

CROSSING THE RED SEA

Exodus 13:17-22; 14

In general with the younger classes the emphasis should be on the crossing of the Red Sea, the story of the Passover being retold chiefly for the sake of getting the word *Passover* fixed in the children's minds in connection with the deliverance from Egypt.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord always protects those who trust in Him.

Goodness must be loved—not merely thought about.

Notes for Parents

Whenever any one of us realizes that he has become a slave to things of the world, the Lord “calls Moses” to lead him out of Egypt; that is, the Lord brings to his mind things of the Word of God which he has learned in childhood to remind him that his true home is not this world but heaven, and that he must free himself from the bondage into which he has drifted and set his feet once more in the path in which he was started as a little child.

But we know that habits are hard to break. Worldly desires and reasonings try to hold us fast. The bonds can be broken only as we come to see more and more clearly the disaster which surely overtakes the souls of the worldly. Moses brought ten plagues, one after another, upon the Egyptians, until finally Pharaoh knew he must let the Israelites go. The Passover feast, which they celebrated on the eve of their departure, was a feast of thanksgiving to the Lord for their deliverance.

In some churches a great deal of stress is laid upon “conversion,” and we are familiar with the programs of revivalists. *Conversion* means a “turning” in another direction—in religion a turning from self to the Lord. Conversion is necessary. We have to make up our

minds to “leave Egypt.” But this decision, which in our story is marked by the celebration of the Passover feast, is only the first step on the way to heaven. We all know how often those who have been converted by the emotional appeal of powerful preaching to a responsive crowd very soon “backslide.”

The initial decision must be followed by immediate action and then by steady progress in a new way of life, under the leadership of the Word of God, which Moses represents. This is the journey of the Israelites—a long, hard journey—from Egypt to the Holy Land through the wilderness, with the pillar of cloud and fire at their head.

Our story for today is a picture of the first temptation met and overcome in this journey. Pharaoh changed his mind and with his army pursued the Israelites to bring them back to slavery. Have we not all had related experiences? We resolve to break from some bad way of life. We start out full of determination and enthusiasm, but very soon we find all the force of our past habit following and catching up with us. It seems that we cannot possibly escape its power, that we are defeated at the outset. This experience is symbolized by the Red Sea. But Moses, instructed by the Lord, stretched forth his hand over the sea and the waters were divided. If we look to the Lord for help, He will lead us safely through this temptation.

Then the Israelites looked back and saw the pursuing Egyptians swallowed up in the sea. We learn by experience—good experience in this case—that even a seemingly irresistible temptation can be overcome with the Lord’s help. Every temptation overcome in His strength shows us the actual powerlessness of the evils we have been serving. The Lord will always open the way for us if we trust and obey Him.

Primary

These children should remember *Pharaoh*, *Moses*, the *Passover*, and the *Red Sea*. They can be told that the reason why the children of Israel became slaves

in Egypt was that they did not go back to the land of Canaan as they should have done when the famine was over. Emphasis should be put on the pillar of cloud and fire and on the power the Lord exercised through the hand of Moses, and the Lord's wonderful protection of His people.

After Moses grew up, he sided with his own people against the Egyptians, and this made the Pharaoh angry. So Moses had to leave Egypt. He went to the land of Midian, and there he was helped by Jethro, the priest of Midian. Moses married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah.

One day when Moses was tending the flocks of Jethro near Mount Sinai, he saw a strange sight. A bush was on fire but did not seem to be burning up. When Moses went over to look at it, the Lord spoke to him out of the midst of the fire in the bush.

The Lord told Moses to go back and lead his people out of Egypt.

He gave Moses power to work miracles, and told him that his brother Aaron would help him.

Pharaoh did not want to let the Hebrews go; so Moses and Aaron brought ten plagues, one after another, upon the Egyptians, and finally Pharaoh said they could go.

The Egyptians were so glad to see them go that they gave them gold and jewels and clothing to take with them.

