

PURPOSEFUL PRECARIOUS PREDICAMENTS

The Life of Moses: Deliverance through Faith.

Exodus 13:17-14:31

Chadron Berean Church

There are times in your life where you will be forced into a corner that you cannot get out of on your own. Times where you will be hemmed in on all sides and it seems there is no way out. Times that try our souls. Circumstances beyond your control. It may be a major hit to your finances, to your health, a relationship gone awry, or just anything *you can't fix on your own. Battle you can't win on your own.* At times they hit like dominoes... back-to-back-to-back. One right after another. You might refer to these crippling situations as **precarious predicaments**. Such predicaments have been defined as: an unpleasantly difficult or perplexing; exposed to constant risk; a situation in which a favorable outcome is impossible; you are bound to lose whatever you do. It's in those kinds of situations that you reach the end of yourself. And when you reach the end of yourself, you quit looking to yourself. And because you quit looking to yourself, you inevitably start to look elsewhere for help—to other people or other things. But where do you look help—to who or what you look too? Maybe you find yourself in such a situation this morning. If you do, I think our passage in Exodus 13-14 is going to be a profound comfort to you as we continue our study on the life of Moses.

Last week, we covered the warning to Pharaoh and the ten “plagues” of the Exodus. The Bible calls them “miracles” or “signs and wonders” of the Exodus. Well today, we come to the final and climactic miracle that results in judgment for the Egyptians and redemption for the Hebrew people. It's the last battle between Egypt and Yahweh in this dramatic duel. And I've decided to use the *Legacy Standard Bible* today. It's a newer translation that advances the aim of the NASB to bring out literal qualities in the original text. I'm still waiting for the prices to go down before I get a copy I want, but one of the reasons I appreciate it is because it translates the YHWH (the tetragrammaton) as **Yahweh**. Instead of using LORD in all caps to refer to Yahweh, it just says Yahweh.¹ And I want us to see the name Yahweh this morning because Yahweh means something. It's the most significant name for God that God gave Moses at the burning bush encounter. It's the name we call God when we refer to Him as the I AM. The present tense God who exists, who is personal and covenant keeping. Who is self-existent and all-powerful.

13:17 Now it happened that when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not guide them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.” 18 Hence God turned the people to the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in battle array from the land of Egypt. 19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.” 20 Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. 21 And Yahweh was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to guide them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might go by day and by night. 22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

I. ISRAEL DEPARTS EGYPT. (13:17-22)

As Israel departs Egypt to return to the mountain of God in Midian where God appeared to Moses, there are a few **details** given. First, is a brief description of the **route** they took—or maybe we should say, *didn't take*. The *quickest* way out of Egypt would have been to go **by way of the sea/way of the Philistines** (Via Maris to the Romans/Way of Horus to the Egyptians). It's the ancient road that ran along the coast of the Mediterranean from Egypt to Israel. If they took that, they could've arrived in the promised land in 2 weeks instead of 40 years! But that was not God's plan. He isn't merely interested in getting them from point A to point B as fast as possible.

One reason He didn't want is them going directly into Canaan or taking this route is because they would encounter intense **opposition**, be demoralized, and change their minds.² Also, **who is traveling?** This isn't a bunch of ready-made soldiers. You have weary slaves, the elderly, pregnant women, children, the handicapped—all coming out of Egypt. They also have flocks and all their possessions. They even have **Jospeh's bones** (Gen. 50:24-26). This is not a battle-ready or battle-hardened bunch. However, they are in a **battle formation** because for one, they needed to travel in an organized fashion to proceed rapidly, they probably thought it might intimidate for enemies; and offer protection in case of an attack. The imagery being painted though is sure, that this is army against army. God's army vs. Pharaoh's army.

You've noticed or will notice that there are a lot of debates over the exact route of the Exodus. This is because the names of the places given just aren't there anymore. The places have eroded over time. Some topography has probably changed. So, we're not going to spend much time on precise locations. But one of the locations that I think is fairly certain is **Midian**, where Moses shepherded and met God. It's in the Arabian Peninsula. And if so, that places Mt. Sinai east of the **Gulf of Aqaba**, the right finger coming off of the Red Sea. The Jews called Aqaba **Yam Suph**, or **Red Sea**. Yam Suph was the boundary for Israel's territory.³ They also probably took the Darb el-Hajj route across the Sinai Peninsula.⁴ If you want an entertaining and educating documenting on the Exodus, look up *Patters of Evidence: Exodus or Red Sea Miracle*. I think you'll really enjoy that even if you don't agree with every detail entirely.

