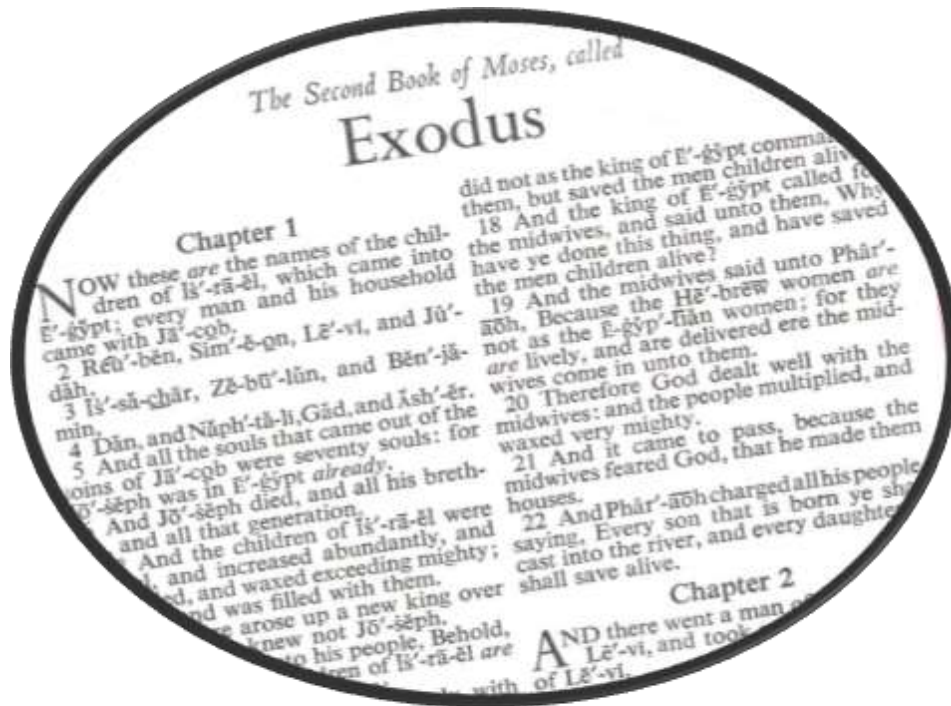


# EXODUS – WEEK 9

## THE GREAT ESCAPE



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Exodus 14:15–15:21 – The Great Escape*

The Egyptian army has caught up to the nation of Israel and it looks like they're about to be slaughtered.

But the LORD parts the Red Sea and they escape. Watching their pursuers drown triggers a great celebration.

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Thank you.

Exodus 14:15–15:21 – The Great Escape  
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1 Exodus 14:15-20 (NKJV)

*And the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”*

*And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.*

Don't miss how big this miracle is. The Egyptian army is in chariots – the state of the art in high mobility warfare. The Israelites are on foot, and slow even for that.

*Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. – Ex. 12:37-38 (NKJV)*

That's an enormous caravan. On average, at any given time, there should be dozens of women in labor. If Washington had to cross the Delaware with this gang, he would have never made it.

But these folks will. We aren't given a lot of details about this miracle, but somehow the difference in the light kept the two groups apart. It may have been as simple as the Egyptians turning in because it was dark while the Israelis kept going in the light.

In any case, the Israelis put some distance between themselves and the Egyptian army. That's significant. The Egyptian charioteers would have cut through the fleeing Israelis like a knife through butter.

But notice that this miracle only helps the Israelites get across the Red Sea. They aren't magically teleported over; they still have to walk.

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That's God's style. He's always teaching and pushing his people to grow.

That's why His answers to prayer often go in unexpected directions. We ask for one thing and get something else.

Sometimes, when we pray for help with a difficult decision, we hear only crickets. Totally bailing us out of a tight spot can defeat the purpose of the tight spot.

God is refusing to take away an important learning experience.