Just before they left, they celebrated a great feast, called the Passover.

Before they got out of Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind and went after them.

Where did he catch up with them?

How did the Lord keep them safe from the Egyptians through the night?

This pillar of cloud and fire was to lead them for forty years.

Then what did the Lord tell Moses to do?

What happened?

How did the children of Israel cross the Red Sea?

What happened to the Egyptians when they tried to follow?

Junior

The Juniors will remember the stories of the call of Moses at the burning bush and of the plagues. Give them an opportunity to recount what they can of these stories. In this class a little more should be done with the story of the Passover, and the reason for its name should be made clear. Attention should also be called to the command to observe the Passover every year as a memorial. Have the children study a map to see the difference between the two

possible routes from Egypt to the Holy Land. The emphasis in the lesson should be put on the need of our going forward courageously on any course we know to be right, trusting in the Lord to help and protect us.

The children of Israel had been saved from all the plagues brought upon the Egyptians. But from the tenth and last they were saved in a special way.

Why was the feast they celebrate called the *Passover*?

How often were they commanded to celebrate this feast?

What did it consist of?

How were they to eat it?

The Lord also told them to change their calendar so that the month of the Passover should be the first month of the year. It was one of the spring months. Their months were governed by the phases of the moon; so they do not exactly coincide with our months, but this first month begins some time in March or April. Many years afterward the Lord was crucified during Passover week. So our Easter is always celebrated just after the Jewish Passover instead of coming on one particular date.

The Lord gave the children of Israel something to lead them on their journey. It was a pillar, a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, and it led them for forty years. They were to stop when it stopped and move on when it moved.

Where were they going?

Look at a map of this area. See how much shorter the journey would have been if they could have gone along near the Mediterranean Sea and through the Philistine country. But the Philistines were a strong people with fortified cities, and the Lord knew that the Hebrews were not ready as yet to do any real fighting; so the pillar led them by the longer route. Read Exodus 13:17-18.

The Egyptian people were so glad to see them go that they gave them many things to take with them: gold, and silver, and jewels, and clothing. But Pharaoh was not glad to lose his slaves. After they had left, he changed his mind again.

What else did they take with them? (Exodus 12:37)

They also had many children with them and all their herds and flocks and baggage. You can imagine that they could not travel very fast.

How did Pharaoh pursue them?

Where did he catch up with them?

They seemed to be trapped between the Egyptians and the Red Sea, and of course they had no boats.

Whom did they blame?

What did Moses tell them?

How did the Lord protect them during the night?

What did He tell Moses to do?

What happened?

How did the Israelites cross the Red Sea?

What happened to the Egyptians?

If we trust in the Lord and obey His commandments, His power will always protect us. His truth stands between us and evil just as the pillar of cloud and fire stood between the children of Israel and the Egyptians. We sometimes come to points in our lives when we do not know what to do. Every way seems full of danger. Then we must remember this story of the Red Sea. We must trust in the Lord and obey His commandments and He will open the way before us.

Intermediate

Emphasize the meaning of the Passover to the Jews and to us and show why the Christian Church celebrates the Holy Supper in its place. These young people will soon be looking toward confirmation and should understand the nature of the decision we are all called upon to make if we wish to be true followers of the Lord. Another good lesson for this age group is the necessity of carrying a good resolution into immediate action and pushing boldly forward, no matter how hard the right course may seem.

For us the coming of the Lord into the world to deliver us from slavery to the hells was so great an event that the Christian world counts the years from it. and even non-Christian nations have followed suit. For the Jews the deliverance from bondage in Egypt

is the great event which started the development of their nation and their religion. They were told to make the month in which they left Egypt the first month of their year, and they still count their religious calendar on this basis although they also have a secular calendar—still different from ours—according to which they celebrate their New Year in the early autumn. Passover is celebrated from the fourteenth to the twenty-first of the first month of their religious calendar. The Lord came to Jerusalem for the last time on the first day of that week for the purpose of celebrating the Passover. So you may always remember that the Jewish Passover is celebrated during our Holy Week, the week before Easter. And you of course know that the Lord on the night of that last Passover feast instituted the Holy Supper, which takes its place for the Christian Church.

