Exodus - Commentaries by William Kelly

The Christian Shepherd: 2003, On Moses

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“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb” (Ex. 3:1).

Moses thought that when he had spent forty years in Egypt, he was fitted to deliver the people of God, but he had to learn that not until he had been taught of God in the wilderness was he competent to lead the people out of Egypt. God has generally to put souls through a sieve and break them down in their own conceit, if He is going to use them in a really honorable way.

W. Kelly

Exodus, Exodus: 8. The Divine Commission to Moses

Ex. 3:6-22

BUT definite words were added to the sight.

“And he said, I [am] the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And Jehovah said, Seeing (or, Surely) I have seen the affliction of my people that [are] in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; 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 and large land, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. And now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me, and I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who [am] I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this [shall be] the token to thee that I have sent thee: when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. And Moses said to God, Behold [when] I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers hath sent me to you; and they shall say to me, What [is] his name? what shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, I AM WHAT I AM; and he said, Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me to you. And God said moreover to Moses, Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me to you; this [is] my name forever, and this my memorial to all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared to me, saying, Visiting (or, Surely) I have visited you and [seen] that which is done to you in Egypt; and I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice; and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt, and ye shall say to him, Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, hath met with us; and now let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Jehovah our God. And I know that the king of Egypt will not give you leave to go, no, not by a. mighty hand. And I will put forth 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. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty; but every woman shall ask her neighbor, 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” (vers. 6-22).

It was a blessed intervention of Jehovah on behalf of His enslaved and cruelly oppressed people. The name He gave Himself was not new in the sense of never having been heard before. Now He was about to act on its reality and present value. There was to be accomplishment up to a certain and evident point, and not promise only. Hence stress is laid on “the God of thy fathers,” and this expounded as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses realized the fact and hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. Most reassuring were the words, “And Jehovah said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows: and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land into a land good and large, into a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. And now behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me; and I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt” (vers. 7-10).

Yet would it be partial and temporary; for what could be more that depended on the first man, a people in the flesh? The fulfillment for everlasting can only be when man truly renounces self, owns his ruin before God, and has Christ, the Second man, as the present and abiding ground of blessing. There was to be shortly a typical redemption; and a typical entrance into the land of abundance, not of corn and fruit only, but flowing with milk and honey. Nothing abides forever but God, and God now has wrought for sinful man in the gift of life eternal and everlasting redemption. So it will be really for Israel when they have their own Messiah present and reigning over them. Till then it could be no more than provisional for Israel, who must learn what it is, after sowing to the flesh, to reap corruption.

Moses is as distrustful now, as he was confident in Egypt; he asks “Who am I” to go unto Pharaoh and bring out Israel? But Jehovah vouchsafes His presence and gives the token of serving God “on this mountain.” Then, to Moses asking a specific name of His presence, He

says, “I AM WHAT I AM,” His essential and abiding being; and bids Moses say to Israel, “I AM hath sent me to you.” All else was but creature. He was the only and ever existing One. But he was also to say, The Jehovah God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, had sent him to them. “This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations.” A wondrous declaration to be infallibly verified, when the Lord Jesus vindicates His every word.

God therefore calls on Moses (ver. 16) to “Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared unto me saying, I have surely visited you and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: and I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey. 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 to him, Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, hath met with us: and now let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Jehovah our God. And I know that the king of Egypt will not give you leave to go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will put forth 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. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: but every woman shall ask her neighbor, 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” (vers. 16-22).

He was to ask at first leave to go “three days' journey into the wilderness,” but would ask more as the obduracy of the king appeared, and God lets Moses know the king's sure defiance, tells of His wonders to be done in reproof, and directs His people not to go empty after their long unrequited labor, and that every woman should (not, borrow, but) ask for jewels of silver and of gold, and thus spoil them, as it was righteous retribution. The word “borrow” is only a secondary sense, and here misappropriate. “Ask” is the direct and primary sense, and therefore right to be preserved.