But the text says as they go out, they are celebrating. They are going out **boldly** (v. 8; lit., “with a high/exalted hand”). And we should also note they have a GPS system—God Positioning System. God Himself is personally leading them through a unique manifestation of His presence called the **pillar of cloud by day** and **pillar of fire by night**. He'll do that for the next **40 years** in the wilderness, providing guidance, shade, and light. The text says that this was **the Lord** (13:21) and **the angel of God** is in this cloud (14:19). I understand this theophany similar to the burning bush. The pre-incarnate Christ is in it personally (Is. 63:9).

II. ISRAEL TRAPPED BY THE SEA. (14:1-20)

14:1 Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the sons of Israel so that they turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. 3 And Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering in confusion in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ 4 Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart

with strength, and he will pursue them; and I will be glorified through Pharaoh and all his army, so that the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh.” And they did so.

So the Lord guides them to **Etham**, on the **edge of the wilderness** (v. 20; presumably the edge of the Midian wilderness). And if Etham was near the northern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, the only logical thing to do at this point is to round the corner and head down into Midian.⁵ But instead, the Lord tells them to **turn back** and camp on the west side of the sea, which makes zero sense. Number one, this was taking them in the **wrong direction** and number two, it was placing them in a very **vulnerable, helpless position**. If this is Nuweibaa beach as some propose, or a beach like it, God is positioning them between the mountains and the sea with a narrow cavity of escape. It was like walking into a trap. But this is exactly what the Lord wanted to do to entice the Egyptians. When the Egyptian **scouts** see this, that they are heading down into an area of the Sinai Peninsula with no way out, he will think they are **wandering aimlessly** and **shut in**.

5 Then the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” 6 So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; 7 and he took six hundred choice chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 And Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, with strength, and he pursued the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out with an exalted hand. 9 Then the Egyptians pursued them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

So God **hardens Pharaoh’s heart** again so that he chases after Israel. And remember, this is the most powerful army in the world in its golden age. It’s state of the art. They have training. They have composite bows, armor, and dually manned chariots. But because it was a rapid strike army, it was also known for being a little reckless.⁶ But so is Pharaoh.

*10 Now Pharaoh drew near, and the sons of Israel **lifted up their eyes [looked]**, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very afraid; so the sons of Israel cried out to Yahweh. 11 Then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What is this you have done against us in bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than for us to die in the wilderness.” [emphasis mine]*

So Israel looks—they **lift up their eyes**—and they behold the Egyptians who are hot on their tail. The dust clouds are rising up behind them. And like the flick of a switch, boldness turns to **fear**. At first, they cry out to God. But instead of waiting, in faith, to see how God responds—when there is no *immediate* relief—they **blame Moses**. They pick on the preacher! How quickly they forget their misery in Egypt and the power of God. But this is why they are here: God is *testing* them and *teaching* them to depend upon Him. And how they would like to have this faithless moment back later. **Deuteronomy 8:2** says, “*Yahweh your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.*”

13 But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of Yahweh which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. 14 Yahweh will fight for you, and you will keep silent.” [emphasis mine]

Don't you love that? That's one of the most important verses in the book of Exodus. We've said it before many times. It isn't Israel's cleverness that delivers them.⁷ It isn't Egypt's kindness. It isn't Moses' superior leadership skills. It's **Yahweh**—the covenant making, promise keeping, self-existent, self-sufficient, all-powerful, never-trapped One—who delivers by His power. **Moses does well by pointing the people to the Lord who will deliver them.** He basically says, “*You just stand there. Don't fight. Don't complain. Don't even cry out. Don't do anything other than position yourselves to see God work. Just have faith in Yahweh.*”

15 Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Speak to the sons of Israel so that they go forward. 16 As for you, raise up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and split it, and the sons of Israel shall [g]o through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17 As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians with strength so that they will go in after them; and I will be glorified through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 Then the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, when I am glorified through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen.” 19 Then the angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

So Yahweh sort of reprimands the people doesn't He? They've forgotten who Yahweh is. They're letting what they see cloud what they know. But at this point, the presence of God moves from before them to behind them. He is now their rear guard. He prevents the Egyptians from getting to Israel all night as He parts the sea and dries out the land for them to walk.

