

Monday morning! They come with amazing regularity! I am so grateful for the many people who responded to last Thursday's Devotional. Yes, it was a little emotional, but that is how I was feeling on that special day in my life. But this is another day. And, it is early morning and time to get into the Word and alone with the Lord. I trust this Devotional will be a blessing to all who read it.

A NEWS ALERT! TROUBLE AHEAD! A DESERT, A SEA, AND AN ARMY!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD,’ So the Israelites did this.” (Exodus 14:1-4; TNIV) On May 17 I posted a Devotional that focused on handling crises in our lives. I developed that Devotional out of the life and reign of King Hezekiah of Judah. I closed the Devotional with the great old Gospel song, “He Rolled the Sea Away,” written in 1896 by Henry J. Zelle, and sung to the music of Henry L. Gilmour, also written in 1896. Since then I have not been able to get that song out of my mind, and my heart. It fits so meaningfully with chapter 14 of Exodus.

The serious condition that seems to keep the Mid-East on edge at this time in history, particularly the recent military conflict between the Arab and Israeli forces, has caused me to return to Scripture for some help in trying to understand what is happening, and to try to discern if possibly it may perchance fit into the eschatological teaching of the Word of God. This led me to the 14th chapter of the Book of Exodus. The first four verses are quoted above, and form the text for my thoughts today.

The chill of the night air, like giant tentacles, took hold of the gifted musician, and held him in its grip. He may have wrapped himself in a blanket, as he sat in his small room or house. As the darkness began to envelope the city of Jerusalem, he lit a little oil lamp, sat down, and began to think ... maybe to pray! He was one of the “men whom David appointed over the service of song in the house of the LORD.” (1 Chronicles 6:31) His name? Asaph, the son of Berechiah (1 Chronicles 6:39). He, along with King David, was a skilled musician and poet. Later, King Hezekiah instructed “the Levites to sing praise to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer (prophet).” (2 Chronicles 29:30) But now, during that chilly evening, he may have well thought about the deliverance of his people Israel out of the 430-year bondage in Egypt. He remembered! The sea parted! On either side of the pathway were the trembling water walls. The ground beneath their feet was dry. The people left behind the dark, glaring mountains and barren desert, and the thundering hoof-beats of the pursuing, heartless army of the Pharaoh. Perhaps with a pen in his hand, the old musician/prophet, using his God-given gift of poetic language, began to write on a piece of parchment. “When I was in distress, I sought the LORD; at night I stretched out untiring hands, ... I remembered you, God, ...I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; ... Your path led through the mighty waters, though Your footprints were not seen. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” (Psalm 77:3, 19-20; TNIV, a Psalm of Asaph)

Yes, he remembered Exodus 14! He easily recalled that God halted the progress of the descendants of Jacob as they fled from Egypt. For a time, its length known only to God, they were where God planted them. There they waited ... in the hot sands of an unforgiving, uninviting desert. They faced a sea too deep to cross. The sky in the west was filling with the dust from the horses and more than 600 chariots of Pharaoh. So, what to do is the question! The Bible gives the answer to us.

The Historic Record is found in the Book of Exodus and the Prophetic Review in the Prophecy of Isaiah.

1. First, let’s look at the Historic Record. The Scripture is clear. “The Egyptians – all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen and troops – pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.” (Exodus 14:9; TNIV) Quite naturally, the Israelites were frightened. Some translations attempting to disclose the strength of the Hebrew word, uses the word “terrified.” They “cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in

Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert." (Exodus 14:10b-12; TNIV)

Moses, God's appointed leader responded carefully but persuasively: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Exodus 14:13, 14; TNIV)

As we would anticipate, the LORD God Himself, ever in charge, spoke to Moses. "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen." (Exodus 14:15-18; TNIV)

Want to see a miracle? Here is one! "Then the Angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left." (Exodus 14:19-22; TNIV)

Lest anyone reading this Devotional wonders as to the identity of "the Angel of God" referred to in Exodus 14:19 noted above, there need be no question. It is made evident in the previous chapter in the Book of Exodus. "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 13:21, 22; NKJV) Yes, it was the Lord Himself who led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the harsh desert, and to the Red Sea. He Himself went before them, and then "moved from in front and stood behind them." (14:19)

