

Stand By and See Salvation
Exodus 13:17–14:14
March 29, 2026

Last fall, my brother, my son, and I were heading out on a hike in a place called Big South Fork, an hour or so northwest of Knoxville, about 30 minutes from Kentucky, out in the middle of *nowhere*. And while I'm not a huge fan of apps, I've told you before how much I *love* the AllTrails one. And I like it, in particular, for trails like this one, when there's no service, no one else is on the trail, and the trail is known to be difficult to navigate. Because service or not, AllTrails downloads the route and alerts you should you be on the verge of getting lost.

I've used the app a number of times on a number of trails. But there was one complication last fall. My phone, at the time, couldn't come close to holding a charge for six hours out in the woods. But since Julie and the other kids were just hanging out at her parents' house that day, we decided to swap phones. No big deal. I'll download the map on *her* phone. Her battery will hold. And we'll have a great time out in the *South Fork Woods*.

Google will tell you that the *Honey Creek Loop* is a rugged, scenic, and technical trail. As I mentioned, it's fairly easy to get turned around. So, more than a few times, my phone would buzz in my pocket—to warn me. But if I knew where I was, I ignored it. On a couple of occasions, we ventured off the main trail, carefully, on some side trails we'd heard of. My phone is, of course, buzzing and buzzing inside my pocket. No big deal, I assumed. I knew where I was.

However, what neither Julie nor I thought about, was how her watch was still linked with her phone. So, all these repeated “buzzes” in my pocket—that I'm repeatedly ignoring—are alerting her wrist a couple hours away, saying alarming things like, “You're off the trail. Please return to the trail.” And of course, Julie can't call me because there's no service.

Eventually—a *good* bit later—we arrive at a certain peak, a peak where there *does* happen to be service, momentarily. And in just a moment or two, text after text come rushing in, “Are you all ok? The app says you're lost, etc.”

So, after I realize what's happened, I'm able to call and say something like, “I'm so sorry. We're fine. I assure you: regardless of what your watch said, we were *never* lost.”

In our text today, the Israelites begin their journey out of Egypt. And in the chapters ahead, they're going to do a *lot* of wandering—a good bit of doubling back and turning around. And the question is this: were they *ever* lost?

1. **The LORD Leads, Even into Seeming Detours (13:17–14:3)**

Verse 17: **Now when Pharaoh had let the people go.**

We can't just *gloss* over that phrase. *Way* back in chapter 3, at the bush ablaze but not consumed, Yahweh told Moses, **I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go** (3:19–20). Like every other utterance that has ever proceeded from His mouth, God said it would happen. And then it *did*.

Verse 17 goes on: **Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near.** As a crow flies, going *through* the land of the Philistines was the quickest route out of Goshen.¹ However, it's a bit like saying, “Sure—you *can* drive through Baghdad if you want to.” In a military sense, the Philistines were a force. They

¹ Doug Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 322.

were an *evil* force, to be sure—a people God would eventually judge. But not *yet*. In these moments He had particular purposes He was working out.

One of which was to protect His people, both from war—and from *themselves*. **God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, “The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.”** God knew the danger of the Philistines; *and* He knew the danger within the hearts of the Hebrews. Would they—a people delivered through mighty signs and wonders—so *quickly* give up and ask to return to Egypt, so that they might put back on the yoke, pick up the bricks, and return to slavery? Absolutely. That will be confirmed momentarily—and then *repeatedly*.

So, knowing those dangers, the LORD directs, purposefully. Verse 18: **Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt.** In wisdom, God led them *around* Goliath’s great grandparents. But note as well that the **sons of Israel went up**. We haven’t talked about this in detail, but it is interesting—and some say symbolic—that topographically Egypt was near sea level, sitting in the lowlands. To go *into* that country was to go *down*. And to come *out* of it was to go *up*—maybe we’d say it’s something of an ascension.²

They went *around* Philistine country. They went *up* out of Egypt. And they did so in martial array—in groups of fifties and hundreds, something like military units.³

And they made their way, or were *led* along the way, **to the Red Sea**. I’m sure I’ll mention this again next week, but the Red Sea was also known as “the sea of reeds,”⁴ *not* because it was cardinal colored, but because reeds grew along its edges. Why bring this up? Because eighty years before this, a loving mother put her baby in a wicker basket—an ark—and put it, and him, **among the reeds**, so that he might be delivered.

As He had in the past, the Lord is leading. Which is something of what we see in verse 19: **Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.”** Joseph said this in Genesis 50, a man that certainly knew what it was like to be led, even into *seeming* detours. Maybe as much as *any* character in the Bible, Joseph understood what was *truly* behind any “frowning providence.”⁵ And he told his fellow Hebrews, “God will surely take care of you.”

