

# Exodus 14:5-14

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-14/exodus-145-14/>

*Pharaoh and his assistants changed their minds about setting free the Israelites. So he prepared his best troops and chariots to pursue them and bring them back to Egypt. They catch up with them at the place where the LORD told the Israelites to camp. When the Israelites saw them, they became terrified and complained bitterly to Moses because he had led them to a place where there was no way of escape for them. Moses told them not to fear, for the LORD was about to do a mighty work.*

Verses 5-9 describe Pharaoh's response when he was told that the people had fled. First, *Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people.* The reality of allowing the Israelites to exit Egypt fell upon them and their minds ("heart") were changed concerning this decision. So, *they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"* It was similar to our saying, "What in the world have we done! We actually let the Israelites go!" Perhaps the reality of the economic impact losing the Hebrew slave labor was being currently felt and dealt with, while memory of the plagues had begun to fade.

As a result of the turning of their hearts, *he (Pharaoh) made his chariot ready and took his people with him.* In particular, *he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.* The "select chariots" were probably similar to those called "special forces" in the military. That this was an all-out effort on Pharaoh's part can be seen in the fact that he deployed all of his chariots and military officers to bring the Israelites back or kill them in the wilderness. Being true to His word, *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.* The mention of the Israelites "going out boldly" (literally "with a high hand") might imply that they left Egypt with an arrogant and boastful attitude, possibly thinking that they could take the credit for the victory over the Egyptians. But such illusions were to be short-lived, because *the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.*

Egyptian forces found the Israelite camp where the LORD told them to go and then surrounded them so that there was no way out. Then as *Pharaoh drew*

*near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened.* The sight of the Egyptian army hastening towards them turned their apparent arrogance into overwhelming fear. Correctly, *the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord* for deliverance.

Then, their fear caused them to blame Moses by saying *Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?* There is irony in this question because Egypt was full of graves. The Egyptians were obsessed with death. The inscriptions found in the ruins along the Nile are testimony to this. The second question is equally ironic – *Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?* Moses did not “deal” with the Israelites “in this way” – the LORD did. And He did in response to their request for deliverance.

Though they were rebuking Moses, they were really showing a lack of faith in the LORD. They had already seen His boundless power in the plagues, but their fear made them forget what had happened. The accusations continue in the next question – *Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’?* It is sad that they remembered this previously unrecorded conversation, while forgetting that it was they who desired deliverance, as well as forgetting all of the LORD’s fulfilled promises and miraculous deliverance.

We see in action here a stark illustration of our human tendency to react to our current circumstances as though that is all that is or ever has been. The Egyptians had just lived through God’s judgement through the ten plagues, and now their focus on their current economic loss apparently has completely overshadowed what they might have learned through that experience. The Israelites saw the same plagues that delivered them, and now are locked up with fear of the Egyptians, causing them to reason that *it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.* They appear to have completely forgotten the misery of slavery from which they cried to be delivered, as well as the LORD’s deliverance.

Of course their exclamation is more an expression of fear than a true rationale. Moses’ response to the people recognizes this. Moses does not reason with them. He directs them. His instruction is direct and firm – *Do not fear!* The Hebrew is more abrupt – “Stop fearing!” Moses has been assured by the LORD that He is in complete control of the situation, so he commanded them to *stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today.* He commanded them also to “stand by” (or, “stand up” as

opposed to cowering in fear) and “see” what the LORD is about to do for them.

Moses wanted all of the Israelites to be eyewitnesses to the fact that their deliverance was not of their own doing but a mighty act of their sovereign God. The word “salvation” is better translated “deliverance” or “rescue.” The deliverance was going to be so complete that *the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever*. This, from a human point of view, was going to be impossible. But there was another aspect to the crisis that made all the difference – *the Lord will fight for you while you keep silent*.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>5</sup>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 we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” <sup>6</sup>So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; <sup>7</sup>and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the *other* chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>Then the Egyptians chased after them *with* all the horses *and* chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.**

**<sup>10</sup>As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>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? <sup>12</sup>Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”**

**<sup>13</sup>But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. <sup>14</sup>The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.”**