

The Exodus from Egypt

DAVE BAST

The children of Israel were between the proverbial rock and a hard place. In front of them stretched an impassable sea; behind them marched an implacable foe. They had just been freed from slavery in Egypt by the supernatural intervention of God; but now Pharaoh and his army are hot on their heels and they have come smack up against the shore of the Red Sea. It looks like they are stuck; finished; toast. Except for one thing; their God, the God of Israel, is a God who can make a way out of no way. Let's see what he does. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, we are working our way through the book of Exodus – the story of Exodus – and dramatic story it is; a lot of familiar tales and we have seen the beginning with the rescue of Moses, the baby from the Nile River, and then the growing up and finally running away. God calls him at the burning bush. He comes back and he confronts Pharaoh, and in our last program we looked at those ten plagues that finally forced Pharaoh to let the people go.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and the great story of the Passover, which we are not delving into specifically in this particular series, but where the people put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their homes; the Angel of Death would pass over their homes, and this finally, for a brief time, convinced Pharaoh: Fine, these people are more trouble than they are worth; I am going to let them go, and he releases them from their bondage. The people leave. The people of Egypt even lavish some gifts on them as they go. Good riddance. Get out of town. Go. So, everything looks like it is going great.

DAVE BAST

Well, and that is one of the themes that recurs over and over. It would be interesting to notice how many times the story of the Exodus is retold throughout the rest of the Bible. It is over and over and over, and even how they plundered the Egyptians, as the Bible says, on the night that they left. So, on the one hand they had to leave quickly and that had something to do with the unleavened bread; they did not have time to let their bread rise in the oven; so, from then on at the Passover they would always eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs to remind themselves of the slavery in Egypt, and the lamb, of course, that was the sacrifice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That goes all the way to the evening of Jesus' betrayal, right? That is the Passover that they are celebrating, and Jesus transforms that into what we now call the Lord's Supper, where Jesus himself becomes the lamb. So, what an incredible story; what incredible significance this night has for the Israelites, but also for Christians ultimately as we take our place in the story through Christ and through the Lord's Supper. So, it looks good. They finally – and it took a long time, the tug of war between God and Pharaoh, Moses and Pharaoh – it took a while, but then we read this from Exodus 14:5-10:

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We let the Israelites go. We lost their services.” ⁶So he made his chariot ready and he took his army with him. ⁷He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. ⁸The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. ⁹The Egyptians, all Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, horsemen, troops; they pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea. ¹⁰And as Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up and there were the Egyptians marching after them. They were terrified and they cried out to the Lord.

DAVE BAST

You know, the night was pretty exciting and dramatic, but the morning comes and they have fetched up against the seashore of the Red Sea, and Pharaoh has changed his mind and he starts out with his whole army, and they are mechanized. This is an awesome force. In modern terms, it would like seeing a whole battalion of tanks coming down on you, and you are these little, unarmed people. Of course they are terrified. It looks like the Exodus is going to be a shorter flight than Wilber and Orville’s was at Kitty Hawk. What is going to happen?

Well, what happens initially is that the people of Israel fall into their characteristic mode of responding, and that is to criticize God and Moses. So we read a little bit later in Chapter 14 that they say this:

¹¹Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert.

It is sort of like revisionist history all of a sudden: Oh, we did not have it so bad in Egypt. Life was pretty good there. And this, again, is going to be a recurring theme throughout Exodus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is going to come up again and again. We will see it in Leviticus; you will see it all over the place in Numbers, where the people are constantly going to – they do not do it quite so much here, but in the future they are going to – in their minds they are going to turn Egypt into Shangri La. Egypt is going to look like Club Med, where they had good food to eat, and hey, things were good! So we were slaves and got whipped mercilessly and had to make bricks without straw, but it was a nice place!

DAVE BAST

Plus the genocide thing was going on, but never mind that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, babies in the Nile, but beyond that... So, now the people say: Aha! This was not a rescue plan after all; this is just a way to get us wiped out somewhere else.