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Exodus, Exodus: 7. The Burning but Unconsumed Bramble

Ex. 3:1-5

The moment so long desired by Moses came. The term, however considerable, of learning the wisdom of the Egyptians did not accomplish it; and an equal length in the desert for unlearning must as it were run out before God gave him the effectual call.

“And Moses tended the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock behind the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb. And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bramble; and he looked and behold, the bramble burned with fire, and the bramble was not consumed. And Moses said, Let me now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bramble is not burnt. And Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, and God called to him out of the midst of the bramble, and said, Moses, Moses! And he said, here [am] I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither; loose thy sandals from off thy feet; for the place, whereon thou standest is holy ground” (vers. 1-5).

There had been significant tokens of the divine ways at great crises vouchsafed by God from the beginning. What more solemn than that which closed paradise to the disobedient pair, from whom the fallen race was to spring? A bad conscience led them to hide themselves from Him who had surrounded them with nothing but good, before He “drove out the man”; and the race thenceforward is by nature in exile from the garden of delights. Cherubim proclaimed God's rights and made re-entrance into Adam's paradise impossible. Innocence once gone is irreparable. Yet God's grace cannot fail in the Second man, the bruised Bruiser of the old serpent, held out to all that believe even before the guilty were expelled.

Again, when the post-diluvian earth began, and Noah offered to Jehovah his burnt-offerings of every clean beast and every clean fowl, so that all should stand on sacrifice, God (Elohim), for this was the right word in each case, set His bow in the cloud, as the token that a deluge of such destruction should never again destroy all flesh.

Further, when Jehovah pledged Himself to childless Abram in Gen. 15 to make his seed numberless as the stars, not only were special sacrifices prescribed, but a deep sleep and horror of darkness fell on the patriarch, and at sunset a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed to his vision between the divided animals as they lay slain: the sign of affliction and service to befall his seed before they should enter the promised land.

It was fitting that there should be given now to Moses with his commission a suited sign. And can any be conceived so meet for the deliverer to see as this great sight when he led the flock of Jethro behind an intervening wilderness, and came to what is significantly called “the mountain of God.” It was the precisely significant mark of Israel under the covenant of law, utterly failing yet not destroyed. “For I am Jehovah, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). The law given through Moses they presumed to obey, forgetting God's promises to the fathers, which Jehovah never forgot. Spite of their self-confidence, the bramble-bush went on burning, but unconsumed, because He, the Eternal, had promised. And they remain still insensible to their real state and its cause. For they in every way broke the first covenant and added to that sin, for which they were led captive to Babylon, the still worse sin of the returned remnant in rejecting the Messiah, even to the death of the cross, and were scattered by the Romans as they remain to this day, as indicated by Isaiah the prophet.

Even when there shall be a future righteous remnant repenting of all their sins and unbelief, the mass or “the many” as Daniel calls the apostate Jews, by compact with the Roman Beast will strive to set up the nation as Jehovah's people and their lawless king in the land (Dan. 11:36, etc.). But Jehovah will come, as Isaiah says (66:15, 16), “with fire and with his chariots like a whirlwind to render his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will Jehovah plead with all flesh, and the slain of Jehovah shall be many.” Such will be the return of the Lord Jesus when He takes up again His ancient people, and deals with the enemies, Jewish or Gentile. Hence it essentially differs from what Moses saw to encourage him then, though there is the common principle that God's judgment of evil is ever

unsparing; and privilege is vainly pleaded, either by Judaism or by Christendom, on behalf of their iniquities.

Here Jehovah manifests Himself as judge of evil in Israel who shall be sustained because of what He is to them, and in no way for their deserts: a greater fact than its wondrous sign. “And God,” the Supreme, “called to Moses out of the midst of the bramble, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here [am] I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither; loose thy sandals from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy ground.” His presence is the true power of sanctification. Forms He could and did use under the law, in tabernacle and temple. But He Himself is more than any or all. What a support for Moses in going in to Pharaoh, and in leading His people out, and bearing their frowardness in the wilderness where all perished save the two witnesses, Joshua and Caleb, yet Israel remained unconsumed to enter the land in the generation to come.

