leads them by a pillar of fire. He is always in front of them, leading their way. But because of the way

God leads them, Israel may wonder if God knows where he is going.

**(b)** The route God is leading them on is an unusual one. He doesn't set them along the most direct route (13:17); instead of going North East, God sends them South East. In 14:1, God takes them on such a roundabout route that they appear to be wandering aimlessly in the desert. It leaves them in a vulnerable position, sandwiched between an Egyptian city called Baal Zephon and the Red Sea. To an observant Israelite, God seems to have lost His way.

**(c)** In 14:3-4, we're told that God is in total control. God has not finished with Pharaoh yet. He would harden his heart again to gain glory for Himself. In this *strange manoeuvre* God is setting an *ambush* and a trap for Pharaoh, making him think that Israel is lost and confused.

**(d)** When Pharaoh sees Israel in a seemingly hemmed-in state between the desert and the sea, he changes his mind about letting them go.

Pharaoh comes out with his entire army; he comes out with a fully equipped army, ready to pounce on an untrained and poorly equipped mass of ex-slaves. Without the weight of women, children, and cargo, they easily overtake the Israelites.

14:9

<sup>9</sup> *The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen <sup>[a]</sup> and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.*

## **2. Israel Panicked and Turned Against Moses 14:10-12**

**(a)** How does Israel react to this new situation? One moment, Israel is confidently following their God as He leads their way into the

desert, but the next moment, they lose heart completely and turn against Moses.

When they see the dust cloud of Pharaoh's chariots, the Israelites are thrown into a panic. They don't stand a fighting chance against Egypt; caught between the desert and the Red Sea, there is no escape. It is going to be a massacre! At that point, every memory of the power God had shown them in Egypt is thrown out the window. All that God had done for them is instantly forgotten in the face of the advancing Egyptians.

**(b)** In 14:11-12, Israel cries out to Moses:

*<sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"*

They are ready to give up and go back to Egypt. They are ready to put their hands in the air and follow Pharaoh back to Egypt, back to slavery.

*It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die (here) in the desert!"*

That's a pretty strong statement, isn't it? It's an amazing change of heart after all God had done for them. They are basically saying that they would've been better off without God in their lives in the first place. God has taken them to a place they didn't expect and they are ready to give up on Him.

Reflection:

As we reflect on Israel's reaction we should be reminded that God doesn't always take you where you expect to go. He doesn't promise a pain-free life. He won't always give you perfect health,

the perfect relationship, the opportunity to go to the best university, or your choice of a job. If you expect this you'll find yourself being disappointed, and you'll easily lose heart when God doesn't give you what you want.

This was exactly the point Israel had come to. They were ready to give up on God, but the great news is that God did not easily give up on them. He doesn't easily give up on you and me either. He remains faithful even when we are unfaithful.

### **3. God Reveals His Power**

**14:19-31**

In v15, God tells Israel to move forward. He tells them to stop crying to Him and to start trusting instead. God also tells Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea so that it will part.

In four great acts of power, God shows how he will fight for His people:

- 1) Vv19-20 - To slow the advancing Egyptians, God sends His angel, who leads Israel to the rear and causes darkness to fall on the Egyptian side. All that night, neither party got near the other.
- 2) Vv21-22 - At the same time, God also sends a strong east wind that parts the Red Sea so Israel could walk through on dry ground. The Israelites walk through a wall of water on their left and a wall of water on their right.
- 3) Vv23-25 - Next, as the whole Egyptian army follows Israel into the Red Sea, God pulls off the wheels of the Egyptian chariots. This causes them to panic and finally realise that God is fighting for Israel.
- 4) Vv26-28 - Finally, while the chariots are frantically spinning around, God makes the sea fall back over the Egyptians, their chariots, and horsemen. Not one of them survives. This final act happens at daybreak so Israel can get a clear vision

of the final result. They get to witness God's powerful salvation firsthand.

V30-31

*<sup>30</sup> That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. <sup>31</sup> And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people **feared** the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.*

Israel witnessed an awesome victory that day. They witnessed God's power over the forces of nature, directed at the Egyptians, and crushing them and drowning them so they could never rise again to trouble His people.

The experience at the Red Sea would be the basis of their confidence in the God who was leading them. Just as Israel would

always remember the Passover, they would also remember the day God threw Pharaoh and all his chariots into the raging sea.

#### **4. Israel's Song**

In chapter 15, Moses and the Israelites sing a song of praise to their great God.

