

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

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by

F. H. Revell

Exodus 14

**“They that go down to the sea in ships,
that do business in great waters;
these see the works of the Lord,
and his wonders in the deep”**

- Psalm 107:23, 24.

How true is this! and yet our coward hearts do so shrink from those **“great waters!”** We prefer carrying on our traffic in the shallows, and, as a result, we fail to see **“the works”** and **“wonders”** of our God; for these can only be seen and known **“in the deep.”**

It is in the day of trial and difficulty that the soul experiences something of the deep and untold blessedness of being able to count on God.

Were all to go on smoothly, this would not be so. It is not in gliding along the surface of a tranquil lake that the reality of the Master's presence is felt; but actually when the tempest roars, and the waves roll over the ship. The Lord does not hold out to us the prospect of exemption from trial and tribulation; quite the opposite: He tells us we shall have to meet both the one and the other; but He promises to be with us in them; and this is infinitely better.

- God's presence in the trial is much better than exemption from the trial.
- the sympathy of His heart with us is sweeter far than the power of His hand for us.
- the Master's presence with His faithful servants, while passing through the furnace, was better far than the display of His power to keep them out of it. (Daniel 3).

We would frequently desire to be allowed to pass on our way without trial, but this would involve serious loss. The Lord's presence is never so sweet as in moments of appalling difficulty. Thus it was in Israel's case, as recorded in this chapter. They were brought into an overwhelming difficulty. They are called to **“do business in great waters.”** They are at their wit's end. Pharaoh, repenting himself of having let them go out of his land, determines to make one desperate effort to recover them.

“And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: and he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them . . . 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.”

Here was a deeply-trying scene - one in which human effort could avail nothing. As well might they have attempted to put back with a straw the ocean's mighty tide, as seek to extricate themselves by ought that they could do. The sea was before them, Pharaoh's hosts behind them, and the mountains around them. And all this, be it observed, permitted and ordered of God. He had marked out their position before **“Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon.”**

Moreover, He permitted Pharaoh to come upon them, And why? Just to display Himself in the salvation of His people, and the total overthrow of their enemies. **“To him that divided the Red Sea into parts; for his mercy endureth for ever. And made Israel to pass through the midst of it; for his mercy endureth for ever: but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea; for his mercy endureth for ever”** (Psalm 136).

There is not so much as a single position in all the desert-wanderings of God's redeemed, the boundaries of which are not marked off, with studious accuracy, by the hand of unerring wisdom and infinite love. The special bearings and peculiar influences of each position are carefully arranged. The Pihahiroths and the Migdols are all ordered with immediate reference to the moral condition of those whom God is conducting through the windings and labyrinths of the wilderness, and also to the display of His own character.

Unbelief may oftentimes suggest the enquiry, **“why is it thus?”** God knows why; and He will, without doubt, reveal the why, whenever the revelation would promote His glory and His people's good. How often do we feel disposed to question as to the why and the wherefore of our being placed in such and such circumstances! How often do we perplex ourselves as to the reason of our being exposed to such and such trials! How much better to bow our heads in meek subjection, and say, **‘it is well,’** and **‘it shall be well’** When God fixes our position for us, we may rest assured it is a wise and salutary one; and even when we foolishly and willfully choose a position for ourselves, He most graciously overrules our folly, and causes the influences of our self-chosen circumstances to work for our spiritual benefit.

It is when the people of God are brought into the greatest straits and difficulties, that they are favoured with the finest displays of God's character and actings; and for this reason He oftentimes leads them into a trying position, in order that He may the more markedly show Himself. He could have conducted Israel through the Red Sea, and far beyond the reach of Pharaoh's hosts, before ever the latter had started from Egypt; but that would not have so fully glorified His own name, or so entirely confounded the enemy, upon whom He designed to **“get him honour.”**

We too frequently lose sight of this great truth, and the consequence is that our hearts give way in the time of trial.

If we could only look upon a difficult crisis as an occasion of bringing out, on our behalf, the sufficiency of divine grace, it would enable us to preserve the balance of our souls, and to glorify God, even in the deepest waters.

