Beginning of Freedom
Exodus 14:21-30
SS Lesson for 11/17/2013

Devotional Scripture: Gal 5:13-21

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERRIDE AND APPROACH TO LESSON
Key Verse: Exodus 14:30
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary
Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson
LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

GOD’S POWER THROUGH DIVINE INTERVENTION (EXODUS 14:21-25)
God's power manifested through nature (21-22)
- God's power over nature is manifested through Jesus' walking on water (John 6:19-21)
- God's power over nature is manifested through calming the storm (Luke 8:24-25)
- God's power over nature is manifested because the Heavens declare it (Ps 19:1)
- God's power over nature is manifested because God's glory is over all the earth (Ps 57:5)
- God's power over nature is manifested because His creations declare it (Rom 1:20)
God's power manifested through deliverance (23-25)
- Deliverance from fear into sonship (Rom 8:15)
- Deliverance from sin (John 8:31-36)
- Deliverance that is continual and proven (2 Cor 1:10)
- Deliverance from all troubles (Ps 34:19)
- Deliverance from trials (2 Peter 2:9)
- Deliverance that is part of the new covenant (Heb 9:15)

GOD’S FREEDOM THROUGH VICTORIOUS RESOLUTION (EXODUS 14:26-30)
God's freedom through destroying the Egyptians (26-28)
- Destruction by the Almighty God (Isa 13:6)
- Destruction because of man's sinful nature (Gal 6:8)
- Destruction by a just God (2 Thess 1:6-9)
- Destruction of the ungodly (2 Peter 3:7)
- Destruction because of detestable practices (Ezek 6:11-13)
- Destruction because of wickedness (Ps 94:23)
God's freedom manifested through salvation (29-30)
- A salvation that God appointed through Jesus (1 Thess 5:9)
- A salvation Jesus will bring with Him at His second coming (Heb 9:28)
- A salvation through justification by Jesus' blood (Rom 5:9)
- A salvation that is gained through belief in Jesus (John 6:40)
- A salvation that bring eternal life (John 11:25)
- A salvation that is hidden in Jesus (Col 3:3-4)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHT FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH
CONCLUSION FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR
Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson
The lesson reviews the Beginning of Freedom for His people. The study’s aim is to see how God delivered Israel from Egypt and cut off any way for them to go back. The study’s application is to realize that in Christ, we are cut off from any power the world might have over us and to apply this principle in our daily life in place of the spiritually negative attractions of the world.

Key Verse: Exodus 14:30
30 So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary
As the Egyptians pursued the Israelites into the dry sea bed, in the morning watch (sometime between 3 a.m. and dawn) the Lord slowed their progress and they were panic-stricken. According to Psalm 77:16-19 God caused a rainstorm, lightning, thunder, and an earthquake. Perhaps the rain quickly soaked the sea floor, which caused the wheels of their chariots to swerve. There was also the noise and buffeting of the wind that was banking the waters. The Egyptians sought to escape, realizing that the God of the Hebrews (the Lord) was fighting for Israel (cf. Exodus 14:14). At daybreak the sea water went together again and the Egyptians were swept... into the sea (lit., “thrown downward”). The crashing walls of water crushed the Egyptians in the sea so that not a single soldier survived. God delivered His people through... dry land, while He destroyed the Egyptians in the sea; their dead bodies floating ashore were a grim reminder of the awesome power of God in judgment. As a result the Israelites... feared and trusted the Lord. The people often fluctuated between trust and complaining, between belief and unbelief (Exodus 4:31; 5:21; 14:10-12, 31; 15:24; 16:2-4; 17:2-3).

