

God's Way Out

"For Us And For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Ezra 8:21.

Lesson 7. Can Obstacles Block God's Way Out?

If ever you wonder if God will remember His promises, read in this chapter how swiftly He moved to liberate a whole nation at the exact time He had appointed.

If the hills around Hebron could listen and speak, they would whisper of a wonderful dream of the centuries. For it was here that Abram heard the voice of God giving one of the most far-reaching of prophetic utterances.

And nigh four millenniums later--could the hills of Hebron speak--they would have whispered to Allenby's soldiers, to tourist, and Arab shepherd: "Every word came true!"

The divine Voice by Hebron declared to Abraham: "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall afflict them four hundred years." Then, "that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance," added the Voice. "In the fourth generation they shall come hither again." [1] How mysteriously it all came to pass!

Down in the rich lands of Egypt the seed of Abraham--the families of Joseph and his eleven brothers--grew to be a great multitude, just as God had foretold. But, as the prophecy had indicated, persecution and oppression came.

Surely enough, "When the time of the promise drew nigh" [2] when the four centuries were almost completed--the kings of Egypt had turned strangely against the children of Israel. Another king rose who knew not Joseph. [3] Cruel were the sufferings of the Hebrews at his hands. He forced them to slave under brutal taskmasters in his brick fields. Fearful lest they should ally themselves with possible invaders, he determined to reduce their numbers. He ordered that all their male children should be thrown into the Nile as soon as they were born. [4] He ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill them. The first "Jewish pogrom" had begun.

Clay-besmeared, sweating, panting, gasping, toiling slaves they toiled till the veins stood out on their foreheads and the heart raced and thumped ominously as they lifted the heavy bricks and clay. Their backs were scarred and bleeding with the

taskmaster's rod. Anger went raging in their spirits at the indignity and the insult of it all.

This dictator-like cruelty in the presence of suspected danger--this, they found, was the fruit of idolatry and man-worship! Sometimes we have to pass through such trouble, or to witness it, that we may learn forever to shun and despise the worship of man, metal, and wood.

Could they ever escape this toiling slavery?

Possibly Amram and Joses discussed it when the taskmaster looked away while they toiled at their brick making:

"Oh-h, Amram! I ache in every limb with this labour in the clay. Will Pharaoh never finish building cities?"

"Release will come soon, Joses. Remember God's promise to Abram. After four hundred years the people of Israel would be freed from this bondage and go back to Canaan with great riches!"

"Four hundred years! May its end come soon!"

"It will. The time is almost gone. Soon the deliverer will appear, and we shall march out of these brick fields, never to see them again, Joses."

"But Pharaoh will never let us go. Will he free over half a million slaves who are all working for him for nothing? Never!"

"We must seize spears and swords, Joses, and find the leader from God. Then will we fight our way out."

"Fight? Fight Egypt? Mightiest nation on earth! Hopeless, Amram. Thou talks without thought. Did thou not see that mighty army pass by on its way to Zoan? A great multitude of flying horses and swift chariots? Soldiers quick as light with their spears! Trained to smash a man's face with one blow of their heavy maces [5] We could never match them."

"Not now, Joses, no! But God will raise up a mighty leader who shall outmatch all Egypt's generals. Did not Joseph declare: God will surely bring you out of this land?"

"Oh, but they laugh at our invisible God--the blasphemers! And they say that Egypt's Nile-god and dog-faced gods and cow gods, and even their dirty black-beetle gods, are mightier by far. Else would they be the slaves and we the conquerors." [6]

"So laughed the people before the Flood, Josep. But when God's hundred and twenty years of mercy had been laughed to scorn--how suddenly they were buried beneath the wild waters!" [7]

"True, Amram. And here in Egypt also--in Joseph's time God declared that after seven years the Great Hunger should come."

"And it did come, at the time appointed, Josep."

"Yes, Yes! I know we should be patient. But thou says that God has promised that Israel shall come out with great substance? Lo, Amram, we be as poor as the mice of the desert. Whence shall we find gold and silver and precious . . . hush, hush! here comes the taskmaster! Give me more stubble!"

