

# Crossing the Red Sea

By

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September 21st 2025

*“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. “For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, ‘They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.’ “Then I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD.” And they did so.”*

*-Exodus 14:1-4*

We are now studying one of the most well-known miracles of the Bible, the parting of the Red Sea. Amongst Christian circles today, the main focus of study when we come to narratives like this one is the historicity of the event, to put it another way, we tend to debate whether or not these events *really* happened in the way described. While I have always said that I believe in the historicity of these events, like with the plagues, the more important question to ask is not whether or not this happened, but *why* it happened. God doesn’t do anything without cause and this event is no exception to this rule. As the Apostle Paul tells us when speaking of the Exodus in his letter to the Corinthian church:

*“Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.”*

*-1 Corinthians 10:6*

There is an important spiritual example that is present for us in the text if we are willing to hear it. And when we see it from that angle, what this passage really helps us understand is an odd concept in Christianity of being “born again” in Christ. As such, much of what we see here becomes the basis for the sacrament of baptism, and also helps us understand the new life that we have in God when we give our lives to Him.

So, for the person studying this who has not yet found that new life in Christ, I pray that the example of the nation of Israel will motivate you to surrender your life to God, and to the person who has already made that decision, I pray that remembering your own salvation will motivate you to further surrender your life to God.

*“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”*

*-1 Peter 2:1-3*

## The Gentle Leading of God

*“Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, “Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.” So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you.” So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.”*

*Exodus 13:17-22*

Although the people of Israel have been called out of captivity, they are not yet out of the reach of Egypt. However, instead of taking the people of Israel through the most direct route, God instead leads the Israelites “around by the way of the Red Sea”. We will see in the next chapter there is another reason why God does this, but in this chapter we are given a different reason, to not discourage the people on their journey. If God were to take the people of Israel through the most direct route, they would come into contact with the Philistines and God was worried that exposure to warfare would have discouraged them in their journey.

This is a profound and beautiful point, first God’s choosing, second God’s compassion, and third God’s patience. First, we can see by God’s guidance, and His powerful deliverance that He has already demonstrated, that God has indeed chosen and called the Jewish people. They could not boast of their liberation in any possible way, for God was the One who performed this feat, sometimes in spite of the resistance of the Jewish people. Jesus tells His followers in John 6:44:

*“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

*-John 6:44*

The idea of God choosing His people is unfortunately a point of contention in Christian circles. While I have no interest in arguing for my perspective on this issue, I do want to point out the amazing beauty that comes with this doctrine. If God had not chosen the people of Israel, they would have never been liberated, and if God had not chosen us, then we would never have found forgiveness and salvation. Of course this is an act of God and it is a wonderful thing to meditate on.

It is so common for us as Christians to struggle with the love of God. To have profound moments of doubt in which we genuinely question whether or not God loves or cares for us. We can feel as though we are one sin away from being cast away from the presence of our God. Now while God does take sin seriously, and while we do have a responsibility to seek God and to pursue God, neither of these points erases the wonderful truth that God has indeed chosen those that He leads to glory. We will see later on that the people of Israel will not only doubt the providence of God, but they will openly accuse Moses of leading them to slaughter when Pharaoh's armies pursue them:

*“And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? “Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.”*

*-Exodus 14:10-12*

But, in spite of their doubts, and in spite of their weakness, God remains faithful to His people because He has chosen them and delights in them:

*“This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”*

*-2 Timothy 2:11-13*

Far from what we fear, God is not looking for an excuse to abandon us, He is looking for every possible way to save us and bring us to repentance. So God's decision to lead His people out of Egypt and assure them through the pillar of fire and cloud, are manifestations of God's grace and kindness to an undeserving people.

Which leads to the second point, that God is gracious in the way that He leads. So even though God is with them to preserve them, and even though God has shown them mighty works, He is still sensitive to the frailty of His people. He knew that leading them towards the Philistines might cause them to give up on their journey. Instead of God rebuking His people for being so weak, He instead meets them right where they are and provides them with a safer journey, and one more miraculous sign of His power and protection over the people.