Exodus, Exodus: 6. Moses Quits Egypt and Flees to Midian

We have seen faith blessed in the saving of Moses, and providence at work in the king's daughter, who made his own mother his nurse, and adopted him as her son and had him instructed, as Stephen said, in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, mighty as he was too in his deeds and words.

Now we are about to hear of his own faith, rising above the elevation which providence gave him at the court of Pharaoh, and enabling him to sacrifice all to God's glory and His promises to Israel in their most despised and distressful circumstances.

“And it came to pass in those days when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he turned this way and that way, and when he saw that [there was] no man, he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. And he went out the second day, and, behold, two Hebrew men were quarreling; and he said to him that was in the wrong, Why art thou smiting thy neighbor? And he said, Who made thee ruler and judge over us? Dost thou intend [say] to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared and said, Surely the matter is known. And Pharaoh heard of this matter and sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from before Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian. And he sat by the well. And the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew [water], and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses rose and helped them, and watered their flock. And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, Why are ye come so soon to-day? And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew abundantly for us, and watered the flock. And he said to his daughters, And where [is] he? Why then have ye left the man behind? Call him that he may eat bread. And Moses consented to stay with the man; and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. And she bore a son, and he called his name Gershom [a sojourner there]; for he said, I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.

“And it came to pass during these many days, that the king of Egypt died. And the children of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and cried; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. And God heard their groaning; and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God took notice” (vers. 11-25.).

It was characteristic of Moses' faith, that he believed God's love to His people because they were His, however deplorable their state through their unbelief and the world's oppression and contempt. The providential circumstances which had lifted him above the low estate of his parents and set him, distinguished by his abilities, his acquirements, and his character in the nearest position to the royal family, gave him the stronger reason to treat all as naught compared with identifying himself with down-trodden Israel. Natural gratitude might plead her claim who had under God's hand delivered him from death. Reason would not fail to argue the prudence of using his nearness at court to gain and seize opportunities for its favor toward his suffering kinsfolk. In the face of all adverse appearances the faith of Moses rested on two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, His promise and His oath to the father of the faithful, that of Abraham's seed He would make a great nation, and that in his Seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Moses was no enthusiastic stripling, but then, as Stephen lets us know, a man about forty years of age. His words, his deeds, his mind, his affection, all point him out as one of the leading spirits for all time. But by faith he deliberately turned his back on Egypt's ease, power, and honor, to take his place among the chosen people of Jehovah, slaves though they then were and strangers in a land not their own. He knew from what we read in Gen. 15 that the end of their affliction must come ere long; for had not Jehovah said hundreds of years before, that He would judge the nation after it had reduced them to servitude and was not the fourth generation arrived, when they should quit their oppression for the land of promise? “By faith Moses, when he had become great, refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, esteeming the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect to the recompence” (Heb. 11:24-26.).

The history gives the facts as they occurred. His brethren under their burdens lay on the heart of Moses; and as he looked, he saw an Egyptian smite one of them. Roused to indignation, “he looked this way and that way,” and seeing no witness, he took the law into his hand and slew the offender, hiding the body in the sand. The love to his brethren was a right and holy feeling; but his inflicting death on the Egyptian was unjustifiable, and led to his long exile to escape the king's resentment. He acted on the impulse of his heart, and in no way as consulting God or obeying Him. Had he looked to Him, he would not have “looked this way or that way.” He tarnished his testimony for God by his efforts to escape, any witness of the deed or of his concealing the corpse, and the consequences.

The very day after, he had to bear the keen wound inflicted not by an Egyptian nor the king but by an unworthy brother. For when he reproved the sad quarreling of Hebrew with Hebrew, he that did the wrong was the one to raise the insulting cry, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge"? and to clench it with the stab, “Intendest thou to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?” The conscience of Moses was bad: “surely the matter is known.” The king too was roused by his act; and Moses fled from his vengeance into the land of Midian. Moses was not brought to nothingness in his own eyes. He was playing the hero rather than the saint who waits on God, not only for the revealed end, but for each step of the way. Hence we walk by faith, not by sight. It is a path of constant dependence on God, guided by His word. And Moses had as it were to unlearn for as many years in Midian as he had been learning the wisdom of the Egyptians. What a change from the court of Pharaoh to lead Reuel or Jethro's sheep “in the back end of the desert,” not far from “the mount of God.” To this discipline the solitude of the wilderness and the lowly life of a shepherd gave the needed sphere, that his impetuous spirit might be broken down, and himself become

“very meek, above all men that were upon the face of the earth.”