Commentary from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary
The locality of this famous passage has not yet been, and probably never will be, satisfactorily fixed. Some place it in the immediate neighborhood of Suez, either above it, as Niebuhr and the Rationalists do, across a very narrow inlet, which is fordable at ebb tide, and about two-thirds of a mile wide, or immediately below it, where there are extensive shallows, also fordable at ebb; where, they say, the part of the sea is most likely to be affected by a strong northeast wind;’ where the road from the defile of Migdol (now Muktala) leads directly to this point, and where the sea, not above two miles broad, could be crossed in a short time. This is Dr. Robinson’s theory (‘Biblical Researches,’ vol. i., pp. 81-86) of the passage, which he describes as a semi-miraculous event, produced on the curvature at the head of the gulf, by a northeast wind; because the Hebrew term denotes any wind from the eastern quarter. ’A strong northeast wind, acting here upon the ebb tide,’ says he, ‘would necessarily have the effect to drive out the waters from the small arm of the sea, which runs up by Suez, and also from the end of the gulf itself, leaving the shallower portions dry; while the more northern part of the arm, which was anciently both broader and deeper than at present, would still remain covered with water.’ In this way-namely, by the wind acting with supernatural impetus upon the ebb tide, and driving out the waters during the night to a far greater extent than usual—he thinks the passage was effected. It was an extraordinary ebb, produced by natural means supernaturally increased. But being nothing more than an unusual ebb, it could not be above three or four hours’ duration; and although the Israelites had probably been prepared, the moment the ford promised safe footing, to march forward; yet, as the action of the wind must have been continued a considerable time before that required effect took place, the passage could not be commenced until midnight, and by sunrise it was completed-thus occupying only two hours. ’As the Israelites numbered more than two million persons, besides flocks and herds, they would of course be able to pass but slowly. If the part left dry were broad enough to enable them to cross in a body 1,000 abreast, which would require a space of more than half a mile in width (and is perhaps the largest supposition admissible), still the column would...
be more than 2,000 persons in depth, and, in all probability could not have extended less than two miles. It would then have occupied at least an hour in passing over its own length, or in entering the sea; and deducting this from the largest time intervening before the Egyptians must also have entered the sea, there will remain only time enough, under the circumstances, for the body of the Israelites to have passed, at the most, over a space of three or four miles.'

With all respect for the opinion of this learned and reflecting traveler, who is supported by Havernick, Ritter, Wilkinson, Stanley, etc., we cannot accept his solution of this important question, which seems to leave out of view a number of circumstances-minute, indeed, but essential to the full consideration of the case. The sea at the point where the passage was made must have been much broader than it is at Suez, because both the Israelites and the Egyptians were on its bared bed at one time. There is no reason to suppose the lapse of a considerable period before the violent action of the wind produced the intended effect; because the result seems to have been immediately consequent on the lifting up of Moses' rod both at the beginning and the end. Instead of the waters being driven out by its resistless impulsion further than during an ordinary ebb, they were divided, or diagonally cut, avert themselves. The word bears the signification of cleaving by a blow or violence. Septuagint, eschisthee to hudoor, seas to be a "wall unto the Israelites on their right hand and on their left." There is an inscription on the rocks at Sinai which, if Foster renders it aright, is to this effect, 'Turned into dry land the sea, the Hebrews flee through the sea' ('Sinai Photographed'). And although it is said that "a strong east wind was used instrumentally, it seems to have been employed not so much for the separation of the waters, as to dry the wet sand. Kadim denotes the character rather than the quarter of the gale-a parching wind, a shurkiyeh, and hence, it is rendered Notos by the Septuagint-not an ordinary or periodical wind, but a special miraculous agent. A sufficient time would thus be afforded, from sunset to sunrise, to conduct over the bed of the sea the mighty multitude of men, women, and children, with their flocks and herds.

