

Once upon a time, a man named Anen watched the sunrise. His sandals were well-worn now. His mind drifted back to the day when another soldier brought new sandals to his unit. He was excited but they were stiff and took some time to break in. He thought philosophically about how life is a bit like those sandals and takes time to understand. Today, the sun came up over his enemy. In the distance, he could see their camp by the sea near Baal-zephon. This was an enemy he did not know. As a soldier, he followed his orders. They had pursued this fleeing people, and now, his enemy had their back to the sea.¹

Anen was hopeful the war would soon end. His spear felt heavy in his hand. Then, someone relieved him from standing watch and he ate his breakfast. It is the same thing every day—bread. But, in ancient Egypt, he has never heard of peanut butter or jelly and Anen is happy that the bread is not too stale.

Anen’s enemy, the ancient Israelites, began their journey to freedom in Exodus 12. We know the story of Exodus from their perspective. As a lowly soldier, he does not know about his enemy, why they flee, or what the battle is about. He follows orders. Sometimes, we understand following God. Other times, we must put ourselves in someone else’s shoes to understand. When we do, we can better understand what going with God means.

Each of us is on a path. We are on a journey. On our path, we can see the world around us. Friedrich Schleiermacher writes, “Even the world is a work of which you survey only a part, and if this part were perfectly ordered and complete within itself, you would not be able to formulate any lofty concept of the whole.”² Anen can see his world, but he can only see a part of the big picture. The ancient Israelites could only see their world. What kind of compassion would have filled their hearts if they could see the big picture? Likewise, we can only see part of the world. We do not see the whole thing.

The Exodus story is about God at work in the world. We are, in some ways, like the Israelite sojourners. We do not know our pursuers and are limited in what we know about the big picture. The text is not about Egyptian or Israelite history. It is about God seeing and acting in the world. Jon Sobrino writes, “God never appears as a God-in-himself, but as a God for history, and, therefore, as the God-of-a-people.”³ God’s promise, “I will be your God and you shall be my people” (Exodus 6:7), is relational. God’s revelation is always in relation to people. We do not experience God in isolation. The Exodus event was not human-focused, human-inspired, or human-accomplished. God heard the cry of the people and responded. “God is a God-*of*, a God-*for*, a God-*in*, never a God-*in-himself*.”⁴

Exodus 14 does not begin with history or easily verifiable details. It begins with someone more powerful. The Lord speaks to Moses. This is a God-*of*, a God-*for*, and a God-*in* history. The chapter continues retelling about God’s deliverance from Pharaoh’s perspective. In Exodus 12, Pharaoh was desperate for the troublemaker-Israelites to leave. Now, he has a radical change of heart. The scene shifts to Moses and the Israelites. They see Pharaoh’s army coming. They see soldiers like Anen and are terrified. “Did you bring us here because

there are no graves in Egypt?!" The people who complain mention the name Egypt five times. Walter Brueggemann writes, "It is the only name they know, the name upon which they rely, the name they love to sound. In the speech of the protesting, distrusting people, the name of [the Lord], however, is completely absent."⁵ Fear has driven them away from their faith. They do not understand a God-*of*, -*for*, and -*in* the world. They want the familiar.

Moses tries to assuage their concerns. "Do not fear," he says, "Stand firm, and see what God is going to do." Moses stretches out his hand and the Lord drives the sea back. We suspend explanatory suspicion and have faith that this is a story about God at work in the world and relating to humanity. God's people walk across on dry land. And, when Pharaoh's army pursues them, Moses stretches out his hand and the seas return, crushing and drowning Anen and his fellow soldiers.

Many of us have heard about God delivering the Israelites since childhood. Only this week, as I reread this passage, did I think about the Egyptians. My heart breaks for them. Maybe I missed the point. Or, maybe not. Where we stand matters. Who we stand with matters. We can either go with God, or we can go our own way.

The central character in this story is God. God instructs Moses. God pushes back the water. And, God lets it go again. One of the main points in this passage is bearing witness to a God-*of*, -*for*, and -*in* the world. The Israelites fail to recognize who God is. And, in their moment of pursuit, the Egyptians confess, "the Lord is fighting for them and against us." This is a God who "never failed me yet!"

Are we going with God? Are we making decisions to move as God directs? Do we let faith dominate our lives? My fictional Egyptian soldier might never have heard of Yahweh. He might not have known about going through life with a God-*of* him, a God-*for* him, and a God-*engaged-with* him. Do we? I would like to think we do.

When we look around and see God moving, working, and acting in our world, how do we respond? Moses responds to God delivering him and the Israelites by singing a song of praise in Exodus 15. He says, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously... the Lord is my strength and my might and has become my salvation."

Let us see a God-*of*, a God-*for*, and a God-*in* our world. And, when we do, let us respond with a song of praise.

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/special/lifeas/soldier.html>

² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Desmond M. Clarke, trans. Richard Crouter, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 35.

³ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 68-69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69, italics original.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, "Exodus," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 793.