As he sat by the well, came the seven daughters of Reuel with their father's flock. But the shepherds drove them away from the troughs they sought to fill for watering the sheep. Moses interposed, and so helped the maidens that they returned soon enough to excite their father's inquiry how it came to pass, and a message sent that the stranger should partake of his hospitality. The gift of his daughter as wife followed, and the birth in due time of a son; whose name expressed the father's sense of strangership in a foreign land, in striking contrast with Joseph's forgetfulness of all his toil and all his father's house, under similar circumstances.

During those “many days” died the king of Egypt. But no relaxation of the cruel strain as yet appeared for the sons of Israel. Their bondage drew out sighs and cries. But their cry, as we are told with touching simplicity “came up to God because of the bondage; and God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob; and God looked upon the children of Israel, and God took notice.” O ye that boast of Herodotus and Thucydides, of Livy and Tacitus, produce any sentence from those classic historians, or from any since down to our day, for words approaching these for tenderness, soon to be rendered into undying facts, now for everlasting principles of truth and righteousness in earthly things which test the soul whether we care for the living God or are in heart His enemies!

Exodus, Exodus: 5. Moses Born Under Interdict

MAN proposes, God disposes. It appears from the facts stated, that, just after Pharaoh's edict for exterminating the sons of Israel, God ordered the birth of their deliverer. For Aaron was born three years before Moses, and was untouched, Miriam being several years his senior, as the history even here implies.

“And a man of the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived and bore a son. And she saw him that he was fair, and hid him three months. And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of paper reeds, and cemented it with bitumen and pitch, and put the child in it, and laid [it] in the sedge, on the bank of the river. And his sister stood afar off to see what would happen to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh went down to bathe in the river; and her maids walked along by the river side. And she saw the ark in the midst of the sedge, and sent her hand-maid to fetch it. And she opened [it] and saw the child, and, behold, the boy wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is [one] of the Hebrews' children. And his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call thee a wet-nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the damsel went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give [thee] thy wages. And the woman took the child and nursed it. And when the child was grown, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses1 and said, Because I drew him out of the water” (vers. 1-10).

The mother's heart regarded the beauty of the babe as a sign from God to preserve him from the murderous fate intended by the king. But there was more than natural feeling. “By faith” Moses when born was hid three months by his parents, because they saw the child fair; and they did not fear the injunction of the king (Heb. 11:23). A deliverer was ever before those who believed, not only the woman's Seed, but Abraham's Seed also. To have taken absolutely that life was a Satanic attack on God's counsels. At the risk of life perhaps they preserved their child three months. We are not told more of the circumstances, why it was impossible to hide the child longer. But obviously he who devised the death of every male child would use means too for due inquisition to ascertain from time to time that his decree was carried out. It is legitimate to infer that the moment was at hand when their concealment could last no longer, the child must be committed to the Nile, and themselves punished also for their contumacy.

Hence the mother was led by a wisdom above her own to commit the baby to an ark of papyrus reeds, well plastered with bitumen and pitch, and to await divine interference. The sister, who was afterward known as not Miriam only but the “prophetess,” watched at a distance, but near enough to see how her little brother would fare on the bank of the river. And who should be the first to come down to bathe near the ark but Pharaoh's daughter, she and her maids? She in God's providence saw the ark, and sent her handmaid to fetch it, and opened it and saw the child. Here again God wrought; for, “behold, the babe wept.” His tears, to say nothing of his beauty, touched the heart of the princess. “She had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.”