*“For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”*

*-Psalm 103:11-14*

And the final point is that God is patient. So it isn't just that God is gracious to provide that allowance for His people, which would be enough, but it is that God has every intention of leading His people to *become* bold in the face of warfare and opposition. People who can trust their Lord to deliver them from hardships and through various trials and tribulations. But God knows that they aren't ready for this yet, in fact it will take the people of Israel over forty years to finally be ready to face down their enemies on the battlefield. But God is patient, and kind:

*“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”*

*-John 16:12*

I personally struggle with this. It's very easy for me to be overly judgemental and harsh towards myself and others. I carry in me high expectations and when those aren't met, I tend to become harsh. But in this passage, God shows a profound quality of His love, that while He hates sin, and while He is pressing His people to be more than what they are, He is also patient with our growth. What can derail relationships is often our impatience with the process of God. Instead of waiting patiently on Him, we try to create salvation through our own strength.

We may have friends or family members that don't yet know God, or have walked away from God. And it is easy to judge them as they are and be harsh towards them in their rebellion. Even this past week, I know that it is hard to even be optimistic about our nation and the direction that it is going. But we don't know the path that God has us on, and we don't know our journey. So while we can, and should, criticize the lack of faith that the people of God have in this passage, and we can equally criticize our own sin

and lack of faith, or the sin and doubts of others, but we should avoid doing this in a final sense.

*“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.”*

*-1 Corinthians 4:5*

It is never too late for a person, or even a nation, to turn to God and experience salvation. To be a follower of God means living in perpetual hope of what God is going to do. We never know precisely what God will do and it won’t always be what we hope for. It was hoped that Egypt would turn after the ten plagues, but unfortunately they didn’t, and we don’t know if the people that we are praying for will come to know God, or if they will reject Him in the end. But our purpose on this earth is to “hope all things” as God does and trust in God to do what is right.

## Light and Darkness

*“But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. “And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. “Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.”*

*-Exodus 14:16-20*

This same point is expressed in the very beautiful, yet strange image of the pillar that God leads His people with. In the day, this pillar appears as one made of clouds, meaning that in the day, it actually functions as a point of shadow and darkness. But in the darkness, the pillar is made of fire meaning that in darkness it manifests itself as a point of light. This point seems strange to us, until this passage when the image comes together. Instead of being one way in day and another at night, the pillar stands between Egypt and Israel, confusing the Egyptians with darkness, but illuminating the path of the Israelites with light.

And so, the decision of God to lead the nation of Israel through the wilderness to help them avoid warfare and help them remain faithful to the call of God, is the same action that “tempts” the nation of Egypt to rebel against God. This is what God tells Moses:

*“For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, ‘They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.’”*

*-Exodus 14:3*

Pharaoh would see their path as a sign of weakness and confusion, and like a shark that senses blood in the water, the predatory Pharaoh would pounce on the perceived weakness of the Israelite people:

*“Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, ‘Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?’ So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.”*

*-Exodus 14:5-9*

We can sometimes think that God is only communicating with His people, but this isn't true. God is always, and at all times, communicating with the world. As we have talked about before, sometimes God uses beauty and goodness to lead people to Himself, but sometimes He even uses pain and suffering to lead people to repent. But in all events in our life, whether it is the beauty of falling in love, or the tragedy of terrible loss, God is always trying to guide us to Him. But, for the ones who are truly seeking God, these signs will appear as light even in the darkest night, but for the ones who are refusing God, these signs are darkness even on the brightest day.

This is so important because there are people who truly think that the reason why they can't believe is because God has not revealed Himself to them. This is not the case, we can see with the Egyptians, that even after the immense miracles of the plagues, even a small amount of time is enough to forget the power of God and try to subvert His will. It's not that the Egyptians were not exposed to truth, but instead that they refused to act upon it.

God's offer of salvation could not be made more clearly. He has demonstrated His love for us through the death of Christ on the cross, and has proven the power of that sacrifice through the resurrection. Beyond that, the creation itself is filled with the knowledge of our God:

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world."*

*-Psalm 19:1-4*

In order to not be stirred by these daily revelations of glory requires a level of self-blindness that no miracle could actually overcome. But to the one who is open to these "common" signs, they will also be open to the greater signs of God, and will eventually surrender to God in proper recognition of who God is.

