

**Amazing Truths of the Pentateuch (12)**  
**God's Curious Ways and a Marvellous Deliverance**  
**Exodus 13:17-14:31**

**Introduction:-**

*What does it feel like to end one chapter of a person's or nation's life, and to begin another? It was on 9th November 1989, five days after half a million people gathered in East Berlin in mass protest, that the Berlin Wall dividing communist East Germany from West Germany finally crumbled. This opened up a new chapter in European History with a number of countries taking advantage of their new-found political freedoms. Likewise, in our passage today, finally the Israelites leave Egypt, after four hundred years of suffering and oppression. It was like a great wall coming down!! Egyptian rule over Israel had finally come to an end, leading to a great climax at the Red Sea, to which the first fourteen chapters of Exodus have been steadily leading us. Finally, our passage today also tells us of the beginning of Israel itself, from a band of slaves, to that of a nation, under God. But within this climactic section, we will also learn something of God's curious and mysterious ways with His people, when bringing about His glorious deliverance for us. Let us now take a closer look at this passage.*

**1. God may not take short cuts - but take the long way home (Exodus 13:17-19)**

*In this section, the Israelites did not take the shortest or most direct way back to the Promised Land. And so instead of taking them by the main coastal road to the Promised Land, which led through Philistine country, and was highly fortified, at this crucial point, God led His people by the desert road that led to the Red Sea. And so, instead of turning north, they turned south, and ended up in the wilderness!! The reason given by God is recorded in verse 17 - "If they face war, they might change their minds, and return to Egypt." This is strange, because on the one hand, the Lord had already just visited Egypt with His great power with the Ten Plagues, and therefore could he not reveal His mighty power again? Secondly, the people will express their desire to return to the conditions of Egypt precisely as a result of the Lord's different leading at Exodus 14:11-12, where they would now encounter the pursuing Egyptians as their enemy. And so what is going on here? Clearly the Lord had a larger purpose in mind, that would involve the Egyptians in a final showdown of His power and glory at Exodus 14:17-18. In other words, the Lord has unfinished business with the Egyptians, which may go back to Exodus 1:22, when the Pharaoh of the day ordered every male Israelite child to be thrown into the Nile. Now it would be Pharaoh's turn - This time to experience the judgment of the Red Sea. Also for the Israelites, this would hold a positive and important outcome, when they would behold the final result at Exodus 14:31. But in the meantime, how do we cope with guidance, when nothing seems straightforward? The answer from this passage is that sometimes in His greater wisdom, God has to lead us in a very round-about way! And this is because His vision of things, is far greater than ours - God sees the big picture, and does not work off a small canvas. We could also say that the principle at Acts 14:22 is also at work: "Through many trials and tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Can you think of some roundabout guidance in your life, which at the time seemed rather perplexing, and yet with hindsight, one could recognize God's purposes in all that happened? Perhaps something like this may be our present experience. If so, are we prepared to trust God for the journey so far, as well as for the journey*

ahead? At the end of this section, even Joseph did so, with the instructions to carry his bones up to the Promised Land with them, when the time would come.

## **2. On they march, the Pillar leading (exodus 13:20-22)**

*In this section, God led His people on, step by step. Many of these places cannot be identified with certainty today, but their final destination in this part of the journey would be the Red Sea. What we discover about God's leading in this section is quite remarkable. God would now go before His people in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. And although this is the first time that we encounter these phenomena, which will become prominent throughout the desert period, we have a hint of them at Exodus 3:2 with the Burning Bush. Now the pillar of cloud and fire take us to the next level of intensity of God's presence with His people, which will reach its climax at Mount Sinai, where that presence will be too much for the people to bear (Exodus 20:18-21). But for now, the presence of God in the cloud and fire is meant to be unbearable not for the Israelites, but for the Egyptians, as the subsequent narrative will make clear (Exodus 14:19-20), where just like the plagues, the cloud creates a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians, in terms of light for one, and darkness for the other!! And so with this total situation, the Lord would accompany His people both by day and by night, by going before them, as well as being their rear guard as well. In this way, guidance and protection was made both easy and unmistakable. Do we have a deep sense of God's presence and guiding hand with us as we journey through this life? Well might we echo the words of the Hymn, "Guide me O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land - I am weak but thou art Mighty, guide me with your powerful hand." We can have this confidence, that those who are "led" by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God (Romans 8:14). Paul illustrates this experience during his second missionary journey, when the Spirit of God prevented him from preaching in the provinces of Asia and Bithynia, leading him finally to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10) - Lord, help me to trust you when it is hard to see the way forward, and to follow the clues that you give me.*

