

## **5) 13:17 - 15: THE MIRACLE OF THE RED SEA**

The miraculous crossing of the Red Sea is one of the most celebrated acts of God in the Old Testament. And just as the Passover celebration is a paradigm for the New Testament view of the saving death of Christ, the miracle of the Red Sea becomes a paradigm of Christ's resurrection from the dead. The Passover and Red Sea deliverance stories are similar with those of the death and Resurrection of Jesus in another way as well. The second story of the pair is meaningless without the first.

### **1) 13: 17-22 Background to the Red Sea Crossing**

- The passage begins with an explanation for the circuitous route taken by the people from Egypt into Palestine. They avoid going through the land of the Philistines because they fear battle. They would lose their nerve and possibly return to Egypt.
- There is reference to the bones of Joseph, the great ancestor of the Israelites who brought them into Egypt at a time of great need. This signals the end of an era and the beginning of something new for the Israelites.
- God continues to be present among the people as their guide and protector (the pillar of cloud by day gives them direction and the pillar of fire by night gives them light (encouragement)).

### **2) 14: 1-18 With their backs to the Sea.**

1-4 God tells Moses to position the people between Pharaoh's armies and the Sea; with their backs to the Sea. Pharaoh interprets this apparently senseless act as aimless wandering. God hardens Pharaoh's heart and he jumps at the opportunity to trap the Israelites. But, in fact, Pharaoh has stumbled into God's trap. God's purpose is expressed as follows: I will gain glory for myself and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.

5-9 Pharaoh pursues the Israelites with a large army - 600 chariots. The Egyptians were noted for their charioteering which combined speed and power in warfare.

10-14 As the Egyptians are in visible distance the Israelites turn on Moses for having brought them to this terrible moment: Were there no graves in Egypt that you have brought us out here to die? We would rather be slaves of Pharaoh than come out here to die.

Moses responds by urging them to trust God. He says the following:

- Don't be afraid;
- Stand firm in your faith;
- keep still (allow God's will to unfold);
- See God's deliverance (witness what God will do);
- God will fight for you (Israel cannot cause a miracle, but only become a beneficiary of it by grace through faith).

15-18 God is frustrated with the Israelites because they lack faith, resolve and commitment. But God will be vindicated not only in the eyes of the Israelites, but also over the Egyptians. God's vindication has its goal the praise of God (chap. 15) which is public witness to the rest of the world that God is God of the whole creation.

### **3) 14:19-31 Pharaoh's army drowned.**

19-20 The pillar of cloud and fire moves between Israel and the Egyptian army. The cloud is first, then the fire indicating that it was probably twilight. In the Hebrew reckoning twilight signals the end of the old day (slavery) and the beginning of the new (freedom).

21-25 The sea is turned into dry land and the waters are divided, making a way for the Israelites to walk across. The Egyptians pursue them into the sea. The salvation of the Israelites will become the entrapment of the Egyptians. They cross from twilight to the "morning watch". The Egyptian chariots get stuck in the wet ground. They begin to fear and sink. The advantage of the Egyptians on dry ground with heavy chariots becomes their massive disadvantage and destruction on ground that is soft and mucky.

Rather than look for naturalistic explanations we must realize that for the Hebrews the parting of the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh's army was experienced as a miracle in the same way that the open tomb was for early Christians. Miracles aren't magic. They are unexpected gifts of nature serving the cause of justice and healing.

26-29 The sea returns to its normal depths and Pharaoh's army is drowned. This again proves that God is sovereign over Egypt and its gods. V.21 refers to a strong east "wind". This is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 - the Spirit (wind) of God was moving over the face of the waters.

30-31 Concluding summary. Note the verbs: The Lord saved... Israel saw... the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in the Lord's servant Moses.

### **4) 15: 1-18 Records of the Red Sea elsewhere.**

A song is composed in celebration of the Red Sea miracle. Music and poetry better express praise and awe than a bare narrative.

References to the Red Sea miracle appear throughout the Old Testament. Notable

examples include Psalms 77: 16-20, 136: 10-15, Isaiah 43: 15-21.

A Jew named Ezekiel (not biblical prophet) living in Alexandria a few centuries before Christ composed a play entitled: "Exodus" which has a part for a lone Egyptian survivor who reflects with horror what has happened to his countrymen.

In the New Testament, the Red Sea is a type of the ultimate miracle of deliverance - the death and resurrection of Christ. examples include I Corinthians 10: 1-13, Acts 13: 16-41. For New Testament writers, the final perfection of salvation is accomplished in Christ's life, death and resurrection.

### **5) Theological reflection**

- One cannot fully appreciate the significance of the Red Sea miracle unless one has felt caged physically, mentally or spiritually. This story has been a powerful one for those who have lived in bondage (Jews in exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, African Americans enslaved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, black South Africans in the 20<sup>th</sup>). This story encourages a trust in God which breeds inner resolve and strength of spirit.

"Egypt symbolized evil in the form of humiliating oppression, ungodly exploitation and crushing domination." (MLK)

- The Red Sea miracle speaks more about God than it does about us as human beings. We are frequently caught up in situations and circumstances that are beyond us to manage or regulate. Miracles happen when we find a way through beyond our all-too-often dim expectations.

- God can bring freedom and deliverance in our lives over forces we cannot control - sin, disease, loneliness, pain, death.