Influenced by these views, the vast majority who have examined the spot reject the theory of Robinson, and fix the passage about 10 or 12 miles further down the shore, at Wady Tawarik, where the sea, reckoning by a straight line from the base of Jebel Attakah, at the northern corner of the Badiyah to the Ras Mesallah, on the eastern or Arabian shore, is from 6 ½ to 8 geographical miles. The time of the miracle was the whole night, at the season of the year, too, when the night would be about its average length. There was thus ample time for the passage of the Israelites from any part of the valley, especially considering their excitement and animation by the gracious and wonderful interposition of Providence in their behalf (Wilson's 'Lands,' vol. i., p. 154), Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Trogus Pompeius in Justin, xxxvi., 2; Artapanus in Eusebius, ix., 27, record the tales told by the ancient inhabitants of the place respecting the marvelous passage of the Israelites through the divided waters). Local tradition also confirms this view; because the names still given to the most prominent objects in the neighborhood bear a direct reference to the passage of the Israelites. Wady Tawarik is called also by the Arabs Wady Musa. Jebel Attakah signifies, in Arabic, 'the mount of deliverance;' the Wady Badiyah, 'the valley of the miraculous;' Wady el Tih, 'the valley of wandering,' etc. The locality of this famous passage, however, it must be acknowledged, is still an unsolved problem; for, from the many geological changes that have taken place in the bed, as well as on the shores, of the Gulf of Suez, even those who have carefully explored the topography of that region, have come to very different conclusions; so that the actual spot at which the Israelites entered on the bared channel remains, and probably will forever remain, a question vexata in Biblical literature.

It is a favourite idea with Rationalistic writers that this record is not strictly historical. 'The narrative of the passage of the Red Sea must not be viewed as literal history. Later traditions exaggerated the event, surrounding it with wonder' (see Davidson's 'Introduction,' vol. i., p. 225). Accordingly, they Endeavour in two ways to impugn the miraculous character of this passage, either by averting that Moses took advantage of a strong ebb tide to transport his people to the Arabian strand, or by comparing it with Alexander's crossing over the Bay of Pamphylia, in his Persian Expedition. In regard to the first, who can be so credulous as to suppose that a stranger like Moses possessed a familiar acquaintance with the time and extent of the flux and reflux of the tide, which enabled him to calculate with confidence on profiting by them on a sudden and perilous emergency, while the king of Egypt and his whole army, though native
inhabitants of the country, knew nothing of any expected extraordinary subsidence of the waters. With respect to the other point, there was evidently nothing miraculous in the passage of the Macedonian hero, as Josephus, who relates it, clearly insinuates; but Callisthenes, adverting to a favourable breeze from the north, which drove away the water in the shallows, thereby affording an easy passage, represented it, with courtly adulation, as the wind doing homage to Alexander as a demigod, by pioneering his way, (Eustathius, 'Notes on Iliad,' iii.). Assuming the veracity of Moses, however, it seems impossible for the human mind to evade the force of this miracle; and from the numerous allusions made to it in Scripture-the profound and awe-inspiring impression it produced upon contemporary nations, as well as the figurative use which the bards of Israel make of it in describing the greatness of Almighty power-it must have been a miracle of stupendous character-or unparalleled magnitude. What was the design of it? There was no absolute need of the Israelites being led through the Red Sea; because there is a route vastly more expeditious, as well as practicable, by which modern travelers are every season penetrating the depths of the Arabian desert. Still there was a necessity for this miracle-not, indeed, a physical, but a moral necessity-the completion of the work which the preceding plagues on Egypt had to a certain extent accomplished, by the revelation of the power and grace of the true God; and the nations were to be taught that the gods of the pagan, even those of the civilized Egyptians, were nothing compared to Yahweh, the Creator and Governor of the whole earth. The Israelites could have been led to Canaan without a miracle; but there would have been no such striking manifestations of God's omnipotence-of His grace and His paternal interest in them. The divine legation of Moses was authenticated by the silent but emphatic testimony of Heaven. The confidence of the Israelites in his mission and authority was strongly, though with many of them but temporarily awakened; and in the astonishing phenomena of that eventful night terminated by the judicial destruction of the Egyptians, demonstration was made to the senses of two million people, of which the effect described was natural and legitimate. "Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses" (Ex 14:31). The apostle Paul, referring to this memorable fact in the history of the ancient Church, says that the Israelites were all "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor 10:2). The conjunction of the cloud with the sea suggests that in these words there may be a literal reference to the spray, which might fall upon the people from the o'er-canopying cloud, and from the liquid walls on their right and their left. But the import of this apostolic declaration is, that the Israelites were baptized unto Moses as unto a typical Mediator, and consequently, by that dedication were bound to yield obedience to the divine dispensation which was soon to be inaugurated with them by his ministry. Further, it also clearly denotes that, in the passage of the literal Israel through the Red Sea, we have a figure of the same kind with the initiatory seal of the covenant of grace-a type of "the washing of regeneration," and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, of which baptism is only the sign. (See Jamieson's 'Use of Sacred History,' vol. i., p. 292.)

**Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson**

The outline of the lesson was adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided.</td>
<td>God's Power Through Divine Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians</td>
<td>God's Freedom Through Victorious Resolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

To understand the miraculous nature of the exodus events, one must look back to the very beginnings of the book of Exodus itself. In the first place, young Moses was saved from a death sentence by divine circumstances to be reared in Pharaoh's household (Exodus 2:1-10; Acts 7:20-22). But at age 40, Moses killed an Egyptian overseer and had to flee for his own life. He then spent 40 years as a shepherd before being confronted by God in the burning bush (Exodus 2:11-3:22; Acts 7:23-32). Moses thus became the man to lead God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 3-6). The miracles of the plagues reached a climax with the death of the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 7-11). When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them by a northern route, the most direct way to Canaan (13:17); rather, he led them toward the south "around by the desert road toward the Red Sea" (13:18). By the time the Israelites "camped at Etham on the edge of the desert" (13:20), the people had seen many miracles performed by God through Moses. Thus they should have been confident in the outcome of what was coming next. When we read Exodus 14:2, we see that God had deliberately led the people into an impossible position (from a human point of view), with their backs to the sea. God placed Israel in this position—with no apparent way to escape the Egyptian army—in order that he might show his glory to the Israelites. An Israelite countermarch tricked Pharaoh into thinking that the Israelites were confused in their attempt to escape into the desert (v. 3). God used this opportunity to "harden Pharaoh's heart" so Pharaoh would chase after the Israelites with his army (vv. 4-6). This he did, with his 600 best chariots plus many other chariots and horsemen (vv. 7-9). The Israelites reacted with great fear and consternation (v. 10). With sarcasm, "They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?'" (v. 11). Time for another miracle!

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

It was one thing for Israel to walk out of Egypt and head for the Promised Land. But how were they to escape the grasp of Pharaoh and his army, whom they could see following them? They had not at this point in their journey put enough distance between themselves and Egypt to be securely away. They were not beyond the reach of Pharaoh's horses and chariots. They had a long way to go, and the Red Sea was just ahead of them. There seemed to be no way they could escape. God's way of deliverance from our problems is not always obvious. We can apply our common sense and do what we can see we need to do in order to deal with adversity, but sometimes there seems to be no good way to proceed. We often have to wait and see what God will do. When God indicates the way to go, we then must respond immediately.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)


21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24 Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. 25 And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."
God's power manifested through nature (21-22)

*God's power over nature is manifested through Jesus' walking on water (John 6:19-21)*

19 When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." 21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

*God's power over nature is manifested through calming the storm (Luke 8:24-25)*

24 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. 25 "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

*God's power over nature is manifested because the Heavens declare it (Ps 19:1)*

19 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

*God's power over nature is manifested because God's glory is over all the earth (Ps 57:5)*

5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

*God's power over nature is manifested because His creations declare it (Rom 1:20)*

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

God's power manifested through deliverance (23-25)

*Deliverance from fear into sonship (Rom 8:15)*

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

*Deliverance from sin (John 8:31-36)*

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

*Deliverance that is continual and proven (2 Cor 1:10)*

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

*Deliverance from all troubles (Ps 34:19)*

19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;

*Deliverance from trials (2 Peter 2:9)*

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.
Deliverance that is part of the new covenant (Heb 9:15)

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

God's Freedom Through Victorious Resolution (Exodus 14:26-30)

26 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen."
27 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.
28 Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained.
29 But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.
30 So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

God's freedom through destroying the Egyptians (26-28)

Destruction by the Almighty God (Isa 13:6)

6 Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.