But this toil and labor, hard though it was to bear, was a sign that the rest of the prophecy would soon be fulfilled. Perhaps that very night, when Amram went home to his wife Jochebed, he was greeted by the cry of a new-born baby, who was to be the very deliverer he had spoken of to Josep.

"What a lovely boy!" they whispered together as they looked at the infant.

"He is a lovely boy," Jochebed repeated to her husband as the days went by. "He must not die, Amram! The Egyptians must not kill him, as they have killed so many Hebrew babies. Throw him into the river? Not for a dozen Pharaohs!"

Will the Baby Escape?

Prayerfully the parents sought wisdom from God, and when the boy was three months old, his mother, moved by an impulse which must have come from Him who loves the children and knows the future, laid him in a tiny covered boat made of papyrus reeds, and placed it among the flags by the Nile brink.

Strange was the sequel. The cruel king's daughter (possibly Princess Hatshepsut [8]) came down to wash at the riverside with her maidens, after the manner of Egypt. She saw the little boat in the cool, quiet water and sent her maid to fetch it.

When she lifted the lid she saw the beautiful child. "And behold, the babe wept."

"And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children." Her woman's heart was touched, and she determined she would adopt the tearful baby. He should not die! But how should she care for him?

Clever Miriam, the baby's sister, solved the problem. She was at the elbow of the princess now.

“Shall I call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for thee?” she inquired.

By all means! Perhaps the baby would cease his wailing then.

The Hebrew woman came up and the princess committed the baby to her. “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages,” she commanded.

And probably her eyes grew moist and twinkled understandingly as the baby snuggled to the breast of his “nurse,” and stopped crying.

“I know well enough who this Hebrew nurse is,” she decided. “My adopted baby will not go short of love and care.”

His mother bore her baby back to the hut with great joy in her heart. Her boy had been restored to her and was under the protection of the great princess. Surely this was the goodness of God, she thought, as she crooned over him.

“Ah, peacefully does thou sleep, my baby, now thou art in my arms again. Thou art yet my’ own darling for a little, little while. But perchance one day thou shall be Israel’s deliverer. How swiftly, how well I must teach thee, so that thou wilt ever be loyal to the God of thy fathers!”

“My precious, soon thou shall be taken from me to live at the great palace of Pharaoh. Then will they try to turn thee away from thy mother’s God, my ‘bright-eyes.’ Wilt thou then worship senseless idols? Nay, I will teach thee of the God of love.”

Moses, that was the name the Princess had given him, seems to have remained with his mother about twelve years. [9] How earnestly she taught him, and how well she succeeded!

When Moses was taken to the palace he was educated in all the learning and wisdom of the Egyptians. But he remained true to his mother’s God. Perhaps he went to the great colleges of Thebes [10] and Heliopolis. Probably he studied astronomy at Dendera, where was a great plan of the Zodiac.

He became a great favorite with the people as well as with his foster-mother and the king. But he remained true to his mother’s God. Ever before him was the picture of the restitution of all things lost by our first parents. Ever before him was God’s way out of darkness into the light of God’s kingdom.

Moses' Education

What a man of learning he became! He was well acquainted with the story of the Shepherd Kings who had invaded Egypt some time before. He knew the exploits of the Pharaohs--Zoser, Khufu, and Khafre, the mighty pyramid-builders. What our Egyptologists could learn from him!

It is very possible that Moses saw Cleopatra's Needle dragged to its place and set up in Heliopolis. He saw the great pyramids in all their towering solemnity, before a stone had been taken away from them. The Sphinx looked down on Moses, and Moses returned the stare with bold disdain.

Moses saw the state funerals and looked on the strange pictures of "The Book of the Dead" in the tombs of the Valley of the Kings. Therein he saw the hyena-headed gods, the god with the balances, and the dog who devoured the wicked. Day by day he saw priests and noblemen participating in the worship of dogs and cats, frogs and birds, the sun, moon, and stars, and the Nile which flowed through the land.

