

## THE LORD'S PRESENCE AND PROTECTION

Rev. Donald Rose

Lessons: *Exodus 13, 14*

What does it mean to us when we say that the Lord is present with us or is close to us? The story of the Israelites being saved from the Egyptians and crossing the Red Sea gives answers to this question.

The Egyptian army that started to chase after the Israelites had everything they needed. They had chariots and horsemen and weapons and trained soldiers. The Israelites had the presence of the Lord. And the way that presence was beautifully pictured was by a pillar—a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Something no one could see was the fact that the Lord was present in the midst of a great host of angels. What they could see was the pillar. This meant that “the presence of the Lord was constant...for so the angels, in whose midst was the Lord, appeared before the people” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8110). That pillar was actually made up of many angels (*Arcana Coelestia* 8192).

“He did not take away the pillar of cloud  
by day or the pillar of fire by night from  
before the people” (*Exodus* 13:22).

Picture in your imagination what that pillar of cloud did. As the Egyptian army came nearer, the cloud moved. It had been in front of the Israelites, leading them. But then it went around behind them. “And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them” (*Exodus* 14:19).

Why was this? This pillar did two things. It provided light and guidance for the Israelites, but it also served to hide them from the enemy.

The cloud “came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night” (*Exodus* 14:20).

We are told that if evil spirits could rise into heaven, they would be blinded by the light and would see nothing. The light would be as darkness to them. The pillar served to hide the Lord's people the way the great wings of a bird might hide its young. Thus it is written in the Psalms, “Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings, from the wicked who oppress me, from my deadly enemies who surround us” (*Psalms* 17:8,9).

One who is surrounded by evil spirits or enemies is surrounded more closely by something far stronger, and this we see when we come to the matter of the sea becoming a wall.

Just as the cloud was a darkness and confusion to the Egyptians and a help to the Lord's people, so the waters of the sea which crashed down and drowned the Egyptians were also like a wall of safety for the Children of Israel.

When Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, the Lord caused all the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night. And the Children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground: "And the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (*Exodus* 14:22).

Going right into the sea itself and having a wall of protection calls to mind another wall in an equally amazing story. Swedenborg was let down into something more dangerous than the sea. He was let down into hell itself. Was he safe? He writes, "I noticed clearly that a sort of column was surrounding me. This column grew greater. Then I was given to know that this was 'the wall of bronze' mentioned in the Word (in *Jeremiah* 15:20). It consisted of angels, so that I could be sent down...and yet remain unharmed" (*Arcana Coelestia* 699).

The protection of Swedenborg in the midst of hell is amazing. And we learn that we also have far more protection than we would imagine. Here is what we are told:

"Unless the Lord defended man every moment, yea, even the smallest part of every moment, he would instantly perish, in consequence of the indescribably intense and mortal hatred which prevails in the world of spirits against the things relating to love and faith toward the Lord. The certainty of this fact I can affirm, having been now for some years (notwithstanding my remaining in the body) associated with spirits in the other life, even with the worst of them, and I have sometimes been surrounded by thousands, to whom it was permitted to spit forth their venom, and infest me by all possible methods, yet without their being able to hurt a single hair of my head, so secure was I under the Lord's protection" (*Arcana Coelestia* 59: portion).

## Family Talk

The Children of Israel had a wall on the right and on the left, and this meant that “the Lord is present, and the presence of the Lord puts away evil and falsity on every side” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8206).

A good answer to the question of what the Lord’s presence means is *safety*. When the Children of Israel reached the other shore and the Egyptians were drowned, they were filled with joy in the safety that they felt. They had known danger enough to feel how wonderful safety is, and they sang a song.

“I will sing to the Lord.... The Lord is my strength and song. And He has become my salvation” (*Exodus* 15:1,2).