Interestingly, Hebrews 11 makes *direct* mention of this particular burial, saying it was done in faith, in things *hoped* for (Heb. 11:1-2). That author writes, **By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the Exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones** (Heb. 11:22). Again, that’s in Genesis 50, hundreds of years before Moses, Joseph made mention of the Exodus. How is that possible? Because back in Genesis 15, God told Abraham all that would happen in Egypt. Did he keep that to himself? Absolutely not. He told his son Isaac. Then Isaac told Jacob. And then Jacob told his sons, including Joseph. Joseph knew the promise of God. That’s why he could say, “God will surely take care of you.” And even as he was dying, he continued to believe it. Keep in mind that in Joseph’s day, the circumstances surrounding him did not give the impression that Egypt was going to be toppled *any* time soon. How convinced must he have been to give these instructions?

Centuries later, in Exodus 13, Moses does what Joseph asked for. The LORD had led, for generations. He *continued* to lead. Verse 20: **Then they set out from Succoth and camped in**

² See Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 51.

³ Stuart, 324.

⁴ Jeffery Leonard, *Exodus 1:1–15:21*, 340.

⁵ Thanks to Andy for this mention Wednesday evening, from William Cowper’s profound hymn.

Etham on the edge of the wilderness. And, then, we're told *how* He led. Verse 21: **The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.**

I mentioned just a moment ago that God told Abraham everything that would happen in Egypt. That was in Genesis 15. In that *same* chapter, in fact *right* after the LORD finished describing what would happen to an enslaved people, we read about the covenant God made with those people. And in that passage, one of the symbols of God's presence was a smoking oven and a flaming fire (Gen. 15:17).

As you know, that's not the final time smoke or fire symbolized the presence of God. In Exodus 3, the covenant-making God of Genesis 15 appeared to Moses in a bush ablaze. Like it had been prior, fire proved to be a way that God's people might look upon Him—in *some* sense—without actually seeing Him in His very person.⁶ Because, of course, fire doesn't *merely* symbolize His presence. It also pictures His unapproachable holiness.⁷ To look on Him would be to be destroyed by Him.

Genesis 15's flaming fire is Exodus 3's burning bush is Exodus 13's pillar of fire. It's not *merely* a sign from Yahweh. It *was* Yahweh. Verse 21 says, **The LORD was going before them.**

To be clear, they had *not* earned this. In fact, one of the dilemmas Exodus wrestles with is this: "How might a holy God dwell among an unholy people?" Yet, in mercy, He was *with* them. And He was leading them.

Chapter 14 continues to show us His leading, even in yet another *seeming* detour. Verse 1: **Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea.**

Now, if you're like me, you want a map to explain what's happening here. You want to visualize *precisely* where they go.⁸ However, there's *quite* a bit of geographical debate. Places change names. It's been a minute. But it's actually not *nearly* as important that we pinpoint sites on a map as we understand what was happening *as* they stopped and reversed course in fits and starts.

Verse 1 uses the term, "turn back," indicating a radical reversal of direction. In fact, based on what verse 3 tells us, their entire course would've been *seemingly* erratic.⁹ Verse 3: **For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, "They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in."** So, at this point—with the pillar in mind—we should ask ourselves, "Was Pharaoh right? Were they lost? Or was that what the LORD *wanted* him to think?" Was their *seemingly* erratic, back and forth route, *not* because they'd followed God's directions wrongly, but because they had followed them—and Him—rightly?¹⁰

Pharaoh came to the conclusion that they were wandering aimlessly. But they were *never* lost.

In fact, *everything* is going precisely as planned. God's people are being led *by* Him away from danger. And God is leading His enemies right into it.

This is what He often does. The LORD leads, even into *seeming* detours. Maybe we grew up praying that He'd lead, guide, and direct us. Of course, He *always* does. And it's a good prayer to ask Him to do what He's already *said* He would do. But maybe we'd accompany that prayer with, "Lord,

⁶ Stuart, 328. Further, in the future—symbolizing the *same* reality of presence—smoke and fire would surround a mountain.

⁷ Alec Motyer, *Exodus*, BST, 9.

⁸ I looked at more than a few this week. I think I like John Currid's best, in *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*, 124.

⁹ Stuart, 330.

¹⁰ Motyer, 169.

help me to trust your wisdom in *wherever* You take me, content with your leading, guiding, and directing.”

2. The LORD Reigns, Even when Evil Seems to Advance (14:4–12)

The first word of verse 4 is so important: “Thus.” The LORD is telling Moses that the conclusion Pharaoh comes to—that the Hebrews are lost—is the conclusion He *wants* Him to come to. And, further, by this quasi-“ruse,” the LORD would continue to accomplish His purposes. Verse 4: **Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them.** In these fits and starts, the Hebrews still had not actually left the borders of Egypt. Again, there are six-hundred thousand of them. Wherever they were in their wanderings would’ve almost *certainly* been reported back to Pharaoh.¹¹

And the LORD knew what Pharaoh would do. He also knew *why* He might. I found it interesting reading this week on the differences between the lower-case gods Egypt worshipped and the God we do. Because on Wednesday nights we’ve been considering the attributes of God. Throughout that study, we’ve considered the truth that God’s purposes do *not* change. His knowledge has never lessened, nor improved. Nor has His power. He is who He has *always* been, who He will always be, and He is who He is—in every moment—*everywhere*.

