

CROSSING THE RED SEA.

– EXOD. 14:13-27. – DEC. 22. –

"I will sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously." – Exod. 15:1.

SKEPTICS have railed greatly against the truthfulness of the Bible record of Israel's deliverance – crossing the Red Sea, etc. They object that so rapid an exodus of from one to two million people, with their flocks and herds, would be an impossibility; and they object, secondly, to the testimony that God miraculously delivered them by making a path for them through the sea. As to the first objection: We can readily see that if the Egyptians had been opposed to their going the difficulties would have been much greater. We are to remember, on the contrary, that after suffering the chastisement of the plagues they were willing, nay, anxious, for their departure, Pharaoh himself sending a message to Moses, even in the night in which the first-born were slain, saying, "Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go and serve the Lord, as ye have said; also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also."

We are to remember that the Israelites were in a measure organized; their tribal and family relationship having been maintained. The narrative shows that they went forth in military order, – either five abreast or in five companies. (Exod. 13:18, margin.) Evidently all were under the command of the heads of the tribes, "the elders of the people." Several days elapsed before their journey brought them to the Red Sea. The great wall of Egypt, called Shur (somewhat similar to the great wall of China), is supposed to have hindered their making a more direct route. Besides, this wall was in the midst of a sandy desert, where there would be no sustenance, either for themselves or for their cattle;

while the route taken, passing through the borders of Egypt to the head of the Red Sea, was evidently the most favorable one as respects pasturage, etc.

Various comparatively shallow places in the Red Sea, near its head, are suggested as possible ones by which the crossing may have been effected, and the description given would indicate that the passage was made on such a sandbar, which perhaps ordinarily would have from five to twelve feet of water upon it, according to the condition of the tides. The presumption is that the strong east wind spoken of, operating with the tides, laid bare this sandbar, and thus gave the Israelites a passage.

But while Pharaoh, under the sting of the last plague, was anxious for the departure of the Hebrews, nevertheless, as his grief assuaged and he considered the loss his empire was sustaining in the departure of over a million subjects, intelligent and ingenious and docile, and when he considered further that they were an unarmed host, and impeded in traveling by their flocks and herds, he evidently felt that he had been too generous in permitting them to go, and concluded that in the few days' march they had already experienced something of the difficulties and trials of the journey, and that by this time they were not only discouraged, but hemmed in by the northern tongue of the Red Sea, and the Egyptian wall, while on either side were mountains. He concluded that they could be easily retaken, and would feel that they had had enough of their "outing" and perhaps would return to their labor more docile than ever. Consequently the Egyptian troops of the capital were started in pursuit.

The Israelites, who for years had learned to dread their Egyptian masters, heard of the pursuit, and cried unto Moses despairingly, Moses in turn crying unto the Lord on behalf of the people. The Lord's response to Moses' prayer is a striking one, from which spiritual Israelites may also take a lesson. It was,

"Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." (Exod. 14:15.) There is a time to *pray* and also a time to *act* and thus to co-operate with God who is answering our prayers. When the Lord's time for answering our prayers has come and we know it, it is for us to manifest our faith in him by going forward. Too many **[R2919 : page 383]** spiritual Israelites, after hearing the Lord's message, instead of going forward in obedience are disposed to tarry and pray to the Lord that he give them some special message not common to others. Such through weakness of faith are in danger of losing their standing. "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" and obedience is merely a demonstration of faith.

Apparently the Israelites got a glimpse of the Egyptians in the distance, before sundown. This is implied in Moses' statement, "The Egyptians whom ye have seen this day ye shall see again no more forever." The account declares that the pillar of fire, by which the Israelites were miraculously led, removed to their rearward, so as to be between them and the Egyptians, – a pillar of cloud and darkness to the latter, and a pillar of fire or light to the former. Apparently there was a great storm that night, the east wind blowing furiously; outside narratives, such as that of Josephus, declaring that it rained, thundered and lightened appallingly. But whether this was merely upon the Egyptians, from the pillar of cloud, or whether it was also upon the Israelites, would be merely surmise. What we do know is that during that night the windstorm blew across that upper neck of the Red Sea in such a manner as to leave the sandbar bare for a considerable breadth, so as to permit the rapid passage of so large a body of people. The Israelites knew, through Moses and their elders, what miracle had been performed, and hastened to escape from their pursuers. The latter probably were totally unaware of the miracle, and perhaps unaware that they were crossing the ordinary bed of the sea, and therefore, without trepidation, hastened onward in pursuit, impeded, however, by various accidents to their chariots,

