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This study begins a four week examination of the life of Moses in the Smyth-Helwys Formations Sunday School literature. Of all the major characters in the Old Testament who have influenced both Jewish and Christian thought, Moses would stand along side Abraham at the top of the list. In both instances, however, the Old Testament scriptures do not present them as unblemished leaders or heroes. With Moses' greatness came failures, sometimes of temper, sometimes of misjudgment. Unlike most ancient literature that presents its leaders and heroes as godlike figures, if not claiming outright deity for them, the Jewish scriptures paint pictures of their heroic figures as real flesh and blood people who possess both outstanding leadership skills but also the fallibilities that typify humankind. Our limited study of Moses' life will treat both aspects. His life was multifaceted as the above graphic depicts scenes from various parts of his life.



I. Context

Relevant parts of the background material will be taken from previous studies in the book of Exodus, mostly from the Exodus 19 study.

The name of the book, Exodus, is derived from the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint (LXX), which uses the title ἐξόδος [exodos, "going out"] for this document. The Hebrew text simply calls the document "and these are the names" [וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת]. G.E. Wright in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (s.v., "Exodus, Book of") has a helpful summation:

The second book of the OT, which receives its name from the LXX designation of the chief event recorded in it — namely, Israel's "going out" of Egypt. In the Jewish canon it is the second book of the Law (Torah, contained in the Pentateuch). In Christian exegesis the events of deliverance from slavery and the covenant at Sinai have received more attention than the law contained in the book, particularly because they have provided a language for comprehending the Atonement (God's "deliverance" in Christ) and the New Covenant. For Israel the events recorded in the book were a testimony to the work of God in fulfillment of promise whereby she became the "people of Yahweh," saved from Egyptian slavery, bound together in covenant with her Lord, and provided with a cultic center (tabernacle and ark of the covenant) which gave assurance of God's "tabernacled" presence in her midst (see §§ 1c, 4c, below).

Both contexts of this passage are important to correct understanding of the meaning of the scripture. Thus, we'll give some attention to these as a foundation for the study of the text itself.

a. Historical

External History. As is typically the case with most of the books in the Old Testament, the external history -- who wrote it, when, where, why, to whom -- is clouded in mystery. The first five books of the Old Testament have often been labeled the "books of Moses" in a traditional belief that he authored them. But as modern biblical scholarship has clearly shown, these beginning five documents have had many hands at work on them over a lengthy period of time. The final shape of Exodus along with the other four documents, as we know them, most likely took place at the close of the OT era. This doesn't exclude elements that go back to Moses, but the final form of Exodus in the Hebrew text tradition is clearly the product of editors who brought the materials together from a variety of sources and developed the content of the text that we're familiar with.

Internal History. As Wright says regarding the dating of the Exodus, "Archaeological evidence from the sites of Bethel, Lachish, Debir, and probably Hazor suggests a thirteenth-century date for the Israelite conquest of Canaan and may be taken to be in accord with the information of Mer-ne-ptah's stele." Mer-ne-ptah was an Egyptian pharaoh who first mentioned the Israelites in an inscription that has been discovered. Thus, if these assessments are on target, our text is dealing with the experience of the Israelites in the 1200s as they were leaving Egypt. (For an interesting animated audio-video depiction designed for children see <http://www.k4t.com/cho-sen/mtsinai.html>.)

The exact location of the [crossing of the sea](#) is disputed. The map on the right reflects three possibilities of crossing. The setting of our text is this crossing. The issue arises because the Hebrew text simply says "Sea of Reeds" (*yam*

suf = "Sea of Reeds" or "Sea of the End") as the crossing point (Exod. 13:18; 15:4). But the LXX translations took this to mean [Red Sea](#) and so translated it. This was then picked up by the Latin Vulgate, and later made its way into English translations from the Vulgate. Wherever it took place historically, we can

be confident that it did occur -- and that important lessons can be learned from the experience of the Israelites.

The leader of the group was [Moses](#). His impact on both Jewish and Christian understanding is enormous. Just a [concordance search](#) of the NRSV of the Bible brings up 824 uses of his name. Over-

whelmingly he is identified with the Exodus and the birth of the Israelite people as a nation. The *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* is but one of numerous Bible dictionaries that devote large amounts of space to a depiction of his life and influence:

MOSES Great leader of the Hebrew people who brought them out of bondage in Egypt to the Prom-

ised Land in Canaan; also the one who gave them the law at Mt Sinai that became the basis for their religious faith through the centuries. Focused in this one person are the figures of prophet, priest, lawgiver, judge, intercessor, shepherd, miracle worker, and founder of a nation.

