

LEAVING EGYPT (Part II)

It had been a terrible time in Egypt for the Egyptians! ... The River Nile turned into blood, then there were the plagues of frogs, lice, and flies, their cattle were destroyed, the people suffered painful boils, balls of hail fell on them from the sky, the plague of locusts, then the darkness consuming the land, and finally the plague which killed every Egyptian firstborn child, including Pharaoh's son.

Why did God send the plagues upon the Egyptians? It was for the reason He told Moses, **Ex. 3:7** 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; ⁸ And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians. ... The purpose of the plagues was to commence the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt.

God's judgment was the consequence of four hundred years of Egyptian cruelty towards the Israelites. Centuries earlier He had foretold their behaviour to Abram, **Gen. 15:13** 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 ... And *exactly* as God said, the Hebrews *were* afflicted, and four hundred years afterwards, ¹⁴ that nation, whom they shall serve [*Egypt*], *will I judge* ... and He judged them with the ten plagues. The second part of the promise to Abram was, **Gen. 15:14** and afterward shall they [*Abram's seed*] come out with great substance.

Often when we forget, God does not forget. Every promise He makes He keeps, and while weeping may endure for a night, ... joy cometh in the morning (Ps. 30:5). ... For four hundred years, the Hebrews wept day and night because of their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians, until God declared, **Ex. 3:8** 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. And after the tenth plague God's people were at last permitted to leave Egypt.

As they departed, in fulfilment of God's word to Moses at the burning bush, **Ex. 3:21** 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 the Egyptians ... and that is exactly what happened, as confirmed in chapter twelve, ^{12:35} the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed [*sha'al, requested*] of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: ³⁶ And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent [*sha'al*] unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled [*plundered*] the Egyptians. ... God keeps His word, regardless of the circumstances.

As they left, He turned the mourning of the Hebrews into joy. When they came down to Egypt four hundred and thirty years earlier, there were only seventy of them ... but when they left, - despite their suffering and slavery, - God had blessed them and their numbers had risen to over two million. ... Try as the enemy will, they can never defeat the purposes and plans and people of God!

Even the Hebrews could not have foreseen how God would have miraculously freed them. Over the years, their faith had dwindled. There was nothing they could have done, but when God stepped in, He did it all. ... He provided them with the way out of Egypt, and the health and strength for the journey. He gave them a leader and He directed them on the route to take, **Ex. 13:17** it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that *God led them* not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near ... ¹⁸ But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed *Ichamush, strong and fit* out of the land of Egypt. He knew of their doubts and fears, and that is why He led them away from the land of the Philistines, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt (v.17). ...

God is always ahead of His people, and He will never lead us anywhere He is not with us. Another prophet, Jeremiah, also faced difficult times, and he prayed, **Jer. 10:23** O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. ... It is God Who watches over His people, with the guarantee, **Ps. 32:8** I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: *I will guide thee* with *mine* eye. ... What a day it must have been when the Hebrew people left behind their homes in Egypt and ventured into the unknown with an old man leading them, towards a sea which stretched out before them, with a wilderness on the other side, trusting in the promise of reaching their own land! ... How incredible, and yet, our God leads us into the inconceivable and He makes the impossible *possible*!

After Pharaoh had mourned over the death of his eldest son, he pursued the Hebrews as they made their way towards the Red Sea. He was convinced he would catch up with them. And he prepared his armies, - more than he needed, **14:7** he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them ... and he chased after the Hebrews.

The Hebrews were understandably nervous and frightened (14:10) and they quickly blamed Moses (v.11), - the man God had chosen to lead them. ... They

were as much as blaming God (!) and they wished they had never left Egypt (v.12). Calmly, Moses' confidence remained as he replied, ¹³ Fear ye not, *stand still Istand fast!*, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. ¹⁴ The LORD shall fight for you. ... And they watched as God opened a dry path in the sea before them to pass through to the other side ...

“When Israel out of bondage came,
A sea before them lay;
The Lord reached down His mighty hand,
And rolled the sea away”.

When the Hebrews had reached the other side, the Egyptian armies raced down to the shore, and arrogantly they entered the sea. ... As they followed the path made for the Israelites, the waves which had been standing tall immediately crashed down upon them (14:23) and the Egyptian armies were destroyed, By faith *Ithe children of Israel* passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians *[attempted]* to do were drowned (Heb. 11:29).

God saved His people from *slavery*, He kept them safe in the *sea*, and He would keep them through the *sand* in the desert and on to the Promised Land! As the prophet Samuel said years later, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us (I Sam. 7:12).

