

## CHAPTER 75

### THE FAITH OF ISRAEL

(~~8129~~ **HEBREWS 11:29**)

The apostle's object in this 11th chapter of Hebrews is to show the power of real faith in God to produce supernatural acts, to overcome difficulties which are insuperable to mere nature, and to endure trials which are too much for flesh blood to bear up under. Various examples have been adduced in illustration. A further notable one is now before us. In it we see how faith enabled Israel to fearlessly venture themselves to enter a strangely formed valley between two mountainous ridges of water, and to reach in safety the opposite shore. In like manner, a real faith in God will enable the Christian to pass through trials and troubles which destroy multitudes of his fellow-creatures, and which will in due time conduct him unto the enjoyment of perfect bliss.

The force of the above example is greatly heightened by a striking and most solemn contrast. The power of faith in enabling Israel to safely cross the Red Sea is demonstrated by the helpless and hopeless destruction of the Egyptians, who sought to follow them.

“The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen”  
(~~10143~~ Exodus 14:23).

But they had no faith. They were moved by passion, by hatred of the Hebrews. It was night when the army of God undertook their strange journey, yet though dark, the hosts of Pharaoh presumptuously and blindly followed. But now had arrived the hour when the long-insulted Divine forbearance was to be avenged.

“And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the hosts of the Egyptians; and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily; so that the Egyptians

said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians” (~~1244~~Exodus 14:24, 25).

But it was too late. The haughty monarch of Egypt and his powerful retinue now discovered how vain it was to fling themselves against the bosses of Jehovah’s buckler: that which had been a channel of deliverance to the believing Israelites, became the grave of their enemies. Thereby are we shown that all attempts of unbelievers to obtain what faith secures is utterly futile, and doomed to certain disappointment.

But here a difficulty presents itself, and a formidable one it has proved unto most of those who sought to grapple with it. In our text we are told that, “By faith they passed through the Red Sea,” whereas in ~~5818~~Hebrews 3:18, 19 it is said, “To whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” Was, then, their faith only a temporary one, like that of the stony-ground hearers? No, for the “faith” mentioned in every other verse in Hebrews 11 was a saving one, and we dare not arbitrarily assume this in 5:29 was an altogether different one.

The solution of our present difficulty lies in attentively noting the pronoun which the Holy Spirit has here employed: “By faith *they* passed through the Red Sea.” It is not there said “By faith the children of Israel” did so, for it is very evident from their later history that the vast majority of them were

“a very froward generation, children in whom was *no* faith”  
(~~1620~~Deuteronomy 32:20).

The reference, then, in our text is unto Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, and the believing remnant among the Hebrews. But, it may be asked, Did not the unbelieving portion of the Nation also pass safely through the Red Sea? Truly, and herein we have illustration of the fact that unbelievers are frequently made partakers of temporal blessings as the result of their association with people of God. Another example of this same principle is found in ~~4274~~Acts 27:24 where we see that an entire ship’s company were spared for Paul’s sake.

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea, as by dry land; which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned” (~~5812~~Hebrews 11:29).

In seeking to expound this verse we cannot do better than adopt the division of the Puritan Manton thereon, considering it three ways: historically, sacramentally, and applicatively. First, then, historically.

Our text takes us back to what is recorded in Exodus 14. There we learn that when at last Pharaoh consented to let the Hebrews go, he soon repented of his grant, and being informed by his spies that the Israelites were entangled in the straits of Pihahiroth, he determined to pursue, and either recover or destroy them. At the head of a great military force he swiftly went after them. The consequence was that

“When Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold the Egyptians marched after them: and they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness” (<sup>1240</sup>Exodus 14:10-12).

A truly desperate situation now faced Moses and the company he was leading.

“Shut in between the great fortress ‘Migdol,’ which was on the ‘Shur’ or wall (built to protect Egypt from Asia), and the sea, with Pharaoh’s host behind, and shut in on the other side by the wilderness: <sup>1241</sup>Exodus 14:2, 3. It was indeed a crisis” (E.W.B.).

What could the poor Israelites do? Fight they dare not, being a multitude of undisciplined people, of all sexes and ages, and pursued by a regular and powerful army of enemies. Fly they could not, for they were completely hemmed in on every side. To all outward appearance their case seemed hopeless; and to human reason, nothing but sore destruction might be expected.

The situation which confronted Israel *was* a hopeless one so far as *they* were concerned, and had not the Lord shown Himself strong on their behalf, they had undoubtedly perished. But, “if God be *for* us, who can be against us”? Ah, my reader, that is the great thing for each of us to make

sure of, and when we have done so, to seek grace to rest with unshaken confidence upon it. Has not God promised,

“When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overthrow thee” (<sup>2482</sup>Isaiah 43:2)!