Miriam had now joined herself at the critical moment to the group; and with wit quickened by affection availed herself of the evident compassion to say to Pharaoh's daughter, “Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrews, that she may suckle the child for thee?” What could the princess say to so sensible and timely a suggestion, but “Go."? “And the damsel went and fetched the child's mother [her own too]; and Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give [thee] thy wages.”

This was no miracle, any more than the preservation of the child. But it was the living God's working in the various persons concerned, to rescue from a watery grave the one who was to rescue His people from a bondage to many more bitter than death in the Nile: the type of the Deliverer from sin and wrath, not for Israel but for every believer; the prophet too and mediator of God's law, like but beyond other men, though immeasurably inferior to Him through Whom grace and truth came, the manifestation of God's light and love as none but Himself.

“And the woman took the child and nursed it.” Say not, believe not, that God gives the believer divine life only, to feel his sins, or pardon through His mercy in forgiving them. Here it was not yet the divine Savior. But what a joy to the parents to have the doom so simply and surely set aside! and the child brought up where it ought to be rather than anywhere else in the world. Even then it was capable of forming impressions which grace would strengthen and deepen another day, to fortify against the unholy influence of a heathen court, whatever the kindness personally of the princess. “And the child grew, and she (the mother) brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said, “Because I drew him out of the water.” How vain to faith what cavilers say in this day or any other! This was the childhood of him whom God inspired in due time, among other great things, to write the Pentateuch, greater than all his great deeds for God and for man. And it abides as a divine monument in face of all the vain efforts of unbelieving detractors, who really possess no more weight than noisy boys blowing against a mountain; but they cannot shake off the guilt of unbelief.

Exodus, Exodus: 3. Israel Made to Serve With Rigor

Exod. 1:8-14

So rapid an increase in the population of Israel did not fail to arouse the attention and the fears of the Egyptians, when the memory of Joseph and of his services had passed away.

“And there arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. And he said to his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel [are] more numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass that, if war occur, they take side also with our enemies and fight against us, and go up out of the land. And they set over them task-masters to oppress them with their burdens. And they built store-cities for Pharaoh, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and spread; and they were distressed because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor; and they embittered their life with hard labor in clay and bricks, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service with which they made them serve [was] with rigor.” (verses 8-14).

The wisdom of the world overreaches and defeats itself. It was bad policy for the Egyptians to live in idleness and luxury, and to leave their works of hard toil and skill as an oppressive burden on their servants. It was a good apprenticeship for those who were to be mighty as well as populous, and to possess the gate of their enemies. In any case the righteous Lord loves righteousness, and is indifferent to injustice nowhere, least of all when done to the family of “the friend of God.” None shall prosper who are unfair or cruel to his seed. “I will bless them that bless thee,” said Jehovah to Abram, “and curse him that curseth thee.”

In the present case it was a breach of the friendly understanding which set Israel and his sons in Goshen. There had never been hostility. The sons of Israel were in no way prisoners of war or captives in any way. They had given no reason for suspicion of seeking dominion over Egypt. They had never abandoned the hope of returning to Canaan as their land of promise. The burial of Jacob proclaimed this loudly; the unburied coffin of Joseph, still more loudly. Yet did the king who knew not Joseph dread the increasing number and strength of a people which served now as if due for a long while. Nor this only. Come, said he, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass that, if war occur, they take side also with our enemies, and fight against us, and get them up out of the land. Was this in any degree just? And is an unjust policy “wise” in the long run, or in itself justifiable?

No doubt it is so that the kingdoms of the world have ever acted. God is not in their thoughts, even if He be on the lips of any. Selfishness reigns publicly as it governs individually. So it was increasingly when kings ruled over Israel and Judah with a slight exception. So it was when Babylon followed and the other world-kingdoms of Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome: So it will not be when He comes whose right it is beyond every other ruler. But before that King reigns in righteousness and princes rule in judgment, a dark page of prophecy must be fulfilled not in blood only but in burning fuel for fire, and such overturning of things above and below as the world has never known. Out of that hurly-burly Israel shall emerge as Jehovah's people, His Son reigning in Zion, and they shall dwell in the land that He gave to His servant Jacob, when He shall have executed judgments on all those that despised or spoiled them near and far off, and they all shall know that He is Jehovah their God.

