

## LEAVING EGYPT (Part I)

One of the most tender stories in the Bible is tucked inside the passage which describes when the baby Jesus was taken to be circumcised in the temple, <sup>Lk. 2:25</sup> And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, *waiting for the consolation of Israel*. ... He was waiting in prayerfully expectancy for the coming of the Messiah.

When Jesus was born, His country was part of the Roman Empire. Indeed, for six hundred years the nation of Israel was continuously ruled by foreign idolatrous powers. This had an effect upon the people, their outlook, their lifestyle, and their religion. The Jewish leaders were divided mainly between the legalistic Pharisees and the worldly-minded Sadducees. Consequently, the ‘ordinary folks’ were in disarray as to what to believe! Generally, they believed in a ‘messiah’ who would free them from the foreign oppressor and reestablish the nation.

Amongst the people though were some who had a Biblical perspective, based upon the Old Testament. These included Simeon, and also <sup>36</sup> ... Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; <sup>37</sup> And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. <sup>38</sup> And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to *all them that looked for redemption [deliverance] in Jerusalem*. ... God has always kept a remnant who trust in His promises, despite the prevailing unbelief, and here is Simeon (‘God has heard’) and Anna (‘favoured’) and a small number who together *looked for redemption in Jerusalem* ... praying and searching God’s Word, believing He honours those who honour Him, and He is faithful to those who are faithful to Him.

In the early chapters of the Book of Exodus, the Hebrews had long since concluded their nation was perishing in Egypt. Like many of the Jews in the early New Testament period, they had forgotten God’s promises.

At the beginning, when the Hebrews first moved as a family of seventy with their father Jacob to the land of Goshen in the fertile Nile delta in northern Egypt, the twelve tribes flourished and multiplied (Ex. 1:7). Joseph was the second most powerful man in the country, and he was used by God in the settlement of his people. However, after thirty years, a series of Pharaohs ruled who knew nothing about Joseph, his prominence, his promises, and his people. They changed their attitude towards the Hebrews for they made them into slaves (Ex. 1:8ff.). For four hundred years God’s people were oppressed.

During those four hundred years the Hebrew people slipped into despair, believing they had nothing to look forward to. They were demoralised, despondent, discouraged. ... There is no record of their worship. There is no mention of a spiritual leader. ... They were a broken nation.

Go back a further few hundred years to the father of their nation who was Abram, an old man to whom God made great promises, <sup>Gen. 12:2</sup> I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee ... <sup>15:3</sup> And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed ... <sup>5</sup> And he [God] brought him [Abram] forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. <sup>6</sup> And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. <sup>7</sup> And he [God] said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. ... <sup>13</sup> ... Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years ... <sup>16</sup> But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again ... <sup>18</sup> In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: <sup>19</sup> The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, <sup>21</sup> And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

God was committing Himself to His people! ... However, when everything seemed to be falling apart around them in Egypt, how was God keeping His promises?! ... Did He truly love His people, or was there an outside ‘chance’ He would allow them to be wiped out? ...

The Hebrews *really* feared for their future. They were defenceless slaves, foreigners, with no one to speak for them, the voice of God was silent ... their future looked bleak. ... Where was God when His people so drastically needed Him? ... Is He there, or where is He?! ... He was indeed there, watching and waiting. ... In this darkest hour of their history, God came to the refugee Moses as he shepherded the sheep on Mount Horeb, and He told him, <sup>Ex. 3:7</sup> I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; <sup>8</sup> And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. ... God was working behind the scenes for He is devoted to His people whom He chose and whom He loves.

Centuries earlier, this was what He had told Abram would happen, <sup>Gen. 15:13</sup> thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years ... At the same time, God *also* promised ... <sup>16</sup> But in

the fourth generation *they shall come hither again ...* <sup>18</sup> ... *Unto thy [physical] seed [Abram] have I given this land ...* God keeps His Word and does not rewrite His promises for nothing hinders His decrees! So, whilst their present reality was *bleak*, God had promised there was coming a day when it would be *bright*.

Four hundred years of slavery must have felt like forever, - that is longer than the slavery of any nation, at any time, in any place of the world *ever!* Generations of Hebrews perished for the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour [*harshness, severity, cruelty*]. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field (Ex. 1:13,14). ... Yet, it was God's will and it did not happen because Egypt was strong, and the Hebrews were weak. Yes, the Egyptians *were* strong, and the Hebrews *were* weak, but they were in the land according to the plan of God!

