

# DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Sixteenth Week - Wednesday

## THE RED SEA

*"And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of Yahweh, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. Yahweh will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.' . . . Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Yahweh 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. 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" (Exodus 14:13-22).*

The expiration of the three days from their departure was a critical time for the Israelites. It will be remembered that their application to Pharaoh was that they might go three days' journey into the wilderness to worship their God. It is clear, therefore, that to continue their march any further would indicate that their intention was not to return, as Pharaoh himself had suspected.

By this time they were near the head of the Red Sea, and here they received directions which seemed at that time unfathomable. They were to turn southward, putting themselves between the mountains that bordered the sea on the west and the sea itself. This would effectively shut them in and stop their further progress, unless they could pass over the sea in front of them or return through the valley behind them into the heart of Egypt. This command must have astonished the Israelites, but they were assured there was an ulterior design of Providence in taking this direction. They obeyed, though it must have seemed to them that they had placed themselves at the mercy of the Egyptians should they be induced to follow them. And it is the best proof of this command being Divine in character, for no human leader would have issued it.

To the Egyptian scouts, who were watching the movements of the Hebrew host, this must have seemed the height of suicidal infatuation. No sooner did the king hear of it than he concluded that they were forsaken by their God, and he took advantage of this seemingly egregious folly by pursuing them with all the forces at his immediate disposal. The loss of so large a body of useful slaves must have been severely felt by the Egyptians, and his primary objective was probably to drive them back through the valley of Bedea. He knew that from the position in which they had placed themselves, as well as from their feeble condition, they were unfit to resist a comparatively small disciplined force and would return without a struggle. Since they

had no retreat, Pharaoh's other option was to drive them forward into the sea; and we can hardly suppose that he would have ventured to take this step had he not conceived that their God had forsaken them and his own gods had now at length bestirred themselves in the cause of Egypt.

To the student of Egyptian antiquities there is something of much interest in the two verses that describe the force of the Egyptians: "So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them" (14:6,7). Here the pursuing force is described as composed entirely of chariots. Yet this is entirely in conformity with the existing testimony of the monuments, which exhibit no kind of military force except war-chariots and infantry. There is no cavalry properly so called, that is, warriors on horseback. And the few horsemen represented on the monuments are not Egyptians but foreigners.

It is true that in verses eighteen and twenty-six we read of "chariots and horsemen," and in verse twenty-three of "horses, chariots, and horsemen." But it has been shown grammatically that the horses are those of the chariots and the horsemen (properly "riders") are those who rode in them. And it appears from the narrative that only chariots were involved in the result. The war-chariots of the Egyptians were of very light construction and drawn by two horses. They mostly carried two people, one of whom managed the horses while the other plied his weapons of war. Sometimes the warrior stood alone in his chariot, the reins being lashed around his body. They must have been expert riders in order to discharge arrows while standing in a chariot with horses at full gallop, guiding the movement of the horses by their bodies. But it is likely that the reins actually afforded some support to the body in this position.

That Pharaoh was able to begin the pursuit so promptly implies the existence of a standing force. Although the number seems small, the six hundred chariots were the "chosen chariots," that is, those of the royal guard. Besides these were "all the chariots of Egypt," that is, all the available ones, which doubtless formed a numerous force. Now this kind of force was always regarded with awe and terror by the Israelites, and no sooner did it now appear than they began to murmur against Moses and Aaron for having brought them into such a calamitous state--for having brought them out of Egypt at all!--only to perish in the wilderness. If left to themselves they would in all probability have yielded to the Egyptians and been driven back like cattle before the chariots of Egypt.

With difficulty the Israelites were pacified by assurances of deliverance; and the Egyptians, satisfied that they had secured their prey and that it was impossible for them to escape, were in no haste to assail them. They were themselves probably wearied with their rapid march. Therefore they encamped for the night, intending no doubt to give effect to their intentions in the morning. The Israelites were also encamped awaiting with trembling anxiety the result. But to their great amazement the pillar of cloud, which was in front of them, took its station in their rear, between them and the Egyptians. And whereas before it had been a pillar of cloud by day and of flame by night, it was now both at once. To the Egyptians it remained a pillar of

cloud still, but to the Israelites it became, as usual at night, a pillar of flame. The effect was that the Egyptians were in darkness while the Israelites had abundant light. The opacity of the cloud before the Egyptians would prevent them from seeing what then took place.

And what took place? At the command of God Moses lifted up his rod over the waters, and forthwith a strong east wind began to blow, dividing the waters and making a pathway through the deep. Encouraged by the light, they ventured into the channel thus opened and began their march to the other side, the waters being a wall to them on the right and left.<sup>1</sup>

It was not until morning, when the last of the Israelites had reached the other side, that the Egyptians became aware of what had taken place. Advancing and finding the camp of Israel deserted, they hurried on by the road which they had evidently taken. It is not clear that they knew or thought they were following them into the bed of the sea. Considering the darkness from the pillar of cloud as well as the darkness of the night, it is not probable that they had any clear perception of the course in which they were moving--least of all that they were traveling in the bared bed of the divided waters. They could hear the noise of the fleeing Israelites before them and could see a little distance in front of their own feet, but in all likelihood the Egyptians were little able to distinguish where they were. They may even have thought they were pursuing the Israelites up the valley of Bedea on their return to Egypt.

But by the time day broke, they became aware of their position. The piled up waters began to return, and the bottom along which they were marching had become soggy by the previous march of the Israelites and their cattle. Finding a heavy sea returning on them, they sought to retreat, but it was too late. They could not extricate themselves from their dangerous position and the waters covered them all. By one fearful stroke the deliverance of Israel and the overthrow of the Egyptians had taken place.

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<sup>1</sup> Kitto mentions in a later Daily Bible Illustration that the distance from one side of the sea to the other at this point of crossing was probably eight miles.