The Passover took its name from the fact that the houses of the Hebrews were passed over by the “angel of death” on the night when the firstborn in Egypt were slain. This was the tenth and last plague, and pictures the final result of a wholly worldly and selfish life—the time when there is no longer any possibility of the development of a living faith. The Passover feast was to be a memorial of the deliverance of the Jews from bondage, and it pictures our acknowledgment of our deliverance from bondage to the world and self. The lamb is the symbol of innocence, and this quality is to be loved and made a part of our lives. The word *innocence* literally means “harmlessness,” and the quality of life it refers to consists in complete dependence upon the Lord for guidance and strength, because we recognize that of ourselves we are constantly inclined to evil. The lamb was to be eaten roasted with fire because love must be the heart of innocence. The unleavened bread of the Passover pictures goodness unmixed with false ideas. The bitter herbs remind us that there will be hardship connected with our journey to heaven. And as the Hebrews were to eat the feast with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands, so we are to be ready to start out actively on this journey to heaven, to put our good resolutions

into immediate practice.

The journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Holy Land is quite generally recognized as picturing the journey which every person who reaches heaven must take, but the symbolism is seldom carried further than a vague general idea. We see the journey as the gradual renunciation of worldly and selfish standards. It is never an easy journey. Many trials and temptations have to be endured and many enemies overcome before we reach even the border of the promised land of heavenly character. These are pictured by the various experiences of the Israelites in leaving Egypt and in the wilderness. Throughout their whole journey, the Lord led them by means of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Swedenborg tells us that this pillar was actually a company or “choir” of angels with the Lord in their midst. The Lord’s angels are messengers of truth, and it is the truth which both guides and protects us on our journey. Thus, the pillar of cloud and fire pictures the Word in its letter with the Lord Himself within it, as it leads us in our spiritual days and nights: our states of confidence and trust (days), and our states of doubt and discouragement (nights).

On this journey we set out boldly. But we have not gone far before the whole weight of our past selfish life catches up with us and tries to drag us back. We are faced by a sea of doubt and disbelief and fear. Our temptation is to give up. The children of Israel said, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?”

But the Lord speaks to us through Moses: “Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” Our first need is for steadfastness and trust. As the Israelites obeyed, the pillar of cloud and fire went around and stood behind them, between them and the Egyptians, giving light and protection to the one, blocking the path of the other with darkness. The Word is not only our guide in our spiritual journey, but is also our protection from our enemies. The evil cannot see the truth of the Word because, since their minds are turned toward self, it is darkness to them. Read John

3:19-21.

The Red Sea here pictures an accumulation of falsity and evil. Swedenborg says it pictures hell. The Lord by means of the hand of Moses—the power of divine law—will disperse the barrier if we go forward boldly. First we must stand fast to our purpose and then go forward as the Lord opens the way. And once we have come safely through this first great temptation, we can look back and see how helpless is the enemy which seemed so threatening.

Basic Correspondences

bread	=	goodness
leaven	=	falsity
fire	=	truth as it is in the Lord, coming from His divine love
cloud	=	truth in the form it takes on earth, or the letter of the Word
the Red Sea	=	an accumulation of falsity from evil—or hell

Senior

Make the distinction clearly between the first decision to follow the Lord instead of self, signaled by the Passover; the period of reformation of our external conduct, the wilderness journey; and the process of regeneration or opening our hearts to the influx of a new will from the Lord, the conquest of the Holy Land. The correspondence of the actual lesson for the day will carry its own moral.

