

EXODUS

Chapter 14

Crossing the Red Sea

Then the LORD said to Moses, 2 “Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, ‘They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ 4 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.” And they did so. 5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” 6 So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, 7 and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. 9 The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. 10 When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. 11 They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” 13 And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” 15 The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. 16 Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. 17 And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. 18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” 19 Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, 20 coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24 And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, 25 clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.” 26 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.” 27 So Moses stretched out his

hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw[c] the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. 28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. 29 But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

14:2 *turn back.* Northward, in the general direction from which they had come. (CSB)

Pi Hahiroth. Located “east of Baal Zephon” (Nu 33:7). (CSB)

“Region of salt marshes.” Location unknown. (TLSB)

Migdol. Location unknown. The name means “watchtower.” (CSB)

sea. The sea that the NIV, in accordance with established tradition, calls the Red Sea—in Hebrew (CSB)

“Watchtower.” Any of several locations. (TLSB)

Baal Zephon. Means “Baal of the north” or “Baal of North (Mountain)”—also the name of a Canaanite god. (CSB)

“Baal of the north,” suggesting a Canaanite influence on this area. Site unknown. (TLSB)

14:3 Because the area south and east of Egypt was a wilderness, Pharaoh would conclude that Israel missed the main road to Canaan and lost their way. (TLSB)

14:4 *harden.* God used Pharaoh’s arrogance to illustrate His care for His people. (TLSB)

get glory over Pharaoh. The Lord plans a final blow. The conclusive defeat of Pharaoh would prove God’s superiority. (TLSB)

the Egyptians shall know. Cf Jsh 2:8–11; 1Sm 6:6. (TLSB)

they did so. Cf 12:50. Luther: “The exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt was not only physical. Indeed, it was spiritual at the same time, as the apostle states clearly in 1 Cor. 10:1–4” (AE 29:157). (TLSB)

14:5 *fled.* Israel had not just gone out to worship, but had left with no intention to return to slavery in Egypt. (TLSB)

Pharaoh and his servants. Now united in purpose. (TLSB)

we have let Israel go. They would not admit that God had forced them to let Israel go. (TLSB)

14:6 *he made ready.* Pharaoh personally led the pursuit of Israel. (TLSB)

14:7 *officers*. The Hebrew for the singular of this word means “third man,” perhaps referring to his place in a chariot crew. (CSB)

The 600 chariots were probably an elite corps with special status and training, while the rest operated as part of the regular army. Each chariot usually carried a driver, an archer or weapons specialist, and an officer to coordinate their attack. (TLSB)

14:8 *going out defiantly*. Not planning to return. (TLSB)

14:9 God resolved this conflict at a place where Israel was trapped in a dead end. (TLSB)

14:10 *marching*. Egypt’s army and chariots were coming into view. (TLSB)

they feared greatly – We can understand that the Israelites were terrified when they saw this well-armed host of Pharaoh approaching swiftly. Ahead of them was the sea. With all their women and children and livestock how could they hope to fight against this organized army? That they should cry to the Lord for help was to be expected. How like our fearful nature in moments of distress! We see the enemy. We see the dangerous situation before us. In our weakness we fail to lift up our eyes to the Lord, who promises to help us and to deliver us from every evil of body and soul. God’s assurances in Scripture – as we can find in places like Psalm 121 or Romans 8:18-39 – are not pious platitudes. They are real promises of deliverance. When Jesus says to us, “Everything is possible for him who believes,” may we respond, “I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief!” (PBC)

cried out to the LORD. Israel responded as it should, by seeking the Lord’s deliverance. (TLSB)

14:11–12 Though Israel cried for help, they also attacked Moses and the Lord’s motives. Neither the Egyptians nor most of the Israelites understood that God was in complete control of this situation. Moses had not told them God’s plans (vv 3–4). (TLSB)

14:11 *no graves in Egypt*. A sarcastic complaint against Moses and the Lord. (TLSB)

14:12 Without eyes of faith, the Israelites could see only two alternatives—one bad, the other worse: slavery in Egypt or death in the wilderness. They did not consider that God would save them from disaster. (TLSB)

14:13–14 Moses was confident of God’s salvation but did not hesitate to turn to God with his concerns. Moses served as an intermediary between God and the people, speaking to God on behalf of the people and speaking to the people on behalf of God. This foreshadows Jesus Christ in His role as mediator for us. (TLSB)

14:13 *salvation of the LORD*. Israel would see God save them from the Egyptian army, which represented their old life of slavery (cf Is 52:10). (TLSB)

14:14 *The LORD will fight for you*. A necessary reminder that although Israel was “armed for battle” (13:18) and “marching out boldly” (v. 8), the victory would be won by God alone. (CSB)

Salvation does not depend on anything humans do or avoid doing; it is a gift from God. Israel did not need to save itself from the Egyptian army. (TLSB)

14:15 Moses had been praying, but it was time for Israel to move. Luther: “One should not despise a Christian person.... He is precious in God’s sight and his prayer is powerful and great,

for he has been sanctified by Christ's blood and anointed with the Spirit of God. Whatever he sincerely prays for, especially in the unexpressed yearning of his heart, becomes a great, unbearable cry in God's ears. God must listen, as he did to Moses, Exodus 14 [:15], 'Why do you cry to me?' even though Moses couldn't whisper, so great was his anxiety and trembling in the terrible troubles that beset him. His sighs and the deep cry of his heart divided the Red Sea and dried it up, led the children of Israel across, and drowned Pharaoh with all his army, etc. This and even more can be accomplished by a true, spiritual longing. Even Moses did not know how or for what he should pray—not knowing how the deliverance would be accomplished—but his cry came from his heart" (AE 43:248). (TLSB)

go forward – Yes, tell the church of Jesus Christ to move on! Sometimes we see only the dangers ahead. The forces of godlessness increase. The frontiers of an unbelieving world close in. Whatever financial gains we make are more than used up in inflationary costs. We can barely maintain the church activities which we have begun. How can we hope to advance in our mission work? And besides, who will listen to us any more in this corrupt, evil world! How did we ever get involved in all our expansion work? Let's dig a hole for ourselves and crawl in! Tell the people of God to move on! What will happen to the enemy is vividly pictured in verses 23-31. (PBC)