Destruction because of man's sinful nature (Gal 6:8)

8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Destruction by a just God (2 Thess 1:6-9)

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Destruction of the ungodly (2 Peter 3:7)

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Destruction because of detestable practices (Ezek 6:11-13)

11 "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out "Alas!" because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel, for they will fall by the sword, famine and plague. 12 He that is far away will die of the plague, and he that is near will fall by the sword, and he that survives and is spared will die of famine. So will I spend my wrath upon them. 13 And they will know that I am the Lord, when their people lie slain among their idols around their altars, on every high hill and on all the mountaintops, under every spreading tree and every leafy oak-places where they offered fragrant incense to all their idols.

Destruction because of wickedness (Ps 94:23)

23 He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the Lord our God will destroy them.
God's freedom manifested through salvation (29-30)

A salvation that God appointed through Jesus (1 Thess 5:9)
9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A salvation Jesus will bring with Him at His second coming (Heb 9:28)
28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

A salvation through justification by Jesus' blood (Rom 5:9)
9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

A salvation that is gained through belief in Jesus (John 6:40)
40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

A salvation that bring eternal life (John 11:25)
25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

A salvation that is hidden in Jesus (Col 3:3-4)
3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh

From the series: Exodus: The Birth of the Nation

The destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea causes us to look seriously at the judgment of God. Several principles of divine judgment are evident in the events of the exodus as described in our text. The judgment of God begins sooner than His final destruction. To put it differently, the judgment of God begins with the hardening of men’s hearts. While the final destruction of the army of Pharaoh came at the time Moses lifted his hand over the sea and it came crashing down on the enemies of Israel, that judgment was already at work much earlier. The drowning of the charioteers was but the final blow of divine judgment, a judgment which had begun a year or more earlier. God had begun to judge the Egyptians at the time that Moses returned to Egypt and appeared before Pharaoh, and the plagues were commenced. Each plague was a judgment of the gods of the Egyptians (cf. Exod. 12:12). For about a year, the ten plagues had been poured out upon Egypt. The destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea was the culminating act of divine judgment. But how is it possible, given ten previous plagues and the present perils of entering into the Red Sea, that the Egyptians could so blindly persist in their oppression of God’s people, and in their indifference to God’s warnings? The biblical answer, found in Exodus and confirmed in other biblical texts, is that they persisted to pursue their own destruction because their hearts were hardened. A little investigation in a Bible concordance will show that reference to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (and sometimes his officials’ or his army’s hearts) occurs 14 times in Exodus. Of these 14 instances, six refer to God hardening Pharaoh’s heart (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8), three refer to Pharaoh hardening his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34), and five are indefinite (7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35). From these passages and others, we can identify several characteristics of hardening.
(1) The hardening the heart is a process. Pharaoh’s heart was not hardened once, it was hardened repeatedly. Hardening is thus a process, not a one-time event.

(2) The hardening of the heart involves both divine and human initiative. On the one hand, God hardens a man’s heart, yet, on the other hand, a man hardens his own heart. When God hardens a man’s heart, He does not cause a man to think and to do other than what that individual is inclined to do. God does not harden a man’s heart by making him want to sin. Pharaoh did not want to release the Israelites, nor did he wish to submit to the God of Israel. God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he would pursue the Israelites (14:4), but this is precisely what Pharaoh was already predisposed to do (14:5). Men often harden their hearts at crucial decision points. Notice that Pharaoh’s heart was always hardened with respect to a particular decision. Each time hardening occurred, it was in regard to a decision which Pharaoh had to make. During the period of the plagues, he had to decide whether or not to let Israel go. After the plagues, he had to decide whether or not to pursue the Israelites to bring them back (thus breaking his word which gave them permission to go).

Pharaoh’s army had to make a decision whether or not to pursue the Israelites into the sea. At each decision point, the Egyptians were hardened or hardened themselves. From a divine perspective, God hardened men’s hearts in order to achieve His pre-determined purposes (such as the destruction of the Egyptian army and the deliverance of the Israelites). From a human point of view, men hardened their hearts by deciding to do that which was clearly identified as sin. The link between sinning and hardening is seen in Pharaoh’s actions: “When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had said through Moses” (Exod. 9:34-35). The New Testament likewise speaks of hardening as the product of the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). Thus, we can say that men not only harden their hearts, which results in sin, they also sin, which results in a hardened heart.