The meaning of his name is uncertain. It has been explained as a Hebrew word meaning "to draw out" (Ex 2:10; cf. 2 Sm 22:17; Ps 18:16). If, however, it is an Egyptian name given him by the daughter of Pharaoh who found him, it is more likely from an Egyptian word for "son" (also found as part of many well-known Egyptian names such as Ahmose,



Thutmose, and Ramses). No one else in the OT bears this name.

Without question, the greatest figure in the OT (mentioned by name 767 times), his influence also extends to the pages of the NT (where he is mentioned 79 times). The first 40 years of his life were spent in the household of Pharaoh (Acts 7:23), where he was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. The next 40 years he spent in Midian as a fugitive from the wrath of Pharaoh, after killing an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew. His last 40 years were

devoted to leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt to the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gn 12:1–3). He died at the age of 120 after leading the Israelites successfully through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness to the very edge of the Promised Land on the east side of the Jordan River (Dt 34:7). He is one of the great figures in all of history, a man who took a group of slaves and, under inconceivably difficult circumstances, molded them into a nation that has influenced and altered the entire course of history.

b. Literary

Genre. The literary form of our text is narrative, and perhaps more precisely episodic narrative. That is, the text narrates the details of a particular event that is understood to have taken place at a certain point in time historically. This is done in prose format. Immediately following the narration of the crossing comes a poetic celebration of the crossing in musical, poetic structure (Exod. 15:2-18), the so-called Song of Moses. The narrational vantage point here is typical of ancient narrative style. We as the readers are placed outside the events and are “looking down” on what happens with a broader knowledge than that possessed by the characters inside the story. That’s important to remember when we feel the urge to criticize the Israelites over their fearfulness when they saw the Egyptian armies approaching. We can see what is going to happen, but they couldn’t. Thus their faith in God and in Moses was put to a test at a much more severe level than ours would be because of their very limited vantage point.

Literary Setting. In an outward flowing liter-

ary structural understanding, our passage is, first of all, a part of a larger narrative: the rescue of God, which covers 13:17-14:31. G.E. Wright (“Exodus, Book of,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, iP-reach) provides a brief synopsis of the contents of this document:

The diverse contents of the book are set within a geographical OUTLINE which may be quickly summarized as follows: (a) 1-19:2, Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian slavery and journey to Mount Sinai; (b) 19:3-40:38, Israel at the holy mount. A more adequate summary, however, may be given under the following headings: (a) the deliverance (1:1-19:2); (b) the covenant (19:3-24:18), its breach and renewal (chs. 32-34); (c) the tabernacle and its furnishings: Moses instructed concerning them (chs. 25-31); Moses directs their construction (chs. 35-40).

Thus, our passage is a part of the first segment of the book, “the deliverance” (1:1-19:2). It contributes to the story of the departure from Egypt and the arrival at Mt. Sinai by narrating the crossing of the Sea of Reeds.

II. Message

Literary Structure. One can understand a natural literary unit of material here, i.e., a pericope, in more than one way. Exod. 13:17-14:31 narrate a cycle of events that begin with (1) pharaoh’s permission for the Israelites to leave Egypt and their departure (13:17-22); moves on to (2) instructions about where they were to camp at Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea in front of Baal-zephon (14:1-4); then (3) pharaoh changing his mind and going after the Israelites with his army (14:5-9); next (4) the Israelites fear when they saw the Egyptians catching up with them (14:10-14); then (5) God instructing Moses on what to do (14:15-18); (6) the angel of God setting a cloud between the Egyptians and the Israelites to protect them from the Egyptians (14:19-20); (7) the crossing of the Sea on dry land by the Israelites and the difficulty of the Egyptians who followed them into the sea (14:21-25); (8) Moses’ stretching out his hand to close the waters with the Egyptians still in the sea (14:26-29); and finally (9) the climatic summary of God’s deliverance and the Israelites witnessing what God had done (14:30-31).

Our passage, 14:10-18, picks up on segments (4) and (5) of this series of events. Thus the text divides itself into two parts. a) Fear of danger (vv. 10-14), and b) God’s protection (vv. 15-18). But these verses must be understood against the backdrop of the sequence of events described in 13:17-14:31.