We feel disposed, it may be, to marvel at Israel's language, on the occasion now before us. We may feel at a loss to account for it; but the more we know of our own evil hearts of unbelief, the more we shall see how marvelously like them we are. They would seem to have forgotten the recent display of divine power on their behalf. They had seen the gods of Egypt judged, and the power of Egypt laid prostrate beneath the stroke of the Lord's omnipotent hand. They had seen the iron chain of Egyptian bondage riven, and the furnace quenched by the same hand. All these things they had seen, and yet the moment a dark cloud appeared upon their horizon, their confidence gave way, their hearts failed, and they gave utterance to their unbelieving murmurings in the following language: **"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! . . . It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness"** (Ver. 11, 12).

Thus is blind unbelief, ever, sure to err, and scan God's ways in vain. This unbelief is the same in all ages. It led David, in an evil hour, to say, **"I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines"** (I Samuel 27:1). And how did it turn out? Saul fell on Mount Gilboa; and David's throne was established for ever. Again, it led Elijah the Tishbite, in a moment of deep depression, to flee for his life, from the wrathful threatenings of Jezebel. How did it turn out? Jezebel was dashed to pieces on the pavement, and Elijah was taken in a chariot of fire to Heaven.

So it was with Israel in their very first moment of trial. They really thought that the Lord had taken such pains to deliver them out of Egypt merely to let them die in the wilderness. They imagined that they had been preserved by the blood of the paschal lamb, in order that they might be buried in the wilderness. Thus it is that unbelief ever reasons.

It leads us to interpret God in the presence of the difficulty, instead of interpreting the difficulty in the presence of God.

Faith gets behind the difficulty, and there finds God, in all His faithfulness, love, and power.

It is the believer's privilege ever to be in the presence of God. He has been introduced thither by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing should be suffered to take him thence. The place itself he never can lose, inasmuch as his Head and Representative, Christ, occupies it on His behalf. But although he cannot lose the thing itself, he can, very easily, lose all enjoyment of it, the experience and power of it.

Whenever his difficulties come between his heart and the Lord, he is, evidently, not enjoying the Lord's presence, but suffering in the presence of his difficulties. Just as when a cloud comes between us and the sun, it robs us, for the time, of the enjoyment of his beams.

It does not prevent him from shining, it merely hinders our enjoyment of him. Exactly so is it when we allow trials and sorrows, difficulties and perplexities, to hide from our souls the bright beams of our Father's countenance, which ever shine, with changeless lustre, in the face of Jesus Christ.

There is no difficulty too great for our God; yea, the greater the difficulty, the more room there is for Him to act in His proper character, as the God of all power and grace. No doubt, Israel's position, in the opening of our chapter, was a deeply trying one - to flesh and blood perfectly overwhelming. But, then, the Maker of Heaven and earth was there, and they had but to use Him.

Yet, alas! my reader, how speedily we fail when trial arises! These sentiments sound very nicely on the ear, and look very well upon paper; and, blessed be God, they are divinely true but, then, the thing is to practice them, when opportunity offers. It is in the practice of them that their power and blessedness are really proved. **"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God"** (John 7:17).

"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Ver. 13, 14).

Here is the first attitude which faith takes in the presence of a trial. "Stand still."

This is impossible to flesh and blood. All who know in any measure, the restlessness of the human heart, under anticipated trial and difficulty, will be able to form some conception of what is involved in standing still. Nature must be doing something. It will rush hither and thither. It would fain have some hand in the matter. And although it may attempt to justify and sanctify its worthless doings, by bestowing upon them the imposing and popular title of "a legitimate use of means," yet are they the plain and positive fruits of unbelief which always shuts out God, and sees nought save the dark cloud of its own creation. Unbelief creates or magnifies difficulties, and then sets us about removing them by our own bustling and fruitless activities, which, in reality, do but raise a dust around us, which prevents our seeing God's salvation. Faith, on the contrary, raises the soul above the difficulty, straight to God Himself, and enables one to **"stand still."**

We gain nothing by our restless and anxious efforts. **"We cannot make one hair white or black,"** nor **"add one cubit to our stature."** What could Israel do at the Red Sea? Could they dry it up? Could they level the mountains? Could they annihilate the hosts of Egypt Impossible. There they were, enclosed within an impenetrable wall of difficulties, in view of which nature could but tremble and feel its own perfect impotency. But this was just the time for God to act.

When unbelief is driven from the scene, then God can enter; and, in order to get a proper view of His actings, we must **"stand still."** Every movement of nature is, so far as it goes, a positive hindrance to our perception and enjoyment of divine interference on our behalf.

