

Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart

Introduction

The fourteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus has long been a favorite one for all who love God's Word. The force and power of our Lord's mighty deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea cannot help but inspire even the most casual reader. No other passage more dramatically demonstrates God's faithful deliverance of His people in the face of looming disaster, even when they have proved themselves undeserving and ungrateful. But perhaps the most unnerving and sobering development in Chapter 14 is the unparalleled resistance to God displayed by Pharaoh during the Exodus and the terrible devastation that results, not only for him personally, but for his entire country.

It will be helpful (especially for individuals unfamiliar with this ministry) to enumerate three basic assumptions of this study:

1. The so-called "documentary hypothesis" theory of the origin of the Pentateuch is rejected. Instead of being an amalgamation of writings, the Torah, the first five books of our Bible, is assumed to be just what it claims to be: a divinely inspired set of books written under divine inspiration almost in their entirety by Moses.
2. An early date for the exodus is assumed (18th dynasty; ca. 1440 B.C.), a standard conservative position in keeping with a high view of inspiration (cf. the *New Scofield Reference Bible* in loc.).
3. Also in keeping with a high view of inspiration, the absolute accuracy and consistency of the text's internal details are assumed, and the Masoretic Text is considered to be a highly accurate source of the original Hebrew monograph.

It will also be of use at the outset to note three important spiritual themes expressed in Chapter 14:

1. The Faithfulness of God: Despite the poor performance of God's people when their faithfulness was tested, God provided them with a mighty deliverance. Despite their faithlessness, He remained faithful and rescued them from imminent disaster, destroying with great power the very enemy whom they thought would destroy them. We need to remember that God is a merciful God whose deliverance we never merit, but which we often receive.

2. The Faith Example of Moses: Moses provides an exceptional example of faith under pressure. Although the Israelites fail, one man remains strong in his faith. Without exact knowledge of the form that God's deliverance would take, under the severe chastisement of the multitude and in common with them viewing the approaching destruction, Moses nevertheless continues to trust God and has the courage and confidence to rebuke and encourage the people

("Do not be afraid, take your positions and watch the deliverance of the Lord. . ." v. 13). We need to remember that one person, imbued with confidence and unflinching faith in the Lord can make a difference, not only for himself, but for the entire community of faith.

3. The Failure of the People: The people failed the testing of their faith - repeatedly. And they did so even though they had seen the mighty miracles of God in Egypt and had God's own promise of deliverance to encourage them. We need to remember that failure of faith is inevitable wherever believers refuse either to receive or to believe God's Word.

Exodus Chapter 14 is the story of God's great deliverance in spite of all human odds. In spite of a powerful ruler who resisted God more than any had ever done, in spite of a stiff-necked people who wavered in their faith, in short, in spite of all indications to the contrary, God delivered the people of the Exodus. We need to remember that no matter how bleak or hopeless our circumstances may sometimes appear, that our God is a mighty God, a God of unbelievable deliverances - unbelievable, that is, to the world, but not to us, His people.