Meanwhile man's will had its way; as Israel built store-cities for Pharaoh, Pithom, and Raamses (or Rameses). But God's providence acted also; for the more the Egyptians afflicted the Israelites, the more these multiplied and spread. Therefore were their masters vexed with fear and horror, and hardship was added to their bondage. The Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor; or as is so graphically described in the text, “they embittered their life with hard labor in clay and bricks, and in all their manner of labor in the field: all their labor with which they made them serve was with rigor.” It was quite different from the conditions of slavery once in the West Indies, and later still in the Southern States of America, where such malice was the exception, yet with a race never in honor but degraded grievously. But the face of Jehovah is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth, even in a day when the moral foundations are out of course. His eyes are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their cry. But the furnace became hotter still, and the divine intervention took a more definite and impressive shape.

Exodus, Exodus: 4. Pharaoh's Malice and God's Blessing

We have seen from ver. 13 that it was not only a new king who regarded the rising strength of Israel with fear and jealousy: “the Egyptians made the sons of Israel serve with rigor, and embittered their lives with hard labor,” in town and country. It was not merely service but harsh bondage, as complete a contradiction to their original tenure of Goshen as could be.

The oppression became more cruel still, and stopped not short of plans of the most cowardly kind and in a crafty and perfidious way.

“And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the one [was] Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah; and he said, When ye do the office of a midwife [or, help in bearing] to the Hebrew women, and see [them] upon the birth-stool, if a son, then ye shall kill him; but if a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male-children alive. And the king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them, Why have ye done this, and saved the male-children alive? And the midwives said to Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women [are] not as the Egyptian women; for they are strong, and they have borne before the midwife cometh to them. And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And it came to pass because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses. And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, but every daughter ye shall save alive” (vers. 15-22).

Such an instance as this, and as Herod's in dread of Messiah's birth, could so exceed the ordinary evil ways of man as to remind one of the hidden wicked one, the old Serpent and the Devil, and his enmity to the woman's Seed from first to last of man's day; whose blindness becomes the deeper because he ignores the secret power that works behind the scenes of the world's sad history. How little its rulers, any more than its classes and masses, believe that he is the spring that actuates the sons of disobedience, slaves of a mightier rebel than themselves! For here is a conflict unceasing between the arch-enemy instigating to destruction the first man against the Second and those

dear, to Him, till the last war whether above to clear the heavenly places (Rev. 12), or the earth enters for the displayed kingdom (Rev. 19), or the final judgment and eternity (Rev. 20; 21:1-8). All other wars generally are petty in comparison, springing from ambition, revenge, or other depraved lusts. We may except such as may have typified on a small scale those immensely momentous events for the deliverance of man and the creation from Satan's thralldom, for God's glory in His purpose of exalting the Christ and all that are His in the heavens and on the earth in the highest, largest, and richest way, and alas! too in the destructive punishment of all His enemies.

Here it is but a dastardly and diabolical effort to thwart what God was doing with the sons of Israel, even through the midwives for the male-children. But it was frustrated by the fear of God in the midwives, whom God established in their houses, as they refused the perfidy and the murder the wicked king commanded.

Exodus, Exodus: 2. Israel in Egypt

Ex. 1:1-7

It was a wondrous act of grace when the God of glory called Abram in Ur of the Chaldees to Himself. The fathers of the chosen race no less than the accursed of Canaan then “served other gods:” a then new and destructive evil, striking directly at God's truth and honor, of which we never hear in scripture till after the deluge. In the early days of Seth, particularly from the birth of his son whom he called Enosh with a due sense of what man is now, frail and mortal, we know that people began to call on the name of Jehovah. Eminent among those who believed later were Enoch and Noah; but all these walked with God where they were. Their spirit was separate to Him whom they knew by His word and Spirit, and they looked onward in confiding hope for Him, the mysterious Seed of the woman who should crush the enemy of God and man. They, or some, called on Jehovah's name with a reality which a new nature alone gives.