Obviously, we can understand their terror – and God does not judge them for that in this particular case – in this case, God does not come down in thunder and say: You fools, I will wipe you out myself. No, I think God probably, in his mercy, understands the panic; understands the fear; he gets it. He does not wash his hands of the Israelites here, or just decide to start over; and Moses, right hard on the heels, and you wonder if even Moses had a little trembling in his voice when he said this, but in verses 13 and 14 of the 14th chapter, Moses says:

¹³Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still. Do not just do something; stand there! Just the opposite of what we sometimes say, but that is Moses’ faith.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and as we know, digging deeper into the story, God puts a temporary hedge or wall of protection between the hosts of Pharaoh and his people of Israel. He causes a cloud of fire and a pillar of smoke, which is going to be the way he leads them through the wilderness, to intervene and create a temporary barrier. So the people are okay for the present, and we are going to see what happens next, and it is really incredibly

dramatic, but before we do that, I just have a note. There is a wonderful preacher, I am sure you are familiar with her, too, Scott, called Fleming Rutledge, who has a sermon on this story, and she borrows for the title of her sermon a phrase from the African American Church, and she calls it *A Way Out of No Way*, which is a wonderful truth about God. God is a God for whom there are no final dead ends. Even though this looks like a complete dead end...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it sure does...

DAVE BAST

He is a God who makes a way. He always manages to make a way out of no way, and we are going to see how he does it in this particular instance in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we have just come up against the brink of the Red Sea with the people of Israel. The Egyptian army is chasing them down and it is terrifying. They are really essentially unarmed. They have maybe a few small weapons, but the Egyptians have a whole crowd of chariots and they are heavily armored. God says: Do not worry about it. All you need to do is be still and watch what I am about to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Of course, what God is about to do is lead the people through the water. You mentioned in the opening, Dave, that they are between a rock and a hard place. They are between the Devil and the deep blue sea, too. There is no way forward, humanly speaking. There is no way forward.

What is interesting here, though, if you read scholars, they will tell you – if you read various commentaries on Exodus – they will tell you there is a lot of uncertainty as to what body of water they were up against. We often picture it kind of Cecil B. DeMille, the Ten Commandments movie, as this gargantuan ocean – very unlikely...

DAVE BAST

Well, the Red Sea, if you look on a map, and look at the Red Sea, it is a big body of water that is miles and miles across.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it might also be the Reed Sea, or the Sea of Reeds, and there were lots of lagoons and marshy areas. You still could not cross them. So, it is not like we are diminishing the miracle that is going to take place when God divides the waters, but be that as it may, there is uncertainty as to which body of water it was. But what is interesting is that the people need to go from Egypt to Canaan. They need to get back to the Promised Land, and if you actually look at a map, there are all kinds of routes you could imagine that would not take them anywhere near a body of water. So, in a sermon some years ago I said if you are in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is where we make these programs, and you want to go to Detroit, Michigan, you can just drive right over to Detroit, but just imagine somebody going from Grand Rapids to Cleveland, Ohio, and then going to Detroit by crossing Lake Erie. That is kind of a funny way to get to Detroit from Grand Rapids, but that is what happens here. There is something about the symbolism of water – and we saw this in the previous program with Moses' reed basket – there is something about the need to go through these baptismal waters that God makes it inevitable that they do bump into water after all even though it could have been avoided because God needs to show his power, but also lead his people through the waters of death to life.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is a great point, and we could also observe that God has some things he wants to do with them in the wilderness. They are going to be heading essentially to the south. Again, if you look in a study bible and look at a map of the Exodus, you will see all kinds of lines wandering across the map because nobody knows, and there are various reconstructions of what their possible route might have been. But, you are absolutely right, Scott. The shortest, quickest way to go involved no water at all and it was a journey of just a few days.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it is the Sinai. It is a desert.

