

Escape From Box Canyon

Lessons From the Red Sea

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Do you remember a scene like this, from a classic Western?

Calloway spurred his mount, but the roan couldn't pound the earth any faster. The posse behind him, made up from the gun-slinging hands of the Lazy P Ranch, seemed to be gaining ground on him and his tired horse. "But," he mused, "this is what happens when you ask the wrong question in the wrong town."

He searched the terrain ahead for any help this unforgiving landscape could give him. Rocks and dirt and scrub were all that met his gaze until, searching farther afield, he caught sight of a shadow that just might be a defile between the cliffs. Riding closer, he whooped in excitement as the shadow disappeared to reveal the entrance to a narrow canyon—one that just might save his skin.

Only yards before he reached it, the first errant shots whizzed over his head. With a last look over his shoulder, he ducked into the dimmer light of the canyon, slowing the roan to negotiate the thin trail. Once his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he saw that the canyon took a sharp turn just ahead, and he urged the spent beast toward it. As shouts behind warned him that the posse had reached the entrance, Calloway let out a moan of dismay: The canyon—and his attempted escape—ended not fifty feet away in a sheer wall of orange-red rock. His refuge was a boxed canyon!

A canyon wall to the left, a cliff to the right, the way blocked to the front, and pursuers approaching fast from behind—the proverbial "between a rock and a hard place." It kind of sounds like how we feel when facing a trial, does it not? Surrounded on three sides, with pursuers behind. It sounds like what we face when we are trying to overcome and grow, does it not? It may not be a huge trial; but we are still trying to overcome our problems (our sins), and we feel like we have hit a blank wall. And what do we do? How do we overcome?

Well, you know, the Bible has its own version of this scenario—the old 'boxed canyon' scenario. It occurred just about this time of the year—on the last day of Unleavened Bread, we believe, as the Israelites were about to march completely out of the land of Egypt. Since this is "meat in due season," I thought that it would be a good idea to see what lessons we can learn from the crossing of the Red Sea. For the Israelites, this was a literal *escape from "boxed canyon."*

For a moment, before we go any further with the Red Sea, let us just consider that this occurs at the end of the week of Unleavened Bread—not at the beginning. Now, this should give us a little bit of pause. If the Days of Unleavened Bread picture the coming out of sin (which they do), then think about it. This happened on the last day of Unleavened Bread, which is the end of that period of time where we picture coming out of sin. And here God had to deliver them from a very big problem, by His wondrous works.

If we put *our own lives* in there, let us say that the week of Unleavened Bread pictures our entire life of overcoming. Coming out of Egypt, at the beginning, we came out with a high hand. We came out

with a wonderful attitude. We were *up*. But over the course of time, as we near the end of that time of overcoming, things changed somewhat. The problems seemed to get quite a bit more difficult. And maybe our attitude towards them seems to change. We seem to be, maybe, a little bit more tired. We are tired of having to face the problems—not just tired because we are older and maybe need a little bit more help. We do not maybe have all the resources that we once had to solve the problems.

Let us go to Numbers 33, to begin. Many of you know, by memory, what Numbers 33 is. It is the reviewing of the journeys of Israel as they came out of Egypt, going to the Promised Land. I want to read verses 3 and 4.

Numbers 33:3-4 They departed from Rameses [This is talking about Israel.] in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness [or, as the *King James* says, "with a high hand."] in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.

This is a very concise description of the events of the first day of Unleavened Bread. Now, look at the *tone* of that. They came out *with a high hand*. They were very bold (as the *New King James* says). They were happy. They were free! They had just been redeemed. They had gone through the terrible plagues—especially the plague of the firstborn. They had gone through the Passover ritual. They had gotten the permission of Pharaoh to leave. They had *plundered* the Egyptians—and been "paid," as it were, for their many years of slavery to them.

This was a great thing that happened! And they were happy! They were just ready to (I do not know) walk all the way to Canaan—that first day. Of course, their trial at that time was actually walking out of Egypt. They had to walk. They had to go through the steps; but they were engaged in this—and they were *thrilled* to be going through it.