*"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

*-1 Corinthians 1:18*

So even though the faith of the Israelites, like our own faith, is weak, it was strong enough to respond to the call of God. But unfortunately the self-will and hardness of heart of Pharaoh and his military was so strong that they would not receive the grace of God. Remember that another way to translate the passage, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" is "God *honored* Pharaoh's heart." God didn't make Pharaoh do anything, He only gave him permission to do as he pleased. And ultimately that is what justice is. For though the patience of God is vast, it isn't infinite. Eventually God will judge the disobedient and that judgement will look like Him ultimately honoring their desire to rebel against Him. And so while the wrath of God drowned the Egyptians, this is what we are told about the Israelites:

*Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses."*

*-Exodus 14:31*

And even for us on this earth, it isn't that we should forestall judgement forever. Remember that even suffering can bring about someone's repentance. When I said that we should not ultimately judge anything before its time, I didn't mean that we can't judge behavior, only the ultimate state of another's soul. But like with Pharaoh we can know, to the one who is seeking God, judgement can actually draw them closer to God, but to

the one who is rejecting God, God's judgement will drive them further away. This is why this account could be technically called the eleventh plague of Egypt. In it, the final military and political power of Egypt is judged, and Israel is finally, and fully set free.

*"Wherefore, though good and bad men suffer alike, we must not suppose that there is no difference between the men themselves, because there is no difference in what they both suffer. For even in the likeness of the sufferings, there remains an unlikeness in the sufferers; and though exposed to the same anguish, virtue and vice are not the same thing. For as the same fire causes gold to glow brightly, and chaff to smoke; and under the same flail the straw is beaten small, while the grain is cleansed; and as the lees are not mixed with the oil, though squeezed out of the vat by the same pressure, so the same violence of affliction proves, purges, clarifies the good, but damns, ruins, exterminates the wicked. And thus it is that in the same affliction the wicked detest God and blaspheme, while the good pray and praise."*

*-Augustine of Hippo - "The City of God"*

## The Point of No Return

*"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen."*

*-Exodus 14:21-23*

But for the faithful, where is God leading us to? Ultimately, it is a point of no return. In Scripture, as well as in most stories, fictional or otherwise, rivers represent a point of no return. In the story of Jacob, when God calls him to confront his brother, he first crosses a river before he encounters God and wrestles Him in the wilderness. The nation of Israel passes through a river in order to leave slavery, but then they cross a different river to enter into the promised land. Even in the New Testament, it isn't a mistake that John the Baptist baptizes people in the Jordan River, and that Jesus Himself is baptized specifically in that river before He begins His ministry.

And so God, in His gentle and patient way, has led His people to a river, a point of no return. They cross through these waters with Pharaoh at their back, and chaotic waters on their left and right. The only safe direction would be forward, towards the call of God. It is for this reason why many people, Jews and Christians, see this as the first baptism, though one could see the flood of Noah as the first, it didn't actually create a clear

covenant with God the way that God does with the people of Israel. Up until this point in Scripture, there has really not been any baptism for God's people, but after this moment, God prescribes the ritual of baptism for His people throughout the law and as a sacrament in the New Covenant.

*"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea..."*

*-1 Corinthians 10:1-2*

Paul sees a type of baptism, not only in the crossing of the sea but also in a future story in Exodus when God appears at Mount Sinai in a cloud and enters into a covenant with His people. These accounts represent baptism for the same reason, it is a sign of complete commitment and reliance upon God. When God parts the waters He uses wind to do so. This is significant because the Hebrew word for "wind" is the same word for "breathe" and "spirit". Meaning, that through a work of the "spirit" here manifested as wind, God makes a way for His people to be delivered from slavery and to enter into a relationship with Him

As such, the same waters that part for the people of God, drowned the armies of Pharaoh. In the same way, when a Christian enters into the waters of baptism, this is what they are representing. By entering into the waters, they are acknowledging a complete reliance upon God. It isn't that the waters themselves save a person, but they are acknowledging that they need to be saved and that God is able to save us. By entering into the waters they are expressing their need to be cleansed and forgiven and they are recognizing that this is something God can do.

And this is a leap of faith. Israel is trapped in between the river and the army of Pharaoh, if God didn't part the waters, they would be doomed. The people of Israel had to be brought to a time when they had to trust in the salvation of God without knowing whether or not He would fulfill it. Salvation is always an act of faith for the believer. We have to step out into the waters, trusting that God will produce dry land. We can't absolutely *know* that God has forgiven us, but we must believe, that is the source of our salvation.

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*

*-Ephesians 2:8-10*

Next, like the nation of Israel, they are doing this because they not only believe that God can do this for them, but further that *only* God can do this for them. The waters of the Red Sea recede to reveal a singular path to freedom, as Jesus later puts it:

*“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

*-Matthew 7:13-14*

To be led to God means coming to terms with the exclusivity of the gospel which is why it is so hard for people to do so. Many modern people take an act like baptism lightly, but for most ancient people this was not so. In order to be baptized it meant publicly declaring yourself as a follower of Christ. In the ancient world, and even throughout our modern world, becoming a Christian meant losing friends and family members, and it might even mean risking overt persecution.

But even when that’s not the case, this claim of exclusivity, when fully understood, can be intimidating. To truly, and publicly, devote ourselves to God is to be held accountable for our decision. It isn’t a private thought anymore, nor is it something that we can hold loosely. We are now *devoting* ourselves to God and offering ourselves up to Him. We now trust Him with our lives and our eternal souls. We are no longer seeking to live our lives as we want, but we are only seeking to live our lives as He would lead us.

Being brought to this point is a rare event. It only comes about when someone has reached the end of themselves and is actually willing to surrender themselves, body and soul, to God. Like the Israelites, we have to be brought to the point where we *know* there is no other way. I like how the apostle Peter put this point when Jesus gives a message that offends a crowd:

*“Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. “Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

*-John 6:67-69*

Finally, baptism is the washing away of sin and depravity. Again, the same waters that purify the Israelites, drown the Egyptians. This isn’t that complex an idea when we think about it. When we take a bath, our body is cleansed *through* washing away dirt and grime, so our souls are “cleansed” by washing away our sin and depravity. So the

Israelites, who represent the desires of the spirit, make it through the waters, but the Egyptians, who represent the desires of the flesh, are drowned in the waters.

Like the other symbols of baptism, this isn't *fulfilled* in the waters, but it is promised. Just as in a marriage ceremony, I haven't fulfilled my vows to my wife until I die, for these vows are not for a time, but "as long as we both shall live". In the ceremony I have declared the aim of my life towards her, not making a statement of accomplishment. However, even though I haven't fulfilled my vows, making the vows has actually married me to my wife. This is the strange element of ritual. We are both embodying our faith, and declaring our hope and commitment.

That is what baptism does, by entering into the waters I am both embodying my faith and unity in God, but I am also declaring my hope in God's work in my life, and my commitment to surrender to Him. So while I am surrendered to God and purified by His Spirit, this is also an ongoing work. I am currently being purified, and working towards that purity in God, and I am also seeking out greater submission in my soul towards God.

## The New Creation

*"Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses."*

*-Exodus 14:24-31*

After this mighty work of God, the result is that Israel is fully set free from the evil of Egypt, and they are on their way to the promised land. This is the picture that we get in the New Testament of being “born again”:

*“This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

*-John 3:2-8*

The idea here is that when someone surrenders themselves to God, which is a work of the Spirit that is manifest in the waters of baptism, they are a new creation. This is how the apostle Paul puts this point:

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

*-2 Corinthians 5:17*

This is why the story of the Red Sea crossing has clear parallels to God’s creation of the earth:

*“Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day. Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so.”*

*-Genesis 1:3-11*

Notice that the account begins with light and darkness, just as the pillar of God manifests itself as light to Israel and darkness to Egypt, then there's the water, and God brings forth land from the water, and finally life appears on the land. This is the pattern of the Exodus when God produces land for His people, leads them out of Egypt, and calls them into a life-giving covenant with Himself.