Moses could read the hieroglyphics at a glance. [11] He knew the history of the great towns of those days. Was not Hebron built seven years before Zoan? Was not Damascus one of the first cities? Babylon--the great metropolis of the East--was not Nimrod the man who founded it? [12] In wars with Abyssinia he showed himself a successful military leader. The king determined that he should be heir to the throne. But neither threats nor flatteries would induce him to worship the idols of Egypt or to participate in the wickedness which was all around him. He continued loyal to his mother's teaching. What an encouragement to every mother as she endeavors to train her children for the conflict of life!

Moses never forgot his mother's lessons. "When God's time is ended, Moses, Israel shall be delivered from Egypt," she had taught him. "One day God will set up a glorious Eden kingdom that shall endure through endless ages," she had said. So when, later, the Spirit of God called him to be the deliverer of Israel, he actually turned his back on Egypt's throne with all its power and wealth and accepted the divine commission.

Has the Time Come?

When he was about forty years old, he was stung to anger one day by the sight of an Egyptian who was brutally smiting a man of the Hebrews. "Thou base coward! The time has come to intervene," he thought. His dagger was out in a flash, and in a moment the Egyptian lay dead on the sand. Moses buried him out of sight.

"But surely all Israel will soon see that the time has come! Before long they will rise against these oppressors and I will lead them out of Egypt," Moses told himself. But Israel did not rise. They were afraid. The time of God had not yet come. Instead of finding himself at the head of the hosts of Israel, he had to flee for his life from an angry Pharaoh who had in some way learned of his killing of the Egyptian. "Moses is stirring up a great rebellion," was the news which the king received.

He Disappears--and Appears Again

The fugitive found employment as a shepherd in Midian, and for forty years he was absent from Egypt. Forty more years of oppression for the nation of slaves! Would the day of deliverance ever come?

When would those predicted four centuries end? It was uncertain just when they began. Was the end as uncertain as the beginning?

But after forty long years, Moses reappeared with the great tidings: "God has sent me to deliver you from Egypt! He has appeared to me in a bush which burned with flame but never burned out. The end of the time is at hand. Look at these signs!"

He threw down his shepherd's rod and it became a serpent. He took the serpent by the tail and it became a rod again. He put his hand in his bosom and it was leprous when he took it out. He put it in his bosom again and drew it out sound and whole.

The Signs Convinced the People

There was great rejoicing in Israel. "At last! At last the time of release has come." But surely Moses could never persuade Pharaoh to free these slaves. One could just as soon have expected Germany to release the Poles in 1941, endowing them with gold and silver and jewels as well. Moses and his brother went up to the palace and gave the king their message from God. They showed their miraculous signs before him and said: "Jehovah commands: Let My people go!"

"Let Israel go!" roared Pharaoh. "Never! Who is Jehovah that I should let them go? They shall not go. Their burdens shall be increased." And instead of the expected release, the astonished and disappointed Israelites were compelled to labor harder than before, until they would not listen to Moses for very anguish of spirit.

Moses was greatly distressed. How could he deliver a people who had so little faith in God? Little could he see that in a very short time this people would be

singing a great song of victory over the Egyptians. Just as it is hard for us in these times to see how soon God's people will be rejoicing over the eternal defeat of the powers of darkness.

But the Pharaoh of Moses' day seemed as immovable as some of the pharaohs of our day.

"My armies are invincible," thought Pharaoh, "and these people are unarmed."

"I have control of all Egypt's wealth. They have no wealth but their four-legged beasts, which I can take whenever I need them," he persuaded himself.

"My priests are highly educated men of science. They can work magic. They are perfect physically; there is not a spot or blemish on them; so they can influence all the gods on my behalf, while these dirty, lazy shepherds--what god will listen to them? Who hath ever seen their God?"

