

might travel day and night. ²²The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

14 The LORD said to Moses: ²Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. ³Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them." ⁴Then I will stiffen Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them, that I may gain glory through Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.

And they did so.

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his courtiers had

and guides the people through the untamed wilderness, signals the beginning and end of each day's journey, and provides a protective screen in times of peril. Although God is portrayed as speaking "from the midst of the cloud," as in Exod. 24:16, this should always be understood as figurative language. There never is a question of His actually residing inside the cloud or being identified with it. This is clear from 19:20, when God "came down" on Mount Sinai only after it had been enveloped in cloud (19:16).

THE MIRACLE AT THE SEA (14:1–31)

The liberated Israelites, having reached the edge of the wilderness, suddenly were ordered to change course. This new direction, fraught with great danger, was actually a tactic to mislead the Egyptians and lure them to their doom, the culminating defeat of Pharaoh. Egypt does not appear in Israelite history again for three centuries, in the time of King Solomon. The miracle of the parting, or splitting, of the sea (*k'ri-at yam suf*) left a profound impression on all subsequent Hebrew literature and became the paradigm for Israel's future redemption from exile. Most of the biblical passages that celebrate the crossing of the sea relate solely to God's sovereign control over nature and history and do not mention the drowning of the Egyptians.

²² לֹא־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם וָעֶמֶד
הָאֵשׁ לַיְלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם: פ

יד וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
²דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּשֻׁבוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי
פִי הַחַיֹּת בֵּין מִגְדֹּל וּבֵין הַיָּם לִפְנֵי בַּעַל
צִפּוֹן נִכְחוּ תַחֲנוּ עַל־הַיָּם: ³וַאֲמַר פִּרְעֹה
לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִבְכִּים הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ סֹגֵר
עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר: ⁴וַחֲזַקְתִּי אֶת־לֵב־פִּרְעֹה
וַרְדֵּף אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְבְּדָה בַּפִּרְעֹה וּבְכָל־
חֵילוֹ וַיֵּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן:

⁵ וַיֵּגְדֹל לְמַלְכָּם מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם וַיִּהְיֶה

REASON TO CHANGE COURSE (vv. 1–4)

2. Some of the place-names mentioned here, and repeated in Num. 33:7–8, cannot be identified with certainty. Baal-zephon was a port on the Mediterranean coast, suggesting a northern route from Succot for the Exodus.

3. astray The word translated as "astray" (*n'vukhim*) here has the sense of "disoriented" or "hopelessly confused." The Israelites, at God's behest (v. 2), have taken up a position where they are hemmed in on all sides—by Egyptian border fortresses, by the wilderness, and by the sea.

4. Pharaoh will be irresistibly drawn to give chase.

stiffen Pharaoh's heart See Comment to 4:21.

that I may gain glory Or "and I will . . ."

The Hebrew is unclear whether this is the purpose of the tactic or its consequence. Destruction of the wicked reaffirms the fundamental biblical principle that the world is governed by a divinely ordained moral order that ultimately must prevail. God is thereby glorified. (For a similar notion that God takes "glory" by humbling a foe, see Ezekiel's war of Gog, Ezek. 38–39.)

THE EGYPTIANS HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART AND GIVE CHASE (vv. 5–9)

5. the people had fled It is clear that the Israelites are not coming back, for the "three-day

a change of heart about the people and said, "What is this we have done, releasing Israel from our service?" ⁶He ordered his chariot and took his men with him; ⁷he took six hundred of his picked chariots, and the rest of the chariots of Egypt, with officers in all of them. ⁸The LORD stiffened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he gave chase to the Israelites. As the Israelites were departing defiantly, ⁹the Egyptians gave chase to them, and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea, near Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon.

¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹And they said to Moses, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to

לִבָּב פֶּרַעַה וַעֲבָדוּ אֶל-הָעַם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִה-נָּתַת עֲשִׂינוּ כִּי-שַׁלַּחְנוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַבְדָּנוּ: ⁶וַיֹּאסֶר אֶת-רֶכֶבּוֹ וְאֶת-עַמּוֹ לָקַח עִמּוֹ: ⁷וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ-מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בָּחוּר וְכָל רֶכֶב מִצְרַיִם וְשָׁלֹשׁ עַל-כֶּלֹּ: ⁸וַיִּחְזַק יְהוָה אֶת-לִב פֶּרַעַה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁנִי יֵצְאוּ בְּיַד רָמָה: ⁹וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁיגוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִים עַל-הֵימָּ כָּל-סוֹס רֶכֶב פֶּרַעַה וּפָרָשָׁיו וַחֲיִלּוֹ עַל-פִּי הַחִירָת לִפְנֵי בַעַל צֶפֶן: ¹⁰וּפֶרַעַה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגָה מִצְרַיִם | נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יְהוָה: ¹¹וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הַמַּבְלִי אֵינָּ קָבְרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר

journey" that Moses repeatedly requested has come and gone, and they have not returned.

6. took his men The word translated here as "men" (*am*) usually means "people." It can also mean an "armed force."

7. Pharaoh himself leads an elite corps of 600 chariots, apparently the standard military unit.

and the rest of the chariots The Hebrew reads, literally, "every chariot/all the chariots/all the chariotry of Egypt"—i.e., in addition to the elite corps. The chariot, a powerful and revolutionary innovation in the art of warfare, was introduced into Egypt from Canaan. Among the Hittites and Assyrians, the chariot crew was composed of a driver, a warrior, and a shieldbearer; but Egyptian chariots generally had only a two-man team. Drawn by two horses, it was used for massed charges. The charioteers, well trained and highly skilled, enjoyed high social standing and became a military aristocracy.

8. departing defiantly Literally, "with up-

raised hand," a metaphor drawn from the depiction of ancient Near Eastern gods menacingly brandishing a weapon in the upraised right hand. The confident Israelites are oblivious of the renewed Egyptian threat.

9. his horsemen Horseback riding was introduced into Egypt only in the 14th century B.C.E., and the use of mounted cavalry in warfare was unknown before the end of the 11th century B.C.E. Hence, the word understood here as "horseman" (*parash*) probably means "steed," as in other biblical texts. It also could be a term for "charioteer," one skilled at handling a horse.

THE PEOPLE'S REACTION; MOSES' RESPONSE
(vv. 10–14)

10. cried out to the LORD The self-assurance mentioned in verse 8 suddenly vanishes. Now only God can save them.

11. This rebuke is uttered with bitter irony, for Egypt was the classic land of tombs.

CHAPTER 14

10. the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing Often in life, we think we can escape our problems by running away, only to find our problems running after us (Baal Shem Tov).

Greatly frightened The Israelites still have a slave mentality, despite their having experienced God's redemptive power during the Ten Plagues (Ibn Ezra). No matter how much God has done for them, they still lack confidence in God's saving power.