Also, it is very interesting just to note that, in verse 4, Moses adds here, "also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments." Think of this, also, in terms of our spiritual journey to the Kingdom. When we are first called and baptized, and this journey begins—we are of the mind that God, indeed, had executed judgments on our false gods. He had convinced us that the way we had been living before—the way of idolatry, the way of worshipping false gods—was wrong. And we, in our first love, in our zeal, had seen them (in our mind's eye) thrown down. God had executed judgments on them—just by revealing Himself and His way of life, and showing their folly and worthlessness.

And we are *thrilled* that we have left that behind. So we walk out of our own spiritual Rameses, feeling just great—that God has called us. We are willing to take on whatever it is that God happens to place in our way.

Let us go to Exodus 12, and see another little detail here. We will start reading in verse 37. This is that same thing—they were coming out of Egypt, on that first day of Unleavened Bread.

Exodus 12:37-39 Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. [So most people think this means between 2 to 2 and a half million people, plus livestock.] A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. [So, who knows how

many feet we would count?]) And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.

They did not want to wait. They wanted to get out, as quickly as possible.

Exodus 12:40-42 Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. [Verse 42 is where I was headed.] It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

So there is also a **solemn** aspect to all of this, because of what had been wrought in Egypt—what had been necessary to redeem them, to free them, and to bring them out. But it is **God's actions** on this particular night that I want to highlight. Early in our conversion, we are very aware (in our first love) of *God watching*. That is what it basically says here. We observe this night because **God observed** His people going out of Egypt. You see—God was there. He was involved. He was **so involved** that it says (back in Exodus 11:7), when He was telling Moses what was going to happen, He said, "Not even a dog will wag his tongue against you." (Meaning, not even a dog will bark as you leave Egypt.) That is how closely God supervised their leaving.

So this just adds another bit of information about how they came out with such **a high hand**. They were aware that God was watching over them. And in our first love, we have this feeling of *closeness with God*. That He is there—guiding us, watching over us. That He is going to get us out. And He has gotten us out. So the whole attitude of the first day of Unleavened Bread (in this "type") is one of joyous boldness. The idea of being **thrilled**—with just a tinge of the solemnity of what it took for God to make our redemption possible.

We have just been through the Passover service, which is a very solemn occasion. And then, we kind of 'let it all go' on the first day of Unleavened Bread—on the other end, of the joy and the thrill of being free and walking out of Egypt. And, let me must add another point to that: We are thrilled because God has greased the way. We are thrilled because we see how much God has made our opportunity to work. He has just opened everything up, and we go through the gates without much problem—because He is doing so much of the work for us. And, basically, all we have to do is **walk**, and continue to go on the path that He has laid out for us. And my point here—comparing the *first* day of Unleavened Bread and the *last* Day of Unleavened Bread—is that walking out of Satan's world is often easier for us than it is staying out—because of the trials that come on us later.

We have kind of set the scene now for the Red Sea crossing, because it is important to see how this came about.

Exodus 13:17-18 Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

Most of you probably have a map in the back of your Bibles; and it would probably be a good idea just to check that at this point. Refresh your memory about the topography of the land. You probably see on the map the Nile delta. It was in the eastern part of the Nile delta where the Israelites lived. It was in one of the best parts of Egypt—one of the most fertile. And it was also the frontier of Egypt—where the land of Egypt ended; and either their provinces, or other nations', began. So this was right in a very good spot for getting into the land of Canaan.

You will probably see on the map that they have a town there called "Succoth." That means, in Hebrew, "tents" or "booths." We keep the feast of "*succoths*" in the fall—the Feast of Tabernacles. It is that same word. And that was, basically, the place where they were all to meet. And then, from there (once everybody got together, all the Israelites), Moses led them out of Egypt. And they got to Succoth pretty much the first night, on their first day of travel; and then they went on to other places (Etham, and then on from there.)

God says, in Exodus 13:17, that He did not lead them by the direct route to Canaan. It was called "the way of the land of the Philistines" (or, "the way of the Philistines"). It was also called by the Romans, later on, "the Via Maris." ("Via" meaning "the way of;" and "maris" means "sea." It was the way of the sea.) This was a very important route between Egypt and the rest of the world—especially the rest of the civilized world, along the Fertile Crescent that goes up along the coast of Canaan, and then up into Assyria, and then down the Tigris and Euphrates River. So, this was a major trade route. It was also a major war route between Egypt and the rest of the civilized world, particularly Mesopotamia.

The Egyptians at this time (from what we gather) were quite strong militarily. They had jurisdiction, basically, over most of Canaan at the time—even though they may not have been there physically. Their power was such that, when you came down that far, you had to worry about Egypt.

The Philistines were at the other end of this Via Maris, in Canaan. We all remember the Philistines (basically, for all the wars that they fought against Israel). The Philistines were the ones that put Goliath up against David; and David fought against the Philistines for quite a few years—as did Saul, before him. The judges also had their problems with the Philistines. The Philistines were so war-like that when Joshua finally brought the Israelites into Canaan, they avoided going into Philistine lands. God told them that all the land was theirs; but the way it worked out was that they had a hard time getting those Philistines out. And they never really did.

So, God said, "I've got the way of the land of the Philistines here to use; but I'm not going to do it—because, for one thing, there are Egyptian fortifications that way. And, once they get to the end of it, there are Philistine fortifications there. Even if they get pass the Egyptians, they are going to have to fight the Philistines. And they don't know war. They've been slaves all of their lives. They don't even really have anybody to lead them into war."

"So," He said, "I'll just avoid that and send them another way." He did not want to discourage them right out of the box. But on the other hand, He was setting things up for the Red Sea. He wanted to manipulate events His own way. So He said that He would not send them by way of the Philistines.

Here we have another typical lesson: Early in **our journey** to the Kingdom of God, God picks our path very carefully. God is the One that is setting **our maneuvers** towards the Kingdom. And He looks out for us. He does not want to discourage us early on. He does not want to give us such a big

trial, right away, that we cannot face it; and we will be discouraged and go back to Satan's world without a fight. So, generally, God gives us "easy" things early on.

I put "easy" in quotes, because I know that, with that little experience in God's way, even easy things are not really easy. They might be easy for us looking back, fifteen or twenty years down the road. But having to go to a boss about the Sabbath, or suddenly learning about second or third tithe (or something like that), might seem pretty hard; but, in the long run, they are fairly easy—or should be.

Let us go to Psalms 107, and we'll see a little bit about how God works with us. We will read the first nine verses. Look how the psalmist here (whoever it was) gets things in proper perspective.

Psalm 107:1-4 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! [Think of what I have just been talking about—that He makes it "easy" for us, early on.] For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so [Now remember, they had just been redeemed.], whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy. And gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in.

They were looking for the same city, basically, that Abraham was—even though they really did not understand that they were doing that. But that is the illustration here.

Psalm 107:5-6 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses.

Now verse 7, which is really the part that I want to get.

Psalm 107:7-9 And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for a dwelling place [an habitation]. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing and fills the hungry soul with goodness.

This is using the illustration of the Israelites coming out of Egypt, in this reflection of how God works with us. Verse 7 says, "He led them forth by the right way." It is always *the right way* when God is leading. And even though He led them away from trouble in the north (on the Via Maris), and led them into trouble in the south (at the Red Sea), it was still "the right way"—because He was leading, and He was guiding. And, as the psalmist says here: Give thanks to the Lord for that—because it is good. He is good! And the result of what He is trying to get out of it is filling our hungry soul with goodness. And He will do whatever wonderful works it takes to accomplish that.

Exodus 13:20-22 So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.

We are told to *walk by faith, and not by sight*, but God had quite a bit of mercy on Israel. They had a *visual aid* that was there all the time—by day and by night, a cloud or a pillar of fire. All they had to do was look up, and their faith could be bolstered. God was in that cloud. God was in that pillar of fire. He was there with them all the time—throughout forty years of wandering. They could see Him

leading—minute by minute. It says in another place that if the cloud went up, they got ready. When it moved, they moved on. When it stopped, they stopped. And they did this for forty years. All they had to do was "look up;" and God was there.

Now, can we apply this to ourselves? He is with *us* just as surely as He was with the Israelites coming out of Egypt—except He is not there visibly. Let us go to Isaiah 41. Think of this, not in terms of Israel, but in terms of the Israel of God.

Isaiah 41:8 "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend."

Are we not the descendants of Abraham—according to the books of Romans and Galatians? We are of the seed of Abraham if we believe.

Isaiah 41:9-10 "You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

Isaiah 41:14 "Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you," says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

So He promises *us* (as the Israel of God) strength, help, and support. What more do we need? Do we really need a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire? We should not. Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who do not see, yet believe."