We recall the meaning of the period of bondage in Egypt, which ended with the raising up of Moses to lead the people back to the Holy Land, and we all remember the story of the ten plagues and of Pharaoh's final capitulation when the firstborn were slain. The firstborn is the symbol of faith. When one, like Pharaoh, stubbornly persists in a worldly and evil course, he finally comes into a state in which the very possibility of faith is destroyed. Such a person simply cannot believe in the existence of anything above the material plane. Then the Israelites, who represent the things of spiritual life, are finally driven out, taking with them all that is

of real value (Exodus 12:35-36). This is the story from the point of view of the Egyptians.

But we are going with the Israelites. They had been spared all the plagues, but they had seen the terrible havoc wrought by them in the lives of the Egyptians, and they were ready now to follow Moses out of Egypt. To escape the last plague they had to do something themselves as a sign of their willingness to obey the Lord. This was the celebration of the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood of the slain lamb on the sideposts and lintel of their doors.

Let us review the meaning of this feast. The lamb represents pure and innocent affection; and its blood, the true thoughts which spring from that affection. The doorposts and lintel of the house stand for the portals of the mind. The sprinkling of the blood there pictures the safeguarding of the mind from evil by means of true thoughts springing from pure affection. The lamb was to be “roasted with fire” rather than eaten raw or “sodden with water” (boiled), because good must be loved, not merely thought about. The unleavened bread pictures principles of goodness unmixed with old, false ideas, for leaven (yeast) in those days was a bit of old, sour dough saved from former bakings. The bitter herbs are the difficulties which we must be willing to encounter if we are to attain spiritual life. And we are to eat the feast girded for the journey; we must be prepared to start out actively to carry the new principles we have adopted into our daily living. We are also to take with us into the new life all our knowledges of worldly as well as of spiritual things, the jewels of silver and gold and the raiment of the Egyptians.

The Lord’s leading of the children of Israel by means of a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night has a beautiful symbolism. Throughout the Scriptures clouds picture the letter of the Word in which the Lord veils His truth and accommodates it to our feeble sight. We cannot see Him as He is, any more than the physical eye can gaze at the sun. During our states of clear thinking—the day-time—we are led by the Lord through our knowledge and under-

standing of the Word. At night, in our states of mental darkness, we are led by our faith in the Lord's love. We say, "I don't understand why these things should happen to me or to my loved ones, but I know that the Lord loves me and them; so there must be a good reason." And we try to remain loving and kind in spite of our disappointments, and gradually the night passes and we find that we have made progress. So the Lord leads us both by day and by night. The pillar represents support.

The dramatic incident of the crossing of the Red Sea pictures the overcoming of the first great temptation which one has to face when he makes up his mind to serve the Lord instead of self. It comes early in the journey. How many people, "converted" at revival meetings, succumb to this temptation and go back to their Egyptian bondage as soon as their natural desires "catch up" with them! The sea looks too deep to cross. And indeed we cannot cross it on our own strength. But the Lord's power, the hand of Moses, will make a path for us through the waters if we will but go forward, and after the temptation is past, we look back and wonder why we were so dismayed. We shall have many other trials and temptations, but we have left Egypt, we have tasted victory, and we shall never go back to the old bondage. "For the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever."

Adult

The lesson to be stressed is that if we are genuinely trying to obey the Lord and are willing to trust in Him, He will always open the way before us. We should learn to recognize anxiety as a sign that we are trusting in self instead of in the Lord and to see the difference between foresight and worry.