All this same imagery exists for the modern Christian. When we come to God, we aren't just moderately changed, we are new creations in Christ. We have a new birth, a new identity, and a new purpose. We are no longer children of this world, we are redeemed children of God. We no longer find our identity and value through our desires and accomplishments, but only through the finished work of God, His love for us, and His commandments for our life. But how does being a new creation actually look?

## The Life of the Spirit

*"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."*

*-Galatians 5:16-18*

It would be nice if the life of the Spirit meant that we are no longer plagued by the desires of the flesh, but this isn't the case. What's interesting about the Red Sea crossing is that God tells His people that before they cross: *"For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever."* This seems to be a promise to be totally delivered from Egypt, and yet, throughout the book of Exodus, and especially the book of Numbers, the people of Israel are constantly tempted to go back to Egypt. Even after becoming a nation, they are still tempted to make alliances with Egypt and even to adopt the terrible practices of the Egyptians.

This is actually what the life of the Spirit is. What God frees His people from is the tyranny of the Egyptians. Meaning that the people of God were set free from Egypt and were delivered from their power. It doesn't mean that they couldn't willingly ally themselves with Egypt, or willingly return, but that the Egyptians no longer pursued the nation of Israel, nor did they have the power to conquer them.

In the same way, sin has lost its overwhelming power for the Christian. We are no longer enslaved to our sins, and therefore we have the power to fight our sins and we are freed from the consequences of our sins. Meaning that God has forgiven us for our sins and therefore we are no longer separated from Him, but joined to Him now and

forever. But the temptations of the flesh remain for the Christian. We will still struggle with temptation and will still fall short of the glory of God. But in our new life of the Spirit, who delivers us from our sin, is it God or us?

*“And Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.” And the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.”*

*Exodus 14:13-15*

I love this passage. It is clear that God Himself is providing the victory over the Egyptians, but instead of wiping them out with some sort of plague, He instead opens up a way for Israel to escape the Egyptians and then He uses the same waters to destroy the Egyptians. This is a pretty good picture of what our lives look like. It is God who makes the way for us to fight our sins and find victory over them, but we must be faithful to walk in the way of God. Paul puts it this way:

*“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”*

*-Philippians 2:12-13*

If you only read verse 12 of this passage, it would seem as though our salvation and our battle against sin is all up to us, but if you only read verse 13 it seems as though it is all a work of God. How do we make sense of this? As with most things of God, they exist in a mystery. I'm not entirely certain exactly *how* this relationship works, but I know *that* it works. And that God will be faithful to me in such a way where sin is defeated in my life. But I also know that I am responsible to fight my sin and pursue God.

This is a hard balance for many Christians. We can easily over spiritualize our lives and pretend as though we have no real responsibility. That all of our faults are the result of demonic activity, and all we need to do is simply pray and God will do the rest. But on the other hand, there are those who live apart from the power of the spirit. They take a more stoic view of their righteousness and merely fight their sin through their own willpower. But when we read many prayers in the New Testament, we see a very different picture:

*“...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance*

*may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel...*

*-Ephesians 6:18-19*

*“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...”*

*-Ephesians 3:14-16*

*“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.”*

*-Colossians 1:9-12*

Notice that these are prayers that God would empower the people to do the works of God. In the prayer, there is a submission and pursuit of God and His power, but there is also a deep acknowledgement of personal responsibility. This is what most modern people who mock “thoughts and prayers” don’t understand, or maybe willingly misrepresent. Prayer is not something that Christians do *instead* of acting in the world, prayer is instead *how* the Christian acts in the world. Through our prayers we orient ourselves to God, seek His will, ask for His power and wisdom, and therefore, we turn all of our works into occasions for praise. For the one who doesn’t work, prayer facilitates laziness, but for the one who doesn’t pray, works lead to pride. But when we get the balance right, we can live our lives in obedience to God, always giving Him right praise for the works done in His name, through His power, and for His glory.

*“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

*-Matthew 5:14-16*