(3) The hardening of a man’s heart occurs when God “locks that man on his course.” The man makes his choice, based upon his own nature and course, but when God hardens that man’s heart, He prevents man from changing the course he has set for himself. What I am saying is that hardening the heart does not override the choices a person would make for himself, it is like a catalyst which causes the person to lie in the bed he has chosen to make, as it were. I know of people who have heard the gospel and have said, “I know that I am a sinner, and that I need to trust in Christ as my Savior. I also know that to make such a choice will necessitate a change in my lifestyle. Therefore, I am going to live my life the way I want to (sinfully), and then, when life is nearly over, I will trust in Christ and be saved from the coming wrath of God.” But, you see, God does not give such a person any consolation in this decision. The hardening of a man’s heart compels that man to live out the consequences of his choices and lifestyle. The process of the hardening of the heart forces us to make our eternal choices now, knowing that we may not be free to change our course in days to come.

(4) The hardening of a person’s heart dulls and deadens their perception of danger and judgment. As we have seen in the headlong plunge of the Egyptians into the sea, the only explanation for such a foolhardy advance is that their hearts were hardened, so that they advanced, with little or no perception of the dangers of their actions. It was not until things actually began to fall apart that the Egyptians finally realized the grave danger they were in (14:25). When one’s heart is hardened, they are unable to see the danger which is abundantly clear to others.

(5) The hardening of the heart can occur both to believers and to unbelievers alike. Pharaoh and the Egyptians who died in the Red Sea were undoubtedly unbelievers. It is not difficult to acknowledge the hardening process in the lives of unbelievers. I believe Scriptures indicate that a similar hardening can happen to the Christian. We read, for example, that the Israelites of old had their hearts hardened (2 Cor. 3:13-14; Heb. 3:7-19), and the application is extended to saints today. So, too, the hearts of our Lord’s disciples were hardened (cf. Mark 6:52; 8:17). I have seen numerous instances where Christians have chosen to do wrong, and as they progress on the path of sin, their hearts become increasingly hardened. Their fate will not be that of the unbeliever, but surely severe consequences will follow (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5).