2 Exodus 14:21-25 (ESV)

*Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."*

What are the Egyptians thinking? This doesn't seem to make any sense. Yet, within the construct of their polytheistic belief system, it does. Their idea of a god isn't like our idea of the God. They've heard of YHVH, but they think he's just a god, like their gods. That means he sleeps; he's moody; he's unreliable.

So, when the light bulb comes on and the Egyptian army realizes that YHVH isn't a no-show for this battle, they panic. The sight of the LORD looking down on them from *the pillar of fire and of cloud* must have been terrifying.

But instead of saying, "Aaaaah!" they say, "*Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.*" That sounds pretty ironic in the middle of a panic.

It's like George Clooney's highbrow lines in *Oh Brother Where Art Thou*, or Strother Martin in *Cool Hand Luke* saying, "What we've got here is failure to communicate." It's way too reasonable for the situation.

Of course, these words were spoken by the Egyptian commander as he tried to marshal his troops. Presumably, the translation from the original Egyptian turned idioms into literal phrases – like the English subtitles for the jive talk in *Airplane*.

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One group that consistently needs and deserves our prayers is the military. Our troops are trained to react reasonably to terrifying situations because they may encounter terrifying situations. Calm heads are essential in tight spots. Too bad the rest of the Egyptian army wasn't as disciplined as the commander who calmly told them to retreat.

Pray for the safety of those currently deployed. Pray that their families will be comforted during their prolonged absence. Ask the LORD to give them success in their mission.

And pray that amidst all the chaos of military action that they will not succumb to the stress and deviate from righteousness.

May they remain true to their mission and keep it righteous.

3 Exodus 14:26-31 (NKJV)

*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.” 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. 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. 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.*

*So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 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.*

Now they believe! Ten plagues didn't convince them, but this does. What's so special this time?

It's fear. Nothing focuses the mind like fear. With the plagues, the Israelites only heard about what happened, or sometimes were observers of it, but because they were spared the worst plagues they missed the terror. With the Passover, they had to play along, but there were still no panicked moments.

Now they're scared out of their wits. They see their lives flash before their eyes. They whine and scream. Then they watch a miracle. Then they exhale. Then they get it.

This isn't pulling quarters out of a child's ear; this is drowning an army – an army that was about to cut them up with swords. They didn't just see this; they felt it. So now they believe *the LORD and in his servant Moses*.

That won't last though.

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Belief fades. We see something with our own eyes and we know it's true. Later, we're not so sure.

What was that? Did I see what I thought I saw? Was it that dramatic? Was it really all that important?

This isn't just about miracles. For example, belief in the danger of hurricanes fades all too quickly. After a few evacuations for hurricanes that miss, people get complacent. It doesn't matter that the forecasters described the danger in terms of probabilities; the evacuations felt like false alarms. So people think they can ride the next one out. Then the big one hits – like Katrina in 2005 – and an easily avoided tragedy is visited on multitudes of innocent people.

Unfortunately, our faith is like that. We all have a bit of a “what have you done for me lately” attitude. When God grants prayer requests, our faith is strengthened. When He teaches us patience, it's weakened.

Screwtape called this undulation. Don't worry about it. The troughs are as useful as the peaks for growth.

4 Exodus 15:1-10 (ESV)

*Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, “I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name.*

*“Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.’ You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.”*

I have a granddaughter who likes to make up songs. I suspect this began with randomly picking the animals that lived on Old MacDonald's Farm. It's always a hoot. “And on this farm he had a ...

lion. E I E I O. With a ... roar roar here and a roar roar there ...”

Now almost anything can happen. Her heart pours forth to some familiar tune. It's never boring.

What Moses does here is typical of God's people. Hannah sings as she dedicates her son Samuel to the LORD (1 Sam. 2:1-10). Mary sings the magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). As soon as Zechariah's tongue is loosed, a song springs forth (Luke 1:67-79).

And don't forget the Bible's songbook – Psalms.

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This isn't really about singing; it's about worship. Worship is from the heart. The singing is merely a symptom. We are used to worship on Sundays – led by someone else.

That's fine but if we never break into worship on our own, we're missing something.