a Fear of Danger, vv. 10-14

LXX

¹⁰ καὶ Φαραω προσῆ-
γεν καὶ ἀναβλέψαντες οἱ
υἱοὶ Ἰσραηλ τοῖς
ὀφθαλμοῖς ὁρώσιν καὶ οἱ
Αἰγύπτιοι
ἐστρατοπέδευσαν ὀπίσω
αὐτῶν καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν
σφόδρα ἀνεβόησαν δὲ οἱ
υἱοὶ Ἰσραηλ πρὸς κύριον
¹¹ καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς Μωυσῆ
ν παρὰ τὸ μὴ ὑπάρχειν
μνήματα ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ
ἐξήγαγες ἡμᾶς θανατῶσαι
ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τί τοῦτο
ἐποίησας ἡμῖν ἐξαγαγὼν
ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ¹² οὐ τοῦτο
ἦν τὸ ῥῆμα ὃ ἐλαλήσαμεν
πρὸς σέ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ
λέγοντες πάρες ἡμᾶς ὅπως
δουλεύσωμεν τοῖς
Αἰγυπτίοις κρεῖσσον γὰρ
ἡμᾶς δουλεύειν τοῖς
Αἰγυπτίοις ἢ ἀποθαιεῖν
ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ταύτῃ ¹³
εἶπεν δὲ Μωυσῆς πρὸς
τὸν λαόν θαρσεῖτε στήτε
καὶ ὁρᾶτε τὴν σωτηρίαν
τὴν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἣν
ποιήσει ἡμῖν σήμερον ὃν
τρόπον γὰρ ἑωράκατε
τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους σήμερον
οὐ προσθήσεσθε ἔτι ἰδεῖν
αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα
χρόνον ¹⁴ κύριος
πολεμήσει περὶ ὑμῶν καὶ
ὑμεῖς σιγήσετε

NASB

10 As Pharaoh drew
near, the sons of Israel
looked, and behold, the
Egyptians were march-
ing after them, and they
became very frightened;
so the sons of Israel
cried out to the LORD. 11
Then they said to Moses,
"Is it because there were
no graves in Egypt that
you have taken us away
to die in the wilderness?
Why have you dealt with
us in this way, bringing us
out of Egypt? 12 "Is this
not the word that we
spoke to you in Egypt,
saying, 'Leave us alone
that we may serve the
Egyptians'? For it would
have been better for us
to serve the Egyptians
than to die in the wilder-
ness." 13 But Moses said
to the people, "Do not
fear! Stand by and see
the salvation of the LORD
which He will accomplish
for you today; for the
Egyptians whom you
have seen today, you will
never see them again for-
ever. 14 "The LORD will
fight for you while you
keep silent."

NRSV

10 As Pharaoh drew
near, the Israelites looked
back, and there were the
Egyptians advancing on
them. In great fear the
Israelites cried out to the
Lord. 11 They said to
Moses, "Was it because
there were no graves in
Egypt that you have
taken us away to die in
the wilderness? What
have you done to us,
bringing us out of Egypt?
12 Is this not the very
thing we told you in
Egypt, "Let us alone and
let us serve the Eryp-
tians"? For it would have
been better for us to
serve the Egyptians than
to die in the wilderness."
13 But Moses said to the
people, "Do not be afraid,
stand firm, and see the
deliverance that the Lord
will accomplish for you
today; for the Egyptians
whom you see today you
shall never see again. 14
The Lord will fight for you,
and you have only to
keep still."

NLT

10 As Pharaoh and
his army approached, the
people of Israel could
see them in the distance,
marching toward them.
The people began to
panic, and they cried out
to the LORD for help. 11
Then they turned against
Moses and complained,
"Why did you bring us out
here to die in the wilder-
ness? Weren't there
enough graves for us in
Egypt? Why did you
make us leave? 12 Didn't
we tell you to leave us
alone while we were still
in Egypt? Our Egyptian
slavery was far better
than dying out here in the
wilderness!" 13 But
Moses told the people,
"Don't be afraid. Just
stand where you are and
watch the LORD rescue
you. The Egyptians that
you see today will never
be seen again. 14 The
LORD himself will fight
for you. You won't have
to lift a finger in your de-
fense!"

army getting within sight of the Israelites as they were camping on the western side of the crossing point of the sea. As discussed in the [Internal History](#) segment, the exact location of this depends upon where they would subsequently cross the Sea of Reeds. Since this crossing point can't be identified with certainty, we can't peg down where they were camped. Ex. 14:9 says, "they [Egyptians] overtook them [Israelites] camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon." If we knew the location of these two places, then we could identify where they were camped. Pi-hahiroth is found in [two passages](#) in the Old Testament. In [Exod. 14:1, 9](#), it is identified as near Baal-zephon; 2) In [Num. 33:7](#), it is identified as west of Etham and not far from Migdol; 3) in [Num 33:8](#), they crossed the sea at Pi-hahiroth to go three

Notes:

This segment falls as the fourth scene of the nine scenes in 13:17-14:31. The Israelites have left Egypt and moved to the west side of the "Sea" (13:17-14:4). The Egyptian pharaoh changed his mind about letting the Hebrews leave Egypt and thus marshalled an army to chase after them to forcibly bring them back into slavery in Egypt (14:4-9).