Let us go to Haggai. Let us think of this in terms of a work that we have to do.

Haggai 1:13-14 Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, spoke the LORD's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the LORD." So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.

Haggai 2:2-3 "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?'

We could say that about the works of the churches now. There was a work that was done years ago, now. Think of it—that was fourteen years ago, when Herbert Armstrong died; and he did a great work. We had nice buildings, nice campuses. Everything seemed "glorious," in many respects. And now we look on the works we can accomplish now; and they seem like nothing.

Haggai 2:4-5 'Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' says the LORD of hosts. 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!'

He connects it right back to what we are talking about to day. "Do not fear. I am with you." Even though the pillar is not there (a pillar of cloud and of fire), He is there with us to do the work—whatever that "work" happens to be, and however glorious that "work" happens to be. And He goes on to say that even though it is going to look kind of shoddy at the moment, this latter work is more glorious than the former work. So, just give it some time. Have some faith. Walk the path. Do the work. That is very interesting.

Now, to Matthew 28. Let us put this into a New Testament context, and bring it right up to the end time.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying [Now, this should give us faith.], "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo [Behold! Look! Pay attention.], I am with you always, even to the [very, very, very] end of the age." Amen.

So our God and our Savior, the Head of this church, is *always* with us. Do we believe it? Do we trust it? Do we *act* as if He is there with us all the time? Or do we allow ourselves to become discouraged and fearful, when we seem to be facing a boxed canyon? That should set the scene for Exodus 14. This is literally the turning point of the story.

Exodus 14:1-2 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea."

They had been going mostly eastward, at this time. They reached a certain point, and God said, "Moses, we're going to turn here. The most obvious route is just to keep going straight, and leave Egypt. But," He said, "Moses, I want you to have the children turn, and I want you to go south. Turn to the right hand. Go south, and camp at this particular place by the sea." What this did was that it put them in a spot. Let us go to verse 3, where God gives His reasons.

Exodus 14:3 "For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.'

If you look on those maps, if they have any topographical information on them, you will see that there is a ridgeline that goes down the western edge of the Red Sea—the Gulf of Suez. There is a very small area there, just on the western side of the Gulf of Suez, where you can lead a group of people. But very soon, the cliffs jut up. And, at a certain point, those cliffs come very close to the water's edge. So, they are almost like a "J" in certain spots.

So they were walking down this narrow strip of land, with cliffs on their right. And once they got to a certain point, the cliffs swung around in front of them and blocked their way south. To their west (that is, to their left) was the Red Sea. They were closed in on three sides, The Sea on the left—and the cliffs before them and to the right. And guess who was coming from the north, behind them. The "bad guys" were on the north.

In verse 4, God continues to explain to Moses what is happening.

Exodus 14:4-9 "Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD." And they did so. Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" ["This is all our capital, leaving."] So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. [It is mentioned again, that they were still going with a pretty high hand—still pretty thrilled about their prospects.] So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.

That was just where God had decided He was going to lay the trap. What *we* really need to see is just that—that God was manipulating this entire event. He had the reins, you might say. Now, go to Isaiah 45. This is in connection with the prophecy about Cyrus; but I want you to see the principle that comes out here. Isaiah made this prophecy, under inspiration of God—I think it was 150 or 200 years before Cyrus was even born. But something comes out here. God speaks to Cyrus as though he was alive at the time.

Isaiah 45:5-6 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me."

Now remember—this is the same reason He gave back in Exodus 14 for wanting to do what He did to Pharaoh and his army. He wanted them to know that He was God! He wanted to have honor, yes; but He wanted them to be absolutely sure Who was working all this out.

Isaiah 45:7 [Now listen to this.] "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things."

Very interesting! This principle means that He can pretty much do whatever He wants. Something that may seem to us to be terrible—a great calamity—but, *in reality, He is working out His plan.* We look at these things from our perspective, and we make a judgment that such-and-such a thing is good and such-and-such a thing is evil. And God is doing the whole thing! Are we really going to ascribe to God evil motives? These things may look that way to us; but, in God's mind, they are all steps in bringing about His plan.

Isaiah 45:8 "Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation [deliverance], and let righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it."