Our thought about our lesson for today should be prefaced by refreshing our minds concerning the Passover and its significance. Let us first look up four references: Numbers 9:1-5, Joshua 5:10-12, II Kings 23:21-23, and Matthew 26:17-30. These tell us about the first anniversary of the Passover celebrated in the wilderness of Sinai, the celebration of the Passover at Gilgal immediately after

the entrance into the Holy Land under Joshua, the celebration of the Passover under Josiah after he found the book of the law which had been lost, and the celebration of the Passover by the Lord on the evening before the crucifixion. These are enough to indicate how necessary it is to have the signification of the Passover clearly in mind if only that we may understand subsequent Bible history. The Passover in general may well be associated in our minds with our thought of “conversion.” In some churches much stress is laid on this experience, every effort being made through revivals and other means to lead people to it. In the New Church we recognize the necessity of conversion—of making the decision to turn away from self and toward the Lord—but we do not feel that it must necessarily take some immediate striking outward manifestation. Conversion is only the first step toward regeneration. We are all born natural, and must sometime, if we are to become spiritual, determine of our own free will to break our bondage to natural thoughts and affections and start on our journey toward a heavenly character. The Passover symbolizes this decision. The slaying of the firstborn of the Egyptians pictures the fact that it is impossible that any spiritual life should spring from the natural itself. The passing over of the houses on which the blood of the paschal lamb was sprinkled symbolizes the possibility of spiritual life with those who determine to look to the Lord for knowledge and power instead of to themselves. This decision is indeed a momentous one and we should keep it fresh in our memories, recalling it at the beginning of new undertakings, renewing it after periods of waywardness, and confirming it as we grow older by coming reverently to the Lord’s Supper.

The actual feast of the Passover was one of the acts enjoined upon the Jewish Church as part of its representative worship, relating men to the Lord through correspondences during the period when they were actually so far from Him that there could be no interior conjunction. The Lord, when He was upon earth, bridged this gap Himself and reestablished the connection, and by instituting the Holy Supper did away with the need of continuing to keep

the Passover. It was after He had eaten of the Passover with His disciples that He took the cup, broke the bread, and bade His disciples “do this in remembrance of me.” Swedenborg speaks of this as the last Jewish and the first Christian Passover. That is, the Passover commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from bondage in Egypt, and the Holy Supper commemorates the reality of which that was the shadow—the deliverance of man from bondage to hell by the Lord Himself. The bread of the Lord’s Supper takes the place of the flesh of the paschal lamb and has the same significance as the blood of the lamb. The Lord speaks of the bread and wine as His body and blood, and He is called the Paschal Lamb.

The Hebrews by command ate the Passover feast with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands ready to depart from Egypt. We have all experienced the first pleasure that comes with a new resolution, the eagerness to carry it out, and the ideas and plans which spring to the mind while it is in this first state. And we have all experienced the fact that this first enthusiasm does not last. For our resolution marks the beginning of a long period called the period of reformation. Before we can even enter the border of the Holy Land of spiritual living, we have the task of putting our external lives in order according to the Lord’s laws. The journey of the Israelites to Canaan represents this period of reformation. The pillar of cloud and fire which led them throughout their forty-year journey represents the letter of the Word which leads and also protects us, both in our daytimes of clear understanding and in our nighttimes of doubt and uncertainty. Swedenborg tells us that the actual pillar was a “choir” of angels with the Lord in their midst. Clouds always picture the letter of the Word; a cloud with fire within it, divine truth from divine love. Moses represents divine law as it connects man with God.

The first great event of the journey of the Israelites was the crossing of the Red Sea. This represents the first practical test of our new determination, the first temptation to be overcome, confirming our decision. It is a vivid picture, and one which our

own experience readily verifies. Here are the children of Israel hastening on their way, led by the wonderful pillar. They have left the land of Goshen in haste, but with rejoicing and eagerness and confidence. Suddenly they find the Red Sea blocking their path and at the same time realize that Pharaoh and his chariots and his horsemen are in close pursuit. They must either cross the apparently impassable sea or be captured and brought back to slavery. How often, in some moment of high thought, we make a decision to break the chains of a long-standing bad habit! Almost immediately we are tempted; we realize that the power of our past indulgence is pressing close upon us, that if we do not break this particular temptation now—immediately—we shall slip back into the same old ways; but it seems impossible to take the right way. The story says to us, “Trust in the Lord and go forward. The Lord is with you and will uphold you.” The Red Sea pictures an accumulation of evils and falsities which bounds the worldly and selfish life—specifically hell—but when the hand of Moses—the power of divine law—is stretched forth over it, the threatening waters will roll back under the strong east wind of truth from the Lord, and we shall pass over on dry ground—the firm basis of good character.

