

Crossing the Red Sea

Speaking of the things experienced by Israel of old, the inspired Apostle writes:

“Now all these things happened unto them *for ensamples*: and they are written *for our admonition* upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

When we look back therefore, at the Old Testament record concerning Yahweh’s chosen people, we do not do so simply with the objective of accumulating a knowledge of the facts and figures of what took place. Rather, we look to their experiences, with the view to comparing them with our own situation. When we see their examples of belief – and unbelief – we find a pattern of principles that we also can be “admonished” by, lest we fall as did they.

1 Corinthians 10 brings to us the spiritual lesson of Israel crossing the Red sea:

“Moreover brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea: *and were all baptized into Moses* in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1-2).

Passing through the waters either side of them, and above them (in the form of a cloud), Israel underwent a national baptism. They were baptised into Moses, the prophet and leader of their Nation. The comparison with our own situation is striking: just as they passed through waters to enter the land of their inheritance, even so we who trust in the Greater Prophet “like unto” Moses (Acts 3:22) are baptised into Christ - and in so doing we are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of Yahweh’s dear son” (Col. 1:13). Not that we have received the kingdom as yet, any more than Israel had received their inheritance when they were baptised. But rather we, as they, embark on a journey through the wilderness of life, along the “narrow way” that will lead us to the coming kingdom of Messiah.

Our passing through baptismal waters symbolises the association with the death of Messiah. The water represents the grave and those who enter into it resolve to put to death the ways of the flesh. So the Apostle writes:

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised *into his death*? Therefore we are *buried* with him by baptism *into death* ... knowing this, that *our old man is crucified with him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed” (Rom. 6:3-4, 6).

This being the case, we can see how that in the parallel case when Moses brought his people through the baptismal waters of the Red Sea, this was symbolic of the nation passing through death in the faith of living a new life the other side. Indeed in these things, we behold two contrasting attributes of the Father: we have His Mercy and Salvation towards his people, but we also see His Judgment upon the ungodly who despise His Ways. The red sea, as well as being symbolic of death to Israel was very literally death to the Egyptians, and therefore also speaks of how Israel was delivered

from bondage. Through judicial death and destruction upon Egypt, came mercy and salvation to Israel. Both aspects come together in Psalm 136:

“To him which divided the Red sea into parts: *for his mercy endureth for ever*: and made Israel to pass through the midst of it: *for his mercy endureth for ever*: But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: *for his mercy endureth for ever*” (Psa. 136:13-15).

The overthrowing of Pharaoh and his host was therefore mercy towards Israel, but death to the Egyptians.

When we consult other passages descriptive of Israel’s passing through the baptismal waters of the Red Sea, we find that there is another parallel with our own circumstance. Just as Israel were brought through the Sea by Moses, even so we are brought through a symbolic baptismal death by Christ. Isaiah 63 describes Israel being baptised into Moses:

“ ... then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying, Where is he that *brought* them up out of the sea with *the shepherd of his flock?*” (Isa. 63:11).

Now compare this with the apostle’s description of Messiah:

“Now the God of peace, that *brought again* from the dead our Lord Jesus, that *great Shepherd of the sheep*, though the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect ...” (Heb. 13:21).

Note the parallel descriptions: Moses bringing Israel up out of the death-sea as a shepherd leading the sheep is aligned with Messiah bringing his people through the blood of the everlasting covenant. There is a shift in emphasis; (Isaiah 63 concerns Israel passing through the sea, whereas Hebrews 13 concerns Messiah himself being brought through death and back into life by his own blood). But the principles remain true for us: Israel passing through a symbolic death parallels with our own passing through the aqueous grave of baptism into Christ.

Exodus chapter 14 describes how Israel were led into a seemingly impossible situation. Brought to the brink of the Red Sea, the people were pursued by Pharaoh’s armies: there was no going back, but also naturally speaking there would be no going forward either: humanly speaking, Israel were stuck! There is a parallel between this situation and our own lives as we walk along our wilderness journey. We are being relentlessly pursued by death. Sometimes the difficulties we have to endure seem to be so great and insurmountable, that it is all too easy for us to weaken in faith. Time and time again, adverse situations might seem impossible for us to overcome: we can see no way out. However, as with Israel, so with us - let us stand still and see the salvation of Yahweh. In alluding back to Israel’s situation at the Red Sea, the apostle gives us the words of comfort:

“... God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted [Grk. tried] above that ye are able; but will with the temptation [Grk. trial] *also make a way of escape*, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Or as David was ‘moved’ to write as he was also being pursued by the enemy:

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: **but Yahweh delivereth him out of them all**” (Psa. 34:19).