There are two main things they sing about in this song:

- 1) In the first half of the song, the thing they sing about is the God who is a warrior

*Vv1-4a:*

*<sup>1</sup> Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD :*

*"I will sing to the LORD,*

*for he is highly exalted.*

*The horse and its rider*

*he has hurled into the sea.*

<sup>2</sup> *The LORD is my strength and my song;*

*he has become my salvation.*

*He is my God, and I will praise him,*

*my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

<sup>3</sup> *The LORD is a warrior;*

*the LORD is his name.*

<sup>4</sup> *Pharaoh's chariots and his army*

*he has hurled into the sea.*

*The best of Pharaoh's officers*

*are drowned in the Red Sea.*

Israel's God is a warrior king who has gone in to fight for His people. He won a great victory.

2) The second theme of the song is about the God who is their shepherd. The God who is a warrior is also a shepherd over

His people. The same hand that crushed the Egyptians now gently shepherds the Israelites to the Promised Land.

V13, 17:

<sup>13</sup> *"In your unfailing love you will lead*

*the people you have redeemed.*

*In your strength you will guide them*

*to your holy dwelling.*

<sup>17</sup> *You will bring them in and plant them*

*on the mountain of your inheritance—*

*the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling,*

*the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.*

Israel sees God as their shepherd who will lead them to the Promised Land. What God does for Israel at the Red Sea gives them confidence for their future. And for now, Israel learns to fear God and trust in Him and His servant Moses. Israel, as a nation, will

forever remember this event in song, through the Psalms and in the telling of the story to future generations.

### **Application:**

From this incredible story of God's victory, I want to draw three lessons for us to apply to today:

#### **1) We need to be reminded of our own helplessness.**

God brought Israel to the point of maximum vulnerability so they could learn to trust Him. They were brought to the point where their life, future, and very existence had no hope unless God acted in a powerful way.

We need to be reminded that we were in the exact same position in the helplessness of our sin. We are in bondage to our own self-centredness and powerless to do anything about it. Apart from God's power, we cannot stop loving ourselves more than God, we cannot stop loving ourselves more than others, and we cannot turn

to God. Even as Christians who have the Spirit, we cannot grow in maturity without God's help. The first step, before we can properly trust God, is to recognise the helplessness of our own spiritual state.

Do **you** recognise that you need Him, that apart from Him, you remain enslaved to sin and death? Do you believe that?

#### **2) We need to learn that God helps those who can't help themselves.**

Once we learn to accept our own helplessness, then we need to remember that God comes to help the helpless. We need to understand that this is completely counter-intuitive.

For example, some of you may have heard this phrase:

*'God helps those who help themselves.'*

You don't need to be a Christian to believe this statement. In practice it's what most of us do, but it's not in the Bible, and it's not

what we learn in the story of the Exodus. What we learn in the Exodus is that God moved heaven and earth to save His people who could not lift a finger to help themselves. All they could do was stand firm and see how God would bring about His mighty deliverance. So it's truer to say that God helps those who *can't* help themselves.

In the same way, all we can do is be still and see what God has already done to save us through the powerful and earth-shattering death and resurrection of Jesus. Romans 5:6 says that while we will still *powerless* Christ died for us. God helps those who can't help themselves. That's the very humbling, but also great, news of the gospel.

**3) It's when we see what God has done in the past that we can live with confidence in the future.**

Just like the Israelites who were on a journey to the Promised Land, we too are also on a journey home. Jesus is our chief shepherd who is leading us. God has promised to bring us to the place that Jesus went ahead to prepare for us. He didn't just promise to bring us home; He also promises to completely destroy every power that stands against God's people, just as He destroyed the Egyptians.

In Revelation 18, John saw the vision of a mighty angel who picks up a boulder and throws it with great violence into the sea. That boulder is Babylon, which represents all the forces that stand against God. It's telling us that all of God's enemies will one day be thrown into the sea. They will be crushed and drowned, and will never rise again to trouble God's people. The day Jesus returns will be a day of rest and peace for all of God's people. Until that day, He promised to never leave nor forsake us.

In 2 Peter 1 we're told that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Jesus. God has

given us His word, Spirit, and the fellowship of believers. You may go through suffering, persecution, sickness, broken relationships and disappointment, but in all this, He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you.

This promise is not grounded in your present circumstances, the stresses you are going through today, or your faith or faithfulness. God's promise is grounded in what He has already done in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's when we see what God has done in the past that we can live with confidence in the future.

What we need to learn is that *'Faith looks back to what God has done and looks forward to what God has promised'*. So when we are faced with temptation or disappointment, we need to keep looking back to where God demonstrated His greatest love, and where He revealed His greatest power, saving us from our slavery to sin and death, and thus bringing us into the eternal kingdom of the Son whom He loves.

When Israel is caught on the edge of the Red Sea, they are fixated on the advancing Egyptian army. This is what they fear so they no longer fear God. It is only when God reveals His great salvation that they learn to fear the only God who can save them and is committed to them. It is only then that they begin to trust in His servant Moses.

So who are you trusting in today? Who are you fearing? Who, or what, are you worshipping right now? Is it Jesus? He is the only one worth fearing and following, both now and forever.