Scene four (vv. 10-14) begins with the Egyptian

days journey into the wilderness of Etham before camping at Marah. In spite of all these points of reference, we are at a loss to pinpoint the location, as J.I. Durham (*Word Biblical Commentary*) describes:



with three soldiers per chariot, were “hand picked” so that they could flank the edge of the others and keep everyone moving

forward in an orderly fashion. A much larger number of chariots made up the center segment of the army. By using chariots, they were able to move much faster in catching up with the Israelites in the desert.

“In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord.” The sight of this Egyptian army had to have been intimidating, to say the least. Couple this with the miraculous way that God had provided for their departure from Egypt, and it is easy to assume that they did not expect to see an Egyptian army coming after them out there in the desert. [Ex. 14:8c](#) asserts that the Israelites “were going [of Egypt] out boldly.” Perhaps, too confidently. Their “cry to the Lord” was a pointed criticism of Moses as God’s spokesman. Three very pointed questions were put to him by the spokesmen of the people:

[1] “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?” Moses is accused of being a tool of the pharaoh to get rid of the Israelites. Or possibly, something worse: Moses had duped them into following him so that he could get them killed in the desert. This may harken back to the increased troubles they endured when Moses and Aaron began the series of plagues in order to convince the pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave Egypt.

[2] What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? This is a follow-up question to the first one, and thus with more sting.

[3] Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?’” This final question hearkens back to early opposition to Moses’ proposal to leave Egypt. No previous mention of this question exists in narratives about the earlier situation, but hints of this attitude are reflected

in 5:21, “They [Hebrews] said to them [Moses & Aaron], ‘The Lord look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.’”

and 6:9 “Moses told this [God’s promise in vv. 2-8] to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.”

This pointed criticism also hints at what would

14:1–2 This reference to the special guidance of Yahweh is followed immediately in the present composite by an account of a further and still more eccentric change of route by Yahweh. Moses is instructed to have Israel turn yet again, apparently back toward Egyptian territory, and to pitch camp for the third time since their departure (Succoth, 12:37, 39; Etham, 13:20), at a site in front of Pi-hahiroth and Baal Zephon, between Migdol and “the sea.” Indeed, their camp is to be “on the edge of the sea.” The purpose of so precise a location, one that provides no less than *four* points of reference, not only suggests a historical base for the exodus route described in this narrative, but also implies that the directions so specified are important for an understanding of the narrative. Once again, our vision of the picture set forth with such precision is clouded by an inability to identify with any assurance the places listed. Noth’s argument (*Festschrift Otto Eissfeldt*, 181–90) that the information of these verses is too late to be of any value is not convincing, since P could have had little reason to invent what is apparently a meandering route.

Our difficulty lies not in the uncertainty of the names, but in our uncertainty about the locations to which they refer. Cazelles (*RB* 62 [1955] 350–52) wonders whether “Pi-hahiroth” should be understood as the “mouth (?) of Hirôt,” as a river or a canal. “Migdol” as a name for more than one Egyptian fortified town is attested in Egyptian sources (Gardiner, *JEA* 6 [1920] 103–6). “Baal Zephon,” generally located in the vicinity of Lake Sirbonis (though see Albright, *Festschrift A. Bertholet*, 1–14, for a different view), is described by Eissfeldt (*Baal Zaphon*, 48–71) and Hermann (*Israel in Egypt*, 59–63) chiefly on the basis of classical texts as an ideal spot for the events of Exod 14. Yet all of this information, interesting though it is, gives us no more specific a location than Exodus does.

Wherever they were geographically, when they saw the advancing Egyptian army, they panicked. The army must have been substantial, since in 14:6–7, reference is made to at least 600 chariots: “6 So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; 7 he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.” The best of his charioted soldiers, some 600 chariots

become a common pattern: the murmuring of the Israelites repeatedly in the years to come. This theme would be picked up in the New Testament, and the Israelites are often held up as a negative example in such actions. See “Murmur” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*:

An overtly vocal or subdued expression of deep pain, grief, distress, discontent, dissatisfaction, or anger. Murmurings, at times, functioned as prayers to God that called for action. Examples include complaints (Heb. *lûn*) by the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 15:24; 16:2, 7–8; 17:3; Num. 14:2, 27, 29, 36). These murmurings had concrete ground, namely, hunger or thirst. God responded to such cries by “hearing favorably” and providing food and water and thus alleviating the people’s anguish.

