

CROSSING THE RED SEA

Rev. Harold C. Cranch

Readings: Exodus 13:21-22, 14:21-23

Do you remember that Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob or Israel became a powerful leader in Egypt and that all the Children of Israel moved to Egypt to be with him there? They lived there for many hundreds of years and grew in number. But then, a Pharaoh arose who did not remember Joseph and all the good things that he had done for the Egyptians. When he saw the great number of Israelites, he was afraid of them and wondered how to make them weaker. So all of the Children of Israel were made slaves, and they suffered a great deal. But the Egyptians were still afraid of the Israelites, and so they decided to kill all their boy babies. Do you remember that Moses' mother put him in a little basket, or ark, and put this basket into the river near the shore to save him? The daughter of Pharaoh found Moses there, and she raised him as her own son.

But Moses never forgot that he was one of the Children of Israel. One day when he was grown up, he looked out and saw an Egyptian hurting one of the Children of Israel. He went out and told this man to stop, and when he wouldn't stop, Moses took his sword and killed him. Then he had to run away, for he was afraid of what Pharaoh would do to him.

You know what happened then: the Lord appeared to Moses one day in the middle of the burning bush and told him to lead the Israelites out of captivity to the promised land of Canaan. Moses and his brother Aaron did all that the Lord commanded. They told Pharaoh that he must let the Children of Israel go. But Pharaoh was an evil man, and he didn't want to lose all those slaves, so he refused to let them go. And so the Lord had to punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians with the ten plagues. Because of these plagues the Egyptians gave gold and jewels and all sorts of precious things to the Children of Israel and told them to leave the land of Egypt.

So Moses gathered all the people together and started out on the journey. Now, they didn't know just where they were going, and they didn't know how they would be able to get there, but they trusted in the Lord to lead them and bring them at last to the promised land. So they followed wherever the Lord led. Do you remember how the Lord led them? A pillar of cloud went before them by day; and at night this turned into a pillar of fire, and they could see by its light.

The Children of Israel followed this pillar wherever it went. Finally it brought them to the edge of a great sea, so wide that they didn't know how they could possibly cross it. On one side was a high mountain, on the other a huge desert,

and before them was the sea. They didn't know which way to go. Then, to make things even worse, the armies of Egypt came up behind them. Pharaoh had changed his mind about letting the people go, and he had sent these armies out after them, to bring them back or else to kill them. The people were afraid; they didn't know what to do, or where to go. And so they did the right thing—they prayed to the Lord for help.

And the Lord answered their prayer! He told Moses to stretch his rod out over the great sea. Moses did so, and the Lord sent a great wind that pushed the waters apart and made dry land right through the middle of the water. Then the Lord told the people to go forward. They, and their children, and their cattle, and all their wagons, went right into the middle of the sea on dry ground. The waters were piled up like great walls on either side of them, but they weren't afraid any more. They had seen the power of the Lord, and they trusted the Lord to save them. The Children of Israel traveled right across on dry land. Meanwhile, the Egyptians came up to the sea and saw that the people were getting away. They were angry and wanted to capture the Children of Israel, so they went right out onto the dry path in the middle of the sea, too.

The Lord again spoke to Moses, telling him what to do to save the Children of Israel. Moses waited until the last of his people had come through the sea, and then he stretched his rod out again. Then the waters that had been piled up crashed down together again. The Egyptians were caught in the water, and they drowned. The Lord saved the Children of Israel because they loved and trusted in Him and had prayed for His help, but the enemies of Israel, who were also enemies of the Lord because they wanted to do an evil thing, finally perished in the sea.

This is a wonderful story of the Lord's care for those who love and trust in Him, and it has a very important meaning for each one of us. Sometimes, in our lives, we seem to come to a point where we don't know which way to turn for safety. Maybe we have done something wrong, like told a lie or taken something that belongs to someone else. We are afraid of being found out and punished, and we don't know what to do. There is only one thing to do—to do what the Lord wants for us. We need to ask for His help and then try to make things right. Then the Lord can help us and take care of us, just as He took care of the Children of Israel when they needed His help.

The Lord is always with us, to guide us through all the days of our lives. If we remember to turn to Him and ask Him to help us to do what is right, then He will lead us away from our evils to real safety and to the path which will bring us to our promised land—to heaven!

Amen.