What better assurance than that can the believing heart ask for? No matter how deep and wide stretching, no matter how dark and foreboding the “waters” of adverse circumstances may be unto sight and sense, has not He who cannot lie declared, “They *shall not* overflow thee”!

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever” (<sup>1243</sup>Exodus 14:13).

Undeterred by the chiding of the people, and wisely making no reply thereto, Moses turned their minds away from the outward danger and directed their thoughts unto Jehovah. They had “lifted up their eyes and beheld the Egyptians” (verse 10), and in consequence they were sore afraid; but there was something else for *faith* to “see,” namely, “the salvation (or deliverance) of Jehovah,” which was not yet visible to natural sight. If they were steadfastly occupied with *that* their trembling hearts would be stilled.

Admire, dear reader, the confident assurance which Divine grace wrought in the heart of Moses, for by nature he was a frail man of like passions and infirmities as us. But there was no wavering or doubting on his part: “see the salvation of the Lord, which He *will* show you today”: that was the language of faith — of a supernatural, God-given faith. Moses was not engaged with the difficulties and dangers of the trying situation which confronted them; instead, he was occupied with One before whom all difficulties disappear like mists before the rising sun. “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (verse 14). Once the soul is able to rest on that fact, doubtings end and alarms are silenced.

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”  
(<sup>45017</sup>Romans 10:17).

Faith must have a foundation to stand upon, and the only firm and sure one is the promise of the living God. “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show you today... The Lord shall fight

for you, and ye shall hold your peace” afforded the necessary ground for the faith of each believing Hebrew to rest upon. The eye of faith must see that Divine “salvation” or deliverance, before the eye of sense beheld it: only the sure word of God could give strength to their hearts to advance into the ocean before them. When the promise had been “heard,” and not before, then came the order “Go forward.”

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea” (<sup>(14:15)</sup>Exodus 14:15, 16).

Thus we learn that the heart of Moses was engaged in silent supplication at this time. The Lord’s statement here is not to be understood as a rebuke. No, Moses was waiting the word of command, and until it was given, he stayed himself upon the Lord.

“And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left” (verse 22).

“When Moses gave the signal by his rod, the sea miraculously retreated, standing up like heaps of congealed ice on either side while they passed through. This is done, and they go on safely; the sea flanked them on both sides; the rear was secured by the cloudy and fiery pillar interposing between them and Pharaoh’s army, till such a time as all were out of danger, and safely arrived at the further shore; and so neither man nor child was hurt. The Egyptians followed the chase, as malice is perverse and blind, and those whom God designeth to destruction take the ready course to bring it upon their own heads; for at the signal again of Moses stretching forth his rod, the returning waters swallowed them all up in a moment” (T. Manton).

“A greater instance, with respect unto the work of Divine providence, of the power of faith on the one hand, and of unbelief with obdurate presumption on the other, there is not on record in the whole book of God. Here we have the end and issue of the long controversy that was between these two people, the Egyptians and the Israelites; a certain type and evidence of what will be the last

end of the contest between the world and the church. Their long conflict shall end in the complete salvation of the one, and the utter destruction of the other” (John Owen).

Though it was night, the Divine pillar of cloud “gave light” unto Israel (<sup><0249></sup>Exodus 14:19). Dreadful indeed must have appeared those walls of water, for the sea would be raised unto a very great height on either side of them. It called for no ordinary faith to put themselves between such walls, as were ready in their own nature to fall on them unto their destruction any moment, abiding upright only under an invisible restraint. But they had the command of God for their warrant and the promise of God for their security, and these, when laid hold of, are sufficient to overcome all fears and dangers. That Moses himself, to guide and encourage them (and as the type of Christ) took the lead, is clear from <sup><2361></sup>Isaiah 63:11-13, “God led them through the sea by the right hand of Moses.”

Let us now briefly consider the remarkable incident related in our text from a *sacramental* viewpoint. In <sup><4300></sup>1 Corinthians 10:1, 2 we are told, “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” From this scripture we learn that Israel’s passage through the Red Sea had the same signification that Christian baptism now hath. The points of resemblance are many, and were developed at length by Manton, and more so by Gouge, from whom we here give a digest.

