

**TUTORIAL**  
**1.28**

# God delivered the Israelites & continued to provide for them

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: ***Exodus 13: 17-22, Exodus 14, 16,17.***

## Last time

Pharaoh arrogantly dismissed Moses' request from God to let the Israelites go. God, already aware of all the outcomes, inflicted a series of 9 plagues on the Egyptian community, but protected His own people. When Pharaoh remained defiant, God brought one final calamitous judgment. He instructed the Israelites to smear the blood of the animals they'd killed on their doorframes and then to stay inside. That night, God took the life of every Egyptian firstborn son, but seeing the blood on the Israelite houses, he spared them. Pharaoh ordered the Israelites to leave the country.

## God led the Israelites to the Red Sea

So God had achieved what He said He would...after the years of bondage, His chosen people were finally free to leave Egypt. He had amply demonstrated His power in the process and was keeping His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about their descendants. He was also preserving Abraham's family line, now an embryonic nation, through which the promised Deliverer was to come.

Finally, as we'll see in the Narrative, by protecting the Israelites, God was putting in place a people group who would be His human storytellers for the next 1500 years. This would be through individuals - prophets - whose words spoken at God's instigation would be recorded in what we call the Old Testament.

God also tasked the people group as a whole with preserving and telling His Story, for the benefit of all humanity. In part, the telling of his Story, revealing who He is...was also to be told in the narrative of their lives - as they showed the other people groups what it was like to live in a relationship with the true and living God.

Moses was God's chosen storyteller for the first part of the written record of His Narrative. His contribution comprises the first 5 books in what would eventually be called the Old Testament.

So now, Moses, an eyewitness of course to these events, continues the account, as God wanted it told, of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt. From Goshen, the location of the Israelite community in Egypt on the south-east edge of the Nile delta, the shortest and most obvious way out of Egypt, and especially toward Canaan, would have been the caravan route that followed the Mediterranean coast around. Instead, God leads them out into the desert in a south-easterly direction away from a potentially demoralising encounter with the hostile Philistines. A warlike seafaring people, they had by now established themselves along the Mediterranean with a line of garrisons that dominated the coastal trade route. But how exactly did God lead the Israelites? Remember this would have been an immense group strung out for kilometres – perhaps over 2 million adults and children, with all their livestock and belongings. (Exodus 13:17-22) The text says that God was then leading them by a pillar of cloud that stayed with them throughout the entire journey.

God had now taken up a very visible role of leading them as a community. Moses was His human mouthpiece, but it would be God showing the way. He leads them to the shore of the Red Sea where they camp. (Exodus 14:1-4) But why are they here? What now? The people were no doubt perplexed. And their consternation was going to get a lot worse. But God was completely in control. They still had much to learn about Him and He was, as always, committed to teaching and revealing who He is.

## **Trapped! Only God can rescue them**

Pharaoh and his ruling elite have been having second thoughts about the Israelites' departure. Now he gets word that they are camped at the shore of the Red Sea, apparently without any clear plan of where to go or what to do. He sees a chance to get them back. (Exodus 14:5-9) Undoubtedly urged on unknowingly by his slave master, Satan, Pharaoh is still defiant. After everything that has taken place, he still hasn't learned anything.

Access to truth is clearly not the only prerequisite to wisdom; it also involves humility in the stance that people take before God. There's no one so profoundly blind as a person who refuses to see what's right in their face. So Pharaoh decides to recapture the Israelites. The troops are mobilised and Pharaoh leads them in the pursuit until they're almost within striking distance of their former slaves. When the Israelites see them coming, they panic: (Exodus 14:10-14) They call out to God, but not in faith. Suddenly they've forgotten all the things God has done to get them out of Egypt. They turn on Moses, "Why didn't you leave us alone in slavery? We said this would happen. Better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness." He tells them to just wait and see what God will do. Certainly, without God in the picture, their situation was a

desperate one. They were trapped. Pressed against the Red Sea with the revengeful king and his army bearing down on them.

These real events provide us with yet another powerful analogy for the plight of the human race. Like the Israelites, we have no way of escape. No direction in which to escape what it means to be part of Adam's lost race. No way to be free from the sin that we are willingly enslaved by. No chance of avoiding the ultimate separation of death, and the punishment that we deserve. Without God providing a way of escape we truly have no way.

## **God rescues His people and destroys the Egyptian army**

The Narrative here is familiar to us, but the contempt that comes with familiarity itself is no doubt one of the Enemy's objectives. To reduce God's Narrative to a series of nice Sunday school stories, the well-trodden territory of 3-point sermons or even the plot of old blockbuster Hollywood movies. But as we've reminded ourselves before, these events were truly God in action, revealing who He is then and now, as we follow His Narrative.

