

Israel at the Red Sea

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that just as God led Israel through the Red Sea, believers must trust God's providence through their own trials and spiritual struggles after conversion.

Scripture: Psalm 106:9, Romans 7:21, Romans 7:24

Topics: "Faith and Trust", "Spiritual Trials", "God's Providence"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the spiritual journey of the children of Israel at the Red Sea as a powerful metaphor for the trials new believers face after conversion. He encourages Christians to recognize that difficulties, sin's renewed assault, and faint-heartedness are common but surmountable through faith and God's providence. Spurgeon offers both comfort and challenge, reminding believers that God's guidance and strength are always present even in the darkest moments.

Transcript

"He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness."—Psalm 106:9.

SEVERAL Sabbaths ago we preached upon the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt, by the blood of the passover: and we told you then, that we believed that event to be typical of the coming forth of God's people from that spiritual house of bondage, that furnace of mental suffering whence they are delivered by the omnipotent grace of God, at the time of their conversion. This morning we pursue the narrative. No doubt the children of Israel supposed that now all was over; the Egyptians has sent them away, entreating them to depart, and loading them with riches. Terror had smitten the heart of Egypt, for from the king on the throne to the prisoner in the dungeon, all was dismay and fear on account of Israel. Egypt was glad for them when they departed. Therefore the children of Israel said within themselves, "We shall now march to Canaan at once; there will be no more dangers, no more troubles, no more trials; the Egyptians themselves have sent us away, and they are too much afraid of us ever to molest us again. Now shall we tread the desert through with hasty footstep; and when a few more days have passed, we shall enter into the land of our possession—the land that floweth with milk and honey." "Not quite so speedily," says God; "the time is not arrived yet for you to rest. It is true I have delivered you from Egypt; but there is much you have to learn before you will be prepared to dwell in Canaan. Therefore I shall lead you about, and instruct you, and teach you." And it came to pass that the Lord led the children of Israel about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea, till they arrived over against Baalzephon, where

on either side the craggy mountains shut them in. Pharoah hears of it; he comes upon them, to overcome them; and they stand in terrible fright and jeopardy of them, to overcome them; and they stand in terrible fright and jeopardy of their lives. Now, beloved, it is usually so with the believer: he marches out of Egypt spiritually at the time of his conversion, and he says within himself, "Now I shall always be happy." He has a bright eye, and a light heart, for his fetters have been dashed to the ground, and he feels no longer the lash of conscience upon his shoulder. "Now," says he, "I may have a short life, but it will be a happy one."

"A few more rolling years at most,

Will land me on fair Canaan's coast.'

And then I shall have no more warfare, no more fighting, no more disturbance; but I shall be at peace." "Not quite as thou desirest," says God. "Oh! thou little one; I have more to teach thee ere thou art prepared for my palace." Then he commences to lead us about, and bring us into straits and perils. The sins which we thought had utterly left us are hunting us behind, while impassible floods block up the way. Even trembling Israel halting by the Red Sea is but a faint emblem of that terrible position into which the child of God usually falls, within a few weeks or months after he has come out of the land of Egypt.

I shall preach this morning a sermon, which I hope will be useful to such of you as have lately come to know the Lord. You were expecting to build tabernacles, in which to dwell on the summit of the mountains of joy for ever; but you find, on the contrary, that you have very great troubles and conflicts; and perhaps now you have a more terrible trial than you ever experienced in all your life before. I will endeavour to show you, that this is just what you might have expected; that there will be a Red Sea very soon after you come out of your house of bondage. Others of you, my dear friends, have passed through all these things many years ago. You can say,—

"Many days have passed since then,

Many changes I have seen,

Yet have been upheld till now;

Who could hold me up but thou?"

But I am sure you will be glad to re-visit the spot, where God delivered you from your distresses. We find it very pleasant to look upon the place where we were taught in our school-boy days, or to visit the haunts of our childhood. So you who are grey-headed in the cause of your Master, will not find it very tedious work to go back a little way, and look to that Red Sea which God rebuked and dried up, that you might be led through it even as through the wilderness.

Coming, then, to the subject; the children of Israel had their difficulties, and so generally the child of God has his very soon after he comes out of Egypt. But then they had their refuges; and moreover, God had a great and grand design to answer in all the troubles into which they were brought.

I. Taking the first point, the children of Israel just now had THREE DIFFICULTIES—three exceeding great dangers. And so I believe that every heir of heaven, within a very short period after the time of his deliverance, will meet with the same.

The first they had was a great trial sent by God himself. There was the Red Sea in the front of them. Now, it was not an enemy that put the sea there; it was God himself. We may therefore think, that the Red Sea represents some great and trying providence, which the Lord will be sure to place in the path of every new-born child; in order to try his faith, and to test the sincerity of his trust in God. I do not know, beloved, whether your experience will back up mine: but I can say this, that the worst difficulty I ever met with, or I think I can ever meet with, happened a little time after my conversion to God. And you must generally expect, very soon after you have been brought to know and love him, that you will have some great, broad, deep Red Sea straight before your path, which you will scarcely know how to pass. Sometimes it will occur in the family. The husband says, for instance—if he is an ungodly man—“You shall not attend such-and-such a place of worship; I positively forbid you to be baptized, or to join that church;” there is a Red Sea before you. You had done nothing wrong; it is God himself who places that Red Sea before your path. Or perhaps before that time, you were carrying on a business which now you cannot conscientiously continue; and there is a Red Sea which you have to cross in renouncing your means of livelihood. You don’t see how it is to be done; how you are to maintain yourself, and to provide things honest in the sight of all men. Or perhaps your employment calls you amongst men with whom you lived before on amicable terms, and now on a sudden, they say, “Come! won’t you do as you used to do?” There, again, is a Red Sea before you. It is a hard struggle; you do not like to come out and say, “I cannot, I shall not, for I am a Christian.” You stand still, half afraid to go forward. Or perhaps it is something proceeding more immediately from God. You find that just when he plants a vine in your heart, he blasts all the vines in your vineyard; and when he plants you in his own garden, then it is that he uproots all your comforts and your joys. Just when the Sun of Righteousness is rising upon you, your own little candle is blown out; just when you seem to need it most, your gourd is withered, your prosperity departs, and your flood becomes an ebb. I say again, it may not be so with all of you, but I think that most of God’s people have not long escaped the bondage of Egypt, before they find some terrible, rolling sea, lashed perhaps by tempestuous winds directly in their path; they stand aghast, and say, “O God, how can I bear this? I thought I could give up all for thee; but now I feel as if I could do nothing! I thought I should be in heaven, and all would be easy; but here is a sea I cannot ford—there is no squadron of ships to carry me across: it is not bridged even by thy mercy; I must swim it, or else I fear I must perish.”

Then the children of Israel had a second difficulty. They would not have cared about the Red Sea a single atom, if they had not been terrified by the Egyptians who were behind them. These Egyptians, I think may be interpreted this morning, by way of parable, as the representatives of those sins of ours, which we thought were clean dead and gone. For a little while after conversion sin does not trouble a Christian; he is very happy and cheerful, in a sense of pardon; but before many days are past, he will understand what Paul said, “I find another law in my members, so that when I would do good, evil is present with me.” The first moment when he wins his liberty he laughs and leaps in an ecstasy of joy. He thinks, “Oh! I shall soon be in heaven; as for sin, I can trample that beneath my feet!” But mark you, scarce has another Sabbath gladdened his spirit, ere he finds that sin is too much for him; the old corruptions which he fancied were laid in their graves get a resurrection and start up afresh, and he begins to cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” He sees all his old sins galloping behind him: like Pharaoh and his host pursuing him to the borders of the Red Sea. There is a great trial before him. Oh! he thinks he could bear that; he thinks he could walk through the Red Sea; oh! those Egyptian—they are behind him! He thought he should never have seen them any more for ever; they were the plague and torment of his life when they made him work in the brick-kiln. He sees his old master, the very man who was wont to lay the lash on his shoulders, riding post haste after him; and there are the eyes of that black Pharaoh, flashing like fire in the distance; he sees the horrid scowling face of the tyrant, and how he

trembles! Satan is after him, and all the legions of hell seem to be let loose, if possible, utterly to destroy his soul. At such a time, moreover, our sins are more formidable to us than they were before they were forgiven; because, when we were in Egypt, we never saw the Egyptians mounted on horses, or in chariots; they only appeared as our task-masters, with their whips; but now these people see the Egyptians on horseback, clad in armour; they behold all the mighty men of valour come out with their warlike instruments to slay them. So did I find, speaking for myself, that when I first knew the weight of sin, it was as a burden, as a labour, as a trouble; but when the second time

“I asked the Lord that I might grow,

In faith, and love, and every grace;

Might more of his salvation know,

And seek more earnestly his face;”

and when he answered me by letting all my sins loose upon me they appeared more frightful than before. I thought the Egyptians in Egypt were not half so bad as the Egyptians out of Egypt; I thought the sins I knew before, though they were cruel task-masters, were not half so much to be dreaded as those soldier-sins, armed with spears and axes, with chariots of iron with scythes upon their axles, hastening to assault me. It is true they did not come so near to me as heretofore; nevertheless they occasioned more fright than when I was their slave. It may be, poor child of God, thou art astonished and amazed to find, that thy sins are more black now than they were when thou wast under conviction; that thou hast less hope than thou hadst even then; and that thy condition is possibly far worse than when the law was beating thee from head to foot, and rubbing brine into the wounds of thy conscience. Thou mayest be saying, “Ah! well, I never thought of this; if I be a child of God, if I were really pardoned and forgiven, how could it be that I should be so vexed and tormented with a sense of my guilt? And if all my transgressions have been cast into the depths of the sea, how is it that I hear the armies of my sins, rattling their horse-hoofs and chariot-wheels behind me?” I tell thee, beloved, in the name of the Lord, that is just what you ought to have expected. The pangs after we come out of Egypt are at times even more painful than those we feel in the house of bondage; and there is usually a time of trial a little while after the new birth, which is even more terrible and awful than the previous agony of the soul, though not usually so protracted. This was the second difficulty.

But there was a third difficulty, which perhaps wrought them more misery than either of the other two: these poor children of Israel had such faint hearts. They no sooner saw the Egyptians than they began to cry out; and when they beheld the Red Sea before them, they murmured against their deliverer. A faint heart is the worst foe a Christian can have; whilst he keeps his faith firm, whilst the anchor is fixed deep in the rock, he never need fear the storm; but when the hand of faith is palsied, or the eye of faith is dim, it will go hard with us. As for the Egyptian, he may throw his spear; while we can catch it on the shield of faith, we are not terrified by the weapon, but if we lose our faith, the spear becomes a deadly dart. While we have faith, the Red Sea may flow before us, as deep and dark as it pleases: for like Leviathan, we trust we can snuff up Jordan at a draught. But if we have no faith, then at the most insignificant streamlet, which Faith could take up in her hands in a single moment, and drink like Gideon's men, poor Unbelief stands quivering and crying, “Ah! I shall be drowned in the floods, or I shall be slain by the foe; there is no hope for me; I am driven to despair. It would have been better for me that I had died in Egypt, than that I should come hither to be slain by the hand of the enemy.” The child of God, when he is first born, has but very

little faith, because he has had but little experience; he has not tried the promise, and therefore he does not know its faithfulness. He has not used the arm of his faith, and therefore the sinews of it have not become strong. Let him live a little longer, and become confirmed in the faith, and he will not care for Red Seas, nor yet for the Egyptians; but just then his little heart beats against the walls of his body, and he laments, "Ah, me! ah, me! O wretched man that I am! How shall I ever find deliverance?" This description of spiritual geography may be uninteresting to some, because they may not have travelled through this part of the wilderness, but others will view it with attention. Who cared about maps of the Crimea till there was war there? But as soon as our soldiers were engaged in that particular spot, every man bought a map of the Crimea and studied the boundaries of Russia. So if you have been in these straits, you will be very glad of my map this morning, that you may see the way in which God leads his family. These are the three dangers—a great trial, sins pursuing us behind, and an exceedingly faint heart.

II. But, thanks be to God! the children of Israel had THREE HELPS.

Oh! child of God? dost thou discern this mystery? Whenever thou hast three trials, thou wilt always have three promises; and if thou hadst forty afflictions, thou wouldst have forty measures of grace. Yes, and if thou hadst a million troubles, thou wouldst have a million measures of mercy. The Israelites had three difficulties, and they had three helps; and as the difficulty was put in the way by providence, so providence did also furnish a relief.

The first help they had was Providence. Providence put the Red Sea there, and piled the rocks on either hand, while providence represented by the fiery cloudy pillar, had led them to its shore, and conducted them into the defile, and now the same pillar of providence came to their assistance. They had not come thither undirected, and therefore they should not be left unprotected, for the same cloudy pillar which led them there, came behind them to protect them.

Cheer up, then, heir of grace! What is thy trial? Has providence brought it upon thee? If so, unerring wisdom will deliver thee from it. What is it thou art now exercised upon? As truly as thou art alive, God will remove it. Dost thou think God's cloudy pillar would ever lead thee to a place where God's right arm would fail thee? Dost thou imagine that he would ever guide thee into such a defile that he could not conduct thee out again? The providence which apparently misleads, will in verity befriend thee. That which leads thee into difficulties guards thee against thy foes; it casts darkness on thy sins, whilst it giveth light to thee. How sweet is providence to a child of God, when he can reflect upon it! He can look out into this world, and say, "However great my troubles, they are not so great as my Father's power; however difficult may be my circumstances, yet all things around me are working together for good. He who holds up yon unpillared arch of the starry heavens can also support my soul without a single apparent prop; he who guides the stars in the well-ordered courses, even when they seem to move in hazy dances, surely he can overrule my trials in such a way that out of confusion he will bring order; and from seeming evil produce lasting good. He who bridles the storm, and puts the bit in the mouth of the tempest, surely he can restrain my trial, and keep my sorrows in subjection. I need not fear while the lightnings are in his hands and the thunders sleep within his lips; while the oceans gurggle from his fist, and the clouds are in the hollow of his hands; while the rivers are turned by his foot, and while he diggeth the channels of the sea. Surely he whose might wings an angel, can furnish a worm with strength; he who guides a cherub will not be overcome by the trials of an emmet like myself. He who makes the most ponderous orb roll in dignity, and keeps its predestined orbit, can make a little atom like myself move in my proper course, and conduct me as he pleaseth. Christian! there is no sweeter pillow than providence; and when providence seemeth adverse, believe it still, lay it under thy head, for depend upon it there is comfort in its bosom. There is

hope for thee thou child of God! The great trouble which is to come in thy way in the early part of thy pilgrimage, is planned by love, the same love which shall interpose as thy protector.

Again: the children of Israel had another refuge, in the fact, that they knew that they were the covenant people of God, and that, though they were in difficulties, God had brought them there, and therefore God, (with reverence let me say it,) was bound in honor to bring them out of that trouble into which he had brought them. "Well," says the child of God, "I know I am in a strait, but this one thing I also know, that I did not come out of Egypt by myself—I know that he brought me out; I know that I did not escape by my own power, or slay my first-born sins myself—I know that he did it; and though I fled from the tyrant—I know that he made my feet mighty for travel, for there was not one feeble in all our tribes; I know that though I am at the Red sea, I did not run there uncalled, but he bade me go there, and therefore I give to the winds my fears; for it he hath led me here into this difficulty, he will lead me out, and lead me through.

But the point to which I want to direct your attention most of all is this. The third refuge which the children of Israel had, was in a man; and neither of the two others, without that, would have been of any avail. It was the man Moses. He did everything for them. Thy greatest refuge, O child of God! in all thy trials, is in a man: not in Moses, but in Jesus; not in the servant, but in the master. he is interceding for thee, unseen and unheard by thee, even as Moses did for the children of Israel. If thou couldst but, in the dim distance, catch the sweet syllables of his voice as they distil from his lips, and see his heart as it speaks for thee, thou wouldst take comfort; for God hears that man when he pleads. He can overcome every difficulty. He has not a rod, but a cross, which can divide the Red sea; he has not only a cloudy pillar of forgiving grace, which can dim the eyes of your foes and keep them at a distance; but he has a cross, which can open the Red sea and drown thy sins in the very midst. He will not leave thee. Look! on yonder rock of heaven he stands, cross in hand, even as Moses with his rod. Cry to him, for with that uplifted cross he will cleave a path for thee, and guide thee through the sea; he will make those hoary floods, which had been friends for ever, and stand asunder like foes. Call to him, and he will make thee a way in the midst of the ocean, and a path through the pathless sea. Cry to him, and there shall not a sin of thine be left alive; he will sweep them all away; and the king of sin, the devil, he too shall be overwhelmed beneath the Saviour's blood, whilst thou shalt sing—

"Hell and my sins obstruct my path,

But hell and sin are conquer'd foes;

My Jesus nailed them to his cross,

And sang the triumph as he rose."

Still look thou to that man who once on Calvary died!

III. GOD HAD A DESIGN IN IT. And here, also, we wish you to regard with attention what God's design is, in leading the Christian into exceeding great trials in the early part of his life. This is explained to us by the Apostle Paul. A reference Bible is the best commentator in the world; and the most heavenly exposition is the searching out of kindred, texts, and comparing their meaning. "They were all baptized," says the Apostle, "unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea." God's design in bringing his people into trouble, and raising all their sins at their heels, is to give them a thorough baptism into his service, consecrating them for ever to himself. I mean by baptism this morning, not the rite, but what baptism represents. Baptism signifies dedication to God—initiation into God's service. It is not when we are first converted that we so

fully dedicate ourselves to God, as afterwards, when some great Red sea rolls before us. I should be delighted to see some of you get into trouble. Am I unkind to utter such a wish? Well I repeat it, I should; for I shall never get you into the church unless you do; you will never come forward and make a thorough dedication of yourselves to God, till you have had a sharp trial. Rest assured of this, that sharp trials were no slight cause of the heroic devotion of the martyrs, confessors, and missionaries, who so thoroughly consecrated themselves to their Master's service. The great purpose of all our affliction is the promotion of an entire dedication to Christ in all our hearts. It is only in the font of sorrow that we are baptized with Christ's baptism. No holy chrism hath efficacy to baptize; it is the Spirit, who alone can dedicate us in the waters of the sea of tribulation. You are brought into these straits, young believer, that you may at such a time receive the baptism for God. Do not, I beseech you, let the time pass by; for there are some who neglect it, who, afterwards, never perfectly know what it is to be "baptized unto Jesus, in the cloud and in the sea." They say, "they will wait a little while," but the consequence is, they wait a very long while. They say they will do to-morrow what they ought to do to-day. Beware how you let slip the opportunity which God presents you, that you may devote yourself publicly to him. The very first time after conversion, when we come into straits and difficulties, is intended that we should then be dedicated to Jesus, and come out openly as the children of the living God.

Now, beloved, let these thoughts rest with you. You may think them unimportant, but I am sure they are not. Believe me, you ought, indeed, to own yourselves on the Lord's side. If God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, serve him. There is nothing which I would more earnestly and ardently press upon you, than the great duty of decision for Jesus Christ. How many of you have a faint and indistinct hope, that when you die you will be Christ's people; and yet you must confess that you are not decided for Christ. You think you are his, but you often neglect duty, and frequently allow what you think a little sin to stain your conscience. You are not godly in worldly affairs. But I beseech you, put truth and righteousness into one scale, and put your own worldly gain into the other, and see which is the most important, and if you think that prudence dictates attention to this world instead of God, then remember, that is hellish prudence, and cometh of the devil, and, therefore, reject it. If ye were Egyptians, I might tell you to serve another master; but since you are God's people, or profess to be, I charge home upon you; and I beg of you, if you make a profession, to be out-and-out with it. How we do loathe those hot and cold people, who are neither one thing nor the other! You, who hold with the hare and run with the hounds—you, who are first one thing and then another—you, who are half horse, half alligator, and neither of them—you, who are something between the two, who are neither Christians nor worldlings in your own opinions. We know which you are. I have often thought what a consistent religion the Roman Catholic would be for some of you go-between people. You are not exactly children of God; but you would not like to be called the children of the devil. Where should we put you at last? It would be a very convenient thing to have a purgatory for you, to place you somewhere between the two. But as we have no such place, we do not wish to have any such characters, and we believe there are none such; you are either servants of God, or servants of the devil. Don't stand halting between two opinions, but just say, once for all, whom you will serve. If you choose the devil, choose him, love him, serve him, and rejoice in your choice. If you choose hell, go there, rush madly there; it's a fearful dwelling place for eternity—an awful home for ever! But if you choose God, I beseech you be in downright earnest about it. The religion of the present day, what mockery it is to call it religion at all! I protest, I believe the common religion of this age will not carry half those who profess it to heaven. It is a religion which they might easily carry to heaven, for it is too light to burden them, but it is too fragile to carry them there. They have a godliness which has not eaten up their soul. I heart a minister say once to his people, that "it would be a long time before the zeal of God's house would eat them up." Take the churches all round: what a slumbering brotherhood they are! There might almost be a controversy

between the prince of this world, and the prince of heaven to whom they belonged. But I beseech you, let there be a marked and decided difference between you and the world. Let your heart be steeped in godliness; let your life be saturated with religion. Take care that, “whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, you do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him.” So shall God see his great design subserved of making you to be baptized unto Jesus, “in the cloud and in the sea.”

Well, then, what shalt thou do to escape this death? What canst thou do to be saved? Why, sinner, in the first place, of thyself thou canst do nothing at all. But, in the second place, there is one—a Man, who can do all for thee. He is the Man Christ Jesus; if thou believest on him, filthy as thou art, and wretched, and outcast, and vile, thou shalt never see the second death, but shalt have eternal life abiding in thee; and when thou diest in this world, instead of black fiends to hound thee through the river, thou wilt have sweet angels playing o’er the stream, waiting to waft thee unto glory; thou wilt feel bright spirits fanning thy hot brow with their soft wings; thou wilt hear songs, sweet as the music of paradise, and when thy troubles are the strongest, thou wilt have a peace with God “which passeth all understanding;” a “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” which shall enable thee to “swallow up death in victory.” “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.” Poor, trembling, penitent sinner, put thine hand inside the hand of Christ; now fall on his mercy; “to-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart.” I beseech you for Christ’s sake, “be ye reconciled to God.” And if ye be penitents, may God give you faith that ye may be believers! As for the rest of you, remember, ere you go, I have told you no fable, but the truth. You may go away and say, “There is no hell.” Well, suppose there is none, believers will be as well off as you are. But suppose there is—and there is for a certainty—suppose yourselves in it, you cannot then suppose yourselves out of it any more. May God grant his blessing, for Jesus’ sake; turning many of you to righteousness.

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