And once we are across, the very temptation which has been overcome will prove to us that our former bad habit is powerless when we obey the Lord and trust in His help. Pharaoh’s army and his horsemen are drowned in the Red Sea. The chariots of the Egyptians are the doctrines of falsity of the natural worldly man; and the chariot wheels, the power of advancing these doctrines against our spiritual purpose. We should remember this story. The conquering of the first temptation after a new good decision is very important. We recall that although the Israelites in the wilderness many times looked back with longing to the “good things” they had enjoyed in Egypt (Numbers 11:5), they never went back.



From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 8192: “*And the angel of the Lord set out.* [Genesis 14:19] That this signifies a setting in order by Divine truth is evident from the signification of ‘setting out’ as being a setting in order. That ‘to set out’ denotes a setting in order is because the pillar of cloud—which was an angelic choir—that had previously advanced before the sons of Israel, now betook itself between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and thus brought darkness upon the Egyptians, and gave light to the sons of Israel; and because these things were thus set in order by the Lord, by means of the setting out of the angel of God, or the pillar, and by means of its interposition, therefore by ‘to set out’ is here signified a setting in order. . . . Be it known further, that in the Word ‘an angel’ is spoken of, when yet many are meant; as in the present case, where it is said ‘the angel of God,’ and there is meant the pillar which advanced before the sons of Israel, and which was constituted of many angels. Moreover, in the Word angels are mentioned by name, as ‘Michael,’ ‘Raphael,’ and others. They who do not know the internal sense of the Word believe that ‘Michael’ or ‘Raphael’ is some one angel who is supreme among his associates; but by these names in the Word is not signified some one angel, but the angelic function itself, thus also the Divine of the Lord in respect to that which belongs to the function.”

Arcana Coelestia, n. 8215: “*And he took off the wheel of his chariots.* That this signifies the power of inflicting falsities taken away, is evident from the signification of ‘to take off’ as being to take away; from the signification of ‘a wheel’ as being the power of advancing . . . and from the signification of ‘the chariots of Pharaoh’ as being doctrinal things of falsity . . . Chariots were of two kinds: there were chariots for conveying merchandise, and chariots for war. By chariots for conveying merchandise were signified doctrinal things of falsity; and by chariots for war were also signified doctrinal things in both senses, but fighting ones, thus the truths themselves, and the falsities themselves, prepared for war. From this it can be seen what is meant by ‘the wheel of a chariot,’ namely, the power of advancing, here of inflicting falsities and of fighting against truths. As this power belongs to man’s intellectual part, by a ‘wheel’ is also signified the intellectual part in respect to those things which are of doctrine. In the other life there frequently appear chariots . . . These things appear when the angels discourse in heaven about doctrines.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

J. How did Moses and Aaron finally persuade Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go?
plagues

- J. What great feast did they celebrate on the eve of their departure?
Passover
- P. What did the Egyptians give them? *jewels of gold and silver, clothing*
- P. How did the Lord lead them? *pillar of cloud/fire*
- J. What did Pharaoh do after they left? *pursued*
- P. Where did he catch up with them? *Red Sea*
- J. How did the Lord protect them through the night?
pillar of cloud between
- P. How did they cross the Red Sea in the morning?
waters parted miraculously
- P. What happened to the Egyptians when they tried to follow? *drowned*
- S. What is pictured by the children of Israel's leaving Egypt? *deciding to stop being merely worldly and to seek spiritual way of life*
- I. What does the Red Sea represent? *accumulation of falsity from evil*
- S. What is pictured by the destruction of the Egyptians?
permanent removal of slavery to worldliness