## **3. Finally, a further unexpected change of direction leads to a Mighty Deliverance (14:1-31).**

*In this final section it is not surprising that panic had set in! At the direction of the Lord, Israel found themselves in a dead-end trap, for the purpose of luring Pharaoh and his army into this situation, in order that the Egyptians might know who the true God really is (14:4, 17-18). This began right back at Exodus 5:2, with Moses' very first encounter with Pharaoh, when Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go." And now in this section, all of these things will find their answer and fulfilment. After realizing the fuller implications of what Pharaoh had done in releasing the Israelites from Egypt, the Lord had hardened Pharaoh's heart, and as a result, Pharaoh pursued the Israelites with his elite army of six hundred of his best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, together with their officers. And so, Pharaoh's strategy was dependent upon chariots and horses, the latest device of speed and power. But had Pharaoh in his madness quickly forgotten the fact that the Lord had already visited and defeated all of the gods of Egypt through the Ten Plagues, including the house of Pharaoh himself, with the death of his firstborn son? (Exodus 12:12). Truly in his madness and folly, he was now playing with fire, in more ways than one!! (See Moses' Song of Deliverance at Exodus 15:1-21). Also, in one of the earlier plagues, locusts*

*were driven by a strong west wind into the Red Sea (Exodus 10:19). Now God intends to deliver His people - and bring glory to His name, in a similar way. But not through locusts this time, but chariots and their drivers. But we also have a contest in this passage, which centred around ownership. Who had the right to claim ownership of Israel, Yahweh's first born son (Exodus 4:22)? Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel for repossession of them in verse 5 reminds us that Christians have been redeemed from slavery to sin, and the Satanic ruler from whom we have been delivered won't easily let us go, either. As we are also reminded in daily life, we too are in a struggle for repossession, and need to constantly resist the "roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8-9). If we are in Christ, then he is our rightful owner now, and no one can snatch us from the Father's hand (John 10:27-30). Furthermore, like Pharaoh, the Father has planned and achieved the ultimate destruction of our enemy. In the meantime, as Peter reminds us, we need to constantly "resist" the seductive voice of our former owner, by reminding him whose we are now, and by staying close to Jesus. As with Israel of old, rebellion and idolatry can remove us from His presence. Then as we come toward the end of this passage, just before the great deliverance of the Red Sea, Moses issues two commands in verses 13-15, which are most important. The first is "Stand firm or still, and you will see - the Lord will fight for you", and the second is "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on." The first command is telling us that the battle is the Lord's. He has done everything necessary for our salvation. We can truly rest in this wonderful truth. The second command is most interesting. Here was something that even excluded prayer. The earthly task and duty of the pilgrim was to simply "move on!!" In other words, in this case, to go to the very water's edge in faith. It is only then that the way will open up, and God will reveal his great deliverance for us. How often is it the case that we say that the way is too difficult for us, and so we prefer to give up. And so we are called here to have the faith of Moses, and go to the very water's edge, in order to experience the power of God. Only then will our Red Seas open up before us. Finally, in our story, a subtle sarcasm emerges in the detail that the defeat of the Egyptians happened "just before dawn" (Exodus 14:24) In Egyptian religion, the Sun god, travelling during the night through the land of darkness, defeats darkness "just before the dawn" and rises victorious to the new day. It is precisely at the moment when Pharaoh (the Sun god) should have been most powerful and victorious, that he is soundly defeated by Yahweh. This passage teaches us that only the Lord is God, and only He can deliver His people from slavery and oppression, guiding them safely in the midst of the waters of chaos and destruction, and bring them safely to their eternal home. This is well summed up by Moses at Deuteronomy 4:32-40 - You were shown these things so that you may know that the Lord is God; beside Him there is no other. Praise be to His Holy Name.*

### **Conclusion:-**

*As God's children today, the story of the great exodus deliverance does not require us to exercise a desperate kind of faith, but rather the trusting faith of Moses, that asks us to be still, and see the salvation of God. And yet at the same time, this also calls us to exercise a robust faith, with the duty and command to keep "moving on", even though this means to go to the very edge of the Red Sea before us. Only then will we see the power of God, and experience our Red Sea opening up before us, whatever that might mean for us today. Let us never forget that we can trust God for the difficult and unknown, for He specializes in this area!! May God continue to bless us with this amazing truth today. Amen.*