But idolatry as an open affront to God could be met by nothing less than His call to open separation unto Himself, not only from the nearest ties of kin and nature but also from the providential order He had Himself lately set up in tongues, countries, and nations. His call was sovereign grace but imperative and paramount, with promises to an earthly seed and to a spiritual, only to be fully accomplished in Christ's day above and below. O how feebly realized meanwhile by faith!

As Abram went down into Egypt under natural pressure, so he was given to know in prophetic vision with a smoking furnace and a flaming fire, that his seed should be a sojourner in a land not theirs, and be in bondage and affliction four centuries, to emerge with great property and divine judgment on their oppressive masters, when the time approached to deal with Amorite iniquity (Gen. 15). Having come down under the prestige of Egypt's greatest governor and the warmest royal favor, Israel might have looked for nothing but ease and honor, settled as they were in the best of the land, in Goshen, the extreme province of Egypt toward the south frontier of Palestine. But spite of appearances Egypt in Jehovah's eyes betokened servitude and affliction; and so it came to pass when Joseph's bulwark no longer subsisted. The word of God abides, and cannot fail, whatever the weakness of man, or the pride of unbelief. For the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and His word is the proof of His goodness toward man, and of counsels of grace and glory unfailing when man comes to the end of his folly and sin, and the divine judgment is proved as sure as is His grace.

“And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came into Egypt: with Jacob came they, the man and his household, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls; and Joseph was in Egypt [already]. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and multiplied and became exceeding strong; and the land was filled with them” (vers. 1-7).

Egypt was the providential nursery provided for the chosen race whilst growing up from a great patriarchal family, the sons and sons' sons of one father, into a people for their destined inheritance. They were sheltered mercifully for a season, that they might grow all the more under adversity when it came, as it must, under man's antipathy to any who claimed relationship with the true God, not without dread as we shall soon find.

Let none deem it carping or unkind criticism, if I cite the words of so excellent a Christian as M. Henry in order to save souls from following him where he shows his utter ignorance of God's church, which he confounds, one while with the saints before or during or since Israel, and as here with Israel as such. This is to ignore all the N. T. light on what is found exclusively there, and impossible to exist alongside of Israel, which supposes the middle wall of partition to have God's sanction; whereas He took it down as an essential act for the being of the church, wherein is neither Jew nor Greek, but Christ is all and in all. The family of faith again was a fact throughout the world's history, and independent of it with increasing degrees of light from God. But the church of God was a wholly new thing, which only began with the Jew's rejection of the Christ, whom God raised and exalted to His right hand, and then and there gave Him to be Head over all things to the church which is His body.

Judge then the profound lack of intelligence in these words which open his Exposition of Exodus, “Moses..., having in the first book of his history preserved and transmitted the records of the church (!), while it existed in private families, comes in this second book to give us an account of its growth into a great nation (!!); and as the former furnishes us with the best Economics, so this with the best Politics.” It is not that other divines of any school are more reliable: they all agree in the display of the same misconception. Nor is it a question of an idea or a theory. The truth of the church is bound up with Christ's glory in heavenly places, and immediately acts on our judgment and our affections; because this is what God is now occupied with, along with the gospel sent to all the creation. Now we, without right understanding of our church relation and of God's revealed will as to it, cannot but drift helplessly from what is of the deepest importance to His glory and the blessing of all concerned. The misunderstanding is through the like Judaizing that was the earliest and widest spread of all the forms of unbelief with which the apostle Paul had his life-conflict. It is no less persistent and ensnaring to-day, blinding not a few of the excellent of the earth against our highest privileges.

Here we have exclusively the sons of Israel brought before us under circumstances favoring an extremely rapid increase to which ver. 7 directs our special attention. There is not the most distant allusion to the church throughout.