Lift ... stretch ... divide. The Lord worked through Moses, affirming his leadership. (TLSB)

through the sea on dry ground. An unimaginable route with unimaginable conditions. (TLSB)

14:19 *angel of God.* Here associated with the cloud (see 13:21). (CSB)

Separate from and guiding the cloud. (TLSB)

behind them. For defense. (TLSB)

14:20 *coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel.* The pillar of cloud (signifying the Lord's presence) protected Israel (see Ps 105:39). (CSB)

By the cloud, the Lord protected Israel and provided them with light while leaving the Egyptians in darkness. (TLSB)

God uses the pillar of cloud to separate the Israelites from the Egyptians, so that the enemy is enveloped in darkness and God's people have light. (PBC)

14:21 *strong east wind.* See 10:13. In 15:8 the poet praises the Lord and calls the wind the "blast of your nostrils," affirming (as here) that the miracle occurred in accordance with God's timing and under his direction (see 15:10). (CSB)

Blowing from behind the Israelites to push back the water and dry the exposed seafloor. Since the water parted in two directions (v 22), wind was only part of the miracle. (TLSB)

14:22 *into the midst of the sea on dry ground.* In later times, psalmists and prophets reminded Israel of what God had done for them (see Ps 66:6; 106:9; 136:13–14; Isa 51:10; 63:11–13). (CSB)

Bible story books try to illustrate this event, but pictures cannot do justice to the greatness of this miracle. Imagine two million people (2 cities the size of Indianapolis) with all their livestock and baggage p[assign through a large sea in a time interval of one night! The space of dry land on which they walked must have been at least one-half mile wide; if not more. (PBC)

waters being a wall. See v. 29. The waters were “piled up” (15:8) on both sides. (CSB)

The wind must have been unusually powerful to turn a sea bottom into dry land, and the walls of water on either side must have been immense indeed! (PBC)

Psalm 77:19,20, “Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. ²⁰ You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.”

What a beautiful expression: “Though your footprints were not seen.” We do not have to see all of God’s footprints to believe in His miraculous power. Peter also reminds us in his epistle as the point believers to Jesus Christ: “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9). (PBC)

14:23 The pillar of cloud and fire now moved aside and allowed the Egyptian army to resume their pursuit. (TLSB)

14:24 *the morning watch.* Often the time for surprise attack (see Jos 10:9; 1Sa 11:11). (CSB)

Three to six a.m. (TLSB)

threw the Eyyptian force into a panic – The Psalmist adds word of comment concerning this “confusion.” (PBC)

Psalm 77:16-17, “The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. ¹⁷ The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth.”

14:25 *clogging their chariot wheels.* The wheels began to sink into the sand and mud. (TLSB)

The Egyptians finally saw God’s intervention, fulfilling v 18. (TLSB)

14:26 *Stretch out your hand.* The water’s return to its place was no accident. (TLSB)

14:27 *threw the Egyptians into the midst.* As he had done with the locusts of the eighth plague (see 10:19). (CSB)

14:28 *host.* The army, which Pharaoh assembled for pursuit (v 9). Troops stationed at other places would not have been included here. (TLSB)

Not one of them remained. The Lord’s victory over the pharaoh’s army was complete. (CSB)

God's victory is complete. Pharaoh and some commanders may have survived if they were directing the army from the rear. Survival, though, meant living with defeat, which would be a fitting punishment for their arrogance. (TLSB)

14:29–31 A summary of the miracle God orchestrated to save Israel and distinguish them as His people. (TLSB)

14:30 *the LORD saved Israel.* The water killed the Egyptian army, which represented Israel's old life of slavery, but God miraculously brought Israel through the water and into a new life of freedom. These actions foreshadowed the deliverance promised in Holy Baptism (1Co 10:2). (TLSB)

Egyptians dead on the seashore. An eyewitness confirmation that the old threat was gone. (TLSB)

14:31 *they believed in the Lord and in servant Moses.* Faith in God's mighty power and confidence in Moses' leadership. (CSB)

When God demonstrated His power and righteous judgment, Israel could not help but realize their weakness and sin, so fear and belief were the appropriate response (cf Is 6:5). (TLSB)

his servant. Here refers to one who has the status of a high official in the Lord's kingly administration (see Nu 12:8; Dt 34:5). See also the same title applied to Joshua (Jos 24:29), Samuel (1Sa 3:10), David (2Sa 3:18) and Elijah (2Ki 9:36). (CSB)

Ch 14 God miraculously brings Israel through the waters, but this is more than simply passing a geographic barrier. When Israel crosses through the sea, they leave behind slavery and a future of death in Egypt for freedom and a future of life with God. Israel is powerless to make this drastic change on its own, but God intervenes to provide the way. We need this kind of drastic change in our own life or we are doomed to slavery in sin and death. God has intervened for us in Baptism (1Co 10:1–2), saving us from our old slavery in sin and bringing us into the new freedom of the Gospel. • “The LORD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is His name” (15:2–3). Amen. (TLSB)