

The Story of Hope #8
Led By a Mighty Hand
Exodus Ch. 14-15
Story of Hope Section 15
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Last week we left with the Israelites huddled in their homes, protected by the blood of a sacrificed lamb. That night, there was nothing to protect those living in the palace of Pharaoh. His son had died, and his kingdom was in disarray. He had been defeated by a greater God. Pharaoh, in his sorrow, hastily summoned Moses and Aaron, and ordered all the Israelites to leave Egypt.

God had communicated to Moses that they were not to leave Egypt as paupers. They would leave as a wealthy nation. Moses told the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for their riches. Wanting to avoid further calamity, the Egyptian people unloaded their wealth into the bags of the Israelites. The progression of the plagues had led them to a place where they feared for their own lives. The possibility that they could all be wiped out was heavy on their thoughts. So consequently, they gave the Israelites everything they asked for.

No longer feeling like slaves, the Israelites left Egypt triumphantly as they saw the promises of God come true. God had heard their cries. He was rescuing them from the clutches of Pharaoh. This would not be a, 'just made it', or 'by the skin of their teeth' rescue. This rescue would be total and complete. You can imagine the joy and astonishment on the faces of the Israelites as they surged out of the cities and into the countryside. Stories of the last few days must have been on their lips. They had witnessed a reversal of fortune unlike anything the world had ever seen.

The shortest route to Canaan was to the north, but God did not lead them that way. He knew they were not ready to stand and fight the hostile nations that inhabited those lands. Just as important, God was setting a trap and luring Pharaoh into his destruction. Instead of north, God lead them to travel south and east towards the wilderness and the Red Sea. After encamping at Succoth and Etham, God commanded the Israelites to turn back and then actually backtrack their steps. This gave the appearance that the Israelites were lost and wandering.

Back in Egypt, Pharaoh received word that the Israelites had left. Not a trace of his slaves remained. Again, God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and in an instant his mind changed. Instead of mourning, Pharaoh's thoughts become dark and evil once more. He calls on his generals to make preparations to chase down his slaves and bring them back to his kingdom and back under his control.

Pharaoh's armies overtook the encamped Israelites at a place called Pi-hahiroth, next to the Red Sea. When the Israelites saw the swarm of Egyptians bearing down on them, they became terrified. Moses pleaded with the people to stand firm, and to not be afraid. God did not lead them out of Egypt to die. He was going to rescue them in a mighty way.

Then something both terrifying, and wonderful happened. God moved! The great pillar of cloud repositioned from the front of the Israelites to the rear. There He stood, between them and their abusers. As darkness fell, one side of the cloud was a black impenetrable wall. On the other side was light.

Moses stretched out his hand and an east wind began to blow. This must have been a wind like no other! As it began to blow, the water of the Red Sea started to part. Each moment the wall of water rose higher and higher until dry land became visible. That night, the nation of Israel crossed through the Red Sea leaving behind their former lives as slaves. They were now free. God had guided, protected, and rescued them.

As the sun rose, the last of the Israelites staggered out on the other side of the Red Sea. God moved again, allowing the Egyptians to see the Israelites free on the other side. Seizing the opportunity, Pharaoh's army follows. When they reach the bottom, God looked out of the pillar of fire and caused the Egyptians to fall into a state of panic. In a moment of realization, the Egyptians attempted to turn and flee, but to no avail. God ordered Moses to stretch his hand over the sea and the water came crashing back down. The strength of Egypt was tossed headlong through the crushing force of the returning water.

I imagine a great stillness swept over the people of Israel. Fear and awe must have filled their hearts, as they began to realize what had just occurred. They had been totally rescued.

Again let's focus on a few anchor points from the text. There are a lot of things we could dive into, but here are two I think are important.

God is the Rescuer. Think back with me, who provided coverings to rescue Adam and Eve from their shame? Who warned Noah of impending destruction? Who provided Noah and his family a way of escape? Who closed the door of the ark? Who forced the Egyptians to release the Israelites? Who guided the Israelites out of Egypt? Who protected them from the advancing armies, and who provided the way through the Red Sea? Each and every time, it was God. It wasn't just God commanding something to happen, it was actually God doing the providing, closing, leading, guiding, defending, and way making. In the same manner, God would also be the promised Rescuer. But wait, although that is absolutely true, there is a tension. The promise. The promise says that the rescuer would be human. An offspring of the woman, and of the family line of Abraham. Could it be that the rescuer would be both God and man?

God Rescues In Fullness, and Judges In Fullness. The Israelites left Egypt lacking nothing. Nobody was left behind. His rescue plan was not just for the strong, or for the intelligent. It wasn't for the women only, or just the men. Feeble grandmothers were not left behind. Not only that, but God provided wealth. Instantly, they had an inheritance. God completely rescued the Israelites. That is how God rescues. In the same way, God's judgement was also complete. It was played out to the end. Pharaoh didn't get a slap on the wrist. He was destroyed. His armies decimated and his kingdom left in ruins. God judged those who opposed Him, justly and completely.