However, murmurings are also presented as clandestine, malicious whisperings of slander against God or his appointed leaders. Korah complained against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16), and the people of Israel are said to have been murmuring against the leadership of Moses (ch. 17). The Israelites are also portrayed as grumbling (*ragan*) in their tents (Deut. 1:27; Ps. 106:25) in response to the report of the spies. This is a graphic picture of the people sulking in their tents instead of preparing for the march upon Canaan. Such murmuring is a scorning of God and his appointed leaders and calls for severe punishment. Those who refused to enter the Promised Land would die in the wilderness. In addition, the people of Israel justifiably murmured in the Promised Land when they believed that the leaders of the nation were disobedient to the rules established by God (Josh. 9:18).

In the NT “murmuring” (Gk. *gongýzo*) generally refers to the complaining of the Pharisees and scribes (Luke 5:30; 15:2; cf. 19:7; Matt. 20:11). The NT church experienced the murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1). Paul exhorted the Corinthians not to murmur as the Hebrews had done in the wilderness, for their murmurings had brought destruction (1 Cor. 10:10; cf. Phil. 2:14).

Their conclusion was simply, “it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” Fear and pessimism are powerfully disabling dynamics, especially when combined. This would not be the last time this “*better for us in Egypt*” mentality would surface. Note Num. 11:18, “Surely it was better for us in Egypt.” And Num. 14:3, “would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” These attitudes virtually crippled the Israelites’ ability to trust God’s leadership through Moses. And this in spite of repeated dramatic provisions or rescues done for them.

Moses’ response (vv. 13-14) was to encourage

them to trust God: “But Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall

never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.” This was no flippant “Trust God” waving off their criticism. Instead, Moses steadfastly believed that God would do something spectacular in rescuing them from this danger. As the following section makes clear, he did not have a preview of exactly what God was going to do, but Moses was convinced that God was going to destroy once and for all time the Egyptian army that was endangering God’s people.

The essence of his encouragement was to not fear, let God do His work, and then witness just how powerful God is.

What connection does all this have to us today?

As the people of God in our world, we are going to face opposition. This is without question. No doubt about that! Probably this hostility won’t come in the same form as that which the Hebrews faced there in the desert. But it will come, both to us individually and to us collectively as Christians. How will we react? Like the Israelites did? Or will we follow Moses’ example of trusting God to take care of us? From this text, one thing does emerge. When we focus more on the danger than on God we will be crippled by fear, and possibly pessimism as well. The longing for the “good ‘ole days” even when they mean “slavery in Egypt” will override a courageous walk into the unknown future with God leading us. The known is better than the unknown. Thus, this passage challenges us to reach out to our God in confidence of His leadership, even when we can’t see the direction that leadership is going to take. To be sure, this means overcoming our fears and



stretching our faith -- the very thing the Israelites were unable to do in this situation at the Sea of

Reeds. Moses then becomes our model to follow.

b. God's protection, vv. 15-18

LXX

¹⁵ εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσήν τί βοᾷς πρὸς με λάλησον τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἀνακευξάτωσαν ¹⁶ καὶ σὺ ἔπαρον τῇ ῥάβδῳ σου καὶ ἔκτεινον τὴν χεῖρά σου ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ ῥῆξον αὐτήν καὶ εἰσελθάτωσαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ εἰς μέσον τῆς θαλάσσης κατὰ τὸ ξηρόν ¹⁷ καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ σκληρυνῶ τὴν καρδίαν Φαραῶ καὶ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων πάντων καὶ εἰσελεύσονται ὀπίσω αὐτῶν καὶ ἐνδοξασθήσομαι ἐν Φαραῶ καὶ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ στρατιᾷ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄρμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἵπποις αὐτοῦ ¹⁸ καὶ γνώσονται πάντες οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος ἐνδοξαζομένου μου ἐν Φαραῶ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄρμασιν καὶ ἵπποις αὐτοῦ

NASB

15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 16 "As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17 "As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 "Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen."

NRSV

15 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. 16 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. 17 Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. 18 And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers."

NLT

15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving! 16 Use your shepherd's staff – hold it out over the water, and a path will open up before you through the sea. Then all the people of Israel will walk through on dry ground. 17 Yet I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they will follow the Israelites into the sea. Then I will receive great glory at the expense of Pharaoh and his armies, chariots, and charioteers. 18 When I am finished with Pharaoh and his army, all Egypt will know that I am the LORD!"

Notes:

This scene, [#5 of the nine](#) in the sequence in 13:17-14:31, brings the cycle of interacting individuals all the way from the Egyptian pharaoh to the Israelites to Moses and now to God. He instructs Moses to tell the Israelites what he is going to do to the pharaoh and his army in a reversal of direction.

Essentially, these verses provide Moses with instructions on moving the Israelites forward even though it is toward the huge barrier of the Sea of Reeds. Humanly speaking, it would seem that the instructions are committing Moses to lead the Isra-



elites into drowning in the sea. But God promises Moses that He will divide the sea so that they can cross it on dry land.

