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Israel's Crossing

Hebrews 11:29

“By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned”

The author of Hebrews wants us to know that the faith he has been describing in **Hebrews 11** is not just for the big names (Moses, Abraham etc) but is for all “the people” of God.

Many of these Israelites later rebelled against God in the desert, but the crossing of the Red Sea is still a foundational part of Israel’s identity as the people of faith.

Throughout the Old Testament it is remembered as a foundational part of Israelite identity, and in the New Testament we are encouraged to understand our Christian identity through the lens of the crossing of the Red Sea.

Israel’s crossing served as a reminder to the people of Israel of their identity in God, rooted in their faith. They regularly referenced it throughout the Old Testament in song, prayers and also have similar crossing experiences (e.g. Joshua 3). We are also encouraged in scripture to learn from Israel’s crossing and the way it helps us to understand our own identity through faith in Jesus (**1 Cor 10:1-2**).

Focusing on the water in the crossing story helps us see the distinctive identity of God’s people. It helps us see the significance of what Jesus has done for us.

The water forms barriers in 3 directions:

1. The people go through the water
2. The people go out of slavery
3. The people go into God’s promises

1. Through the water

The Israelites were completely trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. Although they were armed, they had no way to defend themselves against the strength of the Egyptians. But God used his servant Moses to open a way through the waters and to lead them through.

In **1 Corinthians 10:1-2** Paul uses Israel's crossing as an example for Christians. His use of the word "baptised" means we are to see their journey through the water as a precursor or "type" of Christian baptism.

Like the Israelites, we were trapped with nowhere to go, but God saved us through the water. His servant Jesus opened a way for us to escape death. The water of baptism does not save us, just as simply going through the water did not mean the Israelites were saved when they rebelled against God in the desert. It is faith that is important. Nonetheless, baptism is an important reminder of our identity as God's people, which we can all look back on as a reminder that God has saved me from my old life.

Christianity is invitational, not exclusive. Faith is what saves and all people are invited to believe and go through the water.

2. Out of slavery

After the Israelites come through the water they sing. The focus of their songs is on God's victory rather than on the miracle of the water. God's intention was not simply to save the Israelites through the backdoor, but to completely destroy the Egyptians in a head-on battle. The water closes over Egypt's army, destroying the Israelite's enemies and putting them beyond the reach of any further slavery. The water forms a barrier which cuts Israel off from Egypt.

Likewise Jesus saves us by completely destroying the sin which held us captive. We look back from the safety of the opposite shore and see our sin drowned by the waves and a wall of water separating us from our enemies. We are no longer slaves, we are free.

3. Into freedom

Although the Israelites walked through the water, many did not then live a life of faith. We can be tempted like them to go back to Egypt and live our own way. Don't go back

to Egypt, there is nothing back through the water except death and slavery, focus your eyes on Jesus and walk forward into freedom. We praise God for his victory!

Questions:

- (Optional) What was a life event that most influenced who you are today? The crossing of the Red Sea was like that for the Israelites. (Might be useful for encouraging sharing, but the point is really to understand that the crossing formed the Israelite identity)
- The writer to the Hebrews wants us to know we can all live as people of faith - what do you personally find hard about living a life of faith?
- How does it help to think about baptism as our crossing through the water? How does remembering your baptism help you understand your identity in Jesus? (Try not to get caught up in discussions around baptism and try to focus on how it helps us understand faith!)
- The Israelites were rescued out of slavery by God defeating the Egyptians' power (their army) and their control (the water closed up behind the Israelites so Egypt couldn't follow). What does it mean for your life that Jesus doesn't just help you escape, but has completely destroyed the power and control of sin?
- The Israelites were freed in order to live in freedom. When are we tempted to go back to our old lives (Egypt), and how do we fix our eyes forward so we live for God?



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