Just as Israel were given an escape from the Egyptians, even so we must have the faith that Yahweh will grant us an escape from the trials that come upon us – even when the situation appears on the face of things to be impossible to bear. Let us remember Israel’s circumstance, and the great deliverance that was wrought for them. Truly it is written that “the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of trials ...” (2 Pet. 2:9)

The parting of the Red Sea was brought about by Yahweh, who required Moses to lift up his rod over it:

“Yahweh said unto Moses ... lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea” (Exo. 14:15, 16).

This is most interesting, as the rod used appears to be the same rod that became a serpent before Pharaoh and his supposedly wise men. Exodus chapter 7 recounts how the changing of this rod into a serpent was to be a sign declaring Yahweh’s power. And Moses reaching out and grasping this serpent (cp. Exo. 4:4) demonstrated his authority over the serpent-power. Though he began by fleeing from it, he learned to take the mastery over it, and it became a rod again in his hand.

When this rod became a serpent before the wise men of Egypt, they likewise turned their rods into serpents – but Moses’ rod, held by Aaron swallowed up their rod-serpents:

“... they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods” (Exo. 7:12).

In these things, we have a *type*, or pattern of future things, how that through the work of Christ by obtaining the mastery over the serpent-mind, “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54).

From these things, we can see a pattern emerging: redemption came to Israel by the lifting up of a rod. Before Pharaoh, before the Red Sea, and also in Exodus chapter 17, before the nation of Amalek.

Amalek was the first of the nations to declare war on Israel, as they began their wilderness wandering:

“Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill **with the Rod of God in my hand**” (Exo 17:9).

So Israel went into battle against Amalek. But their success or otherwise appears to have been dependent on the “Rod of God” being lifted up, for as Moses grew weary of

holding it up in his hands, and “when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed” (verse 11). So it was necessary to prepare a rock for Moses to sit upon, and for Aaron (Priest) and Hur (of Judah = King) to help Moses to keep his hands, and therefore the Rod lifted up:

“Moses hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other side: and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun” (Exo. 17:12).

This situation with Moses is alluded to in Hebrews chapter 12. Just as Moses was helped by his brethren to hold up his hands, and give his knees rest by sitting on the rock, even so we ought to help each other in our warfare against sin:

“wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet ...” (Heb. 12:12-13).

Here is the real point: “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong” (Eccl. 9:11), but all things of Yahweh. The victory over Amalek was not of man’s endeavours, but was due to the serpent-rod being lifted up, and the miraculous deliverance that came of it. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and from Amalek – both by the lifting up of the Rod was of God. Even so, we must recognise that we are “without strength” to save ourselves. Even Moses who was the rod-bearer had to recognise that even he could not secure the victory by himself, for due to the weakness of the flesh, he just couldn’t lift up that rod unaided. But through the means described, salvation was brought to Israel – and so became a pattern of things to come (cp Isa. 10:26).

This situation is very reminiscent of another serpent being lifted up in the wilderness, referred to in the Gospel record. Though is it another serpent being referred to the principles involved are the same:

“as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jno. 3:14-15).

The lifting up of Moses’ serpent-rod as the means for deliverance and salvation points forward to the way in which by the lifting up of Messiah upon the cross, sin is seen to be condemned, and the victory guaranteed. Our Master is described as being “the captain of salvation” (Heb. 2:10), who leads his followers into battle – a spiritual warfare against the flesh. Through his being lifted up, we can rejoice that “thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). But we can only be given the victory of Christ if we are engaged in the same warfare as he! Like Israel, we need to depart from Egypt: the water of baptism is death to the natural man, and mercy to those who seek a greater inheritance to come. Our wilderness journey, as with Israel, involves a warfare – a warfare of faith, against the flesh. Let us therefore be valiant in battle, knowing that with every trial there will be deliverance, and that though faith in the prophet like unto Moses, the victory is ours – guaranteed.

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