This is true of us in every single stage of our history. It is true of us as sinners when, under the uneasy sense of sin upon the conscience, we are tempted to resort to our own doings, in order to obtain relief. Then, truly, we must “**stand still**” in order to “**see the salvation of God.**”

For what could we do in the matter of making an atonement for sin?

- Could we have stood with the Son of God upon the Cross?
- Could we have accompanied Him down into the “**horrible pit and the miry clay**”?
- Could we have forced our passage upward to that eternal rock on which, in resurrection, He has taken His stand?

Every right mind will at once pronounce the thought to be a daring blasphemy. God is alone in redemption; and as for us, we have but to “**stand still and see the salvation of God.**” The very fact of its being God’s salvation proves that man has nought to do in it.

The same is true of us, from the moment we have entered upon our Christian career.

In every fresh difficulty, be it great or small, our wisdom is to stand still - to cease from our own works, and find our sweet repose in God’s salvation. Nor can we make any distinction as to difficulties. We cannot say that there are some trifling difficulties which we ourselves can compass; while there are others in which nought save the hand of God can avail. No; all are alike beyond us.

We are as little able to change the colour of a hair as to remove a mountain - to form a blade of grass as to create a world. All are alike to us, and all are alike to God. We have only, therefore, in confiding faith, to cast ourselves on Him who “**humbleth himself (alike) to behold the things that are in heaven and on earth.**”

We sometimes find ourselves carried triumphantly through the heaviest trials, while at other times, we quail, falter, and break down under the most ordinary dispensations. Why is this? Because, in the former, we are constrained to roll our burden over on the Lord; whereas, in the latter, we foolishly attempt to carry it ourselves. The Christian is, in himself, if he only realized it, like an exhausted receiver, in which a guinea and a feather have equal moments.

“**The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.**” Precious assurance!

How eminently calculated to tranquillize the spirit in view of the most appalling difficulties and dangers! The Lord not only places Himself between us and our sins, but also between us and our circumstances. *By doing the former, He gives us peace of conscience; by doing the latter, He gives us peace of heart.*

That the two things are perfectly distinct, every experienced Christian knows. Very many have peace of conscience, who have not Peace of heart. They have, through grace and by faith, found Christ, in the divine efficacy of His blood, between them and all their sins; but they are not able, in the same simple way, to realize Him as standing, in His divine wisdom, love, and power, between them and their circumstances.

This makes a material difference in the practical condition of the soul, as well as in the character of one's testimony. Nothing tends more to glorify the name of Jesus than that quiet repose of spirit which results from having Him between us and everything that could be a matter of anxiety to our hearts. **“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.”**

But some feel disposed to ask the question, “Are we not to do anything?”

This may be answered by asking another, namely, what can we do?

All who really know themselves must answer, nothing. If, therefore, we can do nothing, had we not better **“stand still”**

If the Lord is acting for us, had we not better stand back?

- Shall we run before Him?
- Shall we busily intrude ourselves upon His sphere of action!
- Shall we come in His way?

There can be no possible use in two acting, when one is so perfectly competent to do all. No one would think of bringing a lighted candle to add brightness to the sun at mid-day: and yet the man who would do so might well be accounted wise, in comparison with him who attempts to assist God by his bustling officiousness.

However, when God, in His great mercy, opens the way, faith can walk therein.

It only ceases from man's way in order to walk in God's. **“And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.”**

It is only when we have learnt to **“stand still”** that we are able effectually to go forward. To attempt the latter, until we have learnt the former, is sure to issue in the exposure of our folly and weakness. It is, therefore, true wisdom, in all times of difficulty and perplexity, to **“stand still”** - to wait only upon God, and He will, assuredly, open a way for us; and then we can peacefully - we happily - **“go forward.”**

There is no uncertainty when God makes a way for us; but every self-devised path must prove a path of doubt and hesitation. The unregenerate man may move along with great apparent firmness and decision in his own ways; but one of the most distinct elements, in the new creation, is self distrust, and the element which answers thereto is confidence in God. It is when our eyes have seen God's salvation that we can walk therein; but this can never be distinctly seen until we have been brought to the end of our own poor doings. There is peculiar force and beauty in the expression, **“see the salvation of God.”**

The very fact of our being called to **“see”** God's salvation, proves that the salvation is a complete one.

