



Glory over Pharaoh

Jonathan K. Dodson | Exodus 13:17-14:31 | July 4, 2021

In a recent interview, actress Margot Robbie was asked if she had an impossible question. She said, I want to know *what is outside the universe*. If we knew the answer to that question, it would change *everything*. Why? We'd have an outside perspective on the world! Here is a story with perspective outside ourselves. It shows us the fickleness of humanity, faithfulness of YHWH, victory of God.

Fickleness of Israel

Pharaoh finally lets Israel go. They take the natural route out into the wilderness, away from the Red Sea. But God intervenes to change their direction. Why? Because he sees further and deeper. *Further*, he knows the warmongering Philistines who lay ahead are no match for the inexperienced Israelites. He sees around the corner; we can't see around the next second. And even if we could, it's no guarantee we would make the right decision. Why? We're fickle, can't even discern our own motives. But God sees *deeper*, "[Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt](#)" (13:17). He reroutes them because he knows they're fickle, how easily they'll settle for a house of *slavery*. We do the same thing don't we? We get stressed and overeat, anxious and doomscroll. When life gets hard, return to that addictive habit instead of leaning into God's presence. Although we're free in Christ, we often live as though we're enslaved. We *need* someone who sees further and deeper. Seeing around the corner and into their hearts, the Lord redirects Israel to camp beside the sea. With Egypt bearing down on them Israel says to Moses, "[Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?](#)" They're **afraid** for their lives, and who wouldn't be? It's a natural response: fight or flight, the only two options. But not if you have an outside perspective. God presents a third option, *Fear not*. Not a chest-thumping fear not, but a take-heart fear not. Jesus says this often to his disciples, not as a rebuke but as a comfort. But why shouldn't they fear? Something greater than their fear is present. But Israel leans into fear, fear leads to fantasy, "[For it would have been better for us to serve](#)

the Egyptians than to die” (12). Israel’s vision problem resurfaces. They cry out: it would have been better to *serve* the Egyptians! But the last time they cried out, it was to be *delivered* from the Egyptians (2:23) See fear has turned to fantasy about their former life. And fantasy leads to self-deceit, Didn’t we tell you to leave us alone to serve the Egyptians? Actually, they never said that. When we’re afraid, it can be tempting to romanticize the past. You’re in a tough season in marriage. You’re not communicating well, fighting often. It feels hopeless and your spouse blurts out, “Marriage was so much better before kids.” Really? Truth is, we were broke back then; miserable in the career, desperately wanted kids. But poof, in an instant, history is rewritten. We feed the fantasy and exchange the truth for a lie. We also do it with community: relationships were way better at the other church. If I was in a different city group, community would be awesome. Fantasy leads to deceit. We even do it with Jesus: life was so much better before I was a Christian. That enslaving habit wasn’t that bad. Suddenly slavery looks good! We must shatter our fantasies to live in reality. *Fear not. Fantasize Not. Because the omniscient God has you right where he wants you.* And until we adopt his perspective, live in reality, we’ll fail to love the spouse in front of us, the church, the community, the city right among us. Don’t you see. We can’t see far enough or deep enough. We desperately need a perspective outside ourselves.

Faithfulness of YHWH

Pharaoh hears Israel is wandering the wilderness. He assumes their God has capriciously abandoned them, like Egyptian gods did, so he changes his mind and marshals his army: 600 choice chariots, horsemen, soldiers, and overtakes Israel at their camp. Bloodthirsty Egyptians bearing down on one side, with the impassable Red Sea on the other. Why would God lead Israel into such a difficult place? He reveals why: And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD” (Ex 14:4). It’s not enough to have an omniscient God; we need an *omnipotent* God. A God who sees all *and* has power over all. He hardens Pharaohs’ heart and puts Israel in an impossible situation *to get glory over Pharaoh*. Might object, isn’t that narcissistic? Not if you’re God. We wouldn’t expect a star athlete to hold

back in the playoffs because he doesn't want to show off, or a first chair violinist to play off key so they don't sound better than the 2nd chair. We expect them to perform to get glory over the other players, to perform at their highest level. Why then would we expect God to do anything less? Because getting glory over humanity means God is greater than us. It puts us in our place. Romans 9 elaborates: "[For this very purpose I have raised you \(Pharaoh\) up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.](#)" So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But [who are you, O man, to answer back to God? \(17-20\).](#) There comes a time to put away objections, admit our moral, intellectual, and ontological inferiority, and with a hand over our mouth say to the one outside the universe, *There is none like you, O Lord.* And if you can't do that, then you've made a god of yourself, one with Pharaoh. Now the stunning thing about God's pursuit of his glory is that it secures our eternal good. Israel sees only two options: fight or flight. But God wants to show us a third way: [stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today.](#) If we fight on our own or flee into fantasies, we don't get to see the salvation of the Lord. The omniscient Lord puts us in hard places to reveal his glory and do us good. I recently heard a woman describe how hard it's been to love people over the past 15 months. She described the temptation to cower or criticize, fight or flight. But then she said, *I've discovered the more dependent I am on Jesus, the more I see of the faithfulness of Jesus.* The less dependent I am, the less I see of the faithfulness of Jesus. She learned to stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord. To trust his pursuit of his glory, knowing it is for her good. We need more than perspective; we need a power outside ourselves, which brings us to victory of God.

The Victory of God

Israel is between a rock and a hard place. As the Egyptian hordes close in, God launches his countermove: the pillar of cloud (defensive) and the rod of Moses (offensive). The pillar of **cloud** moves from in front of Israel to behind them, creating a protective barrier. In fact, we're told [And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one](#)

coming near the other all night (14:20). The cloud shines light upon Israel (mercy), leaving the Egyptians in darkness (justice). The glory of the Lord. This move creates the delay Israel needs for YHWH's offensive move. Moses lifts his **rod** to part the Red Sea. A rod? Why not move the waters like God moved the pillar of cloud? Because when a pharaoh was installed as king, he was given a rod imbued with the power of Osiris, the most powerful god in the Egyptian mythology. So, when Moses defeats Pharaoh with a rod, it's unequivocal: *the victory of God over Egypt's greatest god*. It snaps the spell of Egypt by demonstrating the power of God to Israel. And sure enough, they walk through the sea, a wall of water on the right and the left, with the glory of God beneath their feet. His glory for their good. The third option: *Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord*. Egyptian chariot wheels literally come off; they declare, *The Lord fights for them!* Now they know. There is none like him. YHWH is the Pharaoh-Osiris toppler. Moses stretches the rod back over the waters, and they close in on the Egyptian army, and not one remained. The victory of God over the powers of Egypt secures salvation for his people. You see: it's not enough to have a persepcite outside ourselves; we need a power greater than ourselves. Otherwise, we'll fall the for the fantasy. Wander back into slavery. We need, not just the rescue of God but the power of God. It's not enough to be forgiven of sin; we need victory over Satan to be truly free. Colossians 2 tells us we are made alive together with Christ because [he cancelled our debt \(rescue from slavery\) and triumphed over the powers](#) (glory over pharaoh). Why does he put us between a rock and a hard place? To see deeper and further, to snap the spell of Satan, to keep us from wandering back into the house of slavery. And we're told, [Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses](#) (14:31). How should we respond? Fear and belief. Fear the Power over the powers. Believe, your debt is cancelled, the powers overthrown, alive together with Christ, your great exodus. Fear and believe, and show the world the one outside the universe.