which sank into the comparatively soft sand of the sea bottom. They, no doubt, concluded that where the Israelites had gone they could go. Nevertheless, ere they had crossed they became so discouraged with the opposition, of what they probably at first considered accidents, but afterward recognized as divine providences on Israel's behalf, that they resolved on a return – to give up the pursuit, saying that the God of the Hebrews fought for them. By this time it was nearly daybreak, and Israel having crossed over Moses stretched forth his rod over the sea, and winds and tide, etc., being favorable, the waters came again upon the Egyptians, that they were drowned. It is said that wonderful storms, somewhat analogous to this one, frequently occur in this vicinity, and that Napoleon and a troop of soldiers were very nearly overtaken at about the same place that Pharaoh's chariots were lost, by a sudden cessation of storm and rising of the tides.

A critical writer suggests that Pharaoh's charioteers were probably intent upon heading off the Israelites, and thus turning them backward, and that the sea waters were a wall on either hand, in the sense of being a flank protection, hindering the troops from getting ahead of the Israelites, turning their flank. He **[R2920 : page 383]** says, "The wall would not, by any Oriental, be supposed to be an actual wall rising up beside them, any more than 'the wooden walls of Great Britain' are board fences about the island; or 'the hedge about the law,' which the rabbis built by their precepts, was a growth of vegetation."

There are numerous lessons connected with this narrative, profitable to the spiritual Israelites. As already suggested, the experience of the Israelites and the Egyptians at this time represented the experience of the world in the close of this Gospel age, and in the dawn of the new dispensation – the period of deliverance of God's people, too, from bondage to sin and death, which will be accomplished at the dawn of the Millennial age. We may reasonably understand that the last or tenth plague upon

Egypt symbolizes the bitter experience of the world at the close of the present age, and that these experiences will be favorable to the Lord's people, and unfavorable to others, down to a certain point where the contest will be abandoned, and those in authority in the world will agree to the full liberty of all who love righteousness and who desire to walk in the Lord's way. Quite possibly "the powers that be" may concede for a time the demands of the weak and the helpless, and subsequently repent, and attempt their re-capture under the slavery of selfishness, and so through a Red Sea of trouble the Lord will then administer a final chastisement upon all those who oppose his deliverance of the poor and the needy and they that have no helper, and who cry for righteousness, and follow the leadings of his representative, Messiah.

Surely, when the new dispensation has been opened up, and the silver trumpets of the Jubilee shall sound release and restitution throughout all the world, there will be great rejoicing amongst all who love righteousness, and, in the language of our Golden Text, they may say, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." And already the spiritual Israelite can *by faith* thus rejoice and realize his release from sin and death.

Another thought we may draw from this narrative is the unlimited power of God, who has promised us that if we are his, and will follow the leadings of our Master, the anti-type of Moses, all things shall work together for good to us. We are to learn that nothing is too wonderful for our God to accomplish, and in proportion as faith increases our joys will increase, and we will have the full assurance of faith, the full assurance of victory, for "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." We are to learn that while the wicked may triumph for a time the Lord is against them. He is on the side of the poor and oppressed, who are seeking to know his will and to do it, and though he bear long with them, as represented in the parable, yet, finally he will

avenge them of their Adversary: their enemies shall then become the enemies of the Lord, and the enemies of the Lord shall bite the dust – be destroyed. – Luke 18:7; Micah 7:17.

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REVIEW OF THE QUARTER.

– *DEC. 29TH.* –

GOLDEN TEXT: "If God be for us, who can be against us."
– Rom. 8:31.

A review of the year, its blessings and its trials, will be in order, on this the closing Sunday of the year. We trust that all our readers may be able to apply the Golden Text to themselves with confidence and rejoicing.