"But my gods," Pharaoh liked to think this, "my gods are the most powerful in the world; they have showered their gifts on Egypt and on me their associate. The Nile-god brings his gifts in bountiful crops and shoals of fish. Great Ra, the sun-god, causes the wheat and the flax and the vine to grow. The spirit that dwells in the sacred Apis bull gives its blessing in the increase of herds and flocks. And great Death himself hath no terror for me, for the sacred scarab beetle on my embalmed body will ferry me home to the realms of the blest. Who is Jehovah that I should let Israel go?" [13]

"Tomorrow morning I will go and worship the mighty Nile god. I will bring offerings to our beautiful river, and later I will drink of its pleasant waters," determined Pharaoh.

Strange Plagues Begin

Oddly enough, Aaron and Moses were at the river's edge when Pharaoh went down to worship. They gave him the message from God once more, and then stretched out the shepherd's rod over the waters of the river. Consternation! The waters of the river became blood!

Blood in the river and blood in the streams! Evil-smelling blood in the ponds, and blood in the garden fountains. Shudders! "O Pharaoh, think thee of the blood of the Hebrew children. Woe to the world because of the innocent blood that has been shed through idolatry and man-worship!"

“Behold, O Pharaoh! The Nile-god is brought low!” voices whispered. But Pharaoh refused to heed. After seven days Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh again with the message from God:-

“Let My people go! If thou refuse I will smite all thy borders with frogs.”

“I will not let them go,” resolved Pharaoh. “Heki, the goddess of frogs, will drive them away when my priests call on her to help.”

But Heki, the frog goddess, could do nothing to remove these immense swarms of frogs. There were frogs in the houses and frogs in the bedrooms. Frogs in the ovens and frogs in the kneading-troughs. Frogs, frogs, frogs, frogs!

“Behold, O Pharaoh! Heki, the frog goddess, is brought low,” voices whispered.

“Ask the Lord Jehovah to take away the frogs, and I will let the people go,” lied Pharaoh at last.

And when God removed the plague he refused to keep his word. At the command of God, Aaron stretched out the rod and beat the dust of Egypt. Beat and beat the “sacred” soil of Egypt. And behold from the “sacred dust” came loathsome lice fastening on man and beast.

“This is the finger of God,” said the shuddering lice-bitten magicians.

“Behold the sacred soil is brought low,” voices whispered. But lice-tormented Pharaoh refused to hear.

Then came swarms of great venomous, biting flies. Biting flies all over the land--except in the land of Goshen, where Israel dwelt. Painful bites were inflicted on Pharaoh and on his priests; on his chariot-drivers and on his sacred cows. Pharaoh again made lying promises--how easily to trust in the power of lies! Lying to God on the throne of heaven!

Often had Pharaoh trusted in the wealth of Egypt. Silver and gold, cattle and sheep, asses and camels, were his in abundance. Great is the power of wealth! But in a few short hours Egypt's wealth of cattle and sheep came to disaster. Some swift strange disease fell upon all which were out in the field, and they died.

“Alas, O Pharaoh! the sacred rams of Khmim are brought low!” voices whispered. Then fell a plague of painful boils on wicked priests, deceiving magicians, cruel king, and selfish, cruel people. How often their stinging whips and lashes had brought painful sores, blood, and tears to the Israelites and other captives!

Plague followed plague, disaster followed disaster. Always the warning came first, giving opportunity for escape. But punishment follows every cruel action in God's

own time, whatever the position of ruler or citizen. Yet always there is forgiveness if we turn to God.

The Israelites were under the protection of God and suffered none of the more grievous plagues. Thus their confidence in God grew as they saw His power manifested. At His word a terrific storm arose, with great hailstones raining down like shrapnel splinters. The thunder roared, and lightning flashed. At His word the east wind blew, and clouds of locusts came to devour the Egyptians' crops. He spoke, and the west wind blew the locusts away. He spoke again, and clouds of darkness hid the sun for three days. Great Ra, the Egyptian sun-god, was utterly vanquished! What folly to worship Ra!

The Last Strange Scourge

"Prepare to leave Egypt!" Moses now commanded the people of Israel. "Demand your wages, so long held back, from the Egyptians. Demand gold and silver and jewels that are easy to carry. Prepare to leave Egypt! Tonight comes the last great plague, and Pharaoh will let you go!"

