

Joseph And The Eagles

Companion story for Hymn Study: *On Eagle's Wings* | www.Jeanfurgal.org

Let's go back in our imaginations to the eastern side of the Sinai desert about 1350 B.C. and observe a teenage Israelite named Joseph. Joseph is sitting quietly in the shade of an overhanging rock. It is just after sunrise, and he is intently watching an eagle teaching his three eaglets to fly. This is not unusual because many of the Israelites enjoyed bird watching.

The lad is thoughtful. His ambition is to be a great storyteller like his father, and he is thinking about the tale he will weave for the tribe that night when the people are gathered around the campfire. He is struggling to find a good idea and he is running out of time.

Everyone in the tribe is anxious because survival in the desert is so difficult. They live with constant hunger pains and they are always thirsty. And, just yesterday their fears escalated when they stumbled into an area full of poisonous snakes.

Last night, when Moses reported his conversation with Yahweh, the people responded with complaints about their hardships, Moses had said Yahweh would protect them. He had said He would raise them up, as if they were floating on eagle's wings. This was good news because every day was a frantic struggle for survival.

Joseph had lain awake most of the night, wondering what floating on eagle's wings meant. Now, he was watching the eagles, hoping to understand why Yahweh thought the flight of an eagle could comfort the Israelites.

The nest he watched was built high up on the sheer side of a cliff, about 200 feet above the floor of the valley. One at a time the father bird nudged a baby over the side of the nest and flew alongside the young bird as it plummeted straight down, tumbling beak over tail, shrieking in terror.

Even though the parent eagle was aware of his youngster's fright, he knew that plunging down the cliff would help it learn to fly. At the last moment the father swooped under the hysterical eaglet, who frantically sank his claws into his father's back. The adult eagle then gently soared up and returned his youngster to the nest for a brief rest before, once again, pushing him over the edge.

Soon, as they fell, the eaglets accidentally spread their wings and discovered they could float on the breeze. For several hours they practiced gliding, getting more and more brave with each "flight."

When mom returned to the nest with food, the lesson ended. After their meal, the family settled down for an afternoon a nap.

As he watched the eagle family, Joseph realized that Yahweh was speaking to him through their activity. He was showing him that He, Yahweh, was like the father eagle. He had urged His People to escape Egypt just as the father eagle had urged his eaglets to escape the nest. And He had protected His People during the perilous journey across the desert, just as the father bird had protected his young as they tumbled down the face of the cliff. In the end, they could fly by themselves on a wind provided by Yahweh.

"Yes!" thought Joseph. He had his story. He would describe the eaglets' experience and liken it to the way Yahweh was teaching the Israelites a new way of living. As they learned, He would be like the father eagle who pushed his young to take the risks that led them to fly free, all the while protecting them.

His story would encourage trust in Yahweh's protection and feelings of gratitude for their freedom. It would be an enduring story because every time they saw an eagle, they would be reminded of Yahweh's great love for them.

Joseph stood, stretched, and strolled back to camp whistling a happy tune.