Now that should give you a clue. These catastrophes that He is sending down—as rain, in this symbolism here—are supposed to make righteousness spring up. Just like water comes out of the clouds, and grass (or, whatever kind of plant) springs up out of the ground, He is saying that it is a "cause and effect" relationship. *If* He does certain works, and *if* we respond to them correctly, *then* righteousness is going to spring up.

Isaiah 45:9 "Woe to him who strives with his Maker!"

Is this not interesting, that this would follow? Because, automatically, the carnal mind says, "That's not fair!"

Isaiah 45:9 "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth! [But do not strive with God!] Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or, shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands?'"

This is the deist, who says that God has set things in motion and then He goes off somewhere else. That God has no hands—He has no power, He has no part in what is going on. And God, through Isaiah, is saying here that both ideas are wrong. (1) That you should strive with your Maker; and (2) that God is powerless.

Isaiah 45:10-13 "Woe to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to the woman [his mother], 'What have you brought forth?'" [That is kind of stupid, is it not? After the fact?] Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me. I have made the earth, and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; he shall build My city and let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward," says the LORD of hosts.

Now that last verse was speaking of Cyrus; but it could just as well apply to Pharaoh—not in what was accomplished here specifically about building a city, but that God raised up Pharaoh (or, used Pharaoh) to do a certain work for Him. He hardened Pharaoh's heart all through the process, in order to bring them out of Egypt. And once they got out of Egypt, He hardened his heart again—to bring them to the Red Sea: to test them and to get honor over Pharaoh. To show Pharaoh (and all the Egyptians) who was Boss—because, do you not remember (back in chapter 5 or 6), that Pharaoh said, "Who is this Lord, that I should obey Him?"

And so God says, "In order to tie everything up neatly, and to get the lessons learned by all those that I want to learn these lessons, and to make sure the honor is distributed properly, and to make sure that everyone knows just Who is in control of everything that goes on here—let us go to the Red Sea and have it out." That was His "tableau," you might say—so that He could speak, to make sure that everybody knew what was going on.

Now, it was not just "them." Let us go to I Corinthians 10.

I Corinthians 10:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

What is Paul saying here? What is he leading up to? Well, the simplest principle that we can get out of this is that *Israel is a "type" of us*. They walked out of Egypt redeemed by God, and they had to be baptized in the Red Sea.

I Corinthians 10:11-13 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore [This is the conclusion.] let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. [Do not get too high and mighty. Do not think you know it all.] No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

That is all the lessons wrapped up into one little verse. God orchestrated it all—not just for their benefit, not just to make sure Pharaoh understood, not just so all the people round about would fear God; but He did it *for us*—His sons of God, that would be begotten many, many, many generations down the road. So that *we* all have an example to look at, and try not to emulate.

Exodus 14:10 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.

Fear is a typical human reaction when you have 100,000 men (and their horses and chariots) coming down on you, wanting your blood. We can understand that, can we not? Think about them. In their case, they had never fought. They were totally unarmed, as far as we know. I am sure the Egyptians did not give slaves swords, and spears, and whatever else they used in war at the time.

Even though they still felt like they had "a high hand," they were still exhausted from a week of walking. And because they had just been released from slavery, their natural tendency was to submit to their masters—who were breathing down their neck, behind them. I am sure that for many of them, their first thought was to say, "Mercy. Mercy. Take us back." But you notice here that it says the children of Israel *cried out to the Lord*. They were afraid; and then they cried out.

Now, what kind of *crying out* was this? Well, it does not say. We are left to kind of make a few suppositions here. I really do not have any answers. The fear may have brought some of them to their knees, and so it is included here. Their "crying out to God" could have been in complaint— although, normally, when the Bible says that someone cried out to the Lord, it is usually sincere. They are not complaining. They are just asking for help. It is a supplication of sorts. Maybe it was in despair. Was there any faith connected with their prayer? Maybe in some, but it does not seem like, at this point, there was a whole lot of faith. Let us read what came next.

Exodus 14:11-12 Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

It seems like, even if some of them did "cry out to the Lord," the majority reaction was one of complaint—one of terrified complaint. When in terror, people tend to exaggerate their situation; and they also tend to exaggerate how "good" they had it before. That is exactly what they did here. They are very sarcastic. "Are there no graves in Egypt?"

