

The Israelites Cross the Red Sea

Exodus 13:17–14:31

As the mass of over two million Hebrews left Egypt, God knew that facing the warlike Philistines immediately would likely have made the Hebrews lose faith and turn back to Egypt. Even after their roundabout journey, we know that their faith faltered at the edge of the Promised Land when the spies came back with reports of the size and strength of the land's inhabitants (Numbers 13:26–14:4).

The pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night must have been awesome. At first the pillars may have frightened the people. But eventually they became symbols of God's presence that must have been extremely reassuring to the newly freed slaves traveling in unknown territory!

God instructed the Israelites to turn back somewhat toward Egypt. God wanted to make Pharaoh think that the Israelites were wandering aimlessly, which would lure Pharaoh into coming after them. Pharaoh would have been confident that he could easily defeat the Israelites.

Remember that the Israelites were slaves of the Egyptians only days prior to this event. They had been beaten by the whips of the slave drivers and were familiar with the weapons the Egyptians carried. They must have realized that their fighting talents were nothing compared to the Egyptians' and that they would be no match for the Egyptians' horse-drawn chariots. And they were backed against the sea, with mountains on two sides and the Egyptians bearing down on them. The situation must have seemed hopeless.

We need to realize that God had all this planned. He knew that the people would be frightened. He knew that they would doubt him. But he also knew that his power would be remembered forever. God knew that he would prevail, that the Hebrews would be saved from Pharaoh, and that the result would be a people growing greatly in their faith in him.

Various attempts have been made to explain how the Israelites could have crossed the Red Sea the way the Bible describes it. Some have said they really crossed the Reed Sea—a much shallower body of water. Others have suggested that God sent a wind that moved the water so far to one side of the sea that a sandbar was exposed. We don't know exactly what happened, but we do know that there was enough water to drown the Egyptian army and that God somehow moved the water away so that the Israelites could cross. However it was accomplished, it was a miracle of God responding to the needs of his people.

Devotion for Leaders

The One Thing: We live in troubled times, when it's easy for people to lose heart and feel hopeless and lost. But a relationship with Jesus can give us peace and joy. Jesus is our light in times of darkness.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: When have you felt out of sorts and desperate to find some control over your situation? Perhaps the Israelites felt these things after they escaped from Egypt. Although they may not have recognized it at the time, eventually they were able to look back and see how God used that time to protect them and bring glory to himself.

What part of your life might God have his hand in now? What can you do to connect with God during times of fear and desperation? Take a few minutes each day this week to surround yourself with quiet. No kids. No television or music in the background. Reflect on God's hand in your life.