DAVE BAST

Instead, they are up into this Red Sea area or Reed Sea area, as it could be translated, and they are going to end up wandering south to Sinai, to Horeb, to the mountain of God. So here they are, and God says something really interesting. They have just been crying out: What is going on? Why have you brought us here? We are going to die. We are going to die. And Moses says: Do not worry. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still. And then we read:

¹⁵The Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me?” Isn’t it obvious? “Tell the Israelites to move on.” What do you mean, move on? How can they move on, they cannot get through? And then God says this: ¹⁶“Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the waters so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians – we were talking about that phrase in an earlier program with Pharaoh that is a hard saying – I will harden their hearts so they will go in after them and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” And we know what happened. Moses raises his staff and God causes a wind to blow and a way opens through the waters of the sea.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the people pass through the waters; and again, the symbolism theologically and biblically is rich. They pass through the waters safely. The waters that are going to bring death ordinarily and will bring death to the Egyptians; the waters that would end life ordinarily become a safe haven by the grace and the almighty power of God; so God is indeed teaching them some lessons here, even as he is going to do a lot of teaching of them in the wilderness in the years to come, beginning at Sinai a little bit later in the story of Exodus that we will look at in another episode in this series, but God is teaching them; and it is a baptism story. Like one of the confessional standards of the Reformed tradition, the Belgic Confession, at one point has this great line where it is talking about baptism and it refers to Jesus, our Red Sea; and so the Belgic Confession makes that move that Jesus is like what the Red Sea was for the Israelites. He brings us safely through the waters of death, through the waters of chaos, and we arrive to life. It is, in a way, and we will think about this more in the final segment of this, it is a resurrection story – it is an Easter story.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is certainly that for the people of God; the people of Israel, who hear his word and who obey it and who must have been filled with awe as they saw this way open up; but at the same time, it is a very different story for Pharaoh. This arrogant king who continues to harden his heart, and he sees that way open up. You would think he would stop and say to himself: Whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Now I have just seen all of these ten plagues, we have just had death visit the families of Egypt, and now I am seeing a way through the sea being created by the power of Yahweh, whose name he had despised. You would think he would say: Time out; that is enough. Okay, God, I give up. But instead, he lashes his chariots forward and he plunges into his own ruin and destruction. The wheels of the Egyptian chariots get bogged down in the mud; the wind dies down; the waters return; and they are destroyed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, as with the plagues, as we thought about it in a previous episode, the chaos of Pharaoh is defeated by the chaos of the water unleashed – water is ordinarily a source of life, but it can be a source of death in a fallen creation – Pharaoh is a great example of a fallen human being, so it would only make sense that one of the features of a fallen creation would do him in. So, they are drowned by the waters of chaos.

What is interesting, and we will think about this, too, in the final segment, one of the things – and the Israelites may not have realized this fully at the time – but one of the things that this tells us is that salvation is always a costly business. For whatever the reason, once sin and evil came into this universe, God could not just wink at it or wish it away or wave his hand and just dismiss it; it had to be seriously engaged. It is going to ultimately lead to the death of God's own Son before salvation really comes. It is serious business. It can be a terrible business. It certainly was for the Egyptians.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so we experience ourselves a crossing of the Red Sea, whenever we come to Christ, when God's new Israel, God's New Testament people are joined together in him through faith and are delivered from sin and death and the forces of evil that pursue them, it is all a wonderful foreshadowing of the Gospel story itself, and the question is: How do we respond to that? Moses can show us something about that, too, which is what we will look at next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you listening to *Groundwork* and our series on the book of Exodus. We are in the fourth program, Dave, in this series, and we have just looked at the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus Chapter 14, the miraculous power of God; the Egyptians are utterly undone and defeated; drowned in the waters when they return to their place, and now the Israelites are safe on the other side; and how do they respond?

DAVE BAST

They respond with a song, interestingly enough. It is called the *Song of Moses*. It is actually a psalm. It may very well be the oldest psalm in the Hebrew Scriptures, so it is a very ancient song, and it goes like this. We will just read some selected verses. Chapter 15:1:

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. ²The Lord is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation. He is my God and I will praise him; my father's God and I will exalt him. ³The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is his name. ⁴Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea.