Remember in "The Ten Commandments" movie? This was Dathan that came up and said it to Moses. (Edward G. Robinson. Yeah, "the gangster" comes out and says this.) But Egypt is a land of tombs. The tombs of the pharaohs, the tombs of their wives, the tombs of their servants—it was a land of graves. And yet they said: "Were there no graves in Egypt, that you brought us out here to die?" Very sarcastic!

And they also misrepresented what they had said to Moses when they were back in Egypt. They were very willing to call him their "savior" at first. But it was not until Pharaoh said, "Okay, you are going to make bricks without straw. You are going to have to gather the straw yourself. And I want the same amount of bricks as you gave me before." Then they started complaining to Moses, saying, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." So it really was not true that they had not wanted this freedom. They were in it with him.

You might just want to write down Psalm 106:6-8. I will go there and read it to you. I want to show you one other thing. This is a song that was written much later, thinking back on this.

Psalm 106:6-8 We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of Your mercies, but rebelled by the sea—the Red Sea. Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known.

This complaint, this crying out, this being very afraid—was considered by God to be rebellion. And it was. It is very easily seen to be rebellion. As soon as the going got tough, they were headed home; and exaggerating how bad things were then, and exaggerating how "good" things were before.

What they did was put all the blame on Moses, their human leader. And some commentators suppose that they were going to kill him; but, in thinking about it, I did not think that was very likely. He was their only hope! I am not sure that they were picking up stones to stone him, because he was the one carrying the staff. I think that, if any of them had any second thoughts, they would have been able to see that only Moses had been able to save them before.

Maybe some of the more hotheaded ones of them wanted to string him up, or stone him, or whatever; but it just seems that they were so deeply *slaves* in their thinking that they really could not decide something like that for themselves. They still wanted someone to tell them what to do. And so really their only reaction was to complain. "What do we do, Moses? You brought us here. Did you bring us out here just to be killed by the Egyptians? What are you going to do, Moses?" I think this is more despair and rebellion—and not murderous anger—that they showed here.

Let us go back to Exodus 14, where Moses gives his answer to the people.

Exodus 14:13-14 And 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. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

I think this really shows Moses' faith. In the face of two million despairing Israelites, he told them all just to "Be calm. Don't be afraid. God's going to do something."

You might write down Isaiah 63:11-13, which praises Moses for being the shepherd of the flock; and it uses this situation as the illustration. It is very interesting. Moses could "see" the same things that they saw. He could see the cliffs. He could see the sea. He could look and see Pharaoh and his armies coming. But he knew that God had not brought them out here to kill them. He *knew God* better than that.

So Moses said, "Okay, fellows. Ladies. Never fear. Calm down. Somehow, I know it, God is going to defeat the Egyptians for good. So, be quiet and watch God deliver you." A very courageous and faithful answer, but a little vague—if you think about it. He did not know what God was up to, basically. So what he said was good, as far as it went.

Now, let us go to verse 15. God's reaction has always humored me a bit.

Exodus 14:15-18 And the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

"Moses, **move!** Didn't I tell you before that I was going to bring you down here? I was going to defeat the Egyptians, and I was going to bring honor to Myself, and let everybody know that I was the LORD. Didn't I tell you that before, Moses? This is the time that all comes to pass, Moses." I have always thought that God said that with a bit of a mild exasperation. Moses should have known what to do. *Follow the cloud!* The cloud was still there. It was out over the sea, evidently.

What was Moses supposed to do? *Follow the cloud! Follow the pillar of fire!* And that was still before them. Some little old Red Sea is nothing for God. Now, we can understand: Moses was a man, just like us. He had his weak spots. He had his fears. He had his hesitations. He did not know, or his understanding was not quite up to it at this point. So God had to prod him and remind him. You cannot fault him. But God had already said: "You follow the cloud. That's the direction. Why do you need to ask directions, when I have already pointed out to you the way to go? **Go!**"

And this should tell *us*: We have here, and have been reading for years, *God's directions*. When we come to a boxed canyon in our trials, why do we need to stop and say, "Oh no. Here I am—stuck! There's no way out." God says, "No. Move forward. Continue in the way that I have shown you." Now that is not always easy to do; and we are all weak; and we all have our problems (just like Moses had). So we all need to learn this lesson for ourselves. But God says, "The easiest way is just to follow what I have said."

