

International Bible Lesson Commentary
Exodus 14:21-31

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 17, 2013
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 17, 2013**, is from **Exodus 14:21-31**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

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Exodus 14:21-31

(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, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, regretted that he had let God's people go to worship the LORD; so, he sent his army to bring God's people back to Egypt to once again serve him

as slaves. The battle Pharaoh planned would be a battle between himself as a god, with the supposed gods of Egypt helping him, against the LORD as the true God and Creator of all. The LORD had promised to fight for Israel (see Exodus 14:14); so, once again God used Moses, His prophet, and commanded Moses to turn the Red Sea into dry land. God told Moses, “But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground” (Exodus 14:16). We might picture Moses in our mind’s eye with one hand raised with his staff in his hand and with his other hand raised without also holding his staff. His power came from God and not from his staff, and the Bible seeks to make that fact clear.

(Exodus 14:22) The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

God parted the waters using a strong east wind to blow a path in the Red Sea for the Israelites to pass through to safety on the other side. When the wind blew the path, the waters formed a wall for them on their right and left. Since there remained a wall of water on each side of them, the Israelites needed faith in God to step onto the dry ground and march across the sea without fearing that the water walls would collapse upon them. Those who did not have faith in God would have crossed fearfully and with renewed complaining, even as some wished they could go back to Egypt and be slaves rather than face Pharaoh’s army (see Exodus 14:10-12). Moses had to work hard to

build up the people's faith in the LORD, so we know that their eventual faith was based on many great experiences with God and His saving them from disaster and death. Because of lack of faith, most of those who left Egypt would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land.

(Exodus 14:23) The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers.

The Egyptian army followed the Israelites into the Red Sea, rashly assuming the parted waters would remain parted because of the power of the wind or the power of Pharaoh and the gods they worshiped. They would do whatever Pharaoh ordered them to do as their king and god. They did not yet have faith in the LORD as the one true God. They did not know that it is better to obey the true God than serve a false god. Pharaoh's army entered the sea, but the Bible does not tell us that Pharaoh also entered the sea; so, we may assume that Pharaoh himself did not perish in the battle. However, Egypt was destroyed as a world power for many years after this event.

(Exodus 14:24) At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic.

Once again, the Bible reveals the awesome power of the true God, by saying God "looked down" upon Pharaoh's army. The LORD spoke to Moses from the burning bush,

and the Bible says the LORD was in the pillar of fire and in the cloud. As the Creator of all things, the LORD “looked down” from the pillar of fire upon the people He created. Later, the LORD would enter the tabernacle that He commanded Moses to build and even later the LORD would enter the temple that King Solomon built; however, we know that God is everywhere present and greater than His creation; furthermore, the Bible says, “The Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands” (Acts 7:48). No manmade structure can completely contain the true God. Some commentators believe that the LORD in this account is the LORD Jesus, the Son of God, before He came to earth in human flesh.

(Exodus 14:25) He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

God filled the minds and the hearts of the Egyptian army with fear and panic. He returned the water and clogged their chariot wheels in the seabed mud, and as they sank in the sand they “turned with difficulty.” The Egyptian army recognized how easily the Israelites had crossed over, and how difficult the crossing was for them. They recognized that the LORD was greater than the Pharaoh they had worshiped as a god, and they recognized that the LORD was fighting for the Israelites. Some of them may have come to true faith in the true God as God fought against Pharaoh’s army.

(Exodus 14:26) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.”

As the prophet of God, Moses obeyed God by merely stretching out his hand. The “staff of God” is not mentioned here, perhaps to show that the staff was not essential to God’s performing miracles, but Moses as the prophet of God was essential in this instance. The Israelites should not come to think that the staff of Moses was “a magic staff,” though Moses may have used it once again (see God’s command in Exodus 14:16). The Egyptians had trusted in their manmade idols and their Pharaoh who claimed to be a god, and these false gods failed them.

(Exodus 14:27) So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea.

In faith, Moses obeyed God and stretched forth his hand (perhaps using his staff too). Immediately, the waters returned to normal. As the Egyptians fled, they drowned in the sea. God was glorified because the Egyptian people and the Israelites learned the truth about the true God and His character and nature. God used the powers of the nature He had created with perfect timing in order to save the Israelites and destroy the Egyptian army.

(Exodus 14:28) The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

All those who obeyed Pharaoh and entered the sea died. For Pharaoh to rebuild his army, he would need to build new chariots and train new chariot drivers. Pharaoh was so totally defeated, along with all the false gods of Egypt, that he could no longer pursue the Israelites to bring them back into slavery or for any Pharaoh in later years to defeat the Israelites when they were faithful to God.

Remembering the power of God in the Exodus and the weakness of Pharaoh's army, later Israelites should have known to trust in the LORD and not trust in the Egyptians or false gods when they were threatened by their neighbors or other foreign enemies. Unfortunately, later prophets had to warn continually the Israelites not to trust in Egypt or idols, but trust in the LORD.

(Exodus 14:29) But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

God inspired Moses to emphasize the fact that the Israelites had crossed on "dry ground," not in mud from a job half done. The rescue God provided for them was perfect in every way. God's way of rescue became a way of destruction for all the false gods that the Egyptians had trusted. In two verses, the Bible emphasizes exactly how God parted the waters of the sea.

(Exodus 14:30) Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

We might wish that the LORD had chosen a different way to save the Israelites and not destroy Pharaoh's army. However, "will not the judge of all the earth do right?" (see Genesis 18:25). Certainly! God did what was a wise, right, and necessary not only then but as an example for others to consider in the future. God should be trusted and obeyed. God can save those who believe in Him. Those who persist in following false gods instead of trusting in the true God can face destruction as a consequence. No one needs to perish, because they can trust in the true God and be saved for eternity, even though they may suffer and die in this life (consider the examples of Jesus and the first martyr, Stephen).

(Exodus 14:31) Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

This extremely important verse indicates the consequences in the lives of the Israelites after they saw how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and the Egyptian army. They saw that God has the power to do great works. They learned greater truths about God. God has the power to defeat their enemies, no matter how powerful they are. God is worthy to be revered. And God is just and God will execute just judgments, so He is worthy to be feared. If

we disobey God, we should fear him and the consequences of continued rebellion. The LORD and His true servants, such as Moses, are worthy to believe in and trust. God's people should believe in the LORD as God and also believe in His prophets as servants of the LORD. We must not believe in God's servants as gods or as idols to worship, but trust in the true God that they point us to worship and serve.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why did the Israelites need faith in God in order to follow Moses?
2. What did God do through Moses to give the Israelites a reasonable faith in Him?
3. How did the LORD demonstrate that He was greater than Pharaoh and all of the gods of Egypt?
4. Why do you think it was important for God to prove that He was greater than all the idols of Egypt?
5. How might you use this account of the Red Sea crossing to give an unbeliever a reason for why you believe in the true God?

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