The passage begins with a mild rebuke by God of Moses, "Why are you crying out to me?" The narrative hasn't prepared us for this, since no mention is made of Moses complaining to God either about the situation or about the children of Israel. J.I. Durham (WBC) provides insight into this aspect of the text

that has been troublesome to many commentators:

Yahweh's inquiry to Moses is a *non sequitur* to the narrative preceding it, as no cry of Moses to Yahweh has been reported in MT. The inclusion by Syr. of the report that such a cry was made is probably an attempt to resolve this problem, but since the cry itself is not recorded, the attempt is not convincing. We may imagine a protest of Moses to Yahweh following the people's attack on him (vv 11–12), but such a protest would need logically to fall before Moses' reply in vv 13–14, and that in turn would create difficulty with the sequence of vv 15–18. The inquiry of v 15 is best left in its present location and assumed to be a response to a complaint of Moses that is now lost. What follows the inquiry, Yahweh's instruction to Moses, and through Moses, to Israel, fits the sequence perfectly.

The instructions given to Moses touch on three groups of individuals:

1) Israelites: "Tell the Israelites to go forward." For the Israelites this may have seemed strange, even dangerous. Weren't they backing themselves up against a large body of water with no avenue of escape? Perhaps it would be a "fight to the death" with the army of the Egyptian pharaoh. No mention is made in the subsequent scenes of their reaction to this command. The strangeness of the instruction was mitigated by the action of the "angel of God" who moved between the Egyptians and the Israelites through the night creating a dark cloud so that the Egyptians couldn't find the Israelites (14:19-20):

19 The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. 20 It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

The Hebrew text, מַלְאָךְ הָאֱלֹהִים, "messenger, attendant of God" provides an interesting play on concepts. Moses stood in front of the people as their messenger from God. Now another stood behind them to provide protection. Also the "pillar of the cloud" (עַמּוּד הָעָנָן) moved from the front to the rear of the group, shifting from leading to protecting. In addition, the leading mode was during the daylight



hours; now the protecting mode was during the night. This visible symbol of God's presence came to reassure them of God's provision for the situation.

Thus when the actual crossing was made the next day the Israelites had realized that God was protecting them from the Egyptians. What he would do next was not clear to them, but it was to Moses.

2) Moses: "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." Somewhat reminiscent of Moses using his staff during the plagues to signal a miracle from God, this time the action with his staff would signal a huge miraculous action from God. How did God do this? Ex. 14:21 describes the actual event the following day: "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." Then the Israelites walked through the sea with walls of water on either side (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 had protected them exactly as He promised Moses that He would.

3) Pharaoh and the Egyptians: "Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them." This also came to pass in a crushing manner as Ex. 14:23 describes: "The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers." Instead of stopping at the west bank of the sea in realization that a miraculous action from the God of the Israelites had taken place, they continued right into the sea chasing the Israelites who now had crossed and were on the shore of the other side. But this was God's plan, and he had stiffened this determination to re-capture the Israelite slaves. So much so that it blinded them to the danger they were placing themselves

in. The “hardening of the heart” by God (לֵב מְצִרִים) raises an interesting issue: Does God sometimes make people more determined to rebel against Him? Walter Elwell (*Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*) has an interesting perspective on this:

In a few instances, such as Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exod 7:3; 9:12), Sihon, king of Heshbon (Deut 2:30), and the Hivites living in Gibeon (Jos 11:19-20), it is said that God hardened their hearts. There is something of a mystery here, but apparently these people were so irremediable in their rebellion against God that God entered into the hardening process so that he could accomplish his purposes in spite of, and yet in and through, that hardness. It is God’s prerogative, as God, to do this (Rom 9:18-21). That they were morally responsible for their condition is a theological given, and we are warned not to harden our hearts as they did, a command that would make no sense if hardening were simply God’s act (1 Sam 6:6).