Prayer time should include worship. This doesn't have to involve singing (for sure if you're as off-key as I am). Worship isn't quite the same as praise.

Sure, praise is included but so are things like confession and declarations of love and devotion. Make up a poem or song about God – or about your joy. Use Moses' song as a model of how to do this. You can use any tune – Hallelujah, or Somewhere Over the Rainbow, or even a theme song (e.g., to Gilligan's Island).

OK, not that.

5 Exodus 15:11-18 (ESV)

*“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.*

*You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. The peoples have heard; they tremble; pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O LORD, which your hands have established. The LORD will reign forever and ever.”*

Time out. “*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?*” What gods?

Moses knows that the other gods aren’t real, but this is a song and it has an audience – the people of Israel, who just crossed the Red Sea and watched the Egyptian Army drown. Their faith is still weak and primitive. They don’t laugh at the idea of other gods.

Right now, their spiritual understanding is a tossed salad. They have seen some spectacular miracles and know something’s up, but their systematic theology is a mess. They grew up under the Egyptian polytheistic belief system, which still dominates their thinking.

In this song, Moses is tearing down the Egyptian gods and building a monotheistic perspective to take its place. Unfortunately, as we will see, this is a slow and painful process. The people of Israel will revert to their previous beliefs again and again.

This slow and painful process began months ago with the plagues. Remember how they targeted the Egyptian gods? This song puts the same spin on the miracle of the Red Sea crossing.

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We all interpret what we see through the lens of our worldview (a self-consistent, comprehensive conception of the world or philosophy of life). Because of its self-consistent nature, it’s resistant to change. A change in one part often leads to contradictions with other parts. Either the change must be rejected or the whole worldview rethought. That’s a daunting prospect.

That’s why religious conversion is so difficult. It’s easy to be open minded about something that isn’t integral to your view of reality. Conversely, worldviews are, by nature, closed systems. Passover and the Red Sea miracle have challenged the Israelites’ worldview. It’ll take a while to sort that out.

Think about the times that your worldview was disrupted (including your conversion). What triggered that seismic shift? What would it take to trigger such a shift in someone in your personal mission field?

6 Exodus 15:19-21 (NKJV)

*For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.*

*Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them:*

*“Sing to the LORD,  
For He has triumphed gloriously!  
The horse and its rider  
He has thrown into the sea!”*

I wish sports fans would party like this when their team wins a championship. *Tambourines and dancing* are a lot better than creating a nightmare for the local police.

This is worship. God has done a great work and they are celebrating it. The celebration includes singing, dancing, playing musical instruments and, most importantly, praising God specifically for the great things He has done.

But the lesson here is that the things they are doing are not wrong. Singing, dancing, playing the tambourine and praising God all seem pretty obviously OK, but what about all the Egyptians who drowned? Is it OK to celebrate their deaths? What happened to loving your enemies?

*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, – Matthew 5:44 (NKJV)*

The answer is that celebrating God’s judgment isn’t the same as executing judgment yourself. One of the reasons we are to love our enemies is that divine judgment is not our job. We should not presume to know what is in someone’s heart, nor what God’s plans are.

But celebrating what God has done doesn’t violate any of this. The people of Israel had witnessed God’s judgment on people who were their enemies – and His. Their partying doesn’t judge these people and definitely doesn’t execute judgment on them. They’re simply cheering the judge’s actions.

That’s OK.

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Recall the ways that we have seen God glorify Himself recently. Some of them may have been painful, but His mighty hand is always a sight to behold. We cheer and we cry, but we should always marvel.

Spend some time making a list. See it all and praise Him for the way he choreographs His universe.

He’s more awesome when you take notes.



*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Have you ever, in hindsight, realized that God doing nothing in response to a prayer was the right thing for that situation?
2. What's the most scared you've ever been?
3. What events have strengthened your faith?
4. How do you worship privately?
5. When has your worldview changed?
6. What things have you seen God do that you thought were particularly good at bringing Him glory?

*Items for prayer:*