III. GOD DEFEATS EGYPT. (14:21-31)

*21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Yahweh swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea into dry ground, so the waters were split. 22 So the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 Then the Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. 24 Then at the morning watch, **Yahweh looked down** on the camp of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the camp of the Egyptians into confusion. 25 And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for Yahweh is fighting for them against the Egyptians.” [emphasis mine]*

So Israel passes through the sea with walls of water on both sides. And these are “deep waters,” not a shallow lake.⁸ The details reveal it's unexplainable by mere natural causes. And when Israel is out and the Egyptian army is **in the midst of the sea**, they find out they are the ones who are trapped—not Israel. **Yahweh looks down** and fights against them.⁹ At daybreak, Moses stretches out the staff and closes the waters over the Egyptians (vv. 26-29) and verse 30 says,

30 Thus Yahweh saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Then Israel saw the great hand which Yahweh had used against the Egyptians; and the people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and in His servant Moses. [emphasis mine]

We last week we talked about the judgment and mercy concept and how God is glorified through all of this. That's the most point made here. God gets glory through judgment and redemption. But this morning I just want to focus on how this sobering event teaches us a few principles when it comes to the precarious predicaments/Red Sea moments we find ourselves in:

1. God always knows which way is best.

The quickest way is not always the best way. God doesn't always lead us down the easiest path, and He does that because He has **sovereign purposes** in our lives, even when we don't understand that. Scott Mathis posted something yesterday that with God there is mysteries, but never mistakes. The GPS doesn't make mistakes like Siri. He doesn't make wrong turns or miscalculations. He might make us backtrack and take us to a dead end, or place us in a position where we have no way out on our own or take us through deep waters—but His directions are always right.

2. Following the Lord increases your enemies.

Israel has enemies coming after them as they follow God and if you follow God faithfully, it will not eliminate enemies and critics, it will multiply them. You must expect opposition and not let them discourage you. Remember, there is a spiritual element going on here too and sometimes opposition is a sign you are following the Lord.

3. Sometimes waiting is the way of obedience.

When we get back into a corner, we tend to fight or flee or blame others or tell everyone. We want to whine and complain or play the victim and martyr. And when you're in a tough situation, I'm not saying you won't weep or lament or that you shouldn't, but there are times when God calls for the exact opposite—not crying and complaining and walking around like a victim—but FAITH. Yahweh reprimanded them for lack of faith here. *“Stand back and see what I'm going to do. You don't need to do anything but wait with faith in Me.”* Waiting in faith is hard when emotions are high and we feel threatened. But sometimes it's the right thing to do because we'll only make some situations worse. There's some battles He must fight for you. The Red Seas of life open and close in His timing.¹⁰

4. The Lord is our guide and our guard.

From the time they leave Egypt to the time they enter the promised land—through the entire wilderness experience—God guides and guards them—and He does that for us too. We're amazed by that pillar of cloud and fire, but in reality, we have something better—the indwelling Holy Spirit and His Word, the Bible. Jesus said, *“I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”* As a believer, we are never alone. We never walk alone. And I'm not saying He's going to protect us from everything harmful—we don't exploit the promises of God like Satan tried to do to get Jesus to do (Mt. 4:5-7)—but there is a very real element of protection that our all-powerful, all-knowing, Yahweh

provides for us through His presence and through His angels until it's time to call us home (1 Ki. 6:16-17).

5. **Dead ends force us to look up in faith.**

This is the big principle to close with. The big purpose. Sometimes God will intentionally lead or allow us to a dead end—a place where we are bound to lose whatever we do—to bring us to an end of ourselves *so that* we will finally look up in faith. There's always a divine intention. To *test* us, to *teach* us, and to *glorify* Himself (Dt. 8:2). To reveal His Yahweh-ness to us. That He's never trapped. All-powerful. He's sovereign. Again, we know it, but **sometimes *what we see* clouds *what we know***. The problem with the Israelites when they started panicking, was that they looked up and saw the Egyptians, but they didn't look high enough and trust Yahweh. This is what I really appreciate about Moses here. **He teaches us to point people to the Lord who can deliver them.** Hebrews 11:29 says "*By faith the people crossed the Red Sea on dry land*" (Heb. 11:29).