- 1.** The ministry of Moses was confirmed by this miracle, so that the Israelites were obliged to take him for their leader and lawgiver: so the miracles wrought by Christ assure us that He was sent by God as our lawgiver, which we must hear and obey.
- 2.** Israel’s experience is (figuratively) denominated a “baptism” because it signified the difference which God puts between His people and His enemies: the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians was sealed by their passage through the Sea. Similarly baptism is said to be an answering figure to the ark of Noah (<sup><0083></sup>1 Peter 3:20, 21): as those on the ark were exempted from the deluge, so those in Christ are exempted from the deluge of wrath which will yet overwhelm the world.
- 3.** They were baptized “in the cloud and in the sea,” because by submitting to God’s command they gave up themselves to His direction: so in baptism

we dedicate ourselves unto Christ, avowing Him to be our Lord and Master.

4. The passing through the Red Sea and baptism had both the same outward sign, which is water (<sup>4186</sup>Matthew 3:6).
5. They had like rites, which were entering into the water and coming out of it (<sup>4438</sup>Acts 8:38, 39).
6. They had both the same ground, which was God's command and promise (<sup>4243</sup>Exodus 14:13, 16 and <sup>4189</sup>Matthew 28:19, <sup>4166</sup>Mark 16:16).
7. They were both for the same people, namely, the children of God (<sup>4189</sup>Matthew 28:19).
8. They were but once administered (<sup>4045</sup>Ephesians 4:5).

Let us now consider some of the *practical* lessons which this marvelous incident is designed to teach us.

1. The children of God are sometimes called on *to face great trials*: a Red Sea of difficulty and trouble confronts them. Let it be duly observed that it was not an enemy who put the sea there, but God Himself! This tells us that the Red Sea represents some great and trying providence which the Lord places in the path of each newborn Christian: it is in order to try his faith and test the sincerity of his trust in God. Often this trial is encountered soon after conversion. Sometimes it arises from opposition of ungodly members of our own family. Or, you are engaged in some business — perhaps requiring you to work on the Sabbath day — in which you cannot now conscientiously continue. It means renouncing your means of livelihood, and you cannot see how it can be done and provide things honest in the sight of all men. As you emerged from the bondage of Egypt you thought it would be easy to surrender everything to God, but now a Red Sea of testing is before you, and it appears unfordable.
2. The children of God are sometimes *terrified by powerful enemies*. The Egyptian who pursued Israel up to the Red Sea may be spiritualized to represent those sins of the Christians from which he expected to be completely delivered. For a little while after conversion sin does not much trouble the newly-regenerated saint: he is filled with joy and praise at the great things which the Lord has done for him. But it is not long before he discovers with the apostle

“I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (~~4072~~Romans 7:23).

Satan now pursues the young saint, and often it seems as though all the powers of hell were let loose against him. At such a time our sins appear more formidable to us than before they were forgiven: in Egypt our taskmasters only appeared with their whips, but now they are mounted and in chariots! Ah, after conversion sin looks far more frightful to the saint than ever it did before, and we feel the plague of our heart much more acutely.

**3.** The people of God are often *troubled with faint hearts*. When the children of Israel saw the Egyptians they were sore afraid, and when they beheld the Red Sea they murmured against their deliverer. A faint heart is the worst foe a Christian has here: when the anchor of faith is fixed deep in the Rock, he need never fear the storm; but when the hand of faith be palsied, or the eye of faith be dim, it will go hard with us. When faith is dormant the most insignificant stream will make us quiver and cry: I shall be drowned in the flood; but when faith is dominant it fears not an ocean of difficulty or danger. The babe in Christ has but little faith, for he has but little experience: he has not yet proved God’s promises and knows not His faithfulness. But as he grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, and becomes established in the faith, he will not despair before Red Seas and Egyptians; but meanwhile, he often trembles and asks, “How shall I ever find deliverance?”

**4.** The people of God are here instructed *how to act under great trials*. The first word the Israelites received in the hour of their great emergency was, “Fear ye not, stand still”; the second was “And see the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord, which He will show you today”; the third was, “Go forward” (~~02143~~Exodus 14:13, 15). It is of first importance that we should diligently attend to the Divine order of those three things: we are not equipped and ready to “Go forward” until we have “seen” (by faith) the “salvation of the Lord,” and that cannot be properly seen until our fears are calmed and we stand still; or, in other words, till we turn from all self-help and cease from all the feverish activities of the flesh.

The continuous call of God to the Christian is “Go forward”: persevering steadfastly along the path of duty, walking in that narrow way which the Divine commands and precepts have laid down for us. No matter what

obstacles may confront you, no matter what your circumstances may be, no matter what Red Sea of difficulty or danger be before you, “Go forward” is God’s authoritative word to you. “Ah, but often that is far from being an easy thing to do!” Quite true, dear friend; yea, we will state it still more strongly: it is often *impossible* to mere nature. What, then, is to be done when the heart faints, when the soul is well-nigh overwhelmed by the greatness of the difficulty or danger, standing right in your path? Two things; first “Stand still.” Your own efforts to better matters have brought no relief, your own wisdom can devise no solution; very well, then “stand still”: cease from all attempts at self-help.

