“A Strong East Wind”
Exodus 14:10–31

Spiritual writer and humanities professor Marilyn Chandler McEntyre has written recently of “pausing where Scripture gives one pause. She says:

> Learning to notice what we notice as we move slowly from words to meaning, pausing where we sense a slight beckoning, allowing associations to emerge around the phrase that stopped us is an act of faith that the Spirit will meet us there. There is, we may assume, a gift to be received wherever we are stopped and summoned.

Sometimes Scripture invites us to pause over a phrase that seems ordinary. Exodus 14:21 gives us such a phrase:

> *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided.*

A strong east wind.

Wind can move more than air. On Lake Erie, strong winds can create a seiche, pushing water toward one end of the lake and exposing the lakebed at the other. Now listen again to verse 21:

> **Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night.**

Wherever there is a miracle or sign in the Bible it is OK to wonder how did God do it?

Lake Erie can experience dramatic water level drops due to a phenomenon known as a *seiche*. This occurs when strong winds push water toward one end of the lake, leading to significant decreases in water levels on the opposite side. Powerful wind gusts, often associated with severe weather events, can displace large amounts of water. For example, during storms, winds can reach speeds of 60 to 80 mph, causing water to surge dramatically on one side of the lake while exposing the lakebed on the other.

Lake Erie is the shallowest of the Great Lakes and has a long, narrow shape. It is like a bathtub. This makes it particularly susceptible to seiches, as the wind can easily push water across its surface. Severe weather conditions, such as winter storms, can trigger seiches. For instance, a recent storm caused water levels to rise nearly 8 feet on one end of the lake while dropping by about 6 feet on the other, resulting in a net difference of approximately 13 feet.

The problem with a seiche explanation for the parting of the waters is the timing. The Red or Reed Sea parted just at the right time under God's timing after God commanded Moses to stretch out stretch his hand… prior to this there was no storm at sea or strong east wind…

The problem is that it takes God out of the equation and God's divine and saving action. Once again this Scripture gives us an invitation to pause and consider the marvelous inexplicable nature of God as the Red Sea parts…

The seiche illustration may help us imagine the physical force of wind moving water, but it does not explain away the biblical event. Exodus explicitly attributes Israel's deliverance to the LORD: "The LORD drove the sea back."

The text presents Israel as trapped. Pharaoh is approaching from behind, and the sea lies before them. The passage does not say that Israel discovered an escape route. It says that the LORD acted to deliver His people. The central message is not that Israel found a way out. It is that the LORD saved them.

1. GOD LEADS HIS PEOPLE TO THE PLACE WHERE THEY MUST TRUST HIM

God had delivered Israel from slavery, but freedom did not immediately mean an easy road. Exodus 14:10 says:

> *As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD.*

The text describes Israel's fear and complaint. They saw Pharaoh's army approaching, and they believed that death was imminent. In verses 11–12, they even accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness to die.

Their response reveals how quickly fear can distort our understanding of God's past faithfulness. The Israelites had witnessed the plagues and had been brought out of Egypt, yet the approaching army now dominated their vision.

This is so much like us... We, too, may remember God's faithfulness until a new crisis appears. Then the present obstacle can seem more real than God's past deliverance.

Thus, according to the text, Israel's difficult position was not outside God's knowledge or control. God had led them there, and Pharaoh's pursuit would become the occasion for God's glory.

Israel was exactly where God had directed them, yet they stood before an apparently impossible obstacle. That does not mean every hardship we experience can be interpreted with certainty. We should not claim to know God's specific purpose in every trial. But Exodus 14 does teach us that God can lead His people into circumstances in which their own strength cannot deliver them.

The question, then, is not whether Israel can rescue itself. The question is whether the LORD will act. Moses' answer is clear: God Himself will deliver His people.

2. THE LORD FIGHTS FOR HIS PEOPLE AND OPENS THE WAY

Moses told the people:

> *Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today…* and*…The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.*

God will accomplish deliverance. God will fight for Israel. The people are commanded not to panic or attempt their own military solution, but to stand firm and witness what God will do.

The text does not mean that Israel will remain passive throughout the entire event. In verse 15, the LORD tells Moses, "Tell the Israelites to go forward." First, they must stop crying out in fear; then they must move when God commands them.

We pause again at Exodus 14:21:

> *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night.*

The sea does not simply disappear. The LORD divides it, turns it into dry land, and creates a passage for Israel. The text describes the waters as divided and later as standing like walls on either side of the people. God does not merely tell Israel to find a way; He creates the way through the sea.

Exodus 14 does not define faith as the absence of fear, nor does it say that Israel's faith caused the sea to divide. In fact, the people are repeatedly portrayed as afraid. The passage does show that God's command requires a response: Israel must go forward on the dry ground God provides.

We may therefore say that faith responds to God's saving action, but we should not suggest that human faith produces the miracle. The LORD opens the way. Israel walks through it.

We cannot save ourselves. Our salvation does not arise from our moral improvement or spiritual strength. In Christ, God accomplishes what sinners cannot accomplish for themselves. At the cross, Christ bears sin; in His resurrection, He conquers death. Christ saves.

That gospel truth is not a claim that Exodus 14 directly explains every detail of Christ's work. It is the theological fulfillment toward which the Exodus story points.

3. GOD'S DELIVERANCE CREATES A PEOPLE WHO WALK IN OBEDIENCE

"*The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left."*

The text gives us a clear sequence: God divides the sea, and Israel enters the passage. God provides the way, and the people move forward in response to His command.

This provides us with a pattern how God's power is evident in our own lives: God's saving action comes first, and His people respond in obedience. The larger Exodus narrative does show that deliverance from Egypt is not the end of Israel's story. God brings His people out of slavery and later gives them His covenant at Sinai. He does not merely remove

them from Pharaoh's rule; He claims them as His own people and teaches them how to live under His rule.

The parting of the waters shapes the way we should think about justice, mercy, debt, and care for the vulnerable. Later Deuteronomy 15 addresses generosity toward the poor and the remission of debts. Those instructions occur later in Israel's story, not in Exodus 14 itself. The God who delivers Israel from Pharaoh does not authorize His redeemed people to imitate Pharaoh's oppression. The God who hears the cry of the enslaved calls His people to practice justice and mercy. Grace received becomes grace extended.

This speaks to societies (including our own) marked by injustice, including the enduring human and economic consequences of slavery and racial exploitation in this country's history. We should not claim that Exodus 14 alone resolves every contemporary political or economic question. But the wider biblical witness gives us firm principles: God sees oppression, human beings bear His image, the powerful are accountable to Him, and His people are called to act with justice and mercy.

The movement of the larger story is therefore significant: God brings Israel out of bondage, brings them through the sea, and forms them into a covenant people.

God is able to lead His people through circumstances they cannot overcome by their own strength. He commands them to trust His word and move forward when He opens the way. And those who have received His deliverance are called, in the broader biblical story, to live as a people shaped by His mercy.

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