The wilderness was dry, barren, dangerous and it stretched further than the eye could see. ... The direct route was the ‘international coastal highway’ from Egypt to Canaan known as “The Way of the Sea” (Via Maris). It was a popular ancient trade route controlled by Egypt. Coming from the other direction the same route was known as “The Way of the Philistines”, however, as we noted before, **Ex. 13:17** God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near ... ¹⁸ But God led the people ... through the way of the wilderness.

And yet, for most of the next forty years they wrestled and argued with God. They doubted Him. They rebelled against Moses and Aaron who He had given to lead them. They often wished they had never begun the journey. However, God kept them when their enemies in the wilderness pursued them and would not let them pass through their territory. He sheltered them in the fierce desert storms. He fed them with manna and quail. He provided water from the rock. By day He directed them with a cloud, and by night with a flaming fire. He led them when they did not know where they were going. He removed from them those who would have taken them astray. ... With the precious materials they had acquired from the Egyptians, they built a tabernacle to His specifications.

He gave them the Law and the Ten Commandments. He established the sacrifices, and the offerings, and the feast days. ... He *led* them through the wilderness, He *kept* them through the wilderness, and He eventually *brought* them out of the wilderness.

They made many mistakes, such as when ... **Ps. 106:19** They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. ²⁰ Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. ²¹ They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; ²² Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. ²³ Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them. ²⁴ Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: ²⁵ But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD. ... They proved to be constant rebels, and on another occasion when God was about to destroy them Moses interceded, and God promised, **Ex. 33:14** My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. ... He loved them, and kept His covenant with Abraham, **Gen. 17:7** I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. ⁸ And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

There were times in Israel's later history when it looked as if God's promises were under threat, as in the Assyrian invasion of 721 BC, and the Babylonian invasions of 605, 597, 586 BC, and the Roman army's destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Nonetheless, on every occasion, God made provision for upholding His covenant, **Dt. 30:3** the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. ... ⁵ And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good.

The apostle Peter reminded his readers, **II Peter 1:3** According as his [*God's*] divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: ⁴ Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises ... God keeps them all, and His people must believe them. Sometimes it was His will to scatter, but He always gathered them again. The promises God makes, He keeps ... and known only to the Lord are the number of times He has saved and kept us from the enemy.

During their four hundred years in Egypt, the Hebrews could have been annihilated ... but God would not allow it. On the contrary, despite the Egyptians' animosity towards them, despite them being slaves, **Ex. 1:7** the children

of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.

And God covenanted to bring them to the Promised Land ... and that is what He did ... And the God of Israel is *our* God! He has never changed, nor lost any of His almighty power. ... We are living in times when the enemy, - like the Egyptians, - parade themselves as if they are in control. ... Their influence can enter our minds and tell us our days are numbered and, - like the Hebrews, - we are facing extinction. They try to rob us of our faith in God. ... What if the Hebrews had not believed what God told them? ... They would have died in Egypt, without entering the Promised Land, and there would be no Israel today ... and neither would there be any Christians!

At the end of his life, before Moses went from the plains of Moab up to Mount Nebo to die, he spoke to his people as they were looking out over the city of Jericho, and some of the final words he said to them were ... Dt. 33:27 The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee ...²⁸ Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens *[sky]* shall drop down dew.²⁹ Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord. ... They could have *starved* in the wilderness, or they could have been left *suffering* in Egypt, but by God's grace He had *saved* them.

God does not bring His people through afflictions to abandon them. He never rewards faithfulness with failure. The hymn writer (Mary Adams) despaired,

“O the depth of mortal anguish!
O the sorrow and the woe!
Nothing but a gloomy future
Yawns before me as I go ...
And sometimes my faith grows dimmer,
Till I feel I cannot pray”.

... She continued,

“Help and strengthen me, dear Saviour,
For I cannot go alone;
All the weary, gloomy distance
Is entirely unknown;
Not a ray of light to brighten
Up the lonely dreary way,
And sometimes my faith grows dimmer,
Till I feel I cannot pray”.

... And then she realises what she has said, and she changes,
 “Tho’ the sea of life is stormy,
 Thou controlest by Thy will;
 Thou canst whisper words of comfort;
 Thou canst now say, Peace, be still;
 All the roaring, angry billows,
 Every overwhelming tide,
 Thou canst check my dear, dear Saviour:
 I will walk close by Thy side.”

And the Lord keeps you as you “walk close by His side”. The next chapter in the history of the Hebrews is about to begin, ^{Dt. 34:5} So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. ⁶ And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. ⁷ And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force *freshness, vigour* abated. ⁸ And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended. ⁹ And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses. ¹⁰ And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, ¹² And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.

What a testimony! May God guide us through these coming days, and may we be willing to follow Him! Amen.