It teaches that salvation is a thing wrought out and revealed by God, to be seen and enjoyed by us. It is not a thing made up partly of God's doing, and partly of man's. Were it so, it could not be called God's salvation. In order to be His, it must be wholly divested of everything pertaining to man. The only possible effect of human efforts is to raise a dust which obscures the view of God's salvation.

“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.”

Moses himself seems to have been brought to a stand, as appears from the Lord's question, **“Wherefore criest thou to me?”**

Moses could tell the people to **“stand still and see the salvation of God,”** while his own spirit was giving forth its exercises in an earnest cry to God. However, there is no use in crying when we ought to be acting; just as there is no use in acting when we ought to be waiting. Yet such is, ever, our way. We attempt to move forward when we ought to stand still, and we stand still when we ought to move forward.

In Israel's case, the question might spring up in the heart, “whither are we to go?” To all appearance there is an insurmountable barrier in the way of any movement forward. How were they to go through the sea? This was the point. Nature never could solve this question. But we may rest assured that God never gives a command without, at the same time, communicating the power to obey. The real condition of the heart may be tested by the command; but the soul that is, by grace, disposed to obey, receives power from above to do so.

When Christ commanded the man with the withered hand to stretch it forth, the man might naturally have said, “How can I stretch forth an arm which hangs dead by my side?” But he did not raise any question whatever, for with the command, and from the same source, came the power to obey.

Thus, too, in Israel's case, we see that with the command to go forward came the provision of grace.

“But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.”

Here was the path of faith. The hand of God opens the way for us to take the first step, and this is all that faith ever asks. God never gives guidance for two steps at a time. I must take one step, and then I get light for the next. This keeps the heart in abiding dependence upon God.

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.”

It is evident that the sea was not divided throughout, at once. Had it been so, it would have been “sight” and not “faith.” It does not require faith to begin a journey when I can see all the way through; but to begin when I can merely see the first step, this is faith.

The sea opened as Israel moved forward, so that for every fresh step, they needed to be cast upon God. Such was the path along which the redeemed of the Lord moved, under His own conducting hand. They passed through the dark waters of death, and found these very waters to be **“a wall unto them, on their right hand and on their left.”**

The Egyptians could not move in such a path as this. They moved on because they saw the way open before them: with them it was sight, and not faith - **“Which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.”**

When people assay to do what faith alone can accomplish, they only encounter defeat and confusion.

The path along which God calls His people to walk is one which nature can never tread - **“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”** (I Corinthians 15:50).

Neither can it walk in the ways of God. Faith is the great characteristic principle of God’s kingdom, and faith alone can enable us to walk in God’s ways. **“Without faith it is impossible to please God”** (Hebrews 11).

It glorifies God exceedingly when we move on with Him, as it were, blindfold. It proves that we have more confidence in His eyesight than in our own. If I know that God is looking out for me, I may well close my eyes, and move on in holy calmness and stability. In human affairs we know that when there is a sentinel or watchman at his post, others can sleep quietly. How much more may we rest in perfect security, when we know that He who neither slumbers nor sleeps has His eye upon us, and His everlasting arms around us!

“And the angel of God which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night” (Ver. 19, 20).

The Lord placed Himself right between Israel and the enemy - this was protection indeed. Before ever Pharaoh could touch a hair of Israel’s head, he should make his way through the very pavilion of the Almighty - yea, through the Almighty Himself. Thus it is that God ever places Himself between His people and every enemy, so that **“no weapon formed against them can prosper.”** He has placed Himself between us and our sins; and it is our happy privilege to find Him between us and every one and every thing that could be against us. This is the true way in which to find both peace of heart and peace of conscience. The believer may institute a diligent and anxious search for his sins, but he cannot find them. Why? Because God is between him and them. He has cast all our sins behind His back; while, at, the same time, He sheds forth upon us the light of His reconciled countenance.

In the same manner, the believer may look for his difficulties, and not find them, because God is between him and them. If, therefore, the eye, instead of resting on our sins and sorrows, could rest only upon Christ, it would sweeten many a bitter cup, and enlighten many a gloomy hour.

But one finds constantly that nine-tenths of our trials and sorrows are made up of anticipated or imaginary evils, which only exist in our own disordered, because unbelieving, minds. May my reader know the solid peace both of heart and conscience which results from having Christ, in all His fullness, between him and all his sins, and all his sorrows.