There is this powerful imagery of God as a warrior, a fighter, a stronghold, and it is all about a power encounter with the forces of evil as personified by Pharaoh and his army.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They go on, too, a little later at verses 11 and following; they look at this Yahweh, who Moses has introduced them to and reintroduced them to after centuries – long ago since Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were around – and they now look at this God and see what he has done, and they say:

¹¹Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you? Majestic in holiness; awesome in glory; working wonders. ¹²You stretch out your right hand and the earth swallows your enemies. ¹³In your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling. They are coming to see something about God – and actually, this will become a staple of Israelite theology, and we will see it in the book of Psalms, and that is praising God for his loving kindness; praising God for his mercy and his goodness in taking care of his people. That is what they celebrate here because they have seen a powerful, powerful example of it.

DAVE BAST

We have said in some of the earlier programs that in answer to the question: Where is God and what is he doing? So often the answer to that emerges in the ordinary actions of people just going about their business, doing what is right, doing their jobs, doing them well; and that is God at work, certainly; and that is how he normally works. That is how we see him in the story at the beginning of Exodus. But this is something way beyond that. It is also true that the answer to the question where is God is God is acting in his mighty, powerful acts of salvation in delivering his people; here using the forces of nature, the forces of chaos, of fallen nature, as we have said repeatedly, in order to bring about the deliverance of his people. God is also acting in those powerful moments. They do not happen all the time. His normal way of acting is probably the first way, through people. It is not often that we can clearly say: This was supernatural. This was the hand of God. But it happened there at the Red Sea, and the people of Israel were stunned. You can just sense as they respond with this exuberant praise – for 350 years they have been waiting for him to show up like this and finally he does.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is what they have been waiting for. I wonder sometimes if Moses or others thought a little bit about this as well, in terms of the cost of their salvation. Of course they were happy that their enemies were defeated. Of course they were happy that they were not going to die underneath the wheels of Pharaoh's chariots, but a lot of people did die, and I have sometimes wondered – somebody once said that joy is not a first feeling, it is a last feeling – I think it was Cardinal Henry Newman who said joy is not a first feeling, it is a last feeling, and it is a refined feeling even after Easter. Because even after Easter we realize what it cost God to save us; it cost him the death of his own Son. For the Israelites, their salvation also came at a great cost. So, there is joy, but there is also a deep – there needs to be, I think, for Christians reading this story, also – a deep recognition that salvation, as we said in the last segment, is not cheap. The grace and mercy of God is wonderful and fantastic, but it always comes at a cost. There is no cheap grace. You wonder if the people of Israel reflected on that, too.

DAVE BAST

You would hope that there were some among them who looked out at all those dead Egyptian soldiers and felt a pang of: Did they deserve that? Did they have it coming? But that sort of nuance does not seem to be in the Biblical text. It is this overwhelming rejoicing at the spectacular – the surprising – deliverance of God. The way out of no way idea of we were hopeless, we were finished, and then God brought this redemption, at a cost.

But the other thing that strikes me is how naturally they broke into song. It says that Moses led them. This is called the *Song of Moses*, but the Israelites sang, too. Somehow, biblical faith is a singing faith, and it is different in some ways, it is true, if you have ever been to a Middle Eastern country, you have maybe heard the call to prayer. There is a chant that goes on in Islam. But for Christians, congregational singing – I mean, it is the whole people of God who break into song, and there is something about music that our faith is so much a faith of rescue, so much a faith of deliverance that we cannot help but sing about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What I like in Exodus 15 is Moses sings this song to the Lord; Moses' song goes on for 18 verses, then his sister, Miriam gets in on the act and she says: That is a nice song, Moses, but I have a shorter one: Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. A little shorter, a little more memorable, and so all of the women join in with timbrels and dancing and there is this great Easter-like, resurrection-like celebration going on here that indeed God is a strong deliverer. We could wish that that joy would set the tone for the rest of the book of Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch, as we call the first five books of the Bible; unfortunately, we know that the people are going to revert to their complaining soon enough; but even there we will be seeing the great mercy and power of God in putting up with these people – even as he puts up with us – because God is on the side of life; he is on the side of flourishing, and that is good news.

DAVE BAST

It certainly is. Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what you would like us to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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