This morning let's remember that the biggest precarious predicament we are in comes from our being sinners before a holy God. Because we are sinners and God demands perfect righteousness, we cannot save ourselves (Romans 3-5; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:9; Titus 3:3-7). We can't deliver ourselves from our sin problem and we can't deliver anyone else from their sins for their sin problem. We can never be good enough or religious enough or righteous enough and that's why Jesus, the ultimate divine deliverer, had to come and die so that through faith in Him, we would be credited with His righteousness and be saved from sin's penalty and power and someday when He returns, even it's very presence.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/LORD-GOD-Lord-God.html>

"It can be very confusing to understand how the different titles used for God are used in the Bible. Part of the problem is that different Bible translations use the terms somewhat differently. The primary reason for the use of LORD in place of God's Hebrew name is to follow the tradition of the Israelites in not pronouncing or spelling out God's name. So, when God's Hebrew name "YHWH" is used in the Old Testament, English translations usually use "LORD" in all caps or small caps. Also, since ancient Hebrew did not use vowels in its written form, it is not entirely clear how God's name should be spelled or pronounced. It could be Yahweh, or Jehovah, or Yehowah, or something else.

As stated above, when "LORD" in all caps or small caps occurs in the Old Testament, it is a replacement for an occurrence of God's Hebrew name "YHWH," also known as the Tetragrammaton. This is fairly consistent throughout all the different English translations of the Bible. When "Lord" occurs in the Old Testament, referring to God, it is usually a rendering of "Adonai," a name/title of God that emphasizes His lordship. LORD/YHWH and Lord/Adonai are by far the two most consistent renderings throughout all the different English Bible translations.

In the Old Testament, when "God" is used, it is usually a rendering of the general Hebrew word for God, "Elohim." When "LORD GOD" or "Lord GOD" occurs, it is usually a rendering of a dual name for God "Adonai YHWH." The Hebrew term "YHWH Sabaoth" is usually rendered "Lord of Hosts." The Hebrew term "YHWH Shaddai" is usually rendered "LORD Almighty." The Old Testament uses many different names and titles to refer to God, to emphasize certain aspects of His person and attributes. This can result in confusion in translation, but in the original Hebrew, it was done entirely in an effort to glorify and magnify God's name.

The usage of "Lord" and "God" in the New Testament is much less complicated. Almost universally, "God" is a translation of "theos," the general Greek word for deity. Also almost universally, "Lord" is a translation of "kurios," the general Greek word for a master. The key point in all of this is that whether we use His actual Hebrew name, or refer to Him as God, or Lord, or Lord God, we are to always show reverence to Him and His name."

² There were enemy outposts along the route and at this time in history the settlements of Canaan were heavily fortified (like Megiddo or Jericho). **Numbers 14:40** confirms this, that after taking one look at their enemies in the promised land they are supposed to take, they say, "*Let's appoint a leader and go back to Egypt[!]*" That's crazy. They would rather be safe slaves than free men—a danger for any culture to fall into. But you have to remember too that just a couple of days ago, they were slaves. They needed time to transition.

³ "*Yam Suph*" (Red Sea): Ex. 23:31; Num. 14:25; 21:4; Deut. 1:40; 2:1; 1 Ki. 9:26; Jer. 49:21.
<https://ancientexodus.com/the-sea-of-exodus/>

⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 382.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁷ In 2 Chronicles 20:12, Judah was in a similar situation. They were outnumbered by the enemy. They were afraid. They didn't have a plan. So, they gathered the people and prayed. They said, "*We are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You.*" And the Spirit of God said through one of the prophets, "*the battle is not yours, but God's... You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf.*" At the end of the battle, God gave them rest on all sides.

⁸ "*Deep, might waters*" and not a shallow lake: Ex. 14:27; 15:8, 10; Ps. 106:9; Neh. 9:11; Is. 43:16; 51:10, 15; 63:13; Jer. 31:35.

⁹ I find it ironic that the Egyptians' favorite sun god, Re, couldn't help them at the morning watch (daybreak). And in one ancient Egyptian inscription, Pharaoh threatened to drown his enemies. "He whom the king has loved will be a revered one, but there is no tomb for a rebel against his majesty, and his corpse is cast into the water." Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 364.

¹⁰ Charles R. Swindoll, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 226.