(6) The hardening of men’s hearts is for the purpose of achieving what is good. The hardening of the hearts of Pharaoh and his soldiers was for the purpose of releasing Israel, once and for all, from Egyptian bondage. It was also for the purpose of glorifying God. And finally, it was for the purpose of demonstrating to the remaining Egyptians that God alone is Lord (Exod. 14:4). Is it possible that because of this disaster, Egyptians came to faith in the God of Israel?
The final judgment of God comes suddenly and unexpectedly upon those whose hearts have been hardened by sin. We have already seen that the hardening of men’s hearts is the judgment of God. In other words, it seals the fate of those who are destined for judgment. Because of this, hardening the hearts of men dulls their sensitivity to sin and judgment so that it comes upon them suddenly and unexpectedly, as it did to the Egyptians. As I was thinking of the aloofness and apathy of men with regard to God’s judgment, it occurred to me that throughout the Scriptures those whose hearts have been hardened have found that judgment comes upon them suddenly and unexpectedly (Ps. 73:18-19; Prov. 6:15; Prov. 29:1; 1 Thes. 5:3; Rev. 22:20; 1 Thes. 5:4-11; 2 Pet. 3:8-18; 1 John 3:2-3). In marked contrast to the destruction-bent pathway of the Egyptians is the security of the Israelites, whether or not they perceived it at the moment. Reading the account of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea reminded me of the fact that things are often not what they seem to be. The Israelites were fearful, concluding from their circumstances that the Egyptians would be victorious over them. The Egyptians, on the other hand, were confident, thinking that there was no way they could not recapture the Israelites and take them back to Egypt as their slaves. Both the Egyptians and the Israelites were wrong in the estimation of things. Confident as they were, the Egyptians perished in the sea. And fearful as the Israelites were, they passed through the sea, delivered once and for all from their oppressors. The Egyptians felt confident and secure because it appeared that they had the upper hand. They had the chariots and the soldiers. They had the military might of Egypt. But the Egyptians failed to reckon with the fact that they were opposing themselves to God and to His people. No matter how strong and secure one might feel, opposing God is a deadly occupation. The Israelites were fearful and would even have considered going back to Egypt (cf. Exod. 14:10-12). The only thing which prevented this was the providential care of the God who had purposed and promised to deliver them safely to the promised land. Thus, God led them by another way than the “way of the Philistines,” knowing that war would have resulted in their losing heart and retreating (13:17-18). The Lord also assured the Israelites of His presence and guidance by the pillar of cloud and fire, and informed them as to why He was leading them so as to appear to have lost their way. The Lord also prevented the Israelites from retreating by placing the pillar of fire and the Egyptian army behind them. While the destruction of God’s enemies was assured, so was the deliverance of His people. No people were more secure than the Israelites, no matter how the circumstances appeared. No people were in greater peril than the Egyptians, regardless of their confidence and military might. The ultimate issue, which determined the destruction or deliverance of God, was this: ON WHICH SIDE OF THE CLOUD DO YOU STAND? In our text, the judgment of God and the salvation of God employed the same means—the Red Sea. Those who stood in the sea in front of the cloud (the Israelites) were delivered, but those who stood behind the cloud (the Egyptians) were destroyed. To put it in a little different way, those who had sided with the God of Israel were saved, while those who opposed Him were struck down by the sea. While this text graphically portrays the hardness of man’s heart, which leads ultimately to his destruction, it also pictures very clearly the salvation which God offers to all men, regardless of race. The sea was the instrument of God’s wrath, which destroyed the Egyptians. But that sea was also the instrument of Israel’s deliverance. Today, the dividing line between those who will be saved and those who will suffer God’s wrath is not a cloud, but the cross. God’s righteousness demands that sin must be paid for. The sinner must face the wrath of a righteous God. But in His grace, God has provided salvation, by pouring out His wrath on His Son, Jesus Christ. This he did nearly 2,000 years ago on the cross of Calvary. All those who accept Christ’s sacrifice on that cross are saved, and all those who reject it (either actively or passively), must bear the coming wrath of God, which will come upon them just as quickly and unexpectedly as God’s wrath fell on the Egyptians. If this is true, the most important question you will ever answer is this, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH REGARD TO CHRIST AND HIS CROSS? (John 3:16-18).

I urge you not to delay in this decision about the cross of Christ. To delay is to further the hardening process of your own heart, and to bring about greater blindness and insensitivity toward your sin and the judgment which will come upon you.

From URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/red-sea-israel%E2%80%99s-deliverance-and-egypt%E2%80%99s-defeat-exodus-1317-1431
Conclusion from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Hebrews 3 compares and contrasts the faithfulness of Moses as a servant of God with the faithfulness of Jesus as the Son of God. While Israel’s deliverance from slavery was great, the Christian’s salvation from sin is far greater. The apostle Paul uses the exodus event to warn his readers in Corinth by comparing their status in Christ with Israel’s baptism into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:1, 2). Because of the Israelites’ subsequent unfaithfulness, they were condemned to die in the wilderness (v. 5). In spite of our baptism into Christ, we may suffer the same condemnation if we prove to be unfaithful (vv. 6-12). We must show gratitude for our great salvation in Jesus Christ. We do this by obedience to Christ’s law of love. We must not be as the generation that left Egypt after witnessing the miracles of the plagues only to express doubt, fear, and sarcasm as the pursuing army approached (Exodus 14:10-12). “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. When at God's direction men act in faith, God will act in power (Exod. 14:21; cf. Matt. 17:20; Mark 9:23)
2. God will provide for and protect those who fully obey Him (Exod. 14:22)
3. The Lord, who protects His people, also fights against their enemies (verses 23-25)
4. Faith does not ask God how but simply obeys Him fully and immediately (verses 26-27)
5. In the end, God will see His people prevail (verses 28-29)
6. God's past miracles serve as reminders of His present-day power (vs. 30; cf. vs. 31)