

"How far would Moses have gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt?"  
—Harry S Truman

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## **Fear and Faith (Part One)**

The story of the children of Israel fleeing from Egypt never gets old even though we return to it routinely every spring. There seem to be endless lessons we can learn from it, and in that vein, the larger journey contains three examples that make a particular point about complaining.

We will begin in [Exodus 14:14](#). [Moses](#) exhorts the Israelites on the shore of the Red Sea as Pharaoh and his army bore down on them, "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your [peace](#)." In English, it is a perfectly balanced sentence: six words, a comma, and six more words. In the original Hebrew, it is only four words.

The Hebrew word translated as *hold* literally means "be quiet." We can thus read this verse as, "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall be quiet." It begins to take on a more strident, more forceful tone.

*The Revised Standard Version* translates this verse as, "The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still." This rendering is like the New King James' translation, able to be read several ways depending on where the emphasis falls.

*The Common English Bible* expresses the thought as, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still," which adds a bit more force. *The Complete Jewish Bible* ratchets up the emotion: "Adonai will do battle for you. Just calm yourselves down!" *God's Word Translation* puts it even more forcefully: "The LORD is fighting for you! So be still!" Finally, *The Message Bible* gets the message across: "GOD will fight the battle for you. And you? You keep your mouths shut!"

These alternative translations cast this verse in a different light! It has the feel of what it was like to be called into the principal's office back in the day, and the student began to make excuses. The principal would cut him off and snarl, "Sit down and shut up!"—not that I have any firsthand knowledge of that kind of thing, but I've heard stories. He is really saying, "Shut up with your complaining!"

As mentioned earlier, Exodus 14 is the story of the Red Sea crossing. In verse 2, [God](#) led these millions of people into a dead-end situation. They were hemmed in on all sides. God had deliberately turned them away from the Promised Land, southward and eastward, so that Pharaoh's army would follow them (verses 3-4). He led them into a trap so that, as God says in verse 4, "the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD." So, the army of Egypt pursued their former slaves.

"And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD" (verse 10). The Israelites had left Egypt with a "high hand" ([Numbers 33:3](#)) on a grand adventure to the Promised Land, only to have it all crash down around their ears just a few days later! Or so it seemed.

They reacted in a very human way: They cried out in fear. Even after seeing the miracles of the ten plagues, being passed over by the Death Angel, gathering their back wages with interest ([Exodus 12:36](#)), and following the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, they had no [faith](#). They, of course, lacked God's Holy Spirit and so could not see God in a spiritual sense.

To prove to Egypt and all posterity that He was God, He led the people into a box canyon. Did Moses know how God planned to get them out? Did he look at the waves of the Red Sea and think, "Yeah, it's perfect. We'll cross here!" Maybe not. How many times has God delivered us from a trial from a direction we never expected? Moses was probably ignorant of how God would save them, but he had the faith that He would save them, however He would do it! He had seen the same miracles as the people, but he *saw* God in them. Notice his confident words in [Exodus 14:13](#):

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever."

Then, paraphrasing verse 14, he says, "Shut up and watch what God is going to do."

God then reveals His plan in verse 15: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? [Why are you calling on Me for help? Why are you complaining?]' Tell the children of Israel to go forward.'"

Wait, what? "Go forward"? Walk right into the sea? Talk about stepping out in faith! We are not told the specifics of Moses' prayer in this situation, but he was undoubtedly in constant prayer to God. But it seems as if God was just a bit frustrated with him. "Go forward!" He commands His servant. It is easy to sympathize with Moses here because he felt pressure from all sides.

*The Jamison, Faucett, and Brown Commentary* says this about Moses: "[His] [meek](#), unruffled, magnanimous composure presents one of the sublimest examples of moral courage to be found in history." Adam Clarke writes about these verses:

*Moses said—Fear ye not*] This exhortation was not given to excite them to resist, for of that there was no [hope](#); they were unarmed, they had no courage, and their minds were deplorably degraded.

*Stand still*] Ye shall not be even workers together with God; only be quiet, and do not render yourselves wretched by your fears and your confusion.

*See the salvation of the Lord*] Behold the deliverance which God will work, independently of all human help and means.

*Ye shall see them again no more*] Here was strong faith, but this was accompanied by the spirit of prophecy. God showed Moses what [H]e would do, he believed, and therefore he spoke in [this] encouraging manner . . .

We tend to lose sight of this encouraging principle from time to time. In the pressures of daily life—working, paying the bills, raising children, just living in this present, evil age—we often forget that God promises to fight our battles. We should not forget this promise for long! John Ritenbaugh's oft-repeated question, "[Do You See God?](#)" should never be far from our minds.

In our spiritual warfare, God sometimes requires us to act in faith, and at other times, God goes on ahead and clears the way. The older I get, the more I can look back on episodes in my life and recognize that God opened doors, solved problems, inspired solutions, or from time to time, came from a completely unexpected direction to rescue me out of a crisis—just as He did for Moses and the children of Israel.

We will examine two other situations that occurred on Israel's wilderness trek next time.

- Mike Ford (1955-2021)

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Escape From Box Canyon](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Israel left Egypt with a high hand, and with Moses at their head, they made quickly for the wilderness of Sinai. But it was God who was really leading them—and He led them into a box canyon with the Egyptian army nipping at their heels! In this way, God forced Israel either to trust Him completely for their deliverance or to return to their slavery in Egypt.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

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by Mike Ford (1955-2021)

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