Proverbs 3:5-6 puts this in the form of an aphorism—a nice nugget of wisdom that we can learn, and memorize, and use.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

That is the answer. Trust not what you can see with your eyes. Trust not the circumstances that are around you, and that make your understanding very much skewed. Trust in what God has said. Trust

in God's mind—that He is working things out for you, in your life. And follow the cloud! It is an easy answer, but very hard to apply. But that is usually the case, is it not?

So what we have to learn to do is second-guess our human reasoning, because we are *not* to trust that—our own understanding. We are to lean on God's understanding, *God's way*. And I can say with ample proof—from my own life and the lives of others—that *the way* works. It is the application of it and the *moving forward* that is tough.

Exodus 14:19 And the Angel of God [Listen to this.], who went before the camp of Israel, moved. . .

Where had He been? He had been *leading* them. It moved at that point (after God had given Moses the instructions), and went *behind* the children of Israel. I do not know if you had noticed that before. (I had not, until I really started digging into this.)

Exodus 14:19-20 . . . And the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

This cloud's movement did two things: It stopped the Egyptian army from attacking, giving God and Israel time to act: God to open the sea, and Israel to cross it. The second thing that it did, which is kind of ironic, was that it blocked the Israelites from returning to Egypt. They could not go surrender. They were *forced* to move forward. And God will do that, if we are a bit recalcitrant. If we dig in our heels, He will kick us in the rear to get us moving forward; and that hurts, often. He does not give us a chance to back out—or, at least that is His intention. He wants us to move forward.

What this did was force both sides to go through with it: The Egyptians with attacking, and the Israelites with going across—just as God wanted to occur, so that His plan could move forward. There is also some symbolism in that the pillar was *dark* on the Egyptian side, which is an indication of wrath and judgment, darkness of death, and on the Israelite's side it was *light*. It says of Jesus, "In Him was light." Well, light stands for good, or favor. So He was comforting His people and giving the other side the willies. (You might want to write down Nahum 1:7-8—where it says that, in a nutshell, about His approach to the Assyrians.)

Exodus 14:21-25 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. Now it came to pass, in the morning watch [Almost the whole night time has gone by.], that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. [Next comes probably the biggest understatement in all the Bible.] And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty [I'll say. They were riding on the rims!]; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians [against us]."

Now this stupendous miracle that occurred is unexplainable by natural means. If you go into a commentary and they start telling you, "Well, the wind did this, and. . ."—do not believe it, because there is no way a wind could pile up water on opposite sides of the people of Israel. That is what it says. It was a wall to their left and to their right. There is no wind in this world that could do it. Now, if it did, it would blow the Israelites and all their baggage to kingdom come. You have this 500,000 mile-per-hour wind, piling up water; and here are these Israelites yelling in terror and disaster. They would never make it.

But God piled that water up somehow on the one side, and He piled it up on the other; and then He sent a wind down the center, to dry the ground. And I think that the reason why Moses wrote it this way is because to them it looked like it was all one process. They could not explain it; but they felt the wind, drying the ground. So Moses stuck it in there, as whatever kind of an explanation he could come up with. He knew what it was though. The east wind made the sea into dry land.

At some point, God lifted the pillar of cloud; and the Egyptians pursued into the Red Sea. Now here (where most conservative scholars think the crossing was), the Red Sea was probably six to eight miles wide—at this point. So there was plenty of room to get quite a lot of Israelites (on the one end) and the Egyptian army (pursuing from the other end), and to get the entire Egyptian army between the walls of water before they came smacking down. This was *a very large miracle* that occurred. God had that water stand up in a heap, on both sides, for six to eight miles.

Well, we think about Universal Studios; and you go down there, and it is about three feet high. I do not know if any of you have been there; but that is where they filmed the great *Ten Commandments* scene. It was spectacular in itself—that they could do that. But this was for six to eight miles, and high! Who knows how deep the water was there? Yeah, wide too; because it takes a lot of ground to get two to two and one half million people—and their livestock—through this section of Red Sea in one night. *This was a grand work of God!* Something that our minds kind of lose the details on, because it is so big.

God causes the wheels of the chariots to fall off, and the Egyptians are stuck. So they begin to flee.

Exodus 14:26-27 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it . . .

That is kind of interesting. It seems as if they got confused—which God said they did—and they were fleeing the wrong direction. That is the only thing that I could think of—He so confounded them, they did not know which way to go.