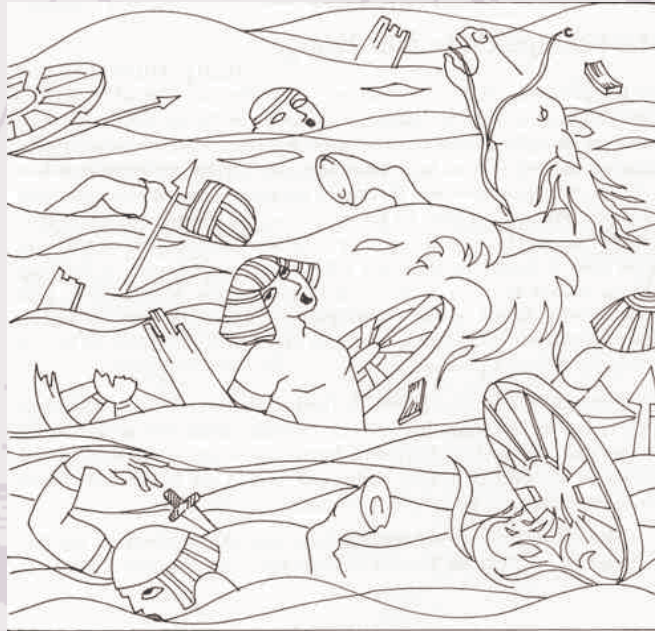
The image here of a “[hardened heart](#)” is mostly that of stubbornness and obstinacy. In Exodus, this image is [used often](#) in regard to the Egyptian pharaoh and his refusal to treat the Israelites properly. In [the New Testament](#) exhortations to “not harden one’s heart” against God are found. These bring one’s own choosing into the picture.

The outcome of all this for God: “I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.” The entire exodus experience beginning with the plagues and climaxing with the crossing of the sea was a tug of war between God and the Egyptian pharaoh along with his gods. The plagues had individually targeted different Egyptian deities in dramatic fashion to demonstrate God’s superiority over them. Now the death of the Egyptian army in the sea would dramatically demonstrate the superiority of God’s power over the most powerful political/military ruler of that day. Ex.

14:23-28 vividly describes how this came to pass:

23 The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. 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. 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.” 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.” 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. 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.



God’s judgment on the pharaoh was severe and dramatic. His wrath brought about destruction in massive fashion. Now it becomes clear why God had led the Israelites on a rather erratic path out of Egypt that included a march west back into Egypt after getting outside its borders at Etham (14:2): “Tell the Israelites **to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth.**” He needed to teach the Egyptian pharaoh and people a lesson about His power and blessing on the Hebrew people that they would not soon forget. It would be many centuries before the Egyptians would attempt to bother the Israelites again.

But another lesson was also intended as 14:30-31 describes:

30 Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 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.

Both comfort and uncomfortableness should come from these verses. God does protect His people from their enemies. His wrath will fall on those who harm them But God doesn’t tolerate rebellion forever. At some point His patience is exhausted and His wrath sets in. Fortunately, His patience is long-suffering. But let’s not see just how long it will last!

LXX

¹⁰ καὶ Φαραῶ προσῆγεν καὶ ἀναβλέψαντες οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ὁρῶσιν καὶ οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι ἐστρατοπέδευσαν ὀπίσω αὐτῶν καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα ἀνεβόησαν δὲ οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ πρὸς κύριον ¹¹ καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς Μωυσῆν νὰ παρὰ τὸ μὴ ὑπάρχειν μνήματα ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ ἐξήγαγες ἡμᾶς θανατῶσαι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας ἡμῖν ἐξαγαγὼν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ¹² οὐ τοῦτο ἦν τὸ ῥῆμα ὃ ἐλάλήσαμεν πρὸς σὲ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λέγοντες πάρες ἡμᾶς ὅπως δουλεύσωμεν τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις κρεῖσσον γὰρ ἡμᾶς δουλεύειν τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις ἢ ἀποθανεῖν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ταύτῃ ¹³ εἶπεν δὲ Μωυσῆς πρὸς τὸν λαόν θαρσεῖτε στήτε καὶ ὁράτε τὴν σωτηρίαν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἣν ποιήσει ἡμῖν σήμερον ὃν τρόπον γὰρ ἐωράκατε τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους σήμερον οὐ προσθήσεσθε ἔτι ἰδεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον ¹⁴ κύριος πολεμήσει περὶ ὑμῶν καὶ ὑμεῖς σιγήσετε ¹⁵ εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν τί βοᾷς πρὸς με λάλησον τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἀναζεῦξάτωσαν ¹⁶ καὶ σὺ ἔπαρον τῇ ῥάβδῳ σου καὶ ἔκτεινον τὴν χειρὰ σου ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ ῥῆξον αὐτήν καὶ

NASB

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. 11 Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 "Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." 13 But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. 14 "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent." 15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 16 "As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17 "As for Me, behold, I will harden the

NRSV

10 As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. 11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." 13 But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." 15 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. 16 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. 17 Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.