“But,” you answer, “I have my responsibilities to discharge, my duties to perform.” Quite true: but admittedly you have now reached the place where a Red Sea is before you; you are dismayed and know not which way to turn. Here, then, is God’s word to you in this dire emergency: “Stand still.” This means, Get down on your knees, and cry unto the Lord: tell Him all about your trouble, unburden yourself freely and fully unto Him; spread your urgent need before Him. Probably, you answer, “I have done so, and thus far no way through my Red Sea has appeared before me.” Then, you are now ready for His next word.

“And see the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord, which He *will* show you.” And what does that mean? This, *the exercise of faith* in the living God, the trusting in Him to *undertake* for you, the confident expectation He *will do so*. Cry unto the Holy Spirit to work this faith in you: remain on your knees until He has given you real assurance that your Father *will* show Himself strong on your behalf; wait before Him till one of His promises is applied to your heart in power. *Then*, you are ready to “Go forward,” to resume your duties and discharge your responsibilities: to look for work, to go on with renewed strength. The Christian is only ready to “Go forward” when faith has *seen* that which is invisible to sight and sense, namely, the “salvation (deliverance) of the Lord” *before* it is actually wrought for us!

The way in which the Christian is required to walk as he journeys through this world on his way to Heaven is *the path of obedience* to God’s commands. Naught but a spiritual faith inclines the heart to comply with God’s demands, and upon compliance to expect the mercy promised:

“Lord, I have hoped for Thy salvation, and done Thy commandments” (~~1916~~ Psalm 119:166).

This is the great business of faith: as the Israelites were to obey God, and to wait for His deliverance out of their imminent danger. Naught but a God-given faith imparts courage to obey God in the most difficult crisis. If we be bidden to go into the Red Sea we must not forbear, for none of God's commands are to be disputed, however contrary they be to flesh and blood. Faith teaches us to depend upon God in greatest extremities. Faith receives the promise of God upon the conditions or terms which He has specified. If Israel were to receive the "salvation" of the Lord," they *must* do what He bade. Faith and obedience can no more be separated than can light and heat in the sun.

As Abraham, at the call of God, went out of Chaldea, "not knowing whither he went," so Israel were required to "Go forward" though the Sea stretched before them. Probably it was not until their feet touched the brink that the waters divided. Nature might have gone over it, but *faith* passed safely "through" it! They feared they would be destroyed by Pharaoh's hosts. The very last thing that they would have looked to as a means of escape would be the Sea! Yet, in obedience to the Divine command,

"The children of Israel went into the midst of the Sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (<sup>1242</sup>Exodus 14:22).

Learn, then, dear reader, we never lose by obeying God.

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea." True faith lifts a man above himself, puts into him a spirit which is more than human, and enables him to rise above the obstacles of reason and sense.

Faith emboldened the hitherto trembling Israelites to venture through that strange chasm between the watery walls. "As by dry land" is added to magnify the Divine providence in making a path in the ocean's bottom fit for women and children to tread upon — like a plain and beaten highway. By faith they "passed through": they took not only a few steps, but continued to perseveringly march mile after mile and hour after hour. Hesitate not, my brother, to venture upon anything which God calleth you unto; be assured that He will safely carry you through all difficulties and dangers. "Which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned": the very means of Israel's deliverance was their destruction: see <sup>1216</sup>2 Corinthians 2:16! It was a just retribution for the slaying of the male Hebrew children in the waters (Exodus 1).

**5.** The people of God may *be assured of the Divine providence*. When Israel “by faith,” obeyed the Divine command to “Go forward,” God wrought a miracle and delivered them from their dire situation. This is recorded for the encouragement of *our* hearts. It was God who had placed the Red Sea where it was, and it was God who opened the way for Israel through it. So, Christian reader, it is God (and *not* the Devil) who has brought about the problem, the emergency, the danger which now confronts you; for “*of Him.... are all things*” (<sup>45136</sup>Romans 11:36). As He has made thy Red Sea, only He can cleave a way through it for you. Trust, then, in His unerring wisdom. Count upon His mighty power working on your behalf. “Stand still” and rest yourself upon God. View “by faith” anticipatively, expectantly, His “salvation” or deliverance. “Go forward” in obedience to His commands, and He will show Himself strong on thy behalf. *He* never fails those who fully trust and unreservedly obey Him.