Exodus 14:27-31 . . . So the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall on them on their right hand and on their left. [It is repeated, so we get the wonder of that miracle.] So the LORD saved Israel that day [delivered them, gave them salvation] out of

the hand of they Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses.

Because God wanted to have honor and victory over Egypt, He tells Moses to work the miracle in the other direction. And unrestrained, millions (or, billions) of gallons of water came crashing back! It smashed the Egyptian army to smithereens. All the men died. All the horses died. And, evidently, many of them washed up on the shore; and this is what armed Israel, for their wars with Amalek (that came on, later on) and later other wars.

The Bible does not say specifically that Pharaoh died. If we understand the historical setting of the Exodus (and we are not exactly sure that this is right), Amenhotep II lived for several more years—if he is the Pharaoh of the Exodus, and the timing is right. So there is a fudge factor there, as we are not exactly sure. But if he did live, he reigned in disgrace, and definitely in political and military weakness, for the rest of his life—because that *smashed Egypt*. Add ten plagues on Egypt and their commerce, and their religion, and their agriculture, and whatever else—and then God pulled the Egyptian army into the Red Sea and smashed that too.

From what I learned at Ambassador College, three generations had to go by before they were strong enough, again, to mount an attack outside of Egypt. That was devastation! And it is no wonder that they do not write about this in their hieroglyphs, because this was a shame to them. They did not want anybody to know that this slave people, and their God, had brought them low.

So, do not let anybody give you that argument. If someone came in and tore the United States down, we would not write about it either. We would be very happy to bury that knowledge, if we could.

Psalms 77 was written with this in mind. It is a psalm of Asaph, and he is thinking of a boxed canyon of his own; and he thinks back on the Red Sea. (By the way, this is in our hymnal.)

Psalm 77:1-3 I cried out to God with my voice—to God with my voice; and He gave ear to me. In the day of my trouble I sought the LORD; my hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.

Think about that. Do we not all go through trials, every once in a while, where the answer just does not seem to be coming? And we ask and ask, and we complain. And we cry out, and we do not seem to get an answer.

Psalm 77:4-5 You hold my eyelids open [He cannot sleep.]; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.

Remember—these things were written for our admonition. And he says, "I've gone back and considered what had happened before, in old times, to get some answers."

Psalm 77:6 I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search.

He is going at it, a mile a minute—trying to find an answer. Then, his question:

Psalm 77:7-9 Will the Lord cast off forever? ["Isn't He ever going to answer me?"] And will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? [He would have to forget to be God, not to be "gracious."] Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?

Think about this too. Have we not all had thoughts like this, at times, "Has God gone far off, so that He won't give me an answer? Have I done something, so that He is withholding all His grace and mercy from me?"

Psalm 77:10 And I said, "This is my anguish; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

That is God's powers—in His right hand. So Asaph says here, "I'm going to remember God in His strength."

Psalm 77:11-15 I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your works, and talk of Your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary [Or, it is a way of holiness.]. Who is so great a God as our God? [There is none!] You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples, You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.

Think about this too—all the great works of God in the past! Now, we get to the Red Sea:

Psalm 77:16-20 The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid; the depths also trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about. The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

That is the answer. *Wherever God leads, that is the way to go!* We face "Red Seas" every now and then. We face trials that seem impossible to overcome. We may cry out to God for help, and it seems as if His favor has been removed far away. But we know that His mercy never fails. We have proof from His Word—from these examples—that He is quick and mighty to save. All He is doing is bringing all the pieces together, and waiting for *us* to walk forward in faith—*into His salvation*.

Oh! I guess you want to know how the cowboy story ends. Will Calloway escape the boxed canyon?

What should he do? Calloway knew he had only seconds to decide; he could already hear the posse coming toward him. Looking around desperately, hoping to find someplace, anyplace, where he could take cover from the inevitable gunfight, his eyes fell on a detail he had missed before. A narrow trail angled up the face of the right-hand cliff—a trail his surefooted mount could easily handle.

With a light spur and a soft, "Get up!" the drifting cowhand pointed the roan toward the trail at a swift trot. He was just topping onto the plateau when he heard the shouts of surprise from the posse below. Calloway smiled; knowing he would live to punch cows another day.