So the Israelites have no other option and the Egyptians think they're going to round them up and take them back to slavery...perhaps killing some as a lesson not to even think of leaving again... At this critical moment God acts. He has not turned His back on His people even though they don't deserve His mercy at all. (Exodus 14:15-31) He has Moses raise his staff – his all-purpose shepherd's crook and walking stick – and God, the creator of oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, water, hydrogen, oxygen and sodium molecules...makes a dry path in the sea bed. And the whole 2 million plus Israelites with all their animals and all their stuff walk through, "with walls of water on each side".

The Egyptians coming behind don't hesitate. They don't stop to wonder how this is happening, or how long it will last. Down they go with their chariots, into the path God has made. They're intent on their mission, to bring back their slaves on whose backs so much of their prosperity has been built. It's night, but they push hard. Suddenly, just as dawn is breaking, there's confusion, their wheels are bogging, they can't steer, the cry goes up to turn back, turn back. The Lord is fighting for the Israelites. But it's too late. The walls of water come crashing in. As the sun comes up God's people see the bodies washed up on the shore. And they were filled with awe at this God, the God of their fathers, now *their* God.

Awe is an apt response when God reveals himself to us through his actions...a mixture of reverence, respect, fear and wonder. Securing the Israelites' release from Egypt, followed by the dramatic rescue at the Red Sea, serve in God's Narrative as a landmark. His actions there have been remembered down through history as the unmistakable evidence of His faithfulness, His power, and His mercy. And the events continue to provide us with powerful analogies

and metaphors for how He rescues and redeems people in bondage who turn to Him for help.

## God provides in the wilderness

It's a month after the dramatic departure from Egypt, with the sea to their right, the 12 tribes have travelled down the Sinai Peninsula. They're now deep into the wilderness. The euphoria of their Red Sea escape has evaporated in the dry desert...along with the gratitude to God for their escape, and their confidence in Aaron and Moses. (Exodus Ch 16 and 17) They're questioning again whether they weren't better off in Egypt. "Did you just bring us out here to starve to death?"

God, graciously and patiently overlooking their ingratitude and lack of faith, provides food – flocks of birds, quail, for meat and a fine, almost flour-like substance that's left on the ground each morning...called manna - "what is it?" - in memory of their first astonishment. Later, when water is short, they return to their complaining. God again graciously provides. They deserve no less than to be left to die of thirst in the wilderness, but God, the provider, gives them the water that they need. Moses is instructed to strike a particular rock. When he does, water comes gushing out...more than enough for the people and their livestock.

For better or worse, God's Story has now also become the Story of a particular people. Complaining, frustrating, lacking in faith, argumentative...but His people. He chooses to join His great Narrative with the smaller stories of individuals and the story of a Group of People who He calls his own...through no merit of their own, entirely because of His grace.



### DISCUSSION POINTS

*God delivered the Israelites, and continued to provide for them*

1. The lesson makes the point that God chose Israel as an avenue for His communication to the world at that time. Focusing just on the Old Testament narrative for now, consider the enormous consequences of His Story being written down and preserved. What does this tell us about God? What are some of the historical results: for the world, for the Jewish people, for us as believers?

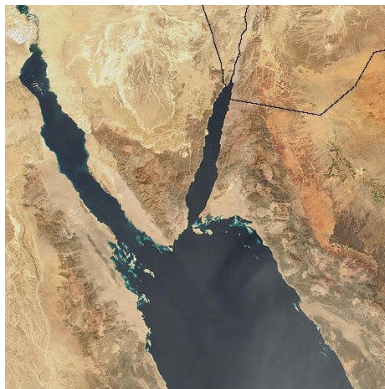
2. By taking the Israelites to the Red Sea where they had no escape, God created a situation in which only He could save them. Describe how this is consistent with one of the most important themes emerging from the Biblical narrative. Do you believe this is a message that many people in our society, or any other welcome?
3. Make any observations you care to about the fact that although the Israelites saw many events which could only be explained by God's intervention, this did not seem to produce lasting faith. Reflect on your own experience in relating to God: are you ever tempted to think that your faith would be stronger if God did more tangible things on your behalf? How does He reveal Himself, and do you have thoughts on why this would be the very best way?



## ACTIVITIES

*God delivered the Israelites, and continued to provide for them*

1. Write an answer to one of the discussion questions above.
2. Research the geography/terrain of the Sinai Peninsula and the shores of the Red Sea.



### ROUTE OF THE EXODUS OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPT

