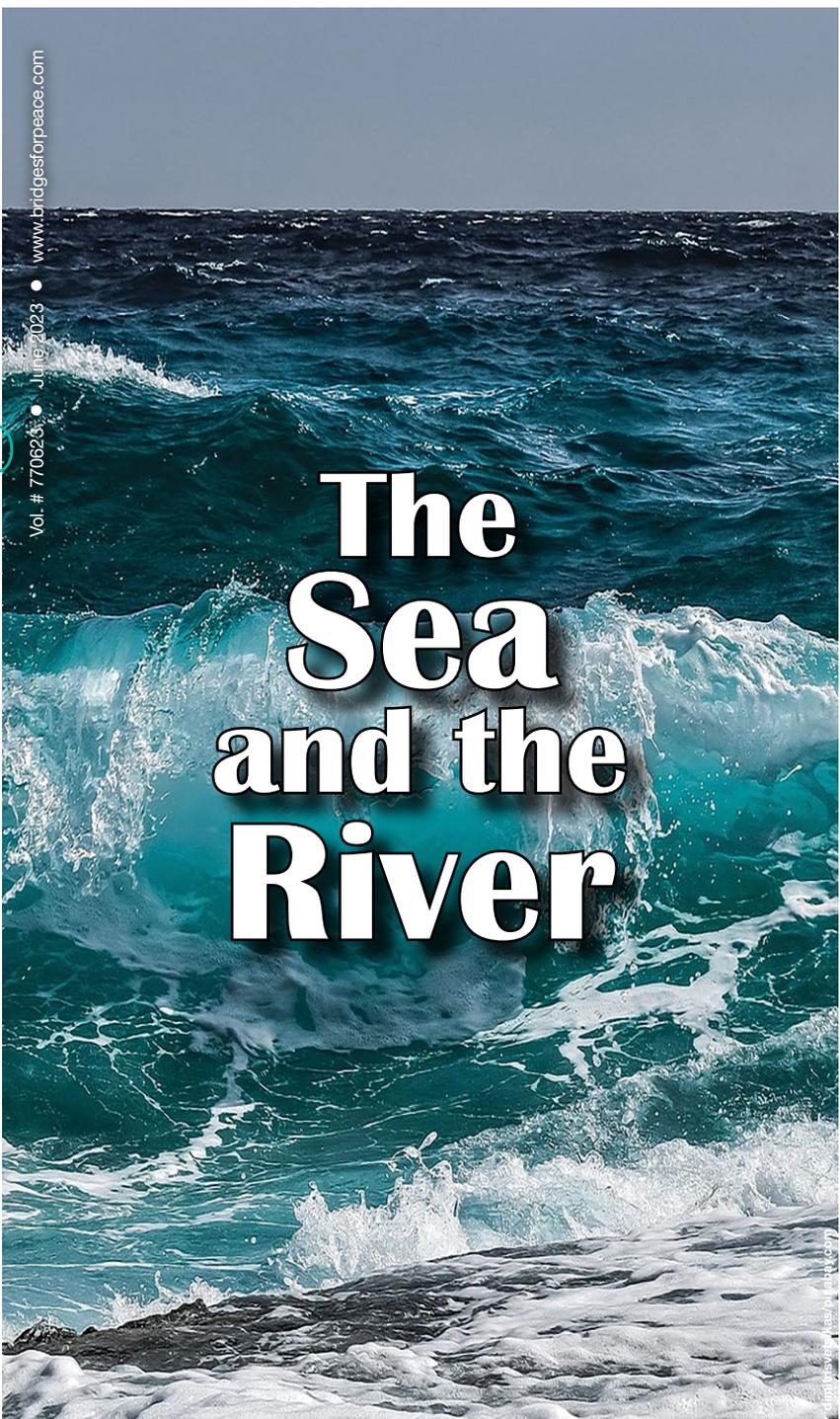


The Sea and the River

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IF SOMEONE WERE CHALLENGED with the task of choosing the greatest miracle found in the Bible, no doubt many people might settle on the splitting of the Red Sea and the Israelites crossing on dry land. The sheer drama of the miracle is astounding. Estimates easily put the Israelite population at between 1.5 to 3 million former slaves freed from bondage and led out by Moses after God's ten wonders (plagues) against Pharaoh and Egypt. Upon initial reading, this looks like the end of the story, a happily ever after triumph. First-time readers might be tempted to sit back in their armchairs with a grin and clap their hands together. God had won and delivered His people! Or had He?

If such first-time readers were to continue the Exodus account, they would be shocked to find a terrifying turn of events in the text that presented a dire problem. Pharaoh was not finished with Israel. The egotistical, totalitarian god-king refused to relent. Despite God warning Moses in Exodus 14:4 that Pharaoh was far from beaten and that God would "*gain honor over Pharaoh,*" first-time readers would no doubt arrive on the shore of the Red Sea with Israel white-knuckled with suspense. At the supposed moment of glorious liberation, a potential massacre of the Israelites loomed on the horizon. What was going to happen?

The climax intensified quickly. Readers can almost hear the war cries and the deafening thunder of chariots as Pharaoh assembled his vast chariot army (Exod. 14:5–9) and overtook the Children of Israel, who found themselves hemmed in by an impossible obstacle: the Red Sea. "*And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD*" (Exod. 14:10). It would seem that all

hope was lost. It would seem that the drowning of the newborn Hebrew boys in the Nile River (Exod. 1:22) would pale in comparison to the barbarous intent of Pharaoh's army. It would seem that the story would end with the wholesale slaughter of the Hebrew population, with the few survivors being worked to death as slaves.

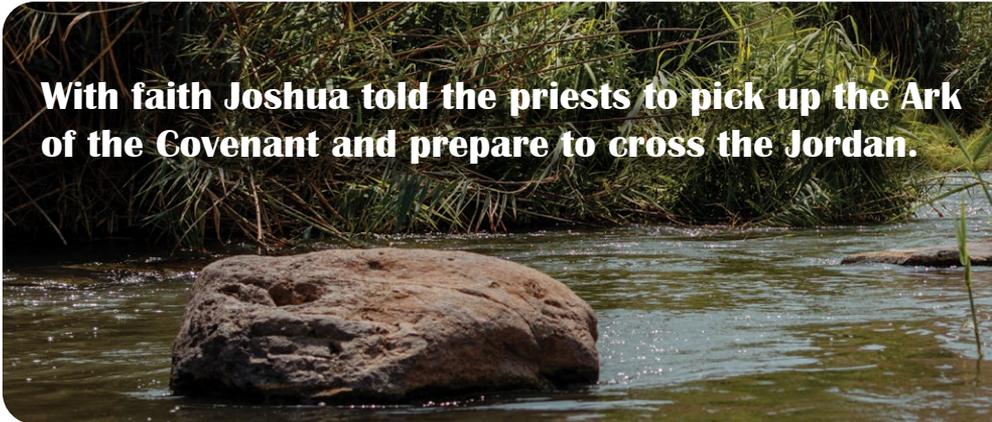
Yet like a trebuchet hurling a missile, God catapulted Israel to the finish line. He divided the Red Sea and the Children of Israel crossed over on dry ground while Pharaoh the dictator and his minion army were destroyed by the waters crashing in upon them after giving chase. *"So the LORD saved Israel 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"* (Exod. 14:30–31).

On the Shores Again

The miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea is the great climax of God's covenantal faithfulness to His people Israel, based forever on His word to Abraham (Gen. 12:2–3, 15), Isaac (Gen. 17:19–21) and Jacob (Gen. 28:3–4, 13–15). However, many people today often overlook another eventful aquatic crossing for Israel: the parting of the Jordan River in the book of Joshua. At first glance, this crossing seems elementary, like a trivial anticlimax when compared to a vast sea suddenly parting with its waters exploding high into the air and forming literal walls of liquid held back by the hand of God.

The reason why the Jordan River crossing is often downplayed in people's minds may come down to two potential issues. The first





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issue lies with the word “river” as opposed to “sea,” with the former conjuring up images of a narrow, winding body of water. The second potential issue is the state of the Jordan River today. At first glance, it often appears as if you could leap over it if you had a good running start. However, consider two other rivers. The Mississippi River is an average of 1 mile (1.6 km.) in width, while the Nile River is an average of 1.7 miles (2.7 km.) wide. These two rivers would be extremely complicated to ford for an entire nation of people on foot, livestock included. In fact, a river crossing is tremendously dangerous and the risk of drowning very high. Moreover, scholars believe that during the biblical period of Joshua, when the Israelites arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, they would have surveyed a body of water over 300 feet (100 m.) wide, possibly more. Joshua 3:15 also states that the river had overflowed its banks as it was the time of the harvest.

For the Children of Israel, the Jordan River would have seemed like another impossible obstacle to cross. God had saved the Israelites from Pharaoh and had led them through the wilderness for 40 years. Yet now, after the death of Moses and the appointment of Joshua, the people found themselves on the border of the Promised Land and yet another obstacle lay before them.

Scripture tells us that they encamped by the banks of the Jordan River for three days (Josh. 3:2). Then the officers roused the people, anticipating that God would somehow bring them into the Land. At this time, three things occurred. First, Joshua instructed the people to sanctify themselves for he believed God would work “wonders” for the nation (v. 5). What incredible faith Joshua



demonstrated! Second, Joshua told the priests to pick up the Ark of the Covenant and prepare to cross the Jordan (v. 6). Still Joshua's faith remained strong. Third, God Himself instructed Joshua to relay a message to the priests that they should step into the water with the Ark and stand in the Jordan (v. 13). What happened next echoed the Red Sea crossing miracle. The Jordan River divided (Josh. 3:14–17) and the Israelites crossed over on dry ground!

The God of Breakthroughs

Recently, a fellow Christian leader here in Israel reminded me, “God is the God of the breakthroughs.” We see a breakthrough in all its grandeur when we examine both the Red Sea and the Jordan River crossings. The parallels between the two accounts are uncanny and speak of God’s powerful, covenantal fidelity for His people. His steadfast love (*chesed*) is unchanging and endures. Let us examine another parallel.

In Exodus 7:5, God informed Moses that everything He would do to free the Israelites from bondage in Egypt had a purpose. Before any of His wonders struck Egypt, God said to Moses, “*And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.*” In other words, everything that would come to pass would reinforce who the true God is in the minds of both Egyptian and Israelite. Egypt, with all its armies, priests, temples, pyramids and gods would be reduced to misery by a nightmarish demonstration of God’s power, wonders and judgment.

**He divides the raging waters,
plants your feet on dry ground
and secures the breakthrough.**



Pharaoh no doubt believed Egypt to be a civilization of order and light. However, beneath a thin veil of greatness existed an Egypt shrouded by chaos and barbarism. The Egyptians were a civilization and people in bondage to their gods. From this position, they exploited the Israelites, enslaved them, slaughtered their children and destroyed their families in an attempt to annihilate their identity. Yet God brought chaos (plagues) into Pharaoh's order so that He could show His mighty wonders and remind all

of Egypt and Israel where true order comes from. For the pagan Egyptian, it must have felt like the end of the world with rivers of blood, swarms of frogs, waves of lice, the horrifying darkness and the terrible deaths of the firstborns. God had declared war against Pharaoh and against the gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12; Num. 33:4) to rescue His people.

Everything God did in the Exodus account was about restoring order and defeating chaos. This way, He received the glory and kept covenantal fidelity (Gen. 15:13–14; Jer. 31:35–37). The incredible thing is that in the aftermath of the plagues, many of the Egyptians joined the Israelites, convinced by the God of Israel's ultimate power over their impotent deities and their powerless Pharaoh to prevent the devastation of his empire (Exod. 12:36, 38).

Just like the Egyptians being confronted with the Lord God of Israel through the wonders and judgments executed on Egypt, the purpose of the Jordan River crossing is similar in nature: that the nations would know the mighty hand of the Lord and that Israel would fear and honor Him. *“For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever”* (Josh. 4:23–24).

The power of God pierced the darkness in the lands of Egypt like shards of light and the Egyptians quaked before His awesome wonders. Likewise, the light had crossed over the Jordan River, leaving the darkness of the wilderness behind. Now the chaos of the land in which the Canaanites dwelt would experience the mighty hand of the Lord as He brought order and judgment (see Gen. 15:16). The Israelites had crossed through the divided Red Sea to reach Sinai where they received the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), the Word of the Covenant. In a similar manner, Joshua led the Israelites through the divided Jordan River to enter the Land of the Covenant. In both cases, the Israelites were led out of chaos and introduced to God's order and will for them, which would have an impact on the nations.

This theme recurs throughout Scripture with God using Israel as a banner or signpost to the nations for them to take note and experience His glory and covenantal character (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 11:9–12, 19:18–25; Ps. 117). God's eternal covenant with Israel—despite

their disobedience at times in their history—is great news for all who call out to Him! It gives us assurance of His unchanging character (Ps. 105:8–11; Rom. 11:29). It is true that there are consequences for wayward actions, and sometimes it hurts as walking with God in this world is not for the faint of heart. Yet God is merciful and beckons to Israel to return to Him. He maps out His glorious will for them, while at the same time, calling them to walk in His ways. Scripture describes a future period that the world will see, both for Israel and the nations, with creation reaching its zenith in what we describe as the Messianic Age (Ezek. 36:22–38), where the nations will stream to Jerusalem to worship the King with Israel (Zech. 8:23, 14:16).

God is keeping His covenant with Israel and therefore He is covenant keeping with you. He removes the chaos in your life and brings everything under His order. He divides the raging waters, plants your feet on dry ground and secures the breakthrough.

Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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