God was watching over them. He had not abandoned them. He saw through the darkness, and in each of the days they were in captivity, He saw their afflictions, He heard their cries, and He knew their sorrows (Ex. 3:7). There was not a single lash from an Egyptian slave-master went unrecorded, <sup>Ex. 2:23</sup> And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel [*they*] sighed by reason of the bondage, and *they cried*, and *their cry came up unto God* by reason of the bondage [*they prayed*]. <sup>24</sup> And *God heard* their groaning, and *God remembered* his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> And *God looked* upon the children of Israel, and *God had respect/ cared* unto them.

He loved them. ... Why though did He allow them to suffer, and for so long?! He gave Abram two reasons, firstly, <sup>Gen. 15:14</sup> that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge [*Egypt's downfall*] - He used Egypt's treatment of the Hebrews to condemn them ... and secondly, afterward shall they come out with great substance [*the Hebrews' deliverance*]. ... He would keep His people through their hardships, and then He would bless them by bringing them into their own country.

He had already brought Moses onto the scene for this purpose, first of all concealed as a three-month old baby in the bulrushes of the River Nile, to be found and to become a prince in Egypt, who would later turn his back on his royal privileges, <sup>Heb. 11:24</sup> when he was come to years, [*he*] refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; <sup>25</sup> Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ... <sup>27</sup> By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. ... This was God's bringing Himself glory in the exodus of His people from Egypt.

He gathered the elders of Israel and the people, and He instructed Moses to tell them, **Ex. 3:14** ... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. **15** And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. **16** ... The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: **17** And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. **18** And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. **19** And I am sure [*know*] that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. **20** And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. **21** And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: **22** But every woman shall borrow [*ask*] of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil [*snatch away from*] the Egyptians.

Moses then went to Pharaoh, and spoke to him the words God had told him to say. Unsurprisingly, he received mediocre responses for sometimes Pharaoh seemed to give his permission to let the Hebrews go, but then he would renege on his word. Nevertheless, Moses and the people kept trusting God ... believing He would set them free.

Meanwhile, during those four hundred years, God was preparing for them in the Promised Land. While the Hebrews were in Egypt, the idol-worshipping Amorites were in the land of Canaan. They descended from the son of Ham, whose father Noah had placed a curse upon (Gen. 9:26,27). In God's 'timeline', He was preparing to bring the Hebrews back to Canaan four hundred and thirty years after they had departed, as He had promised Abram.

Why did God take so long? ... The Lord always has His purposes in doing what He does, how He does it, when He does it, and how long He takes to do it. Sometimes we understand, and sometimes we don't. But the reason He decided to take such a long time was to rebuild, - *revive*, - the confidence of His beleaguered people. He wanted them to behold His glory, and to *know* He was on their side, otherwise they would have been destroyed, **Ps. 90:3** O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

Writing *to believers* in the New Testament, the apostle Peter declared, **II Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slack [*He is not careless or casual*] concerning his promise *[i.e. to His people, His 'beloved', cf. v.1,8],* as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering [*patient*] to us-ward *[i.e. His people],* not willing that any *[i.e. of His 'beloved' people]* should perish, but that all [*His people*] should come to repentance [*none lost*]. ... God is patient, otherwise the Hebrews *would* have perished in Egypt. ... He is patient when we don't keep up with His expectations ... and for His glory's sake, He had a plan to return His people to the land of Canaan, from *out* of their bondage in Egypt. And while in that bondage, His people realised once again their dependence on Him, as the hymn describes, "I could not do without Thee, O Saviour of the lost, ... I cannot stand alone". ... Their experience in Egypt was *not* punishment, but it was for the people's purification preparing them for the Promised Land.

And God promised Moses on Mount Horeb, **Ex. 3:8** I am come down to deliver them [*snatch them away, rescue, save them*] out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up'alah, *cf. II Chron. 36:23; I Kings 12:27; Mt. 20:27*] out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. ... And as certain as He promised it, it *would* be done according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11). ... God keeps His promises and they cannot fail, "when the howling storms of doubt assail, By the living word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God".

Spiritually, we are in times not dissimilar from those ancient days in Egypt. We could believe we have no future ... and there is no point planning ahead ... but that is not how we see God working among His people. God plans deliverance for His own, not defeat. Later in their history, in another difficult time, He promised them, **Jer. 29:11** I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. ... God knows what He is doing even when we don't, and He will do what will bring Him glory, and will also bring joy to His people, **Is. 41:10** Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

How are we to move ahead for the future? It is not easy trying to do God's will in 'a foreign land', and yet, it's our purpose and why He saved us. ... With His help, He will lead us as we follow Him, "Then forward still, - 'tis Jehovah's will ... with a conquering tread we shall push ahead" ... "Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share, but our toil He doth richly repay; Not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a cross, but is blest if we trust and obey".