This is a beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who declared His presence will be with all who place their trust in Him. He gives light in the darkness of night, and protection from the enemy of the soul. For His children, He precedes and protects. He is our guide and our guard. He is our Shepherd and our Shield. He is the One who goes before us, guiding unerringly through our future, and He is the One who goes behind us, gathering our failures, and moving us gently and assuredly. David said it this way: "You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me." (Psalm 139:5; NASB) For all God's trusting people, there is what I choose to call "a holy perimeter." The Psalmist said it this way: "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever." (Psalm 125:2; NKJV)

2. I believe we can also profit from Isaiah's Prophetic Review of the Exodus experience. The Isaian record is Chapter 43:1-20, although the Prophet continues through several chapters with other declarations of the Lord. I invite all who are reading this Devotional to read Isaiah 43:1-20, out of which I am citing only the following brief but instructive passages.

"This is what the LORD says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. ... This is what the LORD says -- He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick. ... I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland (desert). The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to My people, My chosen, the people I formed for Myself that they may proclaim My praise." (Isaiah 43:14a, 16-17, 19b-21; TNIV)

There we have it! The unforgiving, uninviting desert with its glaring mountains and burning sand were left behind! The night wind was sent by the Lord to make a "way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters." The powerful, well trained army of the Pharaoh of the greatest empire in the world at that time, with all its reinforcements was now left at the bottom of the uncrossable sea. The people of God

... some suggest at least 2 ½ million of them ... crossed on dry ground, fully protected by the mighty hand of the LORD God. Through this deliverance they proclaimed His great name, and He was glorified. Where are we today? Where am I? Where are you? How did we get here? There are times in our lives when the hand of God clearly points in the direction we are to proceed. There are other times, usually unfortunately, when we wanted to determine the direction for our lives, and God has allowed us to make those choices. They may have proved to be rather uncomfortable. We may be facing a formidable sea, too deep to just walk through. We may feel the heat of the cutting sand of the surrounding desert and are frightened by the glaring faceless desert mountains. We may hear the pursing armies of opposition charging toward us with relentless fury. We must remember there is no sea deeper than the beautiful ocean of Divine love and grace. There is no wilderness through which He cannot make a way for us. There is no opposing force greater than the hosts of heaven called alongside as we travel on the way He has made for us. How do we know this? Jesus said it! He who is the Angel of God who went before and behind His people Israel and said "I make a way in the sea, and a path through surging waters," is the same One who said "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6; HCSB) And to all who follow Him, this same Jesus said: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20; HCSB) On May 17, I closed that day's Devotional with one of the truly great old hymns. It has been lodged in my brain and heart these days, and today's Devotional has awakened it loudly and clearly. Therefore, I am repeating it, and trusting that by doing so, it will become more familiar to all of you.

"When Israel Out of Bondage Came," or sometimes known as "He Rolled the Sea Away," was written in 1896 by Henry J. Zelle, and sung to the music of Henry L. Gilmour, also written in 1896. Unfortunately it is not in most current hymnals, and our people are not familiar with it. I only wish I could teach it to you. It would be such a blessing. However, here are the words again. It is so strongly applicable to today's Devotional, and to our lives ... every day! He makes the way through!

WHEN ISRAEL OUT OF BONDAGE CAME

1. When Israel out of bondage came, a sea before them lay;
My Lord reached down His mighty hand, and rolled the sea away.
2. Before me was a sea of sin so great I feared to pray;
My heart's desire the Savior read, and rolled the sea away.
3. When sorrows dark, like stormy waves, were dashing o'er my way,
Again the Lord in mercy came, and rolled the sea away.
4. And when I reach the sea of death, for needed grace I'll pray;
I know the Lord will quickly come, and roll the sea away.

Refrain, after each verse:

Then forward still, 'tis Jehovah's will, tho' the billows dash and spray.
With a conquering tread we will push ahead; He'll roll the sea away.