

The Parting of the Red Sea

Exodus 14:21-31

Exodus 14:21-31 – *“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. ²² 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. ²³ And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.*

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ 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.” ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ 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.

³⁰ So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ 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.”

Background Notes

Here in Exodus 14 we have one of the greatest and best-known miracles of the Old Testament, the parting of the Red Sea. Skeptics of the Bible (and even some Christians) have tried to water down this great miracle by saying that the people of Israel only crossed a “shallow lake” or a “marshy area,” because the Hebrew term for Red Sea can also be translated *Reed Sea*. Let’s mention a few things from the text itself that would refute the idea that they crossed a small, shallow lake or marshy area:

1. Verses 22 and 29 both say *“the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”* This is not Hebrew poetry or symbolic language. Hebrew poetry has a certain structure to it. This is historical narrative.

2. Verse 28 says, *“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.”* Now that doesn't sound like waters gradually seeping back into a marshy area, does it?
3. Verse 30 says that, *“...Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.”* Dead bodies don't wash up on the shore of a swamp.
4. Even though the Hebrew term “Red Sea” can be translated “Reed Sea,” the same term is used wherever the Red Sea is referred to in the Old Testament -- including the body of water where King Solomon had his navy! I Kings 9:26 says, *“King Solomon also built a fleet of ships at Ezion Geber which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea.”* Certainly, King Solomon did not have his fleet of ships in a shallow lake or swamp of reeds.

We don't know exactly where Israel crossed the Red Sea. Was it the Gulf of Suez, and extension of the Gulf of Suez, the Gulf of Aqaba, the Straits of Tiran? We don't know for sure. There have been some recent reports that supposed “coral-covered chariot wheels” were found in the Gulf of Aqaba, but to this date, no such findings have been documented conclusively by archaeologists.

Doctrinal Points

1. Divine miracles may sometimes involve unusual events of nature.

A divine miracle could be defined simply as “a deviation from God's normal way of operation, in which God temporarily interrupts or changes the ordinary course of events.” I just finished writing a book on Christian Evidences which has a whole chapter about miracles. Here is a section entitled, “Definition of Miracles.”

“Miracles are not just things that happen that we can't explain. A miracle is an extraordinary event in the physical world when the supernatural realm breaks into the natural realm and temporarily interrupts or changes the ordinary course of events. God is in control over His creation at all times. A divine miracle is simply a deviation from God's normal and natural way of working.

A model train layout is a good illustration. Usually the train is allowed to run along on its tracks in its ordinary and usual way, according to the conditions and the plan and pattern laid out by the designer of the model train layout. But sometimes, for reasons of his own, the designer reaches in to change around some scenery or pick up an engine or boxcar and move it to a different location. In the same way, God, the Great Designer, normally allows His creation to run in its usual and ordinary way, by the natural laws and patterns He set up in the first place. But sometimes for His own special purposes God reaches into His creation to work in an unusual way, a miraculous way. “

(*Definition of Miracles*, from [Ready to Give an Answer](#), a book on Christian Evidences, available on our website.)

Using this definition of a divine miracle, it could be said that miracles may involve unusual events of nature. For example, when God brought down the walls of Jericho, He may have used an earthquake. An earthquake is a natural event, but it can still be a miracle. In the case of Jericho, God timed may have planned for an earthquake to be to be triggered with the blast of the trumpets and the shout of the children of Israel.

When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan before conquering Jericho, we read in Joshua 3 that the waters of the Jordan were completely cut off upstream and heaped up at a place named *Adam* (Joshua 3:14-16). The Lord probably used the natural event of a landslide across the Jordan at that point, again probably due the result of earthquake activity. That whole area, by the way, is subject to earthquakes because of the giant rift that runs the entire length of the Jordan Valley. In any case, earthquakes are natural events, but God may use natural events to accomplish divine miracles.

Now what about the parting of the Red Sea? Was this just a very unusual natural event that God programmed to happen just at the right time, and thus it was a miracle? If so, the timing of the waters returning to drown the Egyptians was also part of this very unusual natural event.

Verse 21 indicates that a *“strong east wind”* was involved in this miracle: *“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.”* But it’s hard to conceive of how this wind would have made the waters like walls and kept them that way when the children of Israel crossed. Presumably the wind stopped in the morning, because the children of Israel and their little ones and animals would not have been able to walk in the face of such a strong wind. In any case, divine miracles may sometimes involve unusual natural events.

2. Divine miracles will always involve the supernatural power of God.

Even when God chooses to use unusual natural events in His divine miracles, His supernatural power is still involved. God is sovereign over nature; nothing happens by chance. Think of the supernatural power of God that was involved in holding those walls of water back until He let His normal Law of Gravity take over, when He said to Moses, *“Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen”* (v26). No wonder we read in verse 31, *“And when the Israelites saw the great power of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him....”*

There are many miracles in the Bible that can only be explained as God’s supernatural power, apart from any timing or unusual natural events. Think of the ninth plague of darkness in Exodus 10. Thick darkness for three days over all the land of Egypt but God gave light to the Children of Israel in Goshen. That sounds like more than just a very unusual natural event, doesn’t it? Think of Joshua’s longest day in Joshua chapter 10. Even Christians have tried, unsuccessfully, to explain this divine miracle as just the timing of an unusual natural event. Think of Daniel’s three friends preserved in the fiery furnace. Was that a natural event? No way! Think of the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, or the miracle of the Lord having Peter walk on water... on and on we could go.

These miracles are not just God's timing of unusual natural events. No, this is God's supernatural power directly at work, apart from any natural events. It seems to me that the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea involved more than just the divine timing of an unusual strong east wind. Here was the supernatural power of God directly involved in holding back the waters, in walls, on behalf of His people. So, whether it just the timing of natural events, or direct supernatural power temporarily suspending natural laws, divine miracles will always involve the supernatural power of God.

Practical Application

Let God open up the way.

In Hebrews 11:29 we read, "By faith the Children of Israel passed through the Red Sea as by dry land." Now that's a very encouraging verse for us, isn't it? Especially when we see how the children of Israel were fearing and complaining before the miracle. But God is gracious. And He opened up a way for the children of Israel, and by faith they passed through the Red Sea – because God wanted them on the other side. Now do you see the lesson? In our walk of faith, the Lord will always open up the way for us to do His Will. No barrier or obstacle can stand between us and God's Will if we let God open up the way.

Illustration: I remember years ago when I sensed that God was calling me out of secular employment to serve the Lord full time in a preaching and teaching ministry. I told the Lord at that time that, by faith, I was going to wait for Him to open up the way. And He Did! Because that was His Will for me.

Now let me ask you, is there some barrier or obstacle right now between you and doing the right thing, or doing what the Lord has called you to do? Even the matter of evangelizing your neighbor or wanting to make something right that you messed up? Listen, the Lord will always make it possible to do His will. Let God open up the way.