Bible Treasury: Volume 15, Smite the Rock

Exodus 17:6

The difficulties of scripture, when opened to simple faith, are amongst its chief beauties and its strongest confirmations. God has not written His word to perplex souls but to exercise their hearts in dependence on Him and confidence in Him. When a supposed discrepancy, as unbelief would suggest, turns out to be a two-fold lesson of distinct truths, how encouraging to the believer, who thus finds in the word, not a dead wall that forbids our passage, but a door that opens to faith with a beautiful prospect which it is for us to enjoy on both sides! Let me exemplify this in “the rock” of the second book of Moses compared with that of the fourth, which skepticism will have to be nothing but two different accounts of the same transaction, and of course equally fabulous. The believer knows that they are wholly distinct, one in the first year of Israel's departure from Egypt, the other in the last year of their sojourn in the wilderness; each of them absolutely true, both of them not only highly instructive but divinely prophetic, and therefore not written by Moses simply but as inspired of God, who had ever before Him the glory of Christ and the blessing of His children.

This deeper character is intimated by 1 Cor. 10:1-11. And as the Lord Jesus warrants our seeing in Ex. 16 Himself the true bread of God coming down from heaven, we may well look for a kindred type in chap. 17.

There was “no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink.” Such is unbelief, ever forgetful of grace, ever turning to second causes. God was not in the thoughts of Israel, who only chade Moses. It was tempting Jehovah, that is, doubting His presence in their midst, and this to care for them, after He had given the most magnificent and varied proofs of His power on their behalf; and this up to the last moment. Why not ask water of Him who had given them flesh at even, and filled them with bread in the morning? Well might Moses say, “Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?” (ver. 1, 2).

But unbelief is as dull to learn as ready to murmur, as swift to speak as slow to hear. “And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst” (ver. 3).

Not so Moses, who “cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me” (ver. 4).

The Lord will be inquired of: it is all-important for man; but He has His own ways. As His end is that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy, so His beginning is goodness without limit where failure is impossible. But man needs to learn by his misery and need, ever prone to forget it through misuse of His very mercies. How blessed that God acts for His own glory!

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us or not?” (ver. 6, 7)

“Now the rock was the Christ.” Such is the comment of the New Testament in direct allusion to the fact before us. The truth is greater and more abiding than the wonder.

It is not only the bread of God in Him that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. More than this is wanted in view of the sinner's need and of God's glory. The Son of man must be lifted up. The power of evil must be crushed; God's character must be vindicated; sins can only be forgiven righteously, because borne and judged: all meet in the precious death of our Lord Jesus. The rod of judgment, “wherewith thou smotest the river,” must smite the rock. Christ suffered once for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. Love, infinite love, there was in Him thus given to die for us; but He was rejurted and put to shame; yea He was forsaken of God, whose face was hid from Him when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. It was not merely that unbelieving Jews esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. In very truth He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities and the chastisement of our peace was as surely upon Him, as we are healed with His stripes. Jehovah laid on Him the iniquity of us all; and the stroke was on Him for the transgression of His people. It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him, to put Him to grief, to make His soul an offering for sin. He bore iniquities; He poured out His soul unto death; He was numbered with transgressors; and He bore the sin of many.

If souls fail to see and bow to this most solemn and affecting testimony of God to the humiliation and suffering of His own Son, it is not for lack of plain words and forcible figures. The real difficulty is in the will of man, which refuses the overwhelming demonstration of its own badness and of God's goodness. For if this be the truth of the cross of Christ, what grace and long-suffering and holy love on God's part? what vanity and pride and malice, what hatred of the Father and the Son on man's? The very cross, whereby peace and deliverance comes, is the absolute condemnation of sin: were it in our person, it must be ruin irretrievable; in Christ it is our salvation.

But there is more here. “Smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.” It is the type of the Holy Ghost given. This gift consequent on Christ's work goes far beyond new birth. Now that redemption is effected, the Spirit is within the believer a fountain springing up into life everlasting, yea, a river flowing out in testimony of Jesus glorified. As having believed in Christ we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of God's glory.

Can any prefiguration be conceived clearer or more important? Not that Moses knew all this beforehand; but that all was naked and open before His eyes with whom we have to do now, as He inspired him then. May we be not faithless but believing.

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