



9. Crossing the Red Sea Exodus 14

“The crossing of the Red C”

Last week we left the people of Israel trapped with their backs to the Egyptians and facing the Red sea with no way out. They had the confidence in God that He was leading them as they experienced His presence in the pillars of cloud and fire. In verse 4 they did as they were told and in verse 8 we read they were triumphant.

But when there was no way out and they saw the Egyptian army running after them, then oh dear, reality caught up with them. Now to be fair, they did pray first but they soon cried to Moses: *“Weren’t there any graves in Egypt? Did you have to bring us out here in the desert to die? Look what you have done by bringing us out of Egypt! 12 Didn’t we tell you before we left that this would happen? We told you to leave us alone and let us go on being slaves of the Egyptians. It would be better to be slaves there than to die here in the desert.”*

They saw an impossible position in front of them – the Red Sea and they had no boats. What were they going to do. At least they cried to God. Then they moaned! What was Moses’ reply? This:

13 Moses answered, “Don’t be afraid! Stand your ground, and you will see what the Lord will do to save you today; you will never see these Egyptians again. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and there is no need for you to do anything.”

Good for him – nice faithful stuff. The bit about God fighting for them was correct, but the rest wasn’t. Here’s God’s reply:

15 The Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out for help? Tell the people to move forward.

Moses did the staff bit and you know the rest.

“What did you learn in Sunday School this morning?” a father asked his son. The son explained: “We learned about how Moses went behind enemy lines to rescue the Jews from the Egyptians. Moses ordered the engineers to build a pontoon bridge. Then, after the people crossed, he sent bombers back to blow up the bridge and the Egyptian tanks that were following them. And then...” The father interrupted: “Did your teacher REALLY tell it like that?” “No,” said his son, “but if I told you what he said you would never BELIEVE it!”

Here it is: one of the most amazing stories in the Bible that has been one of the most studied and speculated upon over the centuries. It is best typified by the children’s chorus “How did Moses cross the Red Sea”

*How did Moses cross the Red Sea?
How did Moses cross the Red Sea?
How did Moses cross the Red Sea?
How did he get across?*

*Did he swim? No! No!
Did he row? No! No!
Did he jump? No! No! No! No!
Did he drive? No! No!
Did he fly? No! No!
How did he get across?*

*God blew with His wind, puff, puff, puff, puff.
He blew just enough, 'nough, 'nough, 'nough, 'nough,
And through the sea He made a path,
That's how he got across.*

The people went across on dry land whilst the angel of the Lord protected their rear flank so the Egyptians could not reach them.. God rescued them in a miraculous way and destroyed the Egyptians.

Over the centuries, it's led to two questions: where? and how? Where: that's a very good question. Traditionally the theory has been that they crossed in the area of the Great Bitter Lakes which would have been wetter in that period of history. The water would have been relatively shallow at that point – the theory being that a natural phenomenon like a strong wind can only move a certain amount of water. A more recent theory has been that they easily went into Sinai and crossed the Red Sea in the Gulf of Aqaba which means that Horeb etc. is actually in modern Saudi Arabia. It's been looked at by some amateur archaeologists but not really by professional ones. There have been various claims for this one but the Saudis won't allow Western archaeologists into their country to study it.

The other question is how? There have been even more theories for this one. Some have suggested that the Exodus coincides with the devastating eruption of Santorini in the Aegean Sea which explains some of the plagues as well as some of the Exodus phenomena. Either that eruption or earthquakes in the Red Sea itself (it's volcanically active) may have caused a tidal wave (Tsunami) which would first draw the water in the sea downwards and then send it rushing back in a massive surge.

But I will caution you with all these theories by using the verse I preached on this morning Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your won understanding. It is nice to be able to verify the Bible is true: people have tried that for centuries and invariably find plenty of evidence to show that it is! But should we reduce something that is given to us in scripture as a miracle to our own understanding.

There is a saying that "the truth is stranger than fiction". When something unusual happens, we often look for the most logical explanation rather see it for what it is. So, someone is healed miraculously, for example - what do we say? Oh, it's just a remission. He must have been taking his vitamins. We don't understand the regenerative powers of the body do we? "It is just a coincidence". "There must be some logical explanation: we just haven't found it yet." But a miracle? Scientists and doctors always try this one don't they?

If I was to give you the definition of a miracle, then it would be something that has occurred that has no logical explanation and could have no logical explanation. For example: someone raised from the dead after being dead for some time and having been embalmed, someone born blind receiving their sight in adulthood, someone walking on water. There are clear examples of these in scripture and modern reports bring forth similar impossibles – people hearing again after nerve death, people whose limbs have regrown and the rest of it.

Why should we try to find a natural explanation of the crossing of the Red Sea? We have a God who created the natural order with a word, so bending it shouldn't be too much of a problem for Him! If that meant creating a way through a few hundred feet of seawater, then so be it. It's just that the scale here was phenomenal.

Where that does have implications for us is that we do have a God who is both the creator and sustainer of the universe and who doesn't change, then we should find claims for miracles throughout history – and of course we do. As always, some are totally spurious, urban legends or just straight lies, but there are plenty of verified examples too. The problem is that the sceptics are always going to be in denial about them because to accept them has huge implications for their lives.

What I'm saying here is don't be afraid to be bold in prayer. We probably won't ever see a Red sea or even a resurrection, but most of the miracles we hear of are smaller but profound in people's lives: that person who is healed of an illness, some unexpected blessing and even better; that person who has always opposed the faith suddenly coming to Jesus! Conversion is a miracle – it's not of man, it's of the Holy Spirit and just as much a miracle as the parting of the Red Sea.

And we come to the undertone of most of what I've preached about recently. It's a matter of prayer. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths. If we trust a God who does impossible things, then we shouldn't be afraid to pray for seemingly impossible things if the Holy Spirit is prompting us to do so – because He can do that.

I remember years ago we never prayed for those in government etc. because Christians just didn't do that sort of political thing. Besides we were a minority so we had to expect that we'd not be noticed. In Haringey, the council was run by a loony left council that were in to all sorts of silly things and were very anti-Christian and anti-religion. The borough was a troubled place with high levels of crime, drugs and racial tension (e.g. Broadwater Farm 1985).

But some Pastors took the example of groups in the USA and Argentina to start praying in unity for their cities, realising that revival and an outpouring of the Spirit also meant that the whole community would change. So they started praying for the community and community organisations. They went to the council and rather than condemn them (which is what the loony leftists expected them to do) they asked if they would pray for them. In Haringey, many churches and hundreds, perhaps thousands of Christians prayed for the borough, its politicians, community organisations, the police, their neighbours. It was an exiting time.

What happened? The politicians changed around. Education policy changed, crime fell, the council approached Christians to formally pray for them and create an advisory group to help them with social policy. The church grew rapidly in many parts of the borough – it has one of the highest evangelical Christian populations in the UK. Many of the problems that beset Haringey are still there but it's different place to what it was in the 1980s. Why? Because Christians started to take God seriously and believed He is a God of miracles who doesn't just get involved in the lives of individuals, but who changes society – and that is being proved over and over many times over in the world every day.

Are we encouraged by stories like this from Exodus and from the modern day? Then this could be our church, our town and our county. How does it start? In prayer.

*Preached by Mark Reid
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