NLT

10 As Pharaoh and his army approached, the people of Israel could see them in the distance, marching toward them. The people began to panic, and they cried out to the LORD for help. 11 Then they turned against Moses and complained, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? Why did you make us leave? 12 Didn't we tell you to leave us alone while we were still in Egypt? Our Egyptian slavery was far better than dying out here in the wilderness!" 13 But Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand where you are and watch the LORD rescue you. The Egyptians that you see today will never be seen again. 14 The LORD himself will fight for you. You won't have to lift a finger in your defense!" 15 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving! 16 Use your shepherd's staff – hold it out over the water, and a path will open up before you through the sea. Then all the people of Israel will walk through on dry ground. 17 Yet I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they will follow the Israelites into the sea. Then I will receive great glory at the

εἰσελθάτωσαν οἱ υἱοὶ
Ισραὴλ εἰς μέσον τῆς
θαλάσσης κατὰ τὸ ξηρόν
¹⁷ καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ σκληρυνῶ
τὴν καρδίαν Φαραῶ καὶ
τῶν Αἰγυπτίων πάντων
καὶ εἰσελεύσονται ὀπίσω
αὐτῶν καὶ
ἐνδοξασθήσομαι ἐν
Φαραῶ καὶ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ
στρατιᾷ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς
ἅρμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς
ἵπποις αὐτοῦ ¹⁸ καὶ
γινώσκονται πάντες οἱ
Αἰγύπτιοι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι
κύριος ἐνδοξαζομένου μου
ἐν Φαραῶ καὶ ἐν τοῖς
ἅρμασιν καὶ ἵπποις αὐτοῦ

hearts of the Egyptians
so that they will go in af-
ter them; and I will be
honored through Pha-
raoh and all his army,
through his chariots and
his horsemen. 18 "Then
the Egyptians will know
that I am the LORD,
when I am honored
through Pharaoh,
through his chariots and
his horsemen."

18 And the Egyptians
shall know that I am the
Lord, when I have gained
glory for myself over Pha-
raoh, his chariots, and
his chariot drivers."

expense of Pharaoh and
his armies, chariots, and
charioteers. 18 When I
am finished with Pha-
raoh and his army, all
Egypt will know that I am
the LORD!"

10 וּפָרַעַה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגָה
מִצְרַיִם׃ נִסַּע אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיַּצַּעְקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל־יְהוָה׃

11 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הַמַּבְלִי אֵין־קָבְרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ
לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר מִה־זֹּאת עֲשֵׂיתָ לָּנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם׃

12 הֲלֹא־זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חַדְל
מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת־מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עֲבֹד אֶת־מִצְרַיִם
מִמֹּתָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר׃

13 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם אֶל־תִּירְאוּ הִתְיַצְבוּ וּרְאוּ
אֶת־יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם

אֶת־מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסִּיפוּ לְרַאתָם עוֹד עַד־עוֹלָם׃
14 יְהוָה יִלְחֶם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תַּחֲרִישׁוּן׃ פ

15 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִה־תַּצַּעַק אֵלַי דִּבַּר
אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ׃

16 וְאַתָּה הֲרֹם אֶת־מִטָּךְ וְנָטָה אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם וּבִקְעָהוּ
וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה׃

17 וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מִחֲזֹק אֶת־לֵב מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְבְּדָהּ
בַּפָּרַעַה וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ בָּרֻכְבוֹ וּבַפְּרָשָׁיו׃

18 וַיִּדְּעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּהִכְבְּדִי בַּפָּרַעַה בָּרֻכְבוֹ
וּבַפְּרָשָׁיו׃

NJB

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up — and there were the Egyptians in pursuit of them! The Israelites were terrified and cried out to Yahweh for help. ¹¹ To Moses they said, ‘Was it for lack of graves in Egypt, that you had to lead us out to die in the desert? What was the point of bringing us out of Egypt?’ ¹² Did we not tell you as much in Egypt? Leave us alone, we said, we would rather work for the Egyptians! We prefer to work for the Egyptians than to die in the desert!’ ¹³ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid! Stand firm, and you will see what Yahweh will do to rescue you today: the Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ Yahweh will do the fighting for you; all you need to do is to keep calm.’ ¹⁵ Yahweh then said to Moses, ‘Why cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to march on. ¹⁶ Your part is to raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, so that the Israelites can walk through the sea on dry ground, ¹⁷ while I, for my part, shall make the Egyptians so stubborn that they will follow them, and I shall win glory for myself at the expense of Pharaoh and all his army, chariots and horsemen. ¹⁸ And when I have won glory for myself at the expense of Pharaoh and his chariots and horsemen, the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh.’

NIV

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ 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?” ¹² 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!” ¹³ Moses answered the people, “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. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

ESV

¹⁰ When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?” ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” ¹³ And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” ¹⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶ Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

TEV

¹⁰ As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. ¹¹ They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?” ¹² Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, “Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians”? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” ¹³ But Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.” ¹⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. ¹⁸ And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.”