"The destroying angel will pass over tonight and all the first-born shall die," declared Moses. "The first-born of Pharaoh upon the throne--the first-born of all!"

"All who would escape, listen! Before the destroying angel comes this night, strike the door-posts and the lintel with a bunch of hyssop dipped in the blood of a lamb. For God hath said: 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you.' 97

Mercy's pleas went out over Egypt. "Strike the door-posts with blood. Trust in the blood of the Lamb. The destroying angel comes this night. Trust in the blood of the Lamb."

And not one was lost where the loving offer of mercy was accepted. When the blood appeared on the door-posts not one mother, Egyptian or Israelite, suffered bereavement that night And not one will be lost in God's great day who puts his trust in the Lamb of God, slain on Calvary for us.

"It came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon."

"And there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead."

Pharaoh urgently summoned Moses and Aaron in the darkness., "Get you forth. . . Take your flocks and your herds, ... and be gone!"

"And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."

God's great prophetic timepiece had struck the hour, and His people marched forth as He had promised. God Himself leading in a pillar of cloud, they strode forth with their little ones, with gladness in their heart and songs of gratitude on their lips. But in a few days their rejoicing was turned to alarm. They had marched into a valley which terminated at the Red Sea. They could not go forward; it seemed as though they had been led the wrong way.

And that very evening cries of terror arose from those in the rear. Away in the distance, coming from the direction of the Nile, was Pharaoh's dreaded army, a multitude of flying horses and swift chariots, soldiers quick as light with their spears, and trained to smash a man's face with one blow of their heavy maces. "O God, we can never match them!" the people murmured fearfully.

But the mighty God of Israel moved swiftly to defend His people. The pillar of cloud, emblem of God's presence, which had gone before them, moved majestically between the host of Israel and Egypt's armies. It became darkness to the Egyptians; it glowed with light over the Israelites. "Fear you not!" Moses called out to the frightened people. "The Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you!"

A Miraculous Way of Escape

"Take thy staff and stretch it over the sea!" God commanded Moses. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Neither Pharaoh's armies nor the depths of the Red Sea shall prevent God's prophetic word from being fulfilled! Moses obeyed. He stretched over the sea the wonder-working rod.

Instantly a strong east wind sprang up, and the dumbfounded Israelites saw the sea making way for them. Along the very bed of the sea a great wide road appeared with a dark wall of water on both sides--God's great way out of danger. With shouts of exultation they bowed their heads to the gale and rushed forward down the wet slope, lighted by the glowing pillar of cloud.

"A night in the bed of the sea"--they talked of it centuries after. But when Pharaoh reached the sea a few hours later, his stubborn heart was still set on defying God, and he urged his army after them. As the last of the Israelites

reached the farther shore, the Egyptian host were hard behind them in the bed of the sea. "We will have them yet!" he raged inwardly. "We will not endure this disgrace."

Fear rose among the Israelites. But Moses was listening to the Voice again, and at the command of God he stretched his hand over the waters. What was going to happen?

Suddenly the east wind ceases. There is a roaring of waters across the channel. The road through the sea is awash! Cries of terror rise from the Egyptians. Confusion falls upon confusion. They try to turn their chariots and retreat! Woe to Pharaoh! Woe to Egypt! Pharaoh's army had met the Leader who should outmatch all Egypt's generals!

REFERENCES

1. Genesis 15:13-16.
2. Acts 7:17.
3. Exodus 1: 8.
4. Exodus 1:11, 16, 22.
5. Where Moses Went to School, Page 3.
6. Where Moses Went to School, Page 3.
7. Genesis 6:3.
8. The Bible Comes Alive, Page 5.
9. Patriarchs and Prophets, Page 244.
10. Exodus 2:5-10. Also "Unfinished Man," by Albert Wilson, M.D.
11. Acts 7:22.
12. Numbers 13:22; Genesis 10:10.
13. Adam Clarke's Commentary, on Exodus 8:26.