This, however, is *not* a description of the gods Egypt bowed before. Their deities were arbitrary and capricious, often vying with one another for power, and quite eager to change their actions. Further, they were *far* from omnipresent, instead making themselves manifest in certain locations, locations they might depart, quite unpredictably.¹²

So, with that framework in mind, Pharaoh could’ve reasoned in this way. Though Yahweh had clearly shown His power, now that the Hebrews were no longer *where* the plagues fell, maybe their God was no longer with them. Now, it was possible, Pharaoh would have the upper hand. So, he chased them down.

And it’s at *this* point we’re told the purpose of the Hebrews’ current wanderings, of the *seeming* detours, and of Pharaoh’s chase. Verse four goes on: **and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.** I actually counted this week. This is “The God Who Makes Himself Known,” part 23.

Pharaoh *thought* they were lost. They were *never* lost. He, instead, was being lured. God was, once again, going to show *His* power over the deities of Egypt.

That’s the big picture. But verse 5 details the *seeming* advance of evil. Verse 5: **When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, “What is this that we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”** We’re not told how long this “change of heart” took, nor how long it’s been since the Passover. Maybe some work-stoppage notices started coming in.¹³ But certainly verse 5 reveals their motives. Israel is no longer *here*—to serve *us*!

Verse 6: **So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.** In the flat and hard ground which constituted much of Egypt, you would be *hard* pressed to find a better mode of transport than the chariot. As the Egyptians were known for regularly modernizing, ever-more updating their models of transport, the six hundred chariots chosen here were **select**

¹¹ Stuart, 329.

¹² Stuart, 330.

¹³ Stuart, 332.

chariots.¹⁴ They were joined by **all of the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them**, likely referring to multiple men in each one of them—drivers and archers carrying bows and spears. The point is this: Pharaoh didn't call up the B team.

Verse 8: **The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.**

If we didn't know what we know, the ending of the story would seem *so* certain. It reminded me a little this week of the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. It's as if the knife is raised.

And that's *certainly* how the Hebrews saw it. The greatest army on the planet was arrayed. And they were far from trained. Verse 10: **As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened.** Of course they were.

Verse 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? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'?"**

After all that we've considered over the past few weeks, all that God instituted to help them remember, it certainly didn't take long for them to forget. Doug Stuart masterfully quips, "When hardship is encountered, the miserable past suddenly looks like the good old days."¹⁵ All of a sudden those who had previously *cried* out for deliverance were acting as if they didn't *ever* think the Exodus was a good idea. You know people with that kind of selective memory? Again, those God delivered were *not* delivered because they were lovely. They were delivered because He'd set His affection on them.

Pharaoh thought they were lost. They were *never* so. Further, the *Hebrews* thought they were lost. It was *never* so. Even when evil seems to advance, the LORD ruled and reigned on behalf of His people. In fact the Egyptians' advance upon them—the chariots, the spears, the bows and arrows—was all subplot.

Not unlike the kiss of Judas, nor the plotting of the chief priests. Yes, they and he "delivered" the Son of God over. But He'd already been handed over by Another—for a purpose (Rom. 4:25). In fact, everything was according to plan—both the sham trial ahead and the burial of a dead Man.

Into seeming detours, in the face of evil's *seeming* advance,

3. **The LORD Leads, Reigns, and Fights for His People** (14:13–14)

Forty years earlier, Moses might've cowered too. But here, in this moment, blocked by the sea on one side and a sea of chariots on the other, he shows courage we've not quite seen prior. Verse 13: **But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear!"** In Exodus 3, Moses had a lot to learn. At this point, he's learned a lot—about himself and about His God. Because on the bank of that vast body of water, with the enemy bearing down—Moses sees something the Hebrews *don't*—at least not yet. Verse 13: **Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today.**

¹⁴ Stuart, 333.

¹⁵ Stuart, 336.

At the sea, Moses sees God's purposes unfolding, declaring in verse 13: **for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.** The first word of that clause could be translated "because." As in, *because* you see the Egyptians now, you should know that what God purposed is going to be fulfilled. In other words, it's clear: they took the bait. Look in front of you. There they are. And *because* you see them now, you will never see them again. Ever.

Moses has struggled through this kind of delay before, in Exodus 2 and in Exodus 5. He knew that into seeming detours, in the face of evil's seeming advance, verse 14 was still true: **the LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.** This is the most basic tenet of holy war. God fights on behalf of His people. And He's committed to—determined, in fact—to achieve a total victory over His and His people's foes.

Moses doesn't say the wind, the lightning, or the water would fight for them. He says the LORD will. And because of that, they were merely to stand by, keep silent, and see salvation.

Conclusion

What's happening here with Moses? How can he say, **Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD?** I think Hebrews 11 answers: **By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen** (Heb. 11:27).

Pharaoh thought they were lost. The Hebrews thought they were lost.

Moses knew that it was *never* so. Even into seeming detours, the LORD was leading. Even as evil *seemed* to advance, the LORD was reigning. And He would fight for them.

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD—*our* God (Ps. 20:7).