It is, at once, most solemn and interesting to note the double aspect of the “pillar,” in this chapter. **“It was a cloud and darkness”** to the Egyptians, but **“it gave light by night”** to Israel.

How like the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Truly that cross has a double aspect, likewise. It forms the foundation of the believer’s peace; and, at the same time, seals the condemnation of a guilty world. The self-same Blood which purges the believer’s conscience and gives him perfect peace, stains this earth and consummates its guilt. The very mission of the Son of God which strips the world of its cloak, and leaves it wholly without excuse, clothes the Church with a fair mantle of righteousness, and fills her month with ceaseless praise. The very same Lamb who will terrify, by His unmitigated wrath, all tribes and classes of earth, will lead, by His gentle hand, His Blood-bought flock, through the green pastures, and beside the still waters for ever. (Compare Revelation 6:15-17, with Revelation 7:13-17).

The close of our chapter shows us Israel triumphant on the shore of the Red Sea, and Pharaoh’s hosts submerged beneath its waves.

The fears of the former and the boastings of the latter had both alike been proved utterly groundless. The Lord’s glorious work had annihilated both the one and the other. The same waters which formed a wall for God’s redeemed, formed a grave for Pharaoh.

Thus it is ever: those who walk by faith, find a path to walk in, while all who assay to do so find a grave. This is a solemn truth which is not, in any wise, weakened by the fact that Pharaoh was acting in avowed and positive hostility to God, when he “assayed” to pass through the Red Sea. It will ever be found true that all who attempt to imitate faith’s actings will be confounded. Happy are they who are enabled, however feebly, to walk by faith. They are moving along a path of unspeakable blessedness - a path which, though it may be marked by failure and infirmity, is, nevertheless, begun, continued, and ended in God. Oh! that we may all enter more fully into the divine reality, the calm elevation, and the holy independence of this path. We ought not to turn from this fruitful section of our book without a reference to I Corinthians 10 in which we have an allusion to **“the cloud and the sea.”**

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (Ver. 1, 2).

There is much deep and precious instruction for the Christian in this passage.

The apostle goes on to say, **“now these things were our examples [types],”** thus furnishing us with a divine warrant for interpreting Israel’s baptism **“in the sea and in the cloud,”** in a typical way; and, assuredly, nothing could be more deeply significant or practical.

It was as a people thus baptized that they entered upon their wilderness journey, for which provision was made in “**the spiritual meat**” and “**spiritual drink**,” provided by the hand of love. In other words, they were, typically, a people dead to Egypt and all pertaining thereto. The cloud and the sea were to them what the Cross and grave of Christ are to us. The cloud secured them from their enemies; the sea separated them from Egypt: the Cross, in like manner, shields us from all that could be against us, and we stand at Heaven’s side of the empty tomb of Jesus. Here we commence our wilderness journey. Here we begin to taste the heavenly manna and to drink of the streams which emanate from “**that spiritual Rock**,” while, as a pilgrim people, we make our way onward to that land of rest of the which God has spoken to us.

I would further add here, that my reader should seek to understand the difference between the Red Sea and Jordan.

They both have their antitype in the death of Christ. But, in the former, we see separation from Egypt; in the latter, introduction into the land of Canaan. The believer is not merely separated from this present evil world, by the Cross of Christ; but he is quickened out of the grave of Christ, “**raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus**” (Ephesians 2:5, 6). Hence, though surrounded by the things of Egypt, he is, as to his actual experience, in the wilderness; while, at the same time, he is borne upward, by the energy of faith, to that place where Jesus sits, at the right hand of God. Thus, the believer is not merely “forgiven all trespasses;” but actually associated with a risen Christ in Heaven. He is not merely saved by Christ, but linked with Him, for ever. Nothing short of this could either satisfy God’s affections or actualize His purposes, in reference to the Church.

Reader, do we understand these things? Do we believe them? Are we realizing them? Do we manifest the power of them? Blessed be the grace that has made them unalterably true with respect to every member of the body of Christ, whether it be an eye or an eye-lash, a hand or a foot. Their truth, therefore, does not depend upon our manifestation, our realization, or our understanding, but upon “**THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF Christ**,” which has cancelled all our guilt and laid the foundation of all God’